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 Reitzes 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 works 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 Panzenko, 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 Shakewitz, 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
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.\(^1\)

Don Reitz, c. 1956

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

Don Reitz
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 1950s: 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 spiritually debilitated. 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 Bendel, ceramics teacher at Northern Arizona University in Flagstaff. The artists inspired each other with their boundless energy and a penchant for disregarding prevailing orthodoxy in teaching and technique.

Reitz at Alfred University, c. 1980, Alfred, NY

Ovoid Baroque Form (detail), 1965

Reitz at Alfred University, c. 1986

Sara with Don Reitz, c. 1986

Reitz and Yukio Yamamoto, c. 1986

At Alfred, Reitz approached his work intuitively, yet these smaller maquette-like works 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 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 archetypical.

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.

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."
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

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.
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.

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. 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. Reitz understood this immediately and completely, seeing in Voulkos’ breakthrough a challenge that could only be met by equal dedication to gestural technique.
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. 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. 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 whip lash 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 could center the self, if only for a moment. 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. 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 whip lash 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 could center the self, if only for a moment. 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.

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. 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 pine needle, pitch;
Dust, hair, woodchips;
Sending the final slivers of yellow pine
Through peephole white blast glow
No saggers 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.6

These were grand occasions for an artist-teacher. A firing brought together fellow masters (Peter Voulkos, Paul Chaleff, and Jack Tray 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.”7

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.8 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.”9

By Glenn Adamson

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.9 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.

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Endnotes

1. This passage draws substantially on Jody Clowes’ discussion in Don Reitz: Clay, Fire, Salt and Wood (Madison: Elvehjem Museum of Art, 2004).
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.
7. Quoted in Clowes, Don Reitz, 92.
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

Scraffito 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 Wendland
Torqued Yeastank
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
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

Reitz assembling a Teastack, c. 2000

Skirted Yeastack
Wood Fired Stoneware, 2013, 51.5 x 14.75 in., Don Reitz Collection
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.”
“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