



## THE CRITIC'S EYE

This new series gives respected craft critics the opportunity to discuss the work of makers that they admire.

Here, ceramist Alison Britton applies the critic's eye to "untitled pot" by Ken Eastman

One of the things that I like about pottery is the fact that a pot consists of the clay that it is made from; plus something else, a surface of slip or glaze, or both. So there are two strands to the work: first, building the pot in three dimensions and then dealing with the surface which will probably involve painting, and a composition with colours that will change in firing. This treatment is aiming at a link between the two and three-dimensional ideas; between skin and body. When pots are not wheel-made and are irregular in form, the two to three-dimensional relationship becomes especially interesting. I have chosen a pot in which the painting is very important to its success and its beauty.

The pot is straight-sided and roughly cylindrical; it reads easily as a pot, though not one that makes you think of a use for it. Its pleasures are abstract, it provides a place for the eye to wander in, to compare and contrast different aspects of the form and the colour, and to make imaginary connections with other forms. It is a pot with two halves: looking down on it, it con-

sists of a thin and a fat semicircular arc, that lap over each other in an unexpected and asymmetrical way where they meet to enclose a wide flat floor. The duality is further emphasized by colour; dark brown on the thin arc against bluish white on the fat one. The outside shape of the pot is very severe and flat: no organic swelling of the form from foot to lip, it is as straight as a drainpipe. The main focus of the form is inside the pot, where the inner wall of the fat arc is cut away in a big arch under the rim, which casts strong shadows. This arch is mysterious and compelling, and draws the eye into its darkness. It gives the pot an architectural reference, and an ambiguous sense of scale. We might be looking into a secret courtyard, or onto a stage in an amphitheatre, instead of into a lap-sized basin. The pot succeeds against the odds, for it is hard to give a feeling of large, light and airy architectural space in a form that still remains quite clearly a pot: there is a fine distinction to be maintained, or else something that is simply a little clay model of a building will result.

The severity of the form is enriched by the

way it is painted. The surface is very dry and matt and soft-looking, built up with thinly brushed layers of slip that are reminiscent of deteriorating fresco, or old walls where one layer of paint is partly visible through another. Italian whitewash is brought to mind – somehow these are building colours, faded in bright light. The only surface decoration (the main source of decoration is the form itself with its complementary arcs) is in the two bold zig-zag lines that run around the curves. The large scale of this pattern against the form is what just brings it back to pottery, away from architecture, in a highly satisfactory way. Glaze would have killed this pot, for it would have overstated the allegiance to ceramics. It has been apparent how important matt surfaces are to the success of many of the more sculptural pots.

I admire this pot for its simplicity, and its subtle way of encompassing aspects of stiffness and sensuality, ancient and modern qualities, architectural and intimate scale. Above all, it is a calm but stimulating thing to have around. □

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