

PIERCE

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## HARRAH'S

The End of an Era?

South America's  
Ski Country

Real Estate Partnerships:  
Do You Know  
What to Look For?

California's Ultimate  
Wine Collection



C E R A M I C

# art:

There's something wonderful and exciting about putting your hands in all that clay, moving it, shaping it, watching it change," ceramic artist Donna Polseno observes. "The tangible quality of clay and my fascination with all the clay processes are what initially lured me to ceramics. And when you finish a piece and hand it over to another element—the fire—an edge of mystery and suspense is added. You aren't sure exactly what will happen. Smoke! Fire! Drama! It's all there."

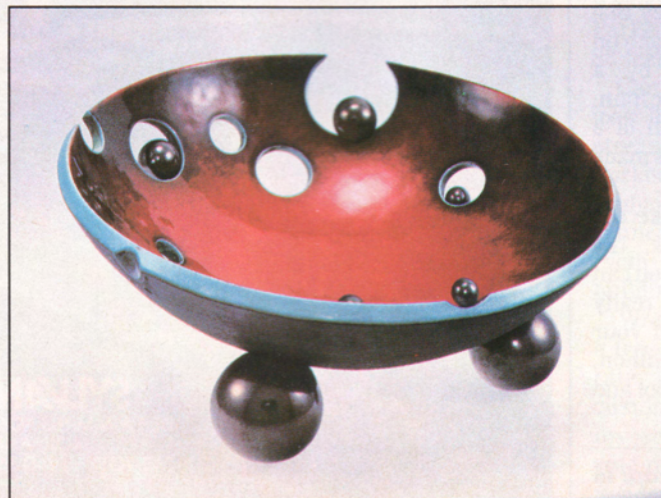
Polseno's passion for clay, for three-dimensional design, and for the romantic and mystical processes that transform earth to art are shared by many ceramic artists. But for all their spiritual attunement and communal roots, contemporary ceramic artists are creating works of incredible diversity—from simple, utilitarian vessels to highly symbolic sculptures. The broad spectrum of styles, the spectacular quality of the work produced, and the relatively affordable prices offer a panoply of possibilities to serious collectors, investors, and consumers with an eye for art.

During the late fifties and into the sixties the American art scene was shaken by a

## IT'S ON FIRE

*The market for contemporary objects crafted in clay is red-hot.*

BY ANNE GRAHAM



Allen H. Hurdle

ceramic art "explosion" that was ignited by West Coast artist Peter Voulkos and others at the Otis Art Institute in Los Angeles. A centuries-old craft previously dominated by European attitudes and techniques suddenly was transformed into a "new" art form fueled by intense energy and individualism. The movement spread across the country and helped create a new image and a new importance for ceramic art.

Ceramic artist Jim Melchert, once a student of Voulkos, has described the evolution as "a fresh and affectionate attack on old genres, creating new possibilities where we were not expecting them."

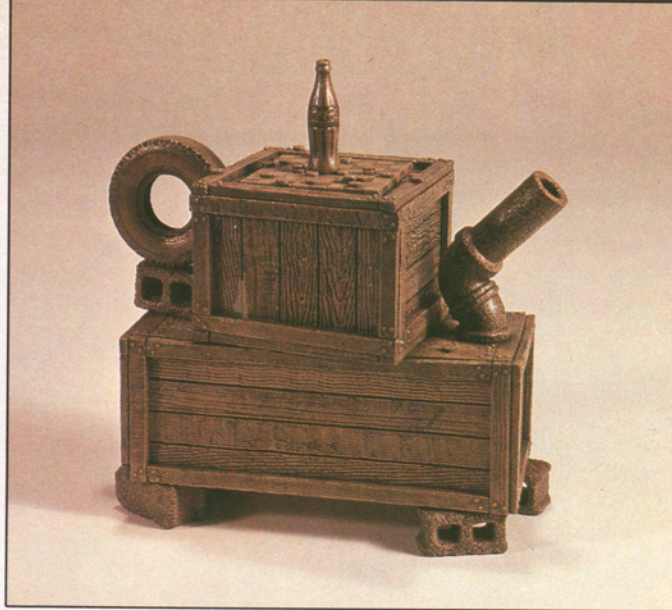
"Artists are the keepers of an elusive fire, not the keepers of forms. Throughout history there have been artists among the potters whose radical sensibilities have created magic in their work. It is the resourceful intelligence of artists that revitalizes forms and long-held values to give them new significance."

*Saturn by Richard Harrison McCord displays the artist's fascination with ceremonial and celestial images.*

A few farsighted collectors zeroed in on contemporary ceramic art in the early sixties. A substantial percentage of the country's top private collections now include ceramic art, and a few focus on it exclusively.

Robert L. Pfannebecker, a Lancaster, Pa., attorney, began his collection some 20 years ago, just after graduating from law school. Although he collects works in other media, ceramic art predominates; he now owns more than 1,000 objects. After filling his five-level contemporary home with art, Pfannebecker constructed two adjacent buildings to accommodate the overflow. He also displays about 60 to 70 items in his office.

Pfannebecker recalls that his interest in collecting was sparked when artist Don Wright opened a gallery in Lancaster. "Some of his enthusiasm for quality ceramics and other art just rubbed off on me," he says. "I tried to learn more by seeing as much as I could and by



Courtesy of Traver Sutton Gallery

*The functional vessel remains a common theme in ceramic art even today. Counterclockwise from top: Stacked Crates Teapot by Richard T. Notkin, Stellar Blue Twisting Square by John Mason, and Jar by Ken Ferguson (shown at wheel).*



Courtesy of Rena Bransten Gallery



Courtesy of Ken Ferguson



Al Nuckles

*Donna Polseno (left), who uses vessels as the foundations of her figurative torsos, says she thinks of the vessels as spiritual containers of life and energy.*