





SPONTANEOUS RESPONSE

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THE INNOVATIVE CERAMICS OF DON REITZ

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A large, textured ceramic sculpture by Don Reitz, featuring a prominent circular, spiral-like form on top and a cylindrical base with a rectangular opening. The sculpture is set against a light blue background.

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WESTMONT  
RIDLEY-TREE  
MUSEUM OF ART

AUGUST 29 – NOVEMBER 9, 2019



**Introduction &**

**Acknowledgements**

*If I can just encourage people to follow their bliss;  
you don't have to find your bliss,  
you have it in here [pointing to his heart],  
you just have to discover it.*

Don Reitz

My first introduction to Don Reitz came when I read the 2001 summer issue of *Ceramics Monthly*. As a recent college graduate, someone had given me a copy of *The Potter's Book* by Bernard Leach. As I read that book, I knew that I had been "badly bitten by the ceramic bug." My newfound passion led to devouring all the ceramic related books I could get my hands on. But, it was the summer issue of *Ceramics Monthly* that turned out to be serendipitous in my life as a potter and as a modest collector of ceramics.

The *Ceramics Monthly* editors, in an effort to celebrate the new millennium, asked their subscribers "to list as many as three living potters and ceramics artists who have had the greatest impact on contemporary ceramics." The survey generated hundreds of names, but there were thirteen artists who were cited most often. That list is arguably the basis for what I would call the greatest generation of ceramic artists—all legendary, groundbreaking, and transformative potters whose work challenged the norm and revolutionized the way we think about ceramic art today. This list included: Rudy Autio, Cynthia Bringle, Val Cushing, Ken Ferguson, John Glick, Robin Hopper, Karen Karnes, Warren MacKenzie, David Shaner, Paul Soldner, Toshiko Takaezu, Peter Voulkos and Don Reitz.

As a young college graduate with a newly found passion for ceramic art, I used this list as a guide for artists I wanted to collect. I began my quest by corresponding with many of them and had the good fortune of adding several small works to my budding collection. What I quickly discovered was that they were all approachable, humble, and generous, which were traits I found refreshing among artists considered "famous." While I never had the opportunity to meet Don personally, we exchanged letters. I purchased a few works

over the years, and he generously sent me a personalized copy of his 2004 retrospective exhibition catalogue from the Elvehjem Museum of Art (now the Chazen Museum of Art) in Madison, Wisconsin.

Don Reitz passed away in March 2014. Four years later, through another series of serendipitous events, I found myself at the Santa Barbara home of Brent and Jennifer Reitz, Reitz's son and daughter-in-law, discussing the possibility of organizing a retrospective exhibition and publication for Reitz. It has been a pleasure getting to know the Reitzs and hearing firsthand stories about Don Reitz and the motivations behind the work he created. What distinguishes the Westmont Ridley-Tree Museum of Art exhibition of Don Reitz's work is, I believe, the personal involvement of his family in this project. Brent's openness to sharing personal narratives and photographs of "Dad" has been invaluable to the development of this exhibition and publication.

There are so many people I would like to thank for their help in making this exhibition a possibility and allowing me to continue chasing and sharing my passion for ceramic arts. First and foremost, I would like to thank the director of the Westmont Ridley-Tree Museum of Art, Judy L. Larson, who trusted me with this ambitious project and has been encouraging about presenting this important work in Santa Barbara and elsewhere. As I organized the exhibition, she advised me to just let my passion for ceramics shine through.

I am grateful to Brent Reitz, Jennifer Reitz, and Donna Reitz for trusting the Westmont Ridley-Tree Art Museum of Art to carry on the legacy of Reitz's work for future generations. The majority of the work in this exhibition comes from the *Don Reitz Collection*, which comprises works that Don Reitz set aside during his career as some of his best examples.

Esteemed ceramic scholar, Peter Held, has been a critical voice in this endeavor, lending his time and importantly his "muscles" in moving these monumental works, and also providing advice, oversight, and expertise as Reitz's close friend. His essay contribution speaks to his love of the ceramic arts and his friendship with Don Reitz.

There are many people who helped make this beautiful publication possible. Thanks to Glenn Adamson for his insightful essay on the life and legacy of Don Reitz. I appreciate Rachel Heidenry for her careful and thoughtful editing of the essays. Kimberly Hahn and James Van Arsdale of Myopia Design responded positively to Reitz's work and expressed their vision in making a publication, which I believe Reitz would have been proud of. Thank you to Westmont campus photographer, Brad Elliot, whose photographic expertise captured the brilliance of the smallest, most subtle pieces to the

monumental expressiveness of Reitz's "tower works." Also, thank you to the numerous photographic contributors who generously agreed to let us publish historical images of Don Reitz: Kent Adams, Dennis Church, Bruce Fritz, Russell Panczenko, Nancy Reitz Petersen, Robert Thompson, and Brooke Wentland.

Thanks to Stephen Johnson for his help and expertise carefully packing and loading these works for transport. Our education and outreach coordinator, Tamara Vaughan, helped with installing the exhibition and coordinating educational events. I appreciate Westmont College's President, Gayle Beebe, and Provost, Mark Sargent, for their continued support of the Museum presenting the best of the visual arts on our campus.

This exhibition was enhanced with important loans from the collection of David and Julie Armstrong, who generously lent some of Don's early pivotal works from their extensive Reitz collection.

We are also so very grateful to the numerous patrons and supporters of the exhibition. Thanks to Ken and Francie Jewesson who stepped up early with a leadership gift. We are also grateful to Michael W. Kidd who made a generous donation in memory of Dr. John B. Janzen and Mr. Benjamin E. Ortega. Other sponsors include Caroline Bottom Anderson and Daniel Anderson, Fay and Phelan Bright, Bob and Christine Emmons, Shari and George Isaac, Laguna Clay Company, Mission Clay Products, David and Judy Neunuebel, Diane Dodds-Reichert and David Reichert, Linda Saccaccio and Barry Winick, Dick and Jazminka Shaikewitz, and Bryan and Joy Vansell. Mona Motte Wilds provided help and advice in seeking funding for the exhibition.

It is my hope that visitors to the Reitz exhibition and readers of our catalogue will discover an innovative ceramic artist whose spontaneity and energy is legendary.

Chris Rupp  
Collections Manager/Curator  
Westmont Ridley-Tree Museum of Art

# The Fearless Nature of Being

THE LEGACY OF DON REITZ

*Life is not a dress rehearsal;  
you only have one shot at it.*

Don Reitz

Don Reitz was larger-than-life, a modern-day folk legend. Consider his cycles of life as a youthful and adventuresome Tom Sawyer—Bunyanesque in early adulthood and sporting the sagely wisdom of a Mark Twain in his mature years. He was a homespun storyteller with an insight that pours forth in a rapid flow, infecting and endearing to all who were near him. Even when challenged by illness stemming from advanced age, Reitz continued to pursue his artistic vision, making the necessary adaptations to produce new and exciting work, teaching workshops, and firing wood kilns for six continuous days, all the while inspiring a new generation of ceramic practitioners.

Born one week after Black Tuesday at the start of the 1929 Great Depression, Reitz's childhood was affected by harsh economic realities. Roosevelt's New Deal sought to revitalize the nation's economy through government programs and subsidies in this era, yet many Americans resisted assistance, determined to make it on their own through frugality, fortitude, and personal strength. These circumstances forever marked American psyches and honed survival skills. Growing up during this difficult time in history, Reitz drew upon a wellspring of strength to make the most of any circumstance. Dyslexia, the disillusionment of academia, and a near fatal accident made for, at times, a tumultuous life. But Reitz remained an eternal optimist, plowing through the fields of life with vim and vigor, undeterred by roadblocks. "I'm a warrior, not a foot soldier," he once said in an interview.<sup>1</sup>



Don Reitz, c. 1936



Reitz at Alfred University, c 1960,  
Alfred, NY



Ovoid Baroque Form (detail), 1965



Sara with Don Reitz, c. 1986



Reitz and Yukio Yamamoto, c.1986

Trained at Alfred University, the preeminent institution for advanced ceramic training in western New York, Reitz's early work is marked by the design imperatives of the 1950's: clean, simple pots with a solid grounding in technical knowledge and craftsmanship. Following the lead of his teachers Robert Turner and Val Cushing, as well as fellow Alfred alumni Karen Karnes, Ken Ferguson and David Shaner, Reitz's formative utilitarian pieces are marked by simplicity, symmetry and prevailing European modernist influences. While the four artists shared similar training, all found their own voices early in their distinguished careers. Peter Voulkos, too, was a life-long role model and colleague; the artists inspired each other with their boundless energy and a penchant for disregarding prevailing orthodoxy in teaching and technique.

At Alfred, Reitz began experimenting with salt-glaze, a technique largely neglected by the post-World War II ceramic studio movement. Readily embracing this firing technique, Reitz quickly realized that it allowed the clay to keep its natural character, and its malleability did not obscure the creator's hand. In a decade's time, he was dubbed "Mr. Salt" by his peers, a moniker formally attributed to his longtime friend Rudy Autio. Baroque pots with ornamental embellishments from this era of Reitz's career are iconic within the field.

Life presents unexpected turns and Reitz experienced his fair share. In 1982, while hospitalized for several months due to multiple injuries suffered from an automobile accident, the artist was not only challenged physically, but felt mentally and spiritually debilitated without his time in the studio. Compounding his misfortunes during this period was his five-year-old niece Sara's bout with cancer. They exchanged drawings as a means of rehabilitation and to bolster each other's spirits. Reitz, inspired by her child-like freedom of form, line and color, took paint and paper in hand as a cathartic healing process. Returning to the studio, he unleashed a torrent of new work. His **Sara Series**—comprised of chalky pastel engobes in vivid hues of red, yellow and blue and gouged and inscribed autobiographical drawings—was stylistically divorced from his previous bodies of work. Always present was his hand print, dipped in a black engobe, as if stating, like the cave painters, "I am here."

In the mid-1980s, Reitz devoted more time to the wood firing process, due, in part, to his long association and friendship with Don Bendel, ceramics teacher at Northern Arizona University in Flagstaff. Bendel invited the Japanese master kiln builder Yukio Yamamoto to build a noborigama and an anagama kiln that continue to be part of the core program at the University. In successive years, Reitz worked

through a number of visual forms in ceramics: shields, tea stacks, bag forms, punch-outs, kachinas and table tops.

After undergoing life-threatening heart surgery in 2007, the reality of his diminished physical stamina made the artist adopt new modes of working. He relied on studio assistants to make cylindrical shapes, which he then altered. This provided a sense of freedom Reitz had never experienced before. He sought opportunities to wood-fire in kilns around the country and collaborated with a multitude of other artists. Artist Chris Gustin wrote, "Don was an amazing artist, full of a vitality and energy that fed his work until the day he died. His curiosity was ever present, not only in his clay-work, paintings and drawings, but also in the way he saw the world."<sup>2</sup>

*Kachina* (2000) is a stellar example of Reitz's prowess in throwing and extruding multiple forms, and then deconstructing them and assembling a complex totemic sculpture. More formal and structural than his other gestural pursuits, these forms are unified by the use of monochromatic ash, born by fire. Artfully composed, yet fresh and spontaneous, the straps and circular forms resting on the mounded organic base become architectural, while retaining the essential qualities of clay. Melding historical and modernist associations, *Kachina* recalls an haniwa figure or Hopi kachina or a Sir Anthony Caro clay sculpture, timeless and archetypal.

Reitz's *X Spiral* (2008) was one of the first objects created in his **Table Top Series**—and he soon realized that a larger scale did not equate to greater impact. Working with cut cylindrical forms, Reitz moved away from his grounding in the vessel and playfully manipulated this basic shape, creating a dynamic with diagonal additives, ever present X's and stacked planks on its base. The repetitive spatial arcing unified the complexity of the object's form. The artist always approached his work intuitively, yet these smaller maquette-like works are more studied and considered. Softened by the extreme temperatures of wood-firing, the seemingly abstract sculptures are rooted in personal associations and Reitz's past histories.

In *Ring Toss with Bar* (2012) Reitz harkened back to his childhood experiences of haunting carnivals and circuses. Mesmerized by the exoticism, frenetic motion and hormonal surges, the artist culled through his stockpile of memories. Multiple motifs occur in the work and are accentuated by oozing color shifts with contrasting black color fields accentuating key forms. The robustness of this work reflects Reitz's dual nature of handling clay directly and intuitively, while balancing the formal canons of sculpture.



Kachina, 2000



X Spiral, 2008



Ring Toss with Bar (detail), 2012



Reitz glazing a sewer pipe, 2009,  
Mission Clay Products, Phoenix, AZ

Not one to rest on his laurels, or for that matter, rest at all, Reitz embarked on his most monumental series in 2009. The artist received an invitation by Bryan Vansell, owner of Phoenix-based Mission Clay Products, producers of extruded industrial sewer pipes, to artistically modify pipes that ranged from five-feet to nearly ten-foot tall. Taking paintbrush, drill and saw in hand, Reitz confidently manipulated the highly compressed and difficult to carve surfaces. Slathering a white undercoat over the chocolate brown clay, he used a palette of color and iconography similar to his *Sara Series*, adding and erasing his gestural markings on a much grander scale. As he became more at ease in the industrial setting, his content shifted toward current events. He likened the tubular forms to telephone poles and covered them with posters and graffiti.

It is hard to imagine a more noteworthy artist to remain a pillar in ceramics for six decades. Don Reitz retained the defining attributes of a formidable artist: exceptional talent and skill, a highly disciplined work ethic, and unbridled enthusiasm with a world composed of subtle nuances and catastrophic events. Mapping the trajectory of his artistic career, one finds it inexplicitly woven into the tidal moments of his personal life—his art a testament to the fearless nature of being Don Reitz. Through constant reinvention and originality, he extended the definition and potential of the ceramic arts.

Peter Held, Independent Curator

This essay was adapted from the original commissioned by Lacoste/Keane Gallery, Concord, Massachusetts, first appearing in the 2011 SOFA exhibition catalog.

### Endnotes

1 Artist Statement, 2003.

2 Watershed Center for the Ceramic Arts honored Don Reitz in 2009 with its Legends award, given in recognition for a lifetime of work that changed the course of American ceramics. Watershed newsletter, 2014.

Opposite:  
Reitz throwing a large platter, c. 2010, Photo: Robert Thompson



# God Bless this Mess

*If you come to a fork in the road, take it.*

Don Reitz

Don Reitz was a mess of contradictions. A self-professed show off who loved nothing better than performing for a crowd, he was also an extremely vulnerable person, deeply preoccupied with interior psychological experience. Working class and proud of it, Reitz was a man of the wilderness, a teller of tall tales sometimes described as a latter-day Paul Bunyan, who often spoke fondly of the years he spent in his twenties as a butcher. Nonetheless, he thrived in the role of university professor. Pragmatist and romantic, juvenile and sophisticate, ambitious artist and humble potter: Don Reitz was all of these things. He had a ravenous appetite for experience and lived its full breadth.<sup>1</sup>

This all-encompassing embrace extended to Reitz's work in clay. If, for some strange reason, you were obliged to explain all the primary tendencies of late twentieth-century studio ceramics using a single artist, he would be the one. He originally trained at Alfred University in the early 1960s when it was a citadel of functional pottery. The early works he made there reflect the expert tutelage of Val Cushing and David Shaner. The pieces are tightly composed and executed, the grooves imparted during wheel-throwing rippling up and down their sides—yet Reitz was already beginning to experiment beyond the functional.

Reitz had been introduced to the breakthrough work of Peter Voulkos through a 1956 profile on the artist published in *Craft Horizons*.<sup>2</sup> The fast, expressive style that Voulkos invented that year quickly took California by storm, breeding imitators and loose comparisons in equal measure. Observers pronounced this new style a ceramic version of Abstract Expressionism or an American statement of Zen Buddhism. Both descriptions capture something of Voulkos' intentions—if not their entirety—but they also obscure the specificity of his innovations. Rather than borrow, Voulkos found innovation through direct engagement with the materiality of clay.<sup>3</sup> Reitz understood this immediately and completely, seeing in Voulkos' breakthrough a challenge that could only be met by equal dedication to gestural technique.



Reitz working in the Alfred Studio, c. 1962, Alfred, NY



Reitz and Voulkos at Callas Studio, c. 2001, Belvidere, NJ, Photo: Robert Thompson



Don Reitz Workshop, c. 1990



Reitz carrying a Baroque vessel, c. 1973, Spring Green, WI



Reitz Salt Firing, 1972, Spring Green, WI

With this powerful influence in mind while still at Alfred, Reitz made his first “bag” forms: loosely worked, pneumatically swollen objects that were as instinctive as his coffeepots and tureens were precise. These indeterminate shapes would not have been out of place in California. Indeed, one of the striking aspects of Reitz’s early career is the way that he defied the stereotype of East Coast vs. West Coast clay.<sup>4</sup> The conventional wisdom is that Alfred potters venerated technique, while the Californians prioritized individualism. Reitz would always prize both. As his work progressed, leaping and bounding from one form to another (in vivid contrast to Voulkos, who settled into a few typologies by the 1970s and never abandoned them), Reitz continually deployed his virtuosity to expressive ends.

Think of his signature moves: the long pulled handles, whipped round into curlicues or ruffled like icing sugar; the gorgeous spills of glaze, coursing down the sides of his pots; the quickly squeezed and torn disruptions to the rims of his plates and the sides of his vases. All of these effects were done at high velocity and with supreme confidence. As anyone who ever attended a Reitz demonstration can attest—and there must be thousands who did over the years, myself included—his pots came together with astonishing suddenness, sometimes surprising even him. It took years of experience to make that serendipity possible.

Reitz’s demonic speed links together his otherwise diverse oeuvre. It is what the earthy, encrusted vessels that dominated his output have in common with the painterly, postmodern pieces he created in the early 1980s. Speed is what connects the whiplash ornament of his early “baroque” vessels and the wet thuds that are his late *Punch Out* sculptures. These latter works, pounded into shape with his fists or a wooden plank, exemplify the man so completely that they could be interpreted as abstract self-portraits. Each object is a primal encounter, the type of work you might try to make if you had never seen clay before. Yet they also have the power of ancient relics. The *Punch Outs* thrum at a deep chord, so low they seem to reverberate upward from the earth itself.

Another contradiction exists—and it is a profound one. Reitz’s preternatural quickness was a means to the eternal. Here, one must not forget the kiln. It was in the firings over hours and days that Reitz solidified his rapid-fire ideas into durable truths. This is why the unpredictable action of salt and smoke was so important to him. On the one hand, like his demos, it was high theatre. When he told the story of his first salt firing (conducted with the Michigan potter Dick Leach) it came with sound effects: *snap, crackle, pop, pa-boom*. When he threw in his first handful of salt, he recalled, “It

bounced back and burned holes in my shirt, and I said, ‘All right. That’s what I’m looking for.’” After the sound and fury were over, though, there were actual stalagmites hanging from the kiln shelf.<sup>5</sup> Performance art and geology, all at once? Salt firing could have been invented just for him.

Reitz also loved the community brought about by the kiln, the rough camaraderie beautifully evoked by Gary Snyder’s poem “The Firing”:

*In ragged shirts and pants, dried slip  
Stuck to with pineneedle, pitch,  
Dust, hair, woodchips;  
Sending the final slivers of yellowy pine  
Through peephole white blast glow  
No saggars tilting yet and segers bending  
Neatly in a row—  
Even their beards caked up with mud & soot  
Firing for fourteen hours. How she does go.<sup>6</sup>*

These were grand occasions for an artist-teacher. A firing brought together fellow masters (Peter Voulkos, Paul Chaleff, and Jack Troy among them) alongside others totally new to the discipline—and with plenty of time for talk. Then, of course, there was the wonder of opening the door and excavating the results. These satisfactions are easily dismissed as the trappings of empty traditionalism, but Reitz knew better. As he once said, he was not out to make Japanese tea bowls: “I cannot make a child-drawing because I’m not a child. It seems a great waste of my time to try and make a Japanese tea bowl. I make a Don Reitz tea bowl.”<sup>7</sup>

So that is what he did. He made one Don Reitz after another, objects of all kinds, functional and sculptural, contained and explosive, each reflecting a facet of his complex soul. All are worth looking at and not a few are masterpieces. But what really matters today, when we can no longer sit in thrall of Reitz in full flow, is the way that his works indexed his life, preserving forever the rolling tides of his personality. Reitz loved the writings of M. C. Richards, who emphasized not the finished pot, but the act of making, which could center the self, if only for a moment.<sup>8</sup> One last contradiction then: Reitz was a blur of perpetual motion forever seeking stillness. What powered this extraordinary spirit? Best to let him say it: “Energy from the audience, energy from the piece you’re throwing, energy from the kiln, energy from the wood—which transfers into you. And you’re just content to go on.”<sup>9</sup>

By Glenn Adamson



Reitz loading a salt kiln, c. 1980, Deansville, WI



Reitz and Peter Voulkos, 2001, Photo: Robert Thompson

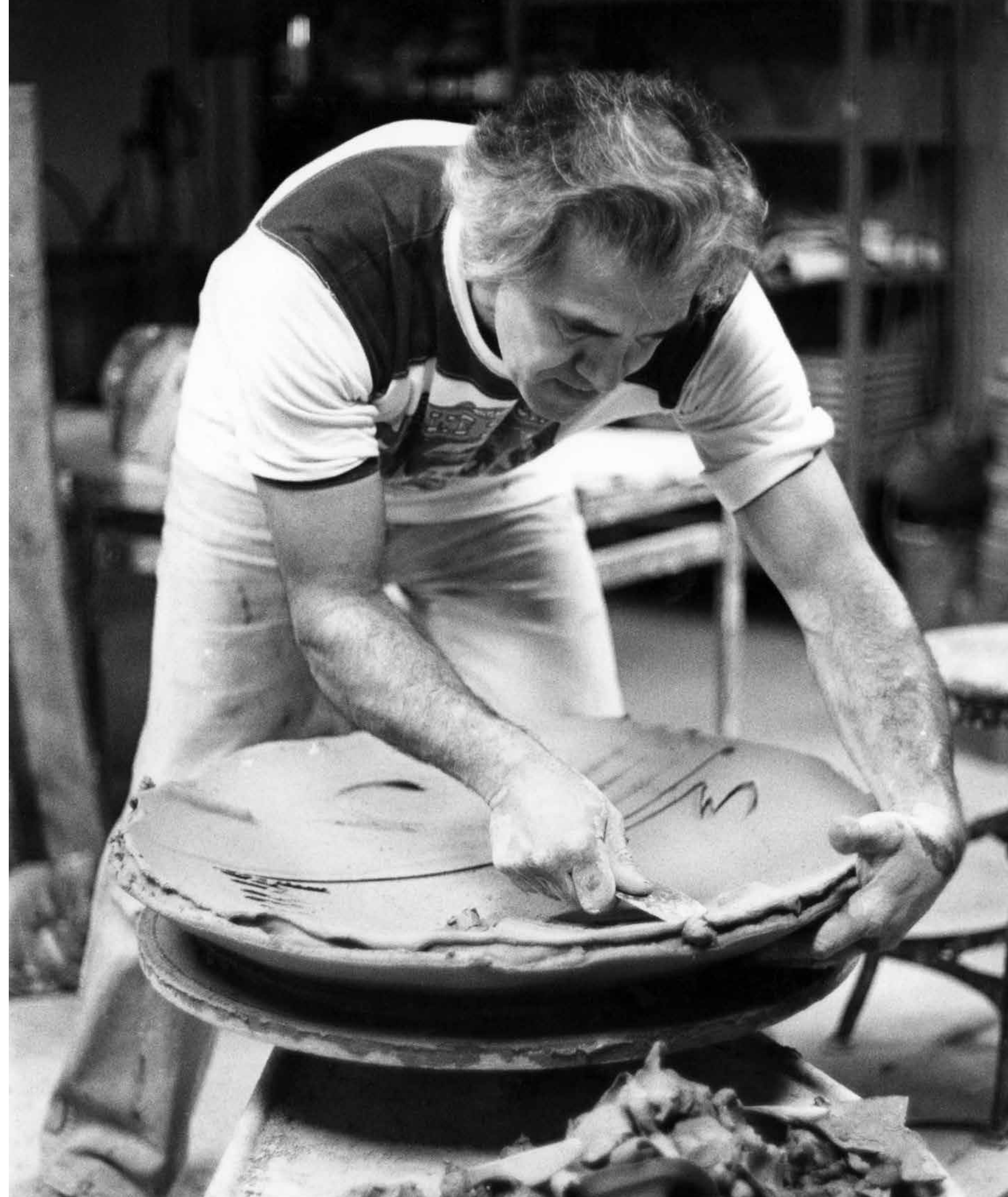


Reitz teaching at University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1972

### Endnotes

- 1 This passage draws substantially on Jody Clowes' discussion in *Don Reitz: Clay, Fire, Salt and Wood* (Madison: Elvehjem Museum of Art, 2004).
- 2 Conrad Brown, "Peter Voulkos," *Craft Horizons* 16/5 (Sept./Oct. 1956).
- 3 See Glenn Adamson, Barbara Paris Gifford, and Andrew Perchuk, *Voulkos: The Breakthrough Years* (New York: Museum of Arts and Design, 2016).
- 4 A *Craft Horizons* roundtable held in the mid-1960s – Reitz's period of artistic formation – was explicitly framed in relation to this geographical opposition, but Daniel Rhodes nonetheless noted that the differences were already breaking down. In the immediate postwar period, he said, "We had no way of knowing what other people were doing, because lines of communication weren't very good. We didn't know who was involved or where the whole thing was going. Now, it's so much more lively. One knows almost instantly when somebody does something – in California, Michigan, or wherever." In "Ceramics: East Coast," *Craft Horizons* 26/3 (June 1966), 20.
- 5 Oral history interview with Don Reitz, June 6-7, 2006. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.
- 6 Gary Snyder, "The Firing," in *The Back Country* (New York: New Directions Publishing, 1971). The poem memorializes a wood firing in Japan conducted in 1963 with Les Blakebrough and John Chappell.
- 7 Quoted in Clowes, *Don Reitz*, 92.
- 8 See Jenni Sorkin, *Live Form: Women, Ceramics, and Community* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016).
- 9 Oral history with Don Reitz.

Opposite:  
Reitz throwing a large platter, c. 1980



A close-up photograph of a fossilized skull, likely from a primate or early hominid. The skull is light-colored, possibly beige or tan, and shows significant wear and tear, including several circular holes and a large, irregular crack running through the center. The texture is rough and porous. A blue text overlay is positioned diagonally across the right side of the skull.

**Works in the Exhibition**



**Bowl**  
Gas Fired Stoneware, 1959, 4.75 x 9 x 9 in., Don Reitz Collection



**Lidded Casserole**  
Reduction Fired Stoneware, 1959, 3.5 x 8.5 x 7.5 in., Don Reitz Collection

Following page:  
**Punch Set for Mom**  
Reduction Fired Stoneware, 1961, Punch Bowl: 8 x 13 x 13 in. Cups: 3 x 4 in., Don Reitz Collection





**Compote**  
 Salt Fired Stoneware, 1962, 3.75 x 10.25 x 10.25 in., Don Reitz Collection



**Box Forms**  
 Salt Fired Stoneware, 1965, 7.25 x 19.75 x 8 in., David and Julie Armstrong Collection, Promised Gift to the American Museum of Ceramic Art



**Broccoli Bowl**

Salt Fired Stoneware, 1965, 4.75 x 14.625 x 12.75 in., David and Julie Armstrong Collection, Promised Gift to the American Museum of Ceramic Art

Opposite:

**Chunk**

Salt Fired Stoneware, 1965, 5 x 6.75 x 5.5 in., David and Julie Armstrong Collection, Promised Gift to the American Museum of Ceramic Art





**Lidded Jar**

Salt Fired Stoneware, 1970, 7.75 x 9 x 9 in., Don Reitz Collection

Previous pages, left to right:  
Reitz with an Ovoid Baroque Form, c. 1965

**Ovoid Baroque Form**

Salt Fired Stoneware, 1965, 25.25 x 15 x 10.5 in., David and Julie Armstrong Collection, Promised Gift to the American Museum of Ceramic Art



**Broccoli Bowl**

Salt Fired Stoneware, 1977, 8 x 15.75 x 14.75 in., Don Reitz Collection





Opposite:

**Shield**

Sara Series, Gas Fired Earthenware with Engobes, c. 1983, 18.5 x 18.25 x 2.75 in., Don Reitz Collection

Previous page:

Reitz in his Wisconsin studio working on a Sara Series sculpture, c. 1984, Photo: Dennis Church



**Fear of Flying**  
 Sara Series, Gas Fired Earthenware with Engobes, 1983, 19 x 18.5 x 1.75 in., Don Reitz Collection

Opposite:  
**Time Was: Thanks Dad**

Sara Series, Low Fire Salt with Engobes, 1984, 20.75 x 24.5 x 4.75 in., Don Reitz Collection





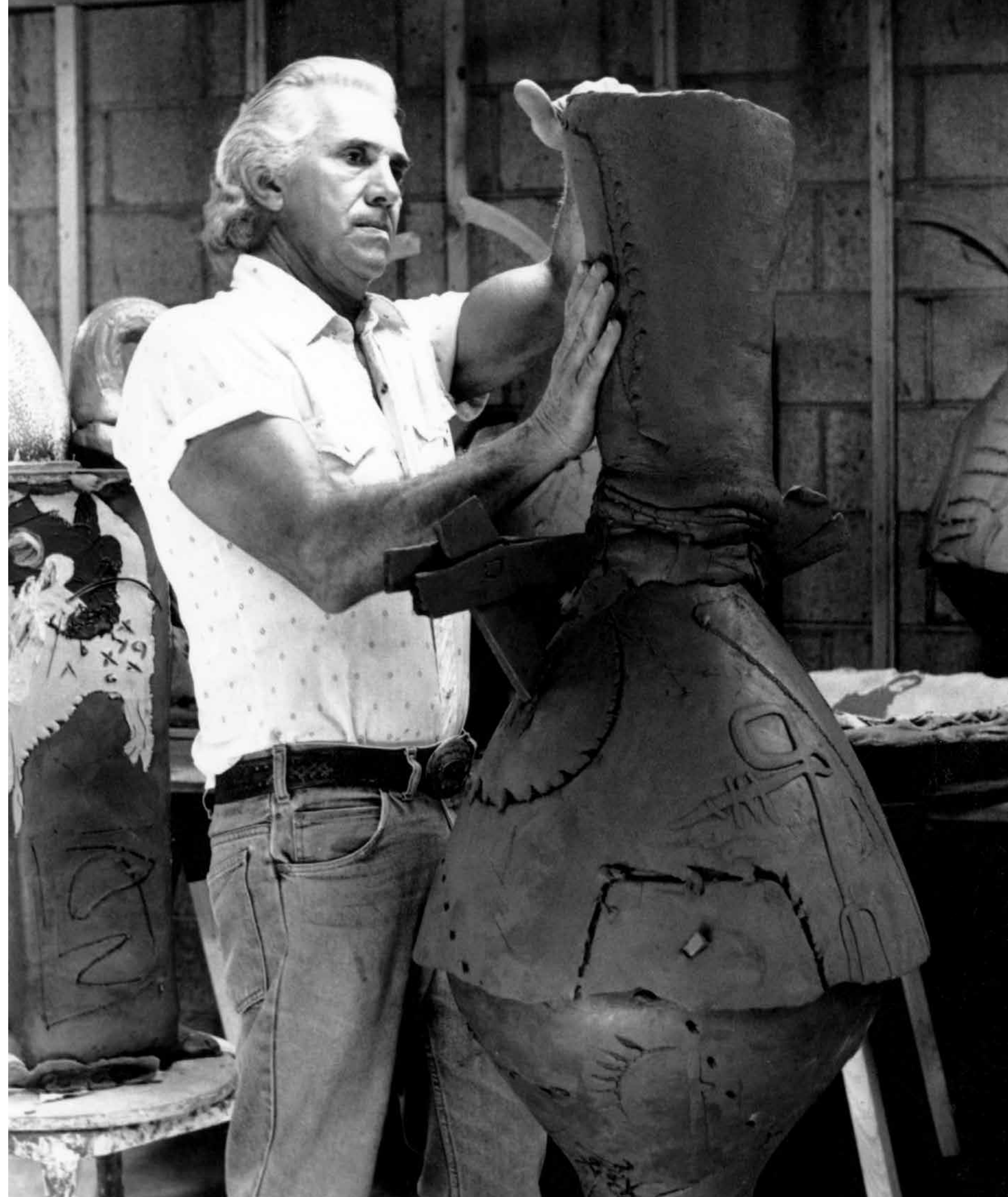
**Shield (HANG on to the WIND and TRUST)**

Sara Series, Earthenware with Engobes, 1984, 22 x 43 x 1.5 in., David and Julie Armstrong Collection, Promised Gift to the American Museum of Ceramic Art

Opposite:  
**Go Without Fear**

Sara Series, Earthenware with Engobes, 1984, 20 x 25 x 2 in., Don Reitz Collection







**Three-Fingered Jar**

Salt Fired Black Clay with Engobes, 1987, 10.25 x 11.75 x 11.25 in., Don Reitz Collection

Opposite:  
**Double X**

Salt Fired Black Clay, c. 1988, 22.5 x 4 in., Don Reitz Collection

Previous pages, left to right:  
**Mother Jar**

Salt Fired Black Clay with Engobes, 1987, 25.75 x 19.75 in., Don Reitz Collection

Reitz constructing a black clay vessel, c. 1989, Clarkdale, AZ





**Scorpion Man**  
Salt Fired Black Clay, 1988, 23 x 4.5 in., Don Reitz Collection



**It Makes Sense to Me**  
Low Fire Salt Earthenware with Engobes and Glaze, 1990, 22.5 x 4.75 in., Don Reitz Collection



**Clamshell Bottle**

Wood Fired Stoneware, 1994, 17.25 x 15 x 5.5 in., Don Reitz Collection

Opposite:

**Vase**

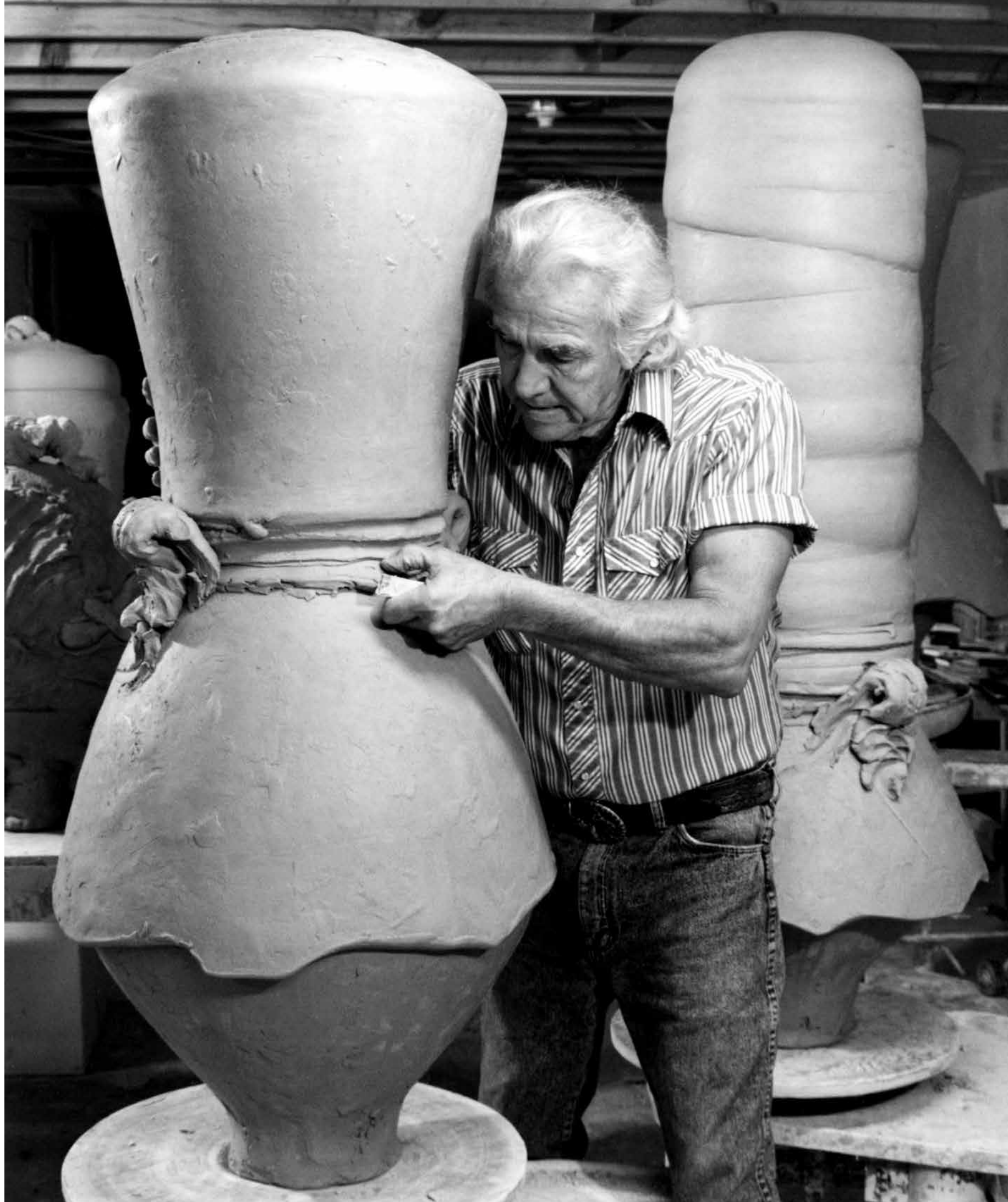
Salt Fired Stoneware, 1993, 18.5 x 10.25 in., Don Reitz Collection

Following pages, left to right:

**Celebration Vessel: Melting Snow**

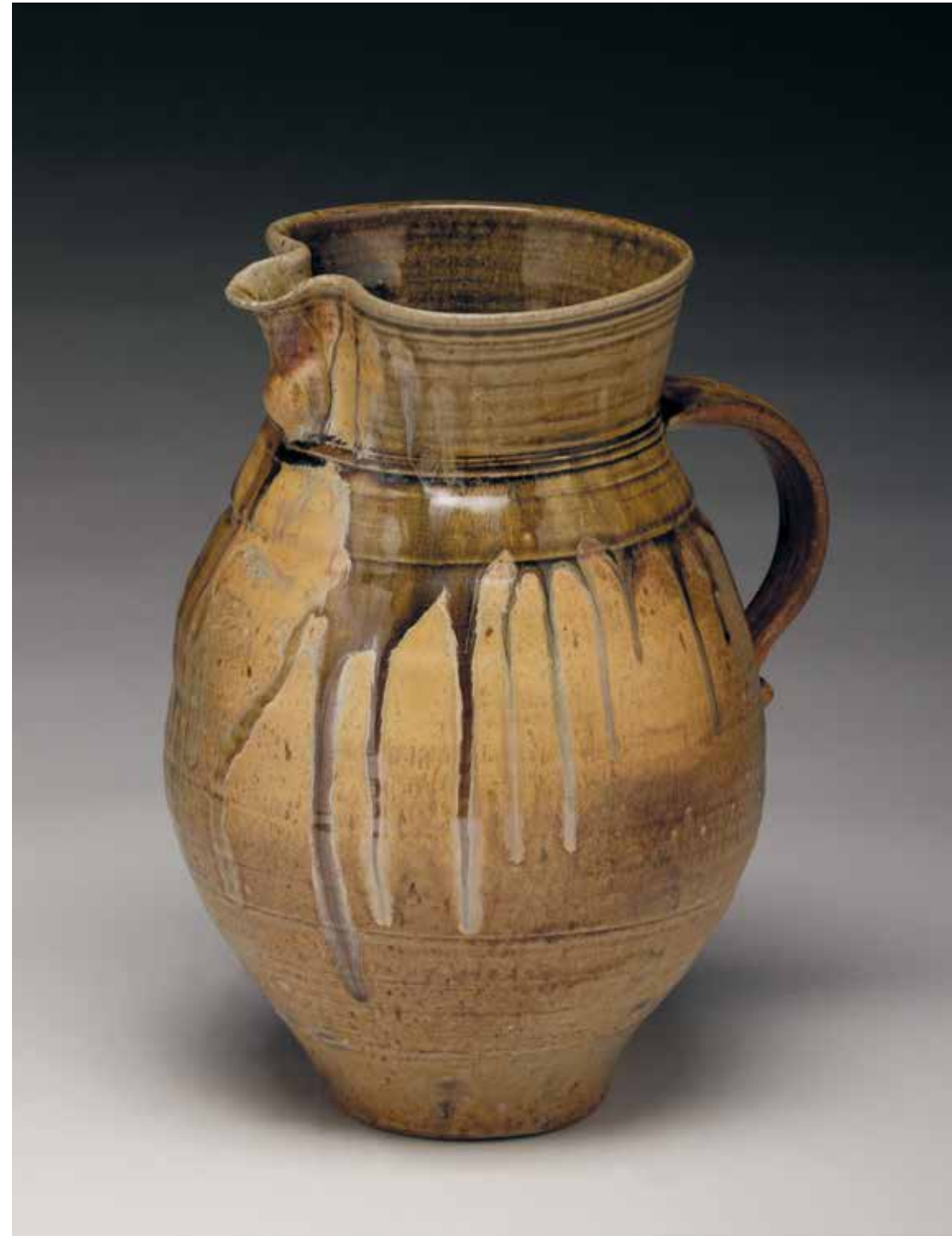
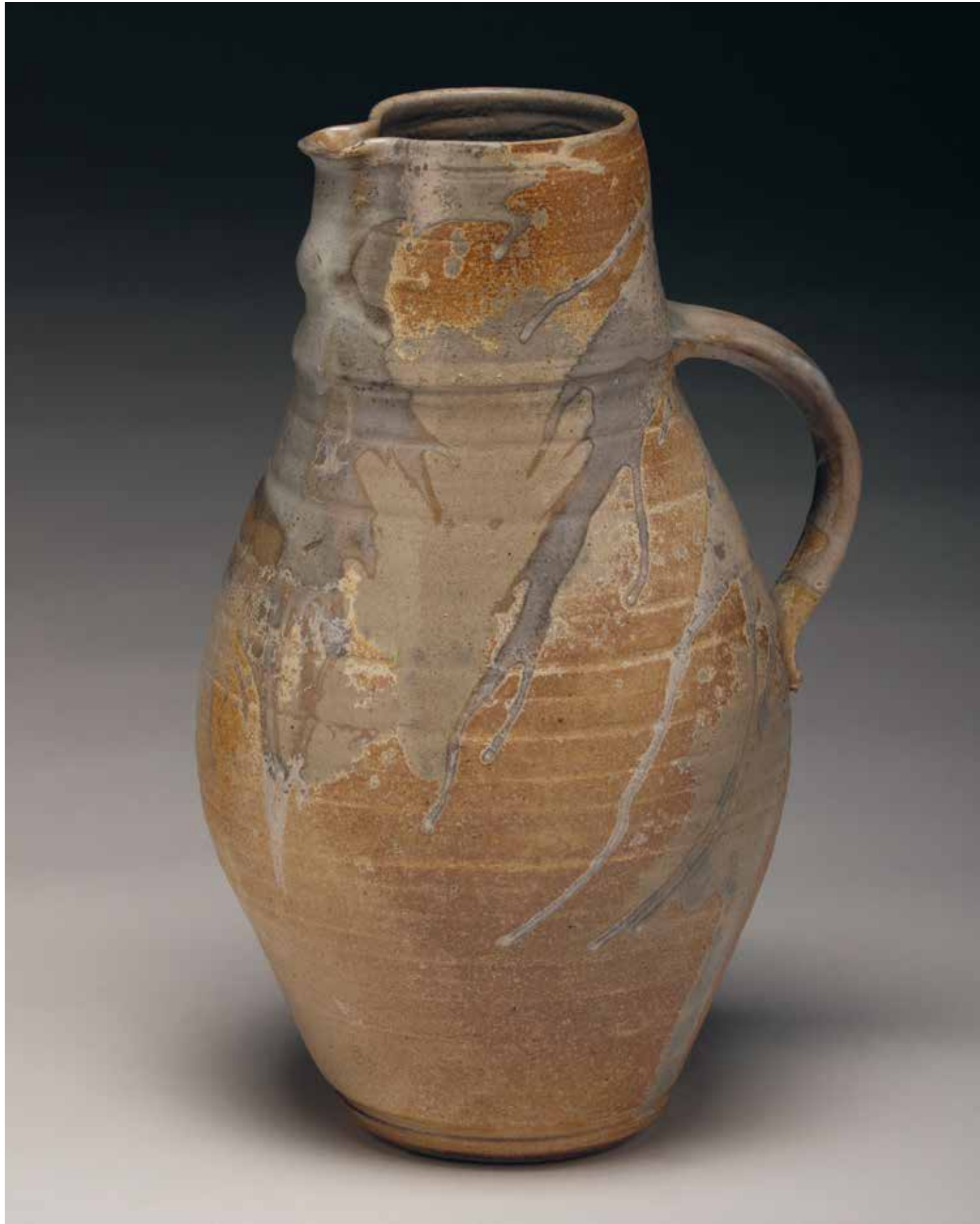
Wood Fired Stoneware (Dan Anderson's Anagama), 1995, 50 x 21 in., Don Reitz Collection

Reitz creating a skirted vessel, c. 1998, Clarkdale, AZ





Opposite and above:  
**Tea Bowls**  
 Various firing methods, dates, and sizes, 15 from Don Reitz Collection, 1 from Private Collection



**Pitcher**

Wood Fired Stoneware, c. 1997, 13 x 9.5 x 8.5 in., Don Reitz Collection

Opposite:

**Pitcher**

Salt Fired Stoneware, c. 1995, 17.5 x 11 x 8.5 in., Private Collection



**Broccoli Bowl**

Salt Fired White Stoneware, 1999, 8 x 14.5 x 14 in., Don Reitz Collection

Opposite:

**Kachina**

Wood Fired Stoneware, 2000, 26 x 10 x 9.75 in., Don Reitz Collection







**Platter**  
Wood Fired Stoneware, 2001, 22 x 3.75 in., Don Reitz Collection

Previous pages, left to right:  
Reitz forming a column, c. 2000

**Looped Column**  
Wood Fired Stoneware, 2000, 50.75 x 20 x 14.75 in., Don Reitz Collection



**Scruffito Jar**  
Wood and Salt Fired Stoneware, 2001, 6 x 6.5 x 6.5 in., Don Reitz Collection

Centerfold:  
**Punctured Column**  
Wood Fired Stoneware (Ghost Kiln), 2004, 58 x 20.25 x 15 in., Don Reitz Collection

**Column**  
Wood Fired Stoneware, 2005, 43.5 x 19 x 13.5 in., Don Reitz Collection







**Table Top Sculpture**  
Wood Fired Stoneware, 2006, 10 x 11.5 x 3.5 in., Don Reitz Collection



**X Curve**  
Wood Fired Stoneware, 2006, re-fired 2012, 10.5 x 13.5 x 7.75 in., Don Reitz Collection



**Platter**

Wood Fired Stoneware, 2006, 19.5 x 4.5 in., Don Reitz Collection

Opposite:

**X Factor Column**

Wood Fired Stoneware, 2006, 33 x 17.75 x 13.5 in., Don Reitz Collection



**X Spiral**  
Wood Fired Stoneware, 2008, 9 x 14 x 13 in., Don Reitz Collection

Opposite:  
Reitz glazing work from his Table Top Series, c. 2008



**Jar with Keyed Lid**

Wood Fired Stoneware, 2008, 11.25 x 8.25 x 8.25 in., Don Reitz Collection

Opposite:

**Treehouse with Green Drip**

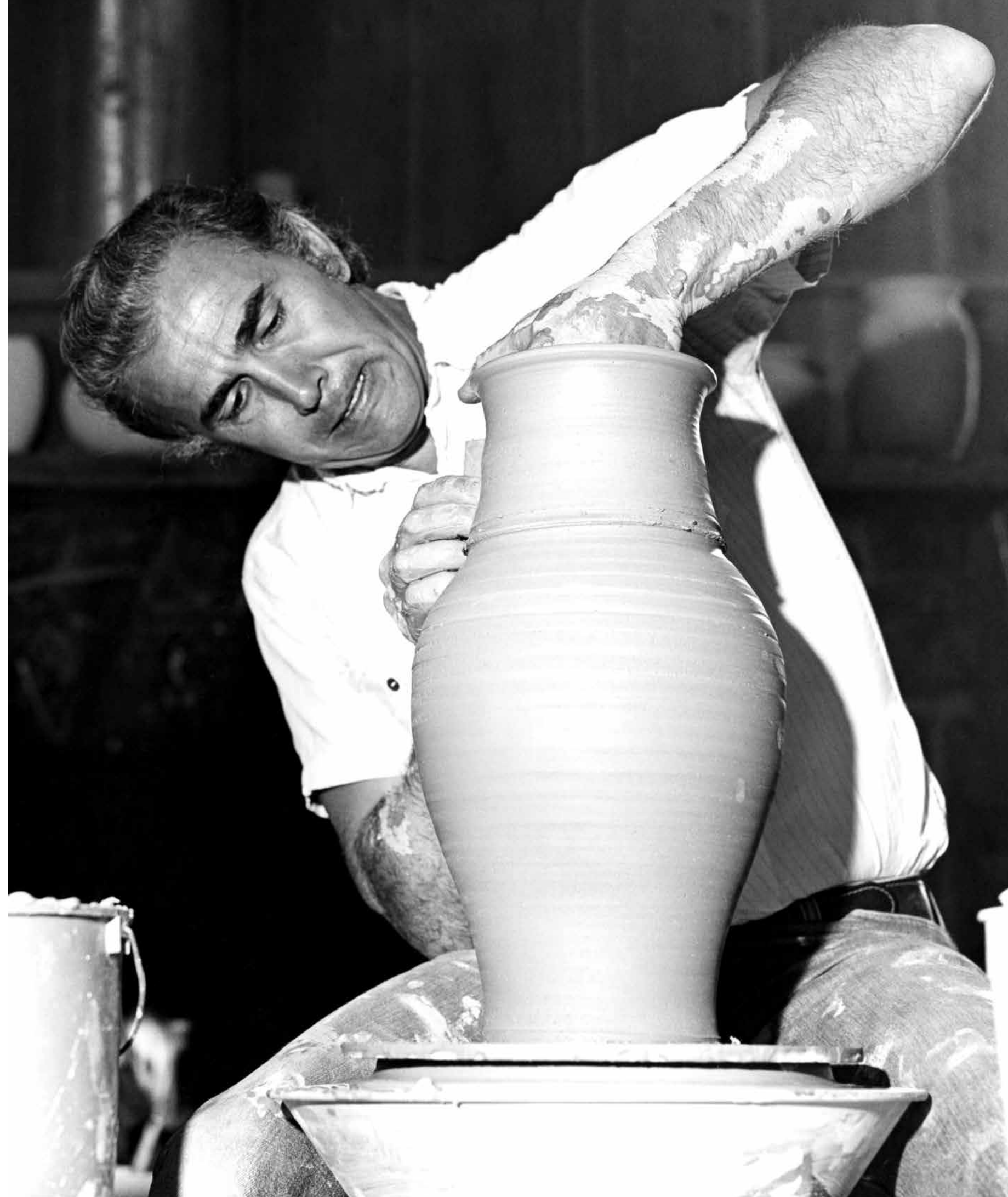
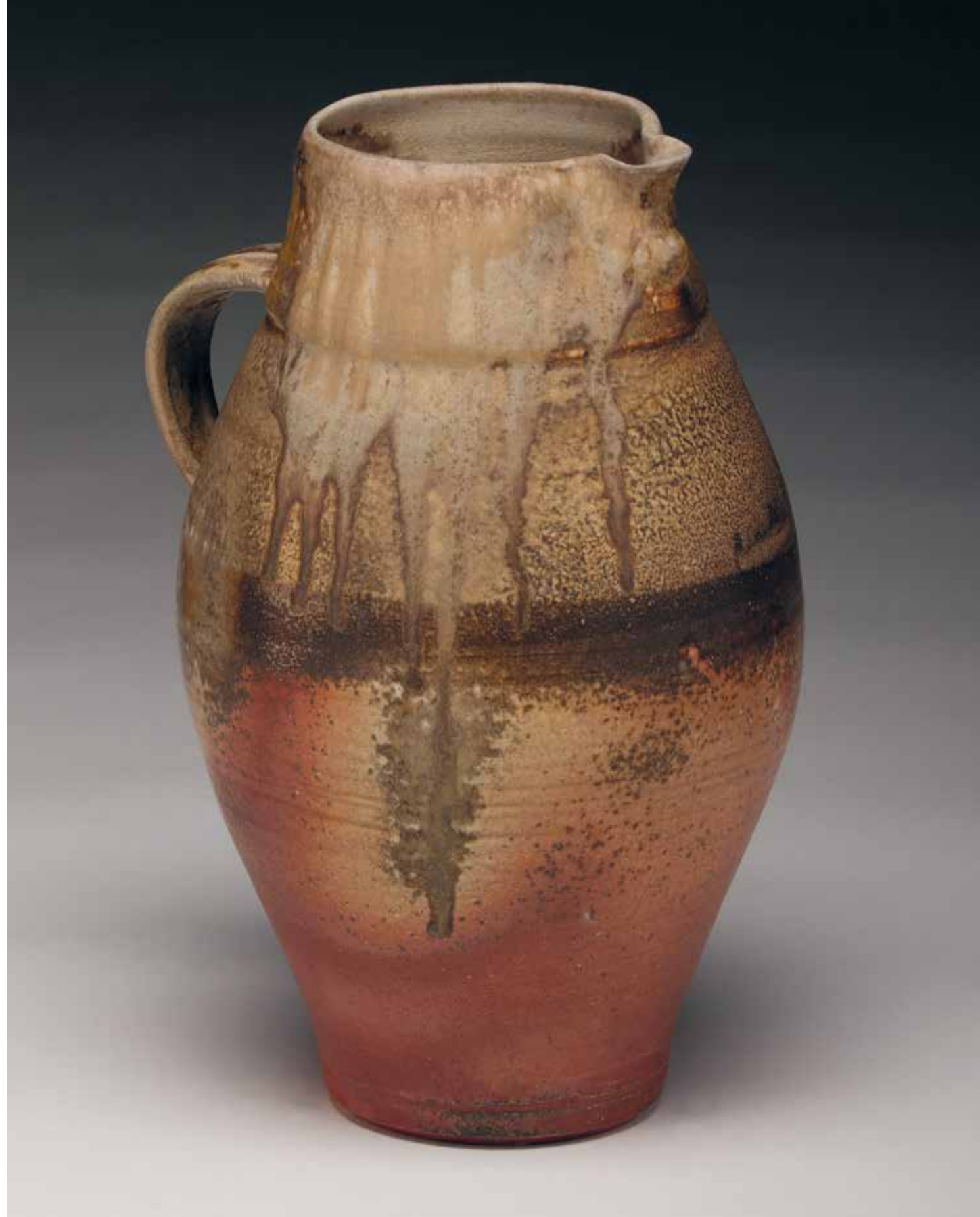
Wood Fired Stoneware, 2008, 40.5 x 13.25 x 11.75 in., Don Reitz Collection

Following pages, left to right:

**Pitcher**

Wood Fired Stoneware (Dan Anderson's Anagama), 2008, 14.75 x 10 x 8.5 in., Don Reitz Collection

Reitz throwing a pitcher, c. 1975, Spring Green, WI





**Double Ikebana**  
Wood and Salt Fired Stoneware, 2008, 8 x 10 x 5.25 in., Don Reitz Collection



**Footed Tray**  
Wood Fired Stoneware with Shino and Engobes, 2009, 6.5 x 18.25 x 11.25 in., Don Reitz Collection



**Platter**  
Wood Fired Stoneware, 2009, 19 x 7.25 in., Don Reitz Collection



**Platter With Shino Glaze**  
Wood Fired Stoneware, 2009, 20 x 6.5 in., Don Reitz Collection



**Bulbous Jar**  
Wood Fired Stoneware, 2009, 14 x 14 x 14 in., Don Reitz Collection



**Jar**  
Wood Fired Stoneware, 2009, 9 x 8 x 7.75 in., Don Reitz Collection



**Geode Bowl**

Wood Fired Stoneware, 2009, 5.75 x 15 x 15 in., Don Reitz Collection

Opposite

**Bag Form**

Wood Fired Stoneware, 2011, 47.625 x 13.5 x 10.25 in., Don Reitz Collection

Following pages, left to right:

Reitz throwing at University of Wisconsin-Madison workshop, c. 2001, Photo: Brooke Wentland

**Torqued Teastack**

Wood and Salt Fired Stoneware, 2011, 37.5 x 13.5 in., Don Reitz Collection

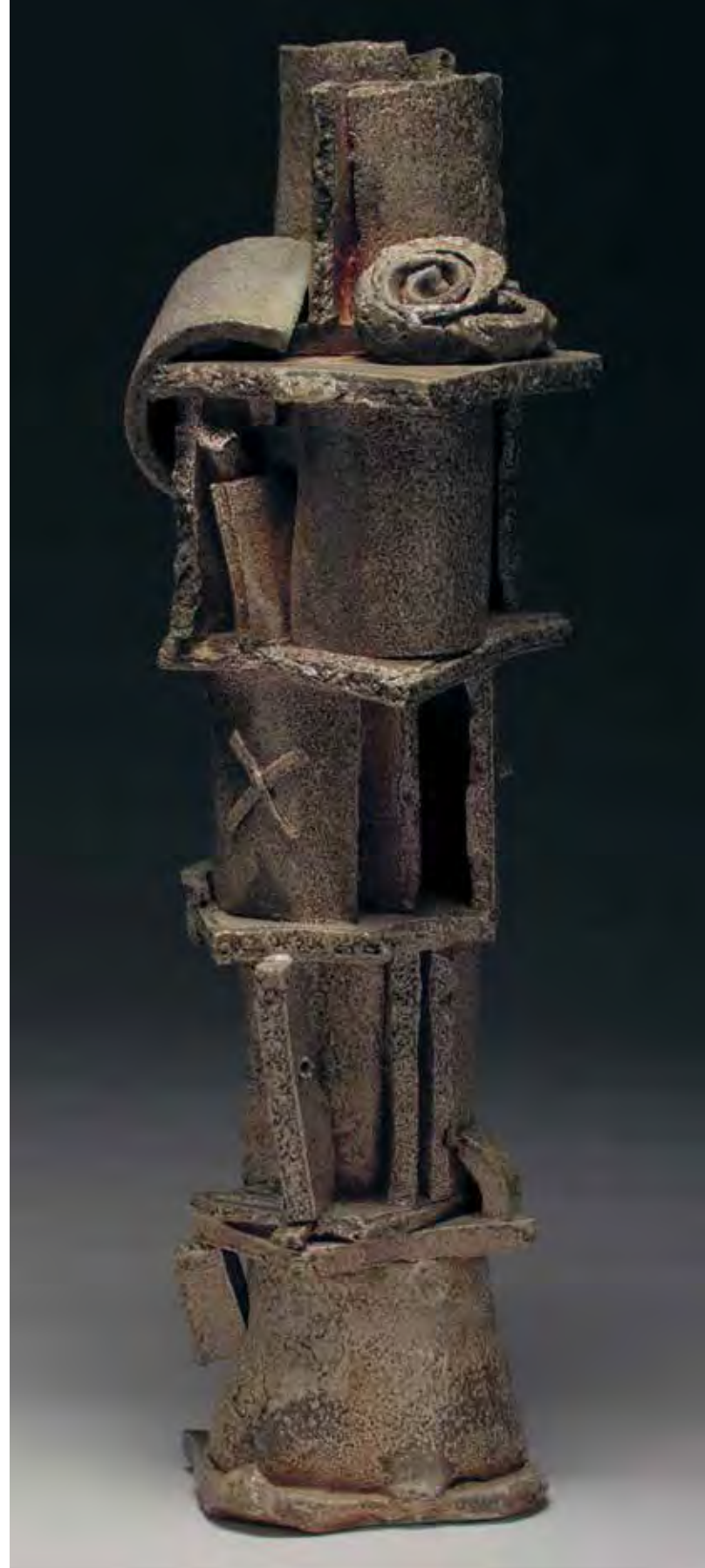






**Spirit Jar**  
Wood Fired Stoneware, 2012, 15.75 x 16 x 16 in., Don Reitz Collection

Opposite:  
**Tower**  
Wood and Salt Fired Stoneware, 2012, 43.75 x 12.5 x 13 in., Don Reitz Collection





**Ring Toss with Bar**  
 Wood Fired Stoneware with Engobes, 2012, 18.5 x 15 x 15.5 in., Don Reitz Collection

Opposite:  
**Faceted Teastack**  
 Wood Fired Stoneware, 2012, 43 x 13.5 in., Don Reitz Collection





**Ikebana**  
Wood Fired Stoneware, c. 2012, 7.75 x 6.5 x 5.5 in., Don Reitz Collection

Opposite:  
Reitz constructing an Ikebana, c. 2010, Photo: Robert Thompson





**Platter**  
Wood Fired Stoneware with Engobes, 2013, 21.5 x 5 in., Don Reitz Collection

Opposite:  
**Tall Ikebana**  
Wood Fired Stoneware, 2013, 20.5 x 13.25 x 7.25 in., Don Reitz Collection





**Jammin'**  
Gas Fired White Stoneware with Engobes and Glaze, 2013, 28 x 14 in. (28 x 42 in.), Don Reitz Collection



**Beveled Tray**

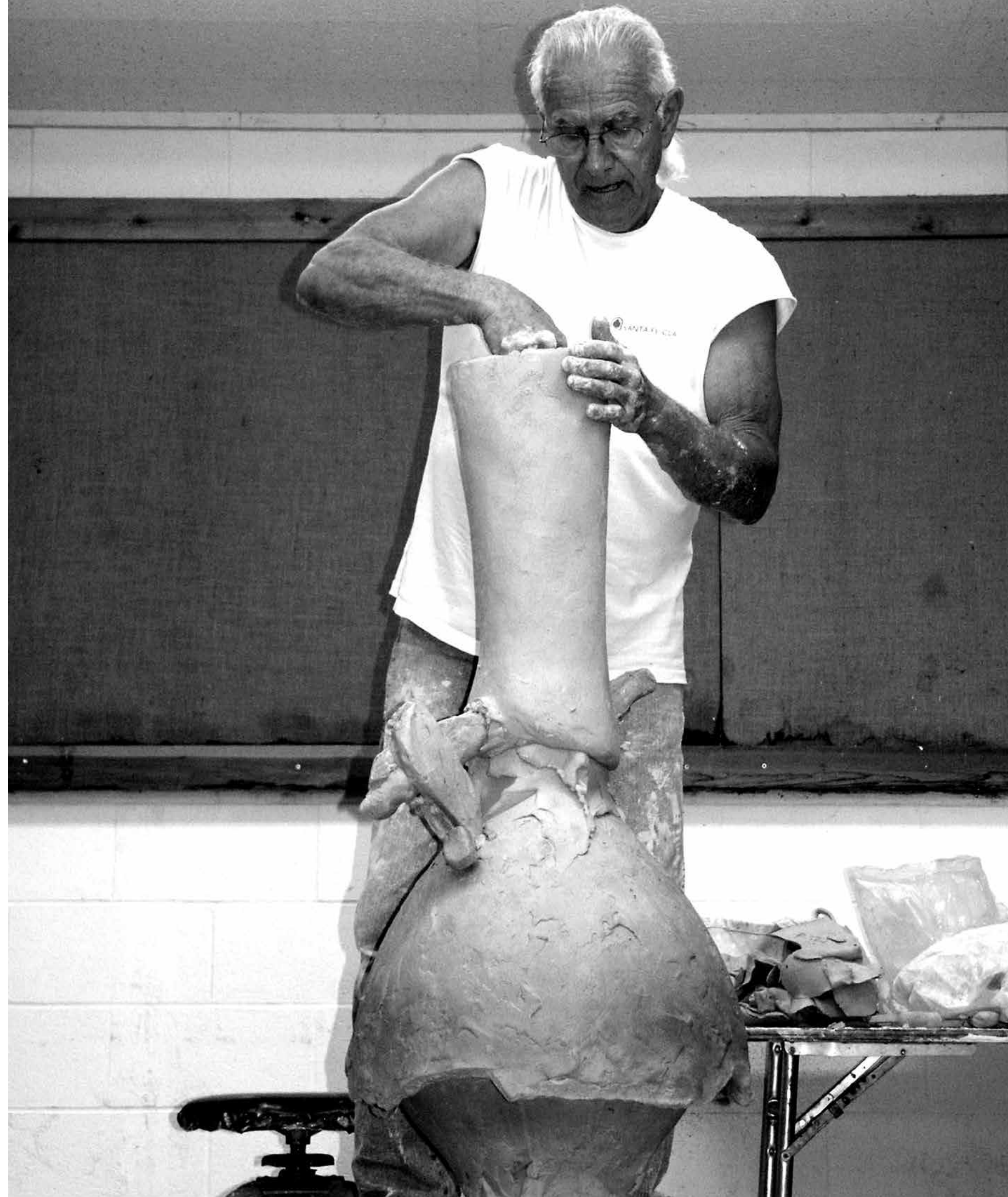
Wood Fired Stoneware, 2013, 7.625 x 18.5 x 10.5 in., Don Reitz Collection

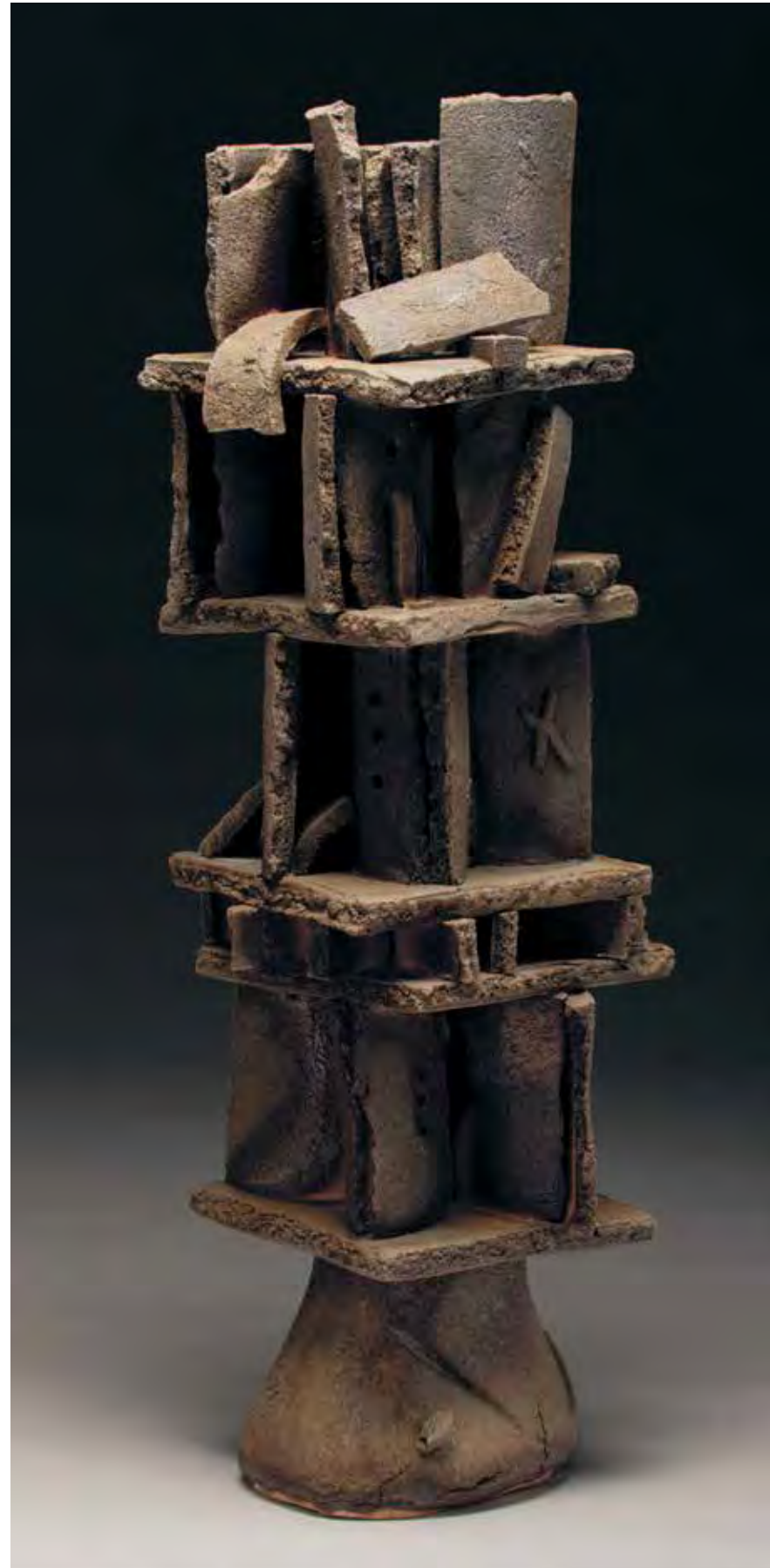
Following pages, left to right:

**Skirted Teastack**

Wood Fired Stoneware, 2013, 51.5 x 14.75 in., Don Reitz Collection

Reitz assembling a Teastack, c. 2000





**Tall Ikebana**

Wood Fired Stoneware, 2013, 22.75 x 12.5 x 9.5 in., Don Reitz Collection

Opposite:

**Tower (Re-emerging #4)**

Wood Fired Stoneware, 2013, 44.5 x 13.25 x 12 in., Don Reitz Collection

This was the last piece Reitz created prior to his passing in March 2014. It was posthumously fired in 2017 in the wood kiln known as the "Reitzagama."

**The Last Dance**  
Wood Fired Stoneware, 2014, 15.75 x 14 x 8.75 in., Don Reitz Collection



# Living Without a Net

Growing up with Don Reitz

*Sooner or later you have to start working without the net.*

Don Reitz

"Gosh, I wonder what kind of mood he'll be in after he unloads this kiln."

I am the son of a potter—a ceramic artist who chose to chase his dreams and a father who encouraged his kids to do the same. Through him, my sister, Donna, and I came to realize his special lesson of life: making your livelihood doing what you love can make for some wonderful and very turbulent crosscurrents in life. When you choose to go all-in and live without a net, things really start to cook.

If I had a dollar for each time one of my father's students, colleagues, or friends asked me: "So, ya gonna be a potter just like your dad when you grow up?" I would have been a very rich young man. I usually found myself trying to avoid that answer. Witnessing how wonderful it was to chase your dreams and make it your livelihood, but also struggle, sacrifice, and live a life constantly wondering when the next paycheck would hit the mailbox seemed a bridge too far. To play the role of artist when you have a net is very different than walking the path my father walked—but, to him, it was worth every minute.

Many of us grow up thinking the cornerstone of success is financial stature, which leads to financial security and comfort. This was not the case growing up with my dad. He constantly pushed his limits, and I'm not sure he was ever comfortable with comfort. Instead, he seemed most himself when moving one hundred miles per hour on his way to hit the next goal. One more firing, one more show, one more workshop. Vacations? Nah, he'd rather just continue working.

Life and how you lived it was what my dad considered the building blocks of success. Are you doing what you love? Do you know how to work hard enough for something so that once you achieve it you feel

fulfilled? Have you put in the effort to gain the knowledge and tools you need to be able to succeed and create? These were the gifts we were given as kids to understand how real success in life feels.

Of course, having enough money to provide a comfortable life for your wife and kids was a necessary evil. Dad wrestled with balancing family, while also doing his art. Looking back, I imagine he wrestled with this every day. As a young man, I felt these two forces pulling him in different directions, but I don't think I understood this tension fully until I lived on my own.

On one hand, he was the father who spent countless hours in the dark, subzero Wisconsin temperatures armed with a John Deere snowmobile suit, head lamp, and garden hose on a mission to transform the dirt floor of the horse corral into a pristine winter ice skating rink for his kids. Night after night he'd be out there in the freezing cold, alone with his thoughts, just to do something special for us.

On the other hand, he seemed more connected to his work than anything else. He spent many late nights out in the shop – a huge red barn that he converted into an impressive art studio. He spent many sleepless nights there firing a kiln, envisioning new great work coming out just in time for the next show. And he took countless trips to conduct workshops large or small—the size of his audience never really mattered to him, he just loved doing the work.

Love and care were always there—even during the moments when life seemed to be crashing down around him. Don worked right up to the very day he passed. Follow your heart was clearly the message he was sending in life—and it remains the one he continues to share today.

Brent Reitz



Reitz posing in front of his wood fired work, 2007, Clarkdale, AZ, Photo: Kent Adams



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**Images:**

Dust jacket, Outside left to right: Reitz preparing to throw a pot, 1971, Spring Green, WI, Photo: Bruce Fritz; Composite of Celebration Vessel; Melting Snow, Wood Fired Stoneware (Dan Anderson's Anagama) (detail), 1995, 50 x 21 in., Don Reitz Collection; Double X, Salt Fired Black Clay (detail), c. 1988, 22.5 x 4 in., Don Reitz Collection; and Functured Column, Woodfired Stoneware (Ghost Kiln) (detail), 2004, 58 x 20.25 x 15 in., Don Reitz Collection; Reitz inspecting a tea bowl after a wood firing, c. 2011, Clarkdale, AZ, Photo: Robert Thompson; Inside: Reitz incising clay with a putty knife (detail), 2008, Clarkdale, AZ, Photo: Russell Penczenko  
Cover: Double X, Salt Fired Black Clay (detail), c. 1988, 22.5 x 4 in., Don Reitz Collection  
Front Endsheets: Reitz teaching a workshop, c. 1984  
Opposite: Reitz signature (detail)  
Back Endsheets: Reitz throwing a platter, 2008, Clarkdale, AZ, Photo: Russell Penczenko

