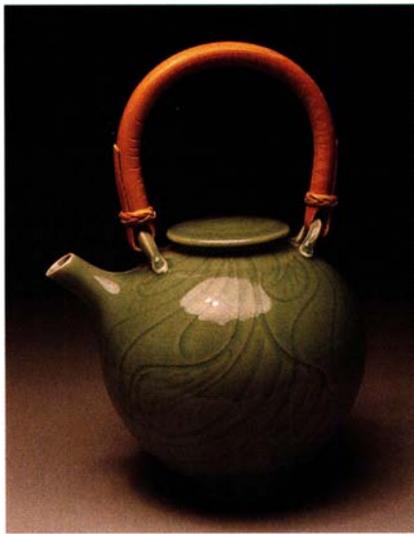
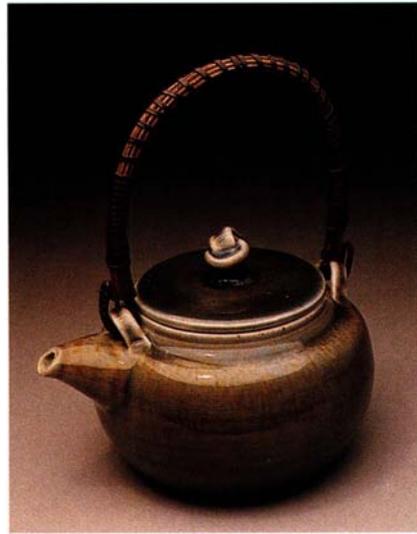


Teapot, 7 inches in height, slab-built porcelain with black terra sigillata, purchased for \$2600, by Edward Eberle.



Celadon-glazed teapot, 11¼ inches in height, wheel-thrown and carved porcelain, \$105, by Molly Cowgill.



Glazed porcelain teapot, 9 inches in height, with handmade handle, \$50, by Ruth Scharf.

## What Do You Do with 314 Pots?

by Joan Lincoln

never intended to collect contemporary, rare American ceramics. My first purchase, a small, red clay, matt-green-glazed bowl by Gertrud and Otto Natzler, caught my eye at the New York City American Crafts Gallery. I could not leave without it. Now, my collection ranges from Laura Anderson to Marguerite Wildenhain, from low-fire earthenware to high-fire porcelain, from functional to purely decorative. I can now read most pots easily for technique and firing; of course, innovative glazing additives are impossible to identify.

I am not an indiscriminate pack rat. I have “rules,” and the first rule of acquisition is that I have an overwhelming, anticipated pleasure in living with that object; for example, a Richard Shaw book/box. Sometimes pleasure changes over years of collecting—it is possible to outgrow art. When this happens, I retire these pieces as “potter development indicators.”

Rule two is that I will be true to my own taste. I do not collect by others’

opinions, current trends, inflated cost or overwhelming size. If a work cannot speak for itself in the rich company of fine craft, no amount of pretentious jargon-hype will make it valid or honest. Obfuscation covers inadequacy.

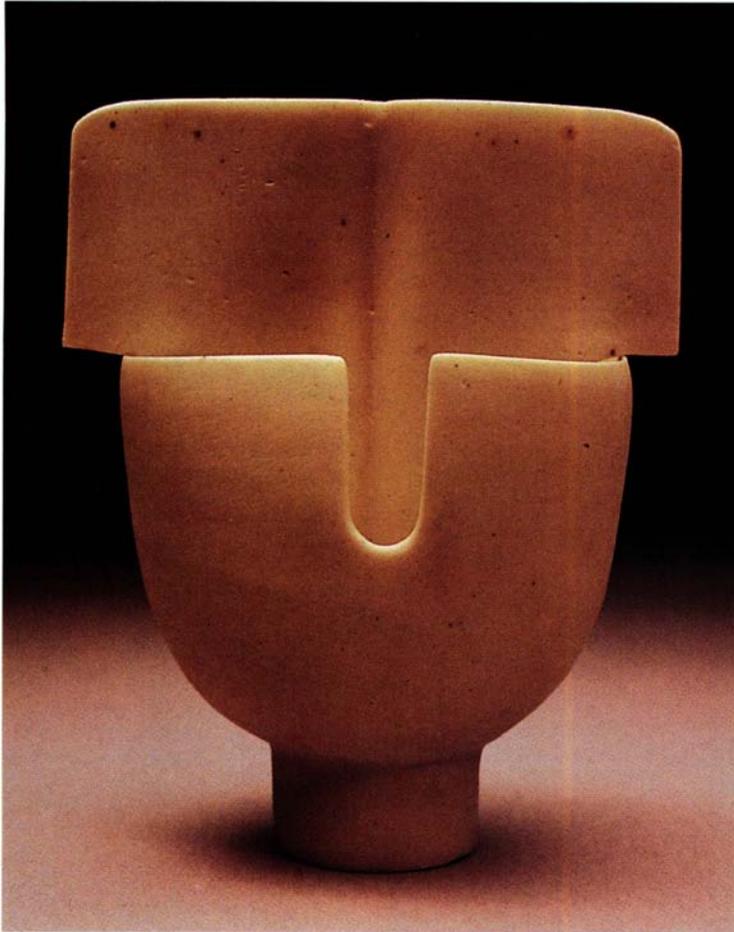
Rule three requires that the object do well that which it was designed to do. The mind likes a justification for the eye’s delight; e.g., my Molly Cowgill celadon-glazed carved porcelain teapot pours well, holds the heat and adds grace to the ceremony.

At the same time, I keep an open mind regarding implied function. Sometimes a form is a parody of a function; for example, a Don Reitz “container” is a piece of sculpture too heavy to lift. My Edward Eberle teapot, constructed of whisper-thin porcelain slabs, is balloon-light and holds only air. Some teapots have become the expression of the idea of a teapot, showing the evolution of a shape now drained of function.

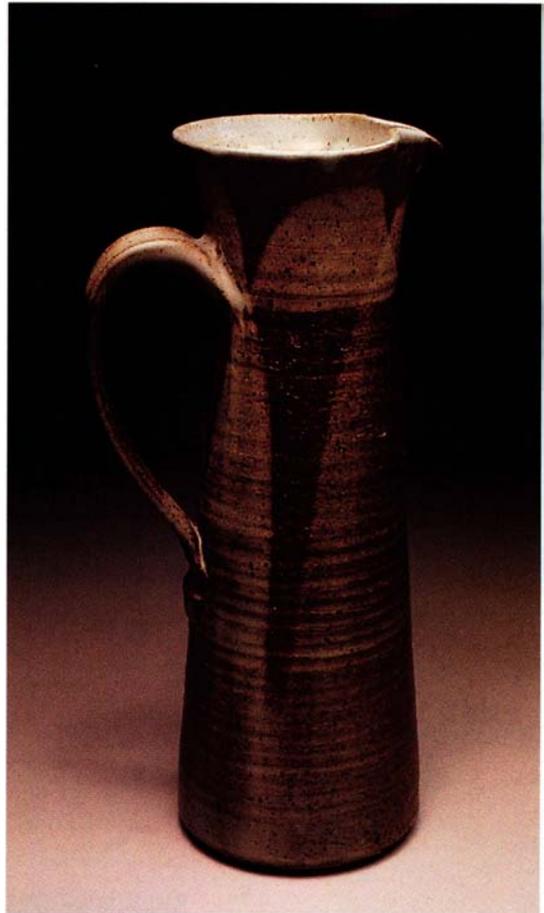
Collecting in the 1950s and 1960s was easy and obscenely cheap, because

few people realized the potential value of a Toshiko Takaezu container; a shop/gallery/fair cannot afford to stay in business on speculation. Friends also gave me ceramic objects, knowing I had been mucking around in clay forever (kindergarten through grad school). Sometimes these gifts were quite remarkable (a 23-inch Rookwood lamp base, probably by Shirayamadani). I also traded/bought from fellow M.F.A. students’ shows. I bought work from my professor Don Schaumberg and visiting lecturer Ruth Duckworth as well.

In the beginning, my acquisitions were easy to display. Their heights were less than the bookshelf height of 10 inches, up and out of the way of careening children. Now my grown children live elsewhere, the collection has passed 300 objects, and I have transformed one of the children’s bedrooms/closets into a permanent mini gallery. The room is furnished with three walls of display shelves, freestanding display modules,



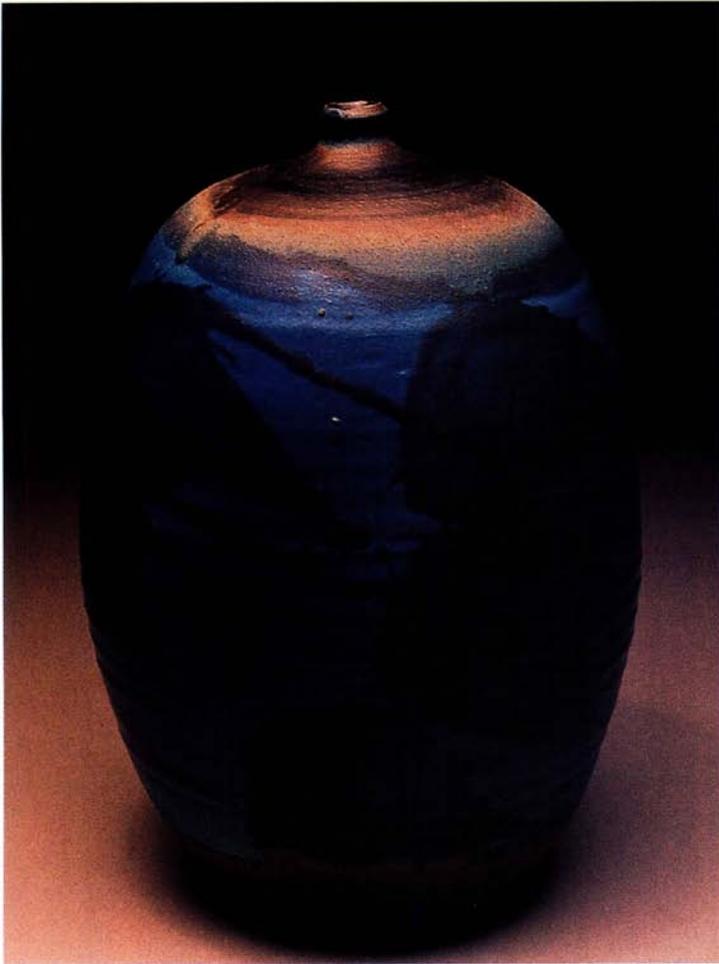
Untitled sculpture, 5½ inches in height, high-fired translucent porcelain, purchased for \$3600, by Ruth Duckworth.



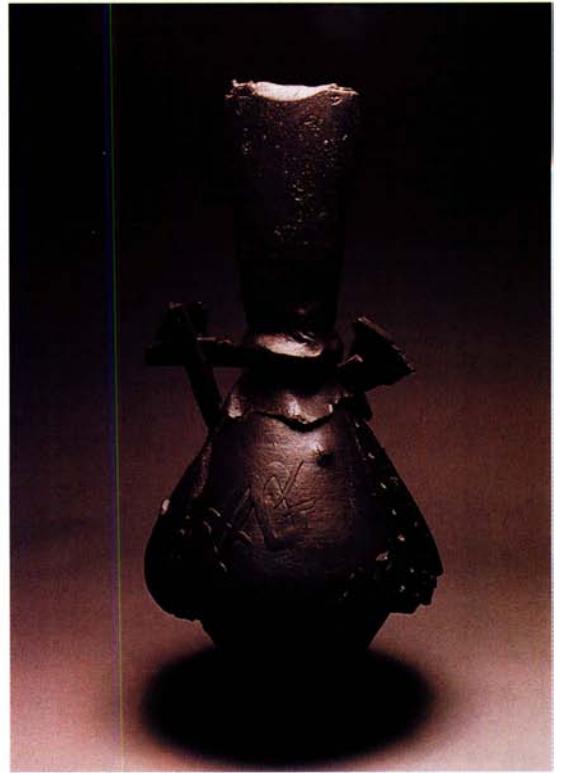
Pitcher, 13½ inches in height, wheel-thrown stoneware, \$650, by Ken Ferguson.



"Tulip Holder," 10½ inches in height, wheel-thrown and handbuilt stoneware, with blue glaze, wood fired, \$1154, by Karen Karnes.



Wheel-thrown porcelain bottle, 9½ inches in height, with brushed Stoneware vase, 26 inches in height, wheel thrown and glaze decoration, purchased for \$50, by Toshiko Takaezu.



and handbuilt, salt fired, \$2500, by Don Reitz.



Sculptured pot, 14 inches in height, glazed stoneware, \$4000, by Ted Randall.



"Book Box," 6½ inches in height, slip-cast porcelain, with decals, purchased for \$6500, by Richard Shaw.

two chairs and a stepstool for access to the upper-level pots.

I live with clay forms throughout the house. Large serving bowls are stacked on the refrigerator. Water pitchers are in the cabinet by the sink. A Ted Randall talks to an Otto Heino in the front hall. Sounds like a veritable warehouse, yes? And yet, how well they mingle with each other, conversational, balancing their spaces together by similarities or differences.

My collection is cataloged with slides and computer listings. Each piece is listed alphabetically by artist, with a description, cost, date and place acquired, plus a computer code number and a slide code number; e.g., G-l-d = John Glick, first artist acquired under "G," slide of the fourth pot. This pot ID matches the filed slide number; it is also written in permanent ink over a thin coat of clear nail polish on the

bottom of the pot. In this way, the code can be removed with nail-polish remover, if necessary.

I use the collection to explain and compare techniques of construction and artistic expression. Cases in point: there is nothing unacceptable in a ready-made bamboo handle, but Ruth Scharf's teapot handle illustrates handmade elegance. I show examples of Karen Karnes' work from two decades to demonstrate innovative development, artistic maturity, client demand and price fluctuation. I have a Ken Ferguson stoneware pitcher from the Archie Bray Collection, a tall, dark green, thrown form that has the ease of body, handle and spout made from a thousand such moves; it is a simple, clean, incredibly strong statement and illustrates all that was to follow. I have no early studio attempts by Peter Voulkos, but then who bought Coca-Cola stock early on?

Despite all the care I take, pots break. Californians use "quake wax" to hold pots to the shelf. Galleries use it to secure lids. My Natzler crashed in a "careening child" episode but was restored, except for the clear sound. Daily use will ding a pitcher lip against a faucet. Accidents happen.

I suppose I could estimate insurance value from cost but my Takaezu was listed at \$50 in the 1950s. What insurance company would believe the value swing? Besides, some historical pot shards are worth more than an indifferent pot. I might as well try to insure a glass of water. It's all in who wants it.

People with only a passing interest say, "That's pretty. I'll wait and buy it when it's on sale," or "He made one; he can make another." Wrong! That moment, that action, that kiln load does not come around again. ▲