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Regional Oral History Office  
The Bancroft Library

University of California  
Berkeley, California

California Craft Artists Oral History Series

Edith Heath

TABLEWARE AND TILE FOR THE WORLD, HEATH CERAMICS, 1944-1994

With an Introduction by  
Rick Sherman

Interviews Conducted by  
Rosalie Ross  
1990-1992, 1994

Edited by Julie Gordon Shearer and Germaine LaBerge

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Edith Heath, circa 1965.

Photograph by Lisa Stephens



Cataloging information

HEATH, Edith (b. 1911)

Ceramicist

Tableware and Tile for the World, Heath Ceramics, 1944-1994, 1995, vii, 411 pp.

Childhood on Iowa farm and Danish background; education: Chicago Teacher's College (1931-1934), Chicago Art Institute (1934-1940), San Francisco Art Institute (1941); Brian Heath and Federal Art Project, Chicago, 1930s; exhibits at Palace of Legion of Honor and de Young Museum, SF; Heath Ceramics, 1944-1994: marketing and sales, unions, development of roller jigger, clays, glazes, dinnerware, tile, buttons, extrusions for bricks; domestic and international buyers; discussion of design, mineral content, ceramic chemistry and recycling; Aspen International Design Conference; Wedgwood factory; architecture and Frank Lloyd Wright.

Introduction by Rick Sherman, studio potter and past president San Francisco Potters Association.

Interviewed 1990-1992, 1994 by Rosalie Ross for the California Craft Artists Oral History Series. Edited by Julie Gordon Shearer and Germaine LaBerge. Regional Oral History Office, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.



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## INTRODUCTION--by Rick Sherman

I was a young student at the College of Marin when I first learned about Edith Heath. What I write here is prompted by my memory of that time. World War II had ended and many of us ex-GIs had begun our college studies. Edith and Brian Heath had just opened their studio in Sausalito and their work was showing marked success.

We were involved in the resurgence of the studio potter movement, although we didn't know it at the time. We and our teachers were developing our skills at the wheel and possessed a strong contempt for "manufactured ware" and deplored the commercialization of fine ceramic form. In truth, we were presumptuous. Edith Heath and her husband, Brian, created cast ware, using molds and a jigger. We understood that Edith was the designer and Brian the engineer. We stuck to making wheel-thrown pots, knowing this was the way to true artistic form. Slip casting and hand building were not the de rigeur of the day.

But Edith Heath ignored the compass. She set her own course and earned our respect and admiration. We knew she had skill at the potters' wheel. Her wheel-thrown work was in exhibits. I was especially pleased to be in a show with her in the Rotunda Gallery of the City of Paris. Edith earned Second Prize. But she and Brian had developed a line of dinnerware that was receiving national attention. *Life* magazine included Heathware in one of its articles. She defined a certain aesthetic which paved the way for Scandinavian design. Arabia, Dansk, and the House of Today, a major outlet, are beholden to her as well as many of today's dinnerware manufacturers producing a line for department stores and specialty shops.

We also knew the Heaths had developed a low-fire stoneware, a clay which fired to a soft brown and was pleasant to the touch. Their matt glazes were equally admired. There was a velvety feel to them which many of us sought to replicate. We did not have the skill and never achieved it. They all fit together, clay, glaze, and design. Look at a tea setting composed of cup and saucer, teapot and creamer and sugar, and you will observe a small sculpture designed for use. The fact that we young potters were there at the beginning, even though only as observers, makes us part of the history.

I continue to follow the activity at Heath Ceramics to discover what Edith and Brian are going to do next. Although Edith is considered the artist, the two work well as a team--and always have. They have never given up on innovation. They develop new glazes, different designs, and introduce new products. Tile work as well as dinnerware has become a forte. They also recycled all the glaze waste to make new glazes, a valuable contribution with the current worry about toxic pollution.

Edith and Brian are practical as well as enterprising, an important facet for the character of any successful artist.

I consider Edith Heath one of the pioneers in ceramics for her artistic contribution as well as her production methods. And she and Brian keep on going. Something new is just around the corner to join the company of her traditional ware. I wish the Heaths well and hope they continue following the line of their own compass well into the future.

Rick Sherman  
Studio Potter

May 1995  
San Jose, California

## INTERVIEW HISTORY--by Rosalie Ross

Edith Heath is a born teacher. As a child she was partly responsible for the care of her younger siblings. Because her family lived far from any city activities, Edith had to create entertainment for her sisters and brothers with what was available on the Iowa farm. By today's standards, she had a hard childhood. She worked long hours helping her mother with the cooking, cleaning, and childcare, but she also set a goal for herself to get an education and to be independent. She accomplished both.

When I moved to Berkeley in the late forties, I--like many of my friends--bought Heath Ceramics dishes. We bought seconds as that was what we could afford, and almost everyone I knew had a Heath ashtray. Over the years I visited the Heath Ceramics shop in Sausalito to buy tiles--beautiful small tiles for a table top--but it wasn't until 1977 that I actually met Brian and Edith Heath.

I met them at a gathering of people interested in theater. At the time, Brian was building a tennis court on their property in Tiburon, and I asked him if I could help build it in exchange for playing on the finished court. He welcomed me to the "work force," and we did indeed build a wonderful court overlooking San Francisco Bay. The theater group dissolved, but our friendship did not. Although Edith didn't play tennis, she was always around, gardening or building the "tennis house" when we were playing.

On first meeting Edith, one is struck by her appearance: short, slim, shoulder-length gray, wavy hair, and always dressed in unconventional style. She has a flair for the unusual--very artistically put together. She has the appearance of an artist.

As I got to know Edith, I was awed by her creative ability and energy. In the past twelve years, she has designed and built one house, rescued a pottery plant in the Cherokee country of Oklahoma, made new tiles for the state capitol, designed and produced a new dinnerware--all of which she speaks about in her oral history. During the same period of time, she continued to work at the shop, garden, travel, and undergo hip replacement surgery.

I first thought of doing an oral history of Edith when I visited the Pompidou museum in Paris and had seen an exhibit of the work of Le Corbusier, internationally influential Swiss architect and city planner. I was fascinated by the many and varied things he had accomplished in his lifetime. It struck me that Edith--though not world famous--had done on a small scale the variety of things he had. I began to think of Edith as the "female Corbusier."

When I volunteered to record Edith's oral history for the Regional Oral History Office, I had no idea it would take from March 1990 to December 1994! And neither did she. But when you have two busy women with full schedules, that is how long it takes. However, it has been a marvelous experience for me. True, it has been frustrating at times because of the difficulties in scheduling the interview sessions, accomplishing the same, and editing the transcripts. Most difficult and scary were the health problems Edith experienced in this period of time.

Because of her style of communication, I initially thought it might be difficult to interview Edith, but she was terrific! During the four years of our interviews, Edith and I found it easy to share our personal lives, and often it took awhile before we got down to the actual recording. But when we did, she was like a student following the directions of a teacher. When she wandered off the subject, I could bring her back to it easily.

A conversation with Edith is often one-sided, with her "educating" you about this or that. Fortunately, she has a lot of interesting things to say. In her distinctive raspy voice she can talk on many subjects, but her favorite subject is her work. Because she is constantly involved with some new creation, or solving a problem at the shop, that is often the topic, and she assumes this is of interest to her listener--no matter how complicated the problem or issue may be. It is not unusual for her to describe in detail a complicated glaze formula or the temperature needed for firing--and to ask the advice of her listener. When she was building the tennis house, she once asked me where a particular support beam should be placed!

Edith has a great interest and concern for the world about her. She keeps informed by listening to her beloved KPFA-FM, the listener-supported Berkeley public radio station. Her political, social, and artistic values are plainly evident in the interviews. Edith met Brian Heath in the thirties at Batavia, Illinois where they both worked in an artist training school, an outgrowth of the Federal Art Project, in which Edith was also involved. She still keeps abreast of world affairs and social issues. She is particularly concerned about woman's role and sometimes gets very emotional about her own experiences.

In the first year of our interviews, the Heaths were given a kitten. It was amazing to see how Brian and Edith would abandon their usual arguing to play with it. The Heaths do indeed argue a great deal--often about trivial matters--but there is obviously a great deal of affection and caring between them. Brian wants very much to retire; Edith will not and is still going strong. Brian does not accept the suggestion that he retire and let Edith continue to work, so this is an ongoing issue. Edith has lost much of her hearing, which is enormously frustrating to them both.



Her hearing loss also affects her relationships at work. She finds it difficult to hear what goes on at business meetings where decisions are made, so sometimes there are misunderstandings. However, she enjoys working on her own projects and continues to spend long hours at the shop.

The sixteen interviews were conducted in the living room of the Heaths' condominium in Tiburon from March 1990 to August 1994. Brian Heath was within hearing during several of the interviews and occasionally interjected comments and answered questions posed by Edith. The home is a work of art created by Edith. Colorful tiles cover the floors and countertops. There is wonderful art on the walls, done by Jean Varda, Mary Lindheim, Walt Kuhlman, and Gene Tepper--artists the Heaths admire, comfortable furniture with colorful fabrics, a fireplace designed by Edith and rebuilt in her own style, and books and magazines within reach of most chairs. Outside is a courtyard garden with the Bay and San Francisco in the background. It was a joy to work there.

Rosalie Ross  
Interviewer

December 1994  
San Francisco, California



## EDITOR'S NOTE--by Germaine LaBerge

In 1990, Rosalie Ross came by the Regional Oral History Office to recommend that Edith Heath, well-known ceramicist, be interviewed. Rosalie knew about The Bancroft Library's oral history goals and methods at first hand, as the wife of ROHO memoirist William Sennett, and she had secured Edith Heath's agreement to spend the year or so involved in recording an oral history. The oral history staff were well aware of Edith Heath's skill, business acumen, and worldwide reputation. Willa Baum, ROHO director, quickly won approval from then-Director of The Bancroft Library, James D. Hart, to begin the formal process. It is with great pleasure that we add this memoir to our California Craft Artists series.

Rosalie Ross not only initiated the Edith Heath project, but she also volunteered to conduct the interviews. She spent many hours studying the techniques of oral history and researching the field of art, ceramics in particular. It is obvious to the reader that Rosalie came well prepared to each session; her enthusiasm and easygoing manner built the rapport necessary for a lively interview. What is not obvious is the silent task of encouraging, organizing, and editing, all a vital part of a finished oral history. Rosalie made a countless number of trips to the University campus to consult with Willa Baum and Julie Shearer of ROHO, to prepare photographs for inclusion, to deliver tapes and transcripts. We thank Rosalie for the contribution she has made to researchers who will use this volume at The Bancroft Library and other research libraries throughout the nation.

The twenty-eight tapes from sixteen interviews were transcribed at the Regional Oral History Office and lightly edited for clarity by Julie Shearer and Germaine LaBerge. Mrs. Heath reviewed the transcripts of the interviews carefully, with the assistance of Rosalie Ross. She reworded many sections, deleted repetitious material and provided additional information.

We wish to thank Brian and Edith Heath for their support of the clerical and editorial work on the manuscript. Thanks also go to Rick Sherman, former president of the San Francisco Potters Association, for writing an introduction to the volume. The completion of this project coincides with an exhibit of Heathware at the San Francisco Craft and Folk Art Museum entitled "Edith Heath: 50 Years of Design." We are pleased to have captured those fifty years for future scholars.

Germaine LaBerge, Editor

March 1995  
Regional Oral History Office  
The Bancroft Library  
University of California, Berkeley



Regional Oral History Office  
Room 486 The Bancroft Library

University of California  
Berkeley, California 94720

BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

(Please write clearly. Use black ink.)

Your full name Edith Kierzyner Heath  
 Date of birth July 24, 1911 Birthplace Ida Grove, Iowa  
 Father's full name Niels Kierzyner  
 Occupation Farmer Birthplace Vaerly, Denmark  
 Mother's full name Caroline Mathisen Kierzyner  
 Occupation Homemaker Birthplace Denmark  
 Your spouse BRIAN Heath  
 Occupation social worker, Birthplace Bridgport, Conn  
 Your children - 0 -

Where did you grow up? 40 miles east of Sioux City, Iowa

Present community Tuburon, Calif

Education Chicago Teachers College '31-'34 Chicago art Institute '34-'37

San Francisco Art Institute, 1942. University of Calif SF. Extension '43

Occupation(s) art teacher, painter, ceramist, potter

Areas of expertise History of art, ceramic chemistry and  
Design, manufacturing of ceramics - dinnerware,  
architectural tile, extruded blocks for architecture

Other interests or activities landscape architecture, gardening  
reading in philosophy, writing poetry - world travel

Organizations in which you are active Calif potters Assn

Design Conference Aspen Colorado



## I FAMILY BACKGROUND AND CHILDHOOD

[Interview 1: March 25, 1990]##<sup>1</sup>

Birthplace, Ida Grove, Iowa, 1911

Ross: This is an interview with Edith Heath. We're at her home in Tiburon and it's March 25th, 1990, Sunday. We're starting this oral history and we are going to go from beginning to end. Okay?

Heath: Where's the beginning?

Ross: Well, the beginning is, the real beginning; like when and where were you born?

Heath: May 24, 1911 in Ida Grove, Iowa, about fifty miles southeast of Sioux City, Iowa.

Ross: Is that a little town or was it then?

Heath: It was a population probably of 2,000, a farming community.

Ross: And where did you fall within your siblings, if you had siblings?

Heath: There were ultimately seven children in the family. I was the second. The first was a boy, Adolph, and I was the second. As such, I became sort of the mother of all of the others who came after me.

Ross: How much space was there between you and your siblings in age?

---

<sup>1</sup>## This symbol indicates that a tape or tape segment has begun or ended. A guide to the tapes follows the transcript.

Heath: My oldest brother and I, for one month out of the year, were the same age. [laughter] So all of the children were very close together. Let's see, the youngest, Anna Jane, was born when I was thirteen and there were seven. Adolph, Edith, Arlo, Amy, Elvie, Earl, Anna Jane. But that was typical of the farm communities at that time.

#### Parents' Immigration from Denmark

Ross: Was your father a farmer?

Heath: Yes, both my mother [Karoline Martinsen] and father [Nils Kiertzner] came from Denmark. My mother's father was a fisherman in the North Sea and all of her brothers were fishermen, not farmers.

Ross: Was your mother born in Denmark?

Heath: Yes.

Ross: And when did she come to this country?

Heath: She came in 1909. My father came in 1906. He came from a town called Varda, about twelve miles from Esbjerg where she lived. So their parents knew each other; they did not know each other.

Ross: They were married in Denmark?

Heath: No. She came as one of the many immigrants at that time. They were, I forgot what it was called. Indentured? In other words, they came with a proviso that they'd not be a drain on the public. They were sponsored by other people and members of the family. My father sponsored my mother's coming.

Ross: Did they know they would be married at that time--was that an arranged thing for them?

Heath: I'm sure it must have been known that they would be married because it's not likely that someone would pay the passage. I'm not sure whether my father was the first to come; he was the oldest in his family of seven children. Two of them never came to this country. Marius was a silversmith and the other, Peter, was a very fine bookbinder in Copenhagen. But the other five children immigrated. There were two sisters and three brothers who came to the states. He came before any of the others, but I'm not sure how he knew the



Behn's, which was a Danish family in Battle Creek, Iowa, my father's sister married into.

Ross: How big of a farm did your parents have?

Heath: It was a section of land.

Ross: Were they homesteaders?

Heath: Almost. I think the family that we bought from were homesteaders. I'm not clear just what the financial arrangements were.

Ross: I asked a question and then I didn't wait for the answer. When your father first came to the United States did he, like many others, start in New York or Chicago or did he go straight--?

Heath: No, he went directly to the farm country.

Ross: Had his parents been farmers in Denmark?

Heath: Yes, although his father, Thomas, was also a musician and had a dance band. As the children grew up, my father became kind of the head of the family because my grandfather was traveling all around Denmark and playing with his orchestra.

Ross: Do you know what instrument he played?

Heath: My father played the flute, and I think my grandfather played many instruments.

Ross: Did your father play the flute after he came to this country?

Heath: He brought the flute with him.

Ross: Do you remember him playing?

Heath: Oh yes. On Saturdays or Sundays, or when there was a moment of rest time, he was sitting out on the front porch playing the flute. [laughter]

### Mother's Difficulty Adjusting to Farm Life

Ross: What about your mother?

Heath: Yes. Well, she hated the farm life and she refused to speak English. So when I started school--my brother and I started at the

same time. He was eleven months older than I was. And none of us could speak English. I learned what English I did learn from our neighbor who insisted that the children learn to speak English, even though my mother didn't want them to. So I learned very quickly. In fact, I can't remember not knowing English, except that first day of school the uncomfortable feeling of not knowing. All of our relatives, the people we knew and associated with, were Danes. They all spoke Danish. So it was sort of a close community.

Ross: But when you went to school that first day, were there other children who also spoke no English?

Heath: I don't remember. I don't think so. I think all the rest of the relatives learned and didn't have the antagonism toward the United States that my mother did. The thing she disliked most was the food, the way people cooked. She didn't think they were good cooks. See, she had worked as a sandwich maker in a large hotel in Denmark.

Ross: Those famous Danish open-faced sandwiches?

Heath: Yes. And the artful way in which they were put together, and doing fancy pastries. So the kind of food on the farm wasn't like that at all. The Danish specialties were made up of all of these tidbits of all kinds of fishes and they were beautiful ones. She made the sandwiches, but she said she never had enough of the right materials to do it on the farm.

Ross: Oh. So she could have done it had she had the materials?

Heath: That's right. In the middle of the United States there were no fish. That was the thing that she missed, was the sea, because she had lived right on the ocean. It was that bit of water between northern Germany and Denmark. Where they lived was on the North Sea.

Ross: So she came from a fishing community. Her father was a fisherman--

Heath: --with all of the various fish, oysters, and clams and the things that just didn't exist on the farm.

Ross: Do you think she was not prepared for that? Did she not know or did she have a choice?

Heath: No, she did not have a choice. Her father, Claus Martinson, insisted that she go to the United States, that that's where the good life was, the potential for the good life.

Ross: Did she ever come to think of it as a good life?

Heath: Grudgingly.

Ross: Did she ever learn English?

Heath: Eventually, after all of the children were grown up. Then she decided--by that time, too, our father had gone bankrupt--

### Bankruptcy and Move to Town

Ross: Wait a second. You mean on the farm he went bankrupt?

Heath: Yes.

Ross: You were still a little girl then?

Heath: No, I was a sophomore in high school. From there they eventually moved into a small town and then from there into Sioux City, Iowa. So that after all of the children were grown up and living in the city, she learned.

Ross: Did you have chores on the farm? Or did you mostly help your mother?

Heath: No, I mostly helped my mother. Although I did milk cows occasionally, and would go out and help shock the wheat during the harvest period. But not very much because what with doing chores, growing our own vegetables and then going to school, there wasn't much time. There were four boys, and they did the chores.

### Early Education

Ross: Was there ever any question about you and your brothers and sisters going to school, or was that always a given--that you would start at the proper time and continue?

Heath: My father was especially very insistent upon our getting our education. My mother didn't feel that it was that important for girls to go to school. I think her reluctance having me go to school was because I wasn't around then to be as much help. So going to high school, she didn't think very highly of that.

Ross: Did you feel like you were taking from her or was there any feeling of resentment?

Heath: Oh, I told her, I said, "Mom, I'm never going to live on the farm. I'm not going to live this kind of life. I don't want to marry a farmer." And she understood that.

Ross: So where did you go to high school?

Heath: I went to two small high schools--one in Battle Creek and the other in Ida Grove. My first two years I was in Battle Creek. It was during that period the farm was foreclosed.

### Losing the Farm

Ross: What happened to the farm?

Heath: It was sold off.

Ross: Why?

Heath: Well, it was what happened to many of the farmers during World War I when there was land speculation and growing food for the European market. Prices of wheat, corn, cattle, hogs and so on just escalated. It was a period of high income. It was during that period when my father would buy cattle, as was the custom for everyone to buy cattle, and feed the wheat and the corn, particularly, to the cattle and to the hogs and then take them to market to Chicago. So in order to really grow large and rich crops they bought tractors and threshing machines and cultivators and all the new farm equipment that was being invented during that period. Every time a new piece of equipment came on the market my father had to have it.

My mother did protest it, because it meant borrowing money at the bank, and the bank financed all the farmers. And then the war ended and the prices dropped overnight, and eventually the stock market crashed in '29. But all during those years from 1920 on, prices just went down more and more. Many people lost their farms.

Ross: How did that affect him? I mean his feelings of worry about taking care of his family.

Heath: I'm sure that it was a terrible experience. I somehow managed to support myself. I was old enough and I was taking care of myself so that I wasn't a drain on the family. When I graduated from high

school, I got a job with the Iowa Public Service Company as a bookkeeper and a teller. People came in to pay their electric bills--

Ross: Like our Pacific Gas and Electric Company?

Heath: Yes. I was able to save enough money in two years, and then I went to Chicago to school. None of the rest of the children were able to get away, to save enough money to go on beyond high school. When they got out of high school the Depression had hit and there were no jobs for them.

Ross: So you were living at home when the farm was lost?

Heath: Yes, I was going by horseback, on a little cart and horse, six miles to high school. I remember driving off the morning the auction took place. It was in March and it was cold and snowy and all the farmers gathered from all around for the auction. And knowing that when I came home that evening that everything would be gone. The only thing that was left were the beds and, I think, the kitchen table and some chairs and a piano. Because my father bought a piano on one of his trips to Chicago and the Haviland china, which is right there behind you. The farmers couldn't afford to buy the piano or the dishes, so we ended up with the dishes and the piano and the mattresses and bedding. That was about it.

Ross: And when you came home from school, that was what was there, but you still had the house?

Heath: No, we had to move into the small town of Ida Grove. So we moved into Ida Grove. Then I transferred from going to the school in Battle Creek to living at home in Ida Grove for my last two years of high school.

Ross: That feeling of going off in the morning when the auction was going on--you couldn't even stay home from school?

Heath: Oh, I wanted to, but I knew that there was nothing that anyone could do about it. But it was a very dreadful thing because my mother kept saying, "You knew that would happen, you just borrowed too much money to buy all of that equipment." So she never forgave. All of her life it was always a bone of contention that if my father hadn't been so profligate in buying all of this equipment--

Ross: I want to go back to that feeling. You left in the morning but then after school, where did you go? Had you already moved into the little town?

Heath: Yes, I presume they must have had the house rented or lined up knowing that when the auction was over--because the other children, you see, were going to the country school still. I was the only one who was going [to high school] and my older brother never did go to high school. In fact, he'd been sort of farmed out to work for another farmer, a dairyman. He hadn't really lived at home for two years I think. He left home when he was fourteen to go and live and be a farmhand.

Ross: At a neighbor's?

Heath: Well, it was right next to Ida Grove. They were about seven miles apart, these little towns--every seven or eight or ten miles there'd be a little village center with a grocery store.

Ross: That seems so sad to me, to hear that. Did you have a feeling of being poor and sad? Was that the feeling you had at the time?

Heath: Yes.

Ross: What age would you have been at that time?

Heath: I was almost sixteen. I knew the meaning of it only too well. I thought it was a terrible thing that had happened. In fact, the family lived in Ida Grove until I graduated from high school and went to work for the Iowa Public Service Company. I was hired as an itinerant clerical to go from one town to another while people in those offices took their vacations. So I went to Rockwell City and to Charter Oak and so on for three or four months at a time to fill in for the people who were away and would return.

#### Farmers' Strike of 1932

Heath: It was during that period that my parents went back to another farm near Sioux City and it was while they were there that there was this farmers' strike where they refused to haul milk and butter to the market because the prices were so low. They would stop the neighbors who were taking milk in to sell and dump the milk on the road to prevent them from going into town. It was a very exciting period. I was in Chicago when my mother, for the first time, took an active interest in political ramifications. My father wouldn't go on strike, he thought that was un-American or something.

Ross: And your mother agreed or disagreed with him?

Heath: She disagreed. Her father was a Socialist in Denmark. The Socialists hated the middlemen. They wanted to sell directly to the customer in the city. They didn't like to go through whoever the middlemen were.

Ross: Did they have a cooperative?

Heath: Yes, there was a farmer's co-op. My father was not interested in that, but my mother was. So it was at that point that she began to speak English. Actually she probably knew more than she ever let on.

### Deciding to Become a Teacher

Ross: Oh, that's interesting. So, you were going from one small town to another, working for the Iowa Public Service Company, when much of that was happening? That seems like a hard way to live too. Did you mind that?

Heath: No, I liked that.

Ross: They found a place for you to live--

Heath: --I knew where I would be going next. Of course, they were small towns, there weren't any hotels or motels. So you rented a room with a family for meals and bed. That was interesting.

Ross: Did you make friends with those people and remain close?

Heath: Yes.

Ross: So you were really seeing more of life, you might say, than just--

Heath: I was an avid reader, so that whatever books were in the library I think I must have read every one of them.

Ross: I gather that about that time, though, you were thinking about going on to school and did you--

Heath: I was going to be a teacher.

Ross: Just a general teacher?

Heath: Yes, because you see, there were one-room schoolhouses throughout the state.

Ross: Where the teacher taught everything?

Heath: The teacher taught all of the grades and everything. I think, in retrospect, it is very good to have children of different ages all in the same room because you overhear the conversation that takes place when the teacher is interviewing the child. There would be only two children in a class, you see (if there were twenty children in a school, there might be two in the first grade, three in the second, and so on). I became the teacher's assistant by the time I was probably in the third grade.

Ross: Was that because you had read so much?

Heath: Oh yes. And because my teachers always said, "You learn so fast." And I knew that I did. If I heard something once or twice, if I was really interested in it, I never forgot it.

Ross: Was that different from others around you? Were you aware that you had that curiosity?

Heath: Yes. It made my younger brothers particularly feel very inferior, I think. Because I had to help, they didn't do so well so they would ask me to help them. But I don't think they liked the idea.

Ross: But you were older.

#### Brother's Work in Cancer Research

Heath: My brother, who was older than I was, just sort of gave up.

Ross: Did you tease him?

Heath: No. I tried to encourage him. I said, "You can learn this, you just don't want to." And he'd say, "I don't need to know that." In other words, if you were going to be a farmer, which was what he was doing, he didn't need to know where Germany was or geography or history.

Ross: Could he read?

Heath: Yes, but I don't think terribly well. It was interesting where he finally ended up. He went to Ames, Iowa, where they were doing cancer study. They used chickens to trace the generations of who gets cancer and who doesn't. Because with chickens, apparently, you can get three crops a year, so you can get historical records with chickens very easily. And he became very much a part of that



department at Ames at the University of Iowa. Because he was really interested in that research and study, and he was supposed to take care of all of the chickens.

Ross: He worked in the laboratory?

Heath: Yes, to see that they were properly cared for and so on, and he helped document the behavior of the chickens to see if one chicken began to evidence some characteristics that were suspicious. He was really the custodian of that, and he finally died of cancer himself. I'm sure that having worked around it--I think he went to work there when he was about eighteen or nineteen, and he died when he was sixty-nine.

Ross: Did Adolph have a good relationship with you?

Heath: Yes.

Ross: But he always stayed in the Midwest.

### Grandparents

Heath: I was going to tell you something about both my grandparents.

Ross: Oh, good.

Heath: My grandfather on my mother's side, at the age of eighty-some, injured his ankle on his bicycle, and it became infected, and it was about to be amputated. He said he would not live with a foot removed, so he sat in front of the potbellied stove with a stove poker and cauterized his ankle to kill the infection.

Ross: This was your grandfather?

Heath: That was my mother's father. The fisherman.

Ross: And that, your mother told you--?

Heath: Yes. And she--if any of us were ever sick, she said, "It's all in your head; you're not sick."

Ross: Was she Christian Science, or--?

Heath: Yes, she eventually did become, yes. And on my father's side, the man who had the orchestra froze to death on the sleigh coming home

from playing at a dance one night. Apparently, he was--no one knows, the horse brought him home, but he was frozen on the sled.

Ross: How old was he?

Heath: He was a relatively young man, I think, when that happened. I don't know, but I would guess somewhere in the forties.

Ross: So your father's father froze to death in the sleigh, and your mother's father, a fisherman, cauterized his own wound at age eighty-four.

Heath: Eighty-four, or whatever it was.

Ross: How long did he live?

Heath: Oh, a long time. Both--everyone in both my father's and mother's families all have lived beyond the eighties and into their nineties. The last of my father's family, Aunt Christina, just died last year at ninety-nine.

Ross: Is that right? And your mother died at what age?

Heath: Ninety-three. And my father, ninety-six. And his brothers, Uncle Marius in Denmark was eighty-nine, and Uncle Peter was--oh, I don't know, he was somewhere between eighties and nineties.

My fourth brother was in Denmark a couple of years ago. He checked up on the Kiertzners to see what their background was. And originally they were, I think it was Hungarian. During one of the famines or some such terrible thing happening in the country the family came to Denmark to escape--whether it was the plague, or whether it was, I don't know.

### Danish Heritage

Ross: So, you come from a stoic stock. When you were growing up, did your family go to a doctor?

Heath: Well, we had one family doctor who, as my mother used to say, "brought all you children into the world."

Ross: And took care of you in times of great need?

Heath: Yes.

Ross: Was there ever a time of great need, medically, that you remember within the family? Did they get scarlet fever, for instance?

Heath: I don't remember scarlet fever. Whooping cough. Let's see. Everyone had to be vaccinated, so Dr. Stokes saw to it that all the children got vaccinated. It may not have been that every rural community had that program, but since there were cooperatives in Denmark, with my grandfather being a Socialist, caring for your health and so on, and having good food to eat--you know, a balanced diet and that sort of thing--was part of the knowledge that people practiced. You couldn't get, let's say, fresh oranges in Iowa, because there was no transportation. (I remember the first orange I ever had, what a remarkable experience that was!)

Ross: How old were you?

Heath: I don't know how old I was, but I remember, "Gee, that's what an orange is!"

Ross: Did your mother make trips back to Denmark?

Heath: Yes. In 1914 my parents, my two brothers, Adolph and Arlo [age three months], and I went to Denmark. My father wanted to go back and see his family and visit the old country. He always referred to it as the old country. Later, when my mother was eighty-nine, she called me and said, "How about meeting me in Denmark next week?" [laughter]

Ross: At this time you were living here?

Heath: Yes, I was here in California. And I said, "Well that's a little short notice. Don't you think?"

Ross: Your mother was eighty-nine?

Heath: Yes. Well, she decided she wanted to go to Denmark with my cousin, Ruth, who was living in Sioux City. I said, "Well, I'll think about it. I can't do it next week, but I will plan to meet you in Denmark." So we did two weeks later. Brian and I flew in. Driving with her in Denmark, she pointed out where she lived as a child, the school and so on, and I met my cousins in Copenhagen. They were the children of the silversmith and the silversmith himself who looked a great deal like my father.

Ross: Why didn't your father go at this time?

Heath: He didn't want to go. He was ten years older--no, he couldn't have been. Wait a minute. Well, he died at ninety-six. No, she was

eighty-four, I guess it was, and he was ninety-four. And he didn't want to go.

Ross: She still spoke Danish of course?

Heath: Yes, although now she couldn't speak it very fluently so she had trouble in Denmark.

### Meeting Uncle Marius, 1960

Heath: There was something I was going to say about my uncle. We were going to go to Frankfurt [Germany] first, before we went to Denmark, so we changed planes in Copenhagen. It was about eight o'clock in the morning. As we came off the plane we were paged. It was the whole family who lived in Copenhagen who'd come down. They knew because I had written to them that we would just be changing planes there and going onto Frankfurt and then we would come back to Copenhagen later. But they didn't wait. They came down and we were paged. I walked out and it was so amazing to see Uncle Marius, how much he looked like my father.

Ross: You had never seen him before?

Heath: No. Having always lived in the city, he was so sophisticated-looking and so much the dapper gentleman, with his cane and his moustache and his white hair and his charming little hat that he wore. And it was so different to see two men who looked so much alike. They were about two years difference in age. One who was a dandy and my father who was just a simple peasant. It was a very strange experience to see how one's life had so much effect upon how you looked. His clothing, the way it fit, and so on.

Ross: He was an artist?

Heath: Yes. He made cufflinks and tie pins for gentlemen--very nice things--and rings. They were all custom-made; that was his livelihood.

Ross: On that trip then, you were with your mother and you visited with your relatives, all for the first time?

Heath: Yes.

Ross: When you came back to Copenhagen then, you got to know aunts and uncles?

Heath: We spent a couple of weeks there, and from there we went over to Sweden to Stockholm and to Finland.

Ross: You say this was your first trip to Europe as an adult. How old were you then?

Heath: It was in 1960. I was forty-nine.

### More on Farmers' Strike and Developing Political Views

Ross: Let's go back to when you finished high school and you were working for the Public Service Company and watching the strike take place; your mother had taken on her first interest in politics and really exposed herself as an American, an American speaking out, one might say. Did you get involved at all?

Heath: The thing that's most vivid is going down to the highway, the main road going into Sioux City. The farm was set back from the road maybe a quarter of a mile and my father went down with the wagon, with these large milk cans about three feet high with the screw-on caps. There were old farmers there to intercept anyone getting through, trying to block the road with their wagons and their bodies, to prevent people from getting through, and it became a very belligerent kind of experience. The people who were protesting their delivering just simply got onto the wagon where the cans were and just pitched them over the side into the ditch. The people down there unscrewed the caps on the cans and let the milk run into the ditch.

Ross: Was there fighting then amongst the men?

Heath: No, once it was accomplished they returned home, because I think that they knew that it was probably better to. I don't know that it ever made any difference in the price of the milk, though.

Ross: You mean the protest?

Heath: Yes, I'm not sure that it did much good.

Ross: As you recall, there was never any settlement?

Heath: No. I really don't know, because times just seemed to get worse and worse. The Depression. It's when the orange trees--remember when they were burning oranges in California?

Ross: Yes.

Heath: And the food was needed and yet it was thrown out.

Ross: Did that bring out in you some of your political understandings? Had you read anything about--?

Heath: These discussions went on now around the family table, year in and year out. The debate that the middleman makes all of the money, not the person who grows the crop. And it affected me, when I got into making dishes and going through a middleman. I kept thinking it would be so nice if we didn't have to pay somebody else to distribute for us, if we could sell directly to the customer, without having that extra markup in there. The worst thing you have to do as a businessman is decide what's the cost of making this thing, how much do you need for it as compensation in order to make the next piece?

#### Early Awareness of Artistic Things

Ross: At what point in your young life did you ever think about art or pottery?

Heath: Well, going to teacher's college. Well, the earliest, of course, was my mother always made all of our clothes which were embroidered. So I learned to embroider and tat and crochet and make my own clothes.

Ross: Were you creative?

Heath: Yes.

Ross: I think in the farm communities back then things were pretty much one style, weren't they?

Heath: Well, there was the Sears Roebuck catalog, a Montgomery Ward catalog which I used to go through and look at all of the fashions.

Ross: And then you were able to copy?

Heath: Well, not to copy, but to think, "Oh, I can make a dress that's better-looking than that." [laughter]

Ross: And did you?

Heath: Sure. Or at least I thought so. I was always known as that girl who was always trying to be different. "Edith is just doing that to be different."

Ross: Did you think that?

Heath: Well, in a way I was trying to make a distinction. I'd say, "Well, somebody else has already made it like that. Why can't I make another kind?"

Ross: Do you think you were liked because of that or do you think you were envied?

Heath: I think I was certainly teased for being teacher's pet, and I think the brightest kid in school always gets badgered by the other students. Although within our own family I think there was a kind of pride in the fact that you could learn and that it was important to learn. And particularly in the making because on the farm you make practically everything. You make your furniture, fences, the gardening. We didn't have electricity so everything had to operate off of kerosene.

Ross: You mentioned that when the sale of the house took place the Haviland china was here. Did you have an appreciation for that in a recognizable way, that you thought that you could ever make that?

Heath: I don't know that I ever thought that I could make that, but we certainly made mudpies and sort of primitive little pots as kids. Because I became sort of a teacher. I remember one summer we spent building roads all through the walnut grove, and there was a hat shop and various businesses in this grove, and we used the apple blossoms off the apple tree and got all the farmers' hats together, their straw hats and their winter hats, and embellished them with the blossoms and the leaves and hung them on the branches and had them for sale. [laughter]

Ross: Was this you and your brothers and sisters?

Heath: Yes, and the neighbor's kids.

Ross: So it was an ongoing summer project, playtime?

Heath: Yes. Then when the winter months came--then, of course, it was the snow and ice and making a skating rink. We would clean up the sides of the bank to make the water running and the creeks spread out in order to get a skating rink. My recollection is that all winter long everybody had ice skates and skated. And then we had sleds for coming down the hillsides.

Ross: So you have a lot of pleasant memories of your childhood, is that right?

Heath: Oh yes.

Ross: Of playing and studying and reading--

Heath: Oh, being very competent. If you dreamed up something you wanted to make, you could make it and there would always be somebody around to help. Like my mother, especially.

Ross: Was she creative?

Heath: Yes. When she made the clothes for us she always tried to make those "Sunday best."

### Religion and Holidays

Ross: Talking about Sunday, did you go to church?

Heath: No.

Ross: Was your father--were they atheists?

Heath: Or non-believers. Especially my father, who thought it was a big joke.

Ross: So he sort of ridiculed it?

Heath: Yes, he said, "People who have to go to church, they're hoping there is something like a God. There really isn't, and when you die, you die; you become part of the earth." So in other words, make the most of this life because that's the only one you are going to know.

Ross: You thought of him as a good honest man without the need for any of the other--

Heath: He had security within himself of who he was and what he was.

Ross: Within your Danish community, was he seen as a radical in that sense?

Heath: No, that was quite characteristic, as I remember. There was a Lutheran Church. That was where we were baptized.

Ross: Oh, you were baptized. Now, why did he approve of that?

Heath: I don't know why. It's a good question. But the Lutheran Church was so far away from the farm. It was bad enough getting us to school, let alone getting whatever you needed from the town that



couldn't be grown--the salt and the flour and the--because really most of the food came right off the farm.

Ross: Did he work on Sunday?

Heath: Well, that's one thing about being a farmer--you see, you can never take a day off, because if you have any animals around, the animals have to be fed morning and evening.

Ross: What about plowing of the field?

Heath: Well, the plowing would take place in the spring and the harvesting in the fall. And in between you'd cultivate the plants and kill the weeds so that the only time that you couldn't be out working would be when there's snow and ice.

Ross: Well, I grew up in a farming community, but it was a religious community, and I recall that the farmers went to church and they took that day off. But in your family, as a non-religious family and a hardworking farming family, was there any one day of the week that was sort of considered a family day or a special day when you'd have special foods?

Heath: Well, there were birthday parties, but that could be any day of the week. And there was Christmas, Thanksgiving, Fourth of July, New Year's Day. Those were the four holidays.

Ross: Did they follow some of the Danish traditions for food and Christmas?

Heath: Yes, you'd start baking and putting up all of the goodies a month before Christmas and making great tinfuls of gallons and gallons of cookies of every kind and description.

Ross: Did you like that?

Heath: Oh yes.

Ross: And then was there a visiting time from one place to another?

Heath: Yes, and exchanging gifts and the women comparing their cookies to see which one was the most tasty and so on.

### Linking Bread Making to Clay Modeling

Ross: Did you ever learn to bake?

- Heath: Oh yes. When I went to high school, one of the first things we were asked to do in our literature class was to write a story or a paper about how to make something. And so I wrote about how you make bread. That was my first literary effort. You know, making bread you start the night before with the yeast and the potato water and getting the primer started. Then the next morning was when you had risen it over the night, then you rolled out the dough and made the rolls and baked them.
- Ross: Well, it's interesting because it seems to me that everybody made their bread, didn't they?
- Heath: Yes, I think most people did.
- Ross: So that was a rather ordinary subject then. So why did you, creative Edith, choose what I would consider maybe an ordinary subject to write about? Did you write about it in a different kind of a way, or was it more than a recipe? Was there chemistry involved with the yeast?
- Heath: Well, the preparation involved with all of the food--the making of butter for instance was a great experience. First, separating the cream from the milk in the separator, and then churning the butter and seeing it changed from a liquid into a solid and working the salt into it. In fact, there's so much about ceramics that's so similar to the bakery business. I suspect that was one reason why I liked working with clay, was because it was another dough.
- Ross: That was what I was wondering, because that story doesn't seem like it would be very interesting for someone who had to every day make their bread. But you found something interesting in it.
- Heath: And I liked doing it. I liked churning the butter and churning the cream and have it turn into butter and making cottage cheese and buttermilk. All of these different things you could make from something that came out of a cow. You could make butter and you could make cottage cheese or cheese.
- Ross: And you have to knead the bread--
- Heath: Like making clay.
- Ross: Did you ever connect those two activities?
- Heath: Oh, always. When I was at teacher's college and with the first chunk of clay we were handed to work with, I thought, "Oh, it's like a loaf of bread." And off I went. You can make balls out of them, you can twist them. See, the Danes make many of their loaves of bread twisted; they're not a solid loaf. You make two long

coils like strands of a braid. You braid them and so on. And extruding cookies--you extrude clay for making tiles, same idea. You have the different parts that fit onto the nozzle of--I have forgotten what it was called, the cookie maker.

Ross: Is it a press? You made spritz, didn't you--those butter cookies the Danes always make?

Heath: Yes, with little fluted edges.



## II STUDYING AND TEACHING ART, CHICAGO

Chicago Teacher's College, 1931-1934

Ross: When you first went away to college, you had a real goal to be a teacher.

Heath: Yes, because I had really been teaching all of my life with the kids.

Ross: And then when you worked a couple of years, got enough money and went to Chicago Teacher's College.

Heath: And at teacher's college, since there were no art teachers in the schools, every teacher had to be able to teach art, one art class at least if you were going to teach elementary school. It was in Chicago--the teacher's college I went to was established to implement John Dewey's concept of how one learns and how to teach. Because Dewey said that you learn through doing, not talking. So that when you were in the first grade, the children created an Indian community with tepees, and made Indian headdresses and so on, and became an Indian family. And then you went from that to visiting a fire station, learning how to be a policeman, learning how to be a fireman. Then you had a grocery store. So all through the elementary school, especially in the first two or three years, there was always something being built, a whole village being laid out in the classroom.

And art was just part of it, the craft of being able to do it. And we had a male and a female teacher come from the Art Institute to the teacher's college to teach.

Ross: Does Chicago Teacher's College still exist?

Heath: No, it folded during the Depression shortly after I graduated, which was in '34. I think it only lasted another two or three

years. It was a private school; they made their money by taking in children enrolled in the school. Bing Crosby's children were enrolled in the school, privileged. It was that part of Chicago near the lake shore where the wealthy families lived. And so sending the children to the elementary school, the tuition for that helped to pay to train teachers.

Ross: So the Chicago Teacher's College had an Art Institute professor come and do the art teaching. That was pretty good stuff, wasn't it?

Heath: Yes, and that was where most of the teachers that I had said, "When you leave here, be sure to go to the Art Institute and take classes." So I graduated in June, and in September I went down and enrolled at the Art Institute half time. I had been living in a settlement house and teaching for room and board. I was still living at the settlement house when I went to the Art Institute.

#### Howell Neighborhood Settlement House In Chicago, 1934-1937

Ross: What is a settlement house?

Heath: I think the concept behind the settlement house was to build these institutions for the benefit of the community. There was the settlement house in the neighborhoods. Sort of like a community center.

Ross: I see.

Heath: But the emphasis on teaching English for the foreign-born was high on the list. So that they were located in areas where the immigrants came. The Howell Neighborhood House, where I was for four years, was in a Czech and Polish neighborhood. The people who came from Czechoslovakia, especially, I remember their interesting music. They had people who came and played their instruments there, and made their own dances for the communities, so that they brought their culture with them, their culture from Europe.

And their culture was practiced in the settlement house, and it was a very enriching experience, because then during the Depression, when the Federal Art Projects were established, the WPA [Works Progress Administration] projects--you know, there was the writers' projects and theater projects and painters and sculptors and weavers and--I became part of that group. So when I lived at the settlement house, I was appointed to become a supervisor, or to help in the guiding and setting up of centers throughout Chicago,

in the black neighborhood, for instance, in church basements or in storefronts or whatever.

### Frank Lloyd Wright and Hull House

Heath: Oh, an interesting thing I learned just recently about Hull House was that Frank Lloyd Wright, who was the architect at the turn of the century, was very active in the arts and crafts movement. (That's why so many of his buildings have stained glass windows, decorative windows, and the furniture and everything in the house was made by carpenters and woodworkers, or glassmakers, and brickmakers.) And they met at Hull House. That was the meeting place of Frank Lloyd Wright and that whole cluster of people who were interested in the integration of the arts and crafts into building houses.

Ross: You mean, they had their meetings there?

Heath: Yes. But they also had their exhibitions--in fact, Hull House was famous for the art exhibitions that were held there, and their theatre projects--when Viola Spolin worked with the children's theatre, it was an outgrowth for the early years. I think I mentioned that these settlement houses were created for the benefit of the community. There was a settlement house in the Italian neighborhood for instance.

Hull House was on Eighth Street and Twelfth Street, I think, where the Jewish open market was. And that was sort of the background of the people in that area, so that many of them used the settlement house.

I graduated from Teacher's College in '34, and the Federal Art Projects were just beginning at that time. So I was chosen out of Chicago Teacher's College, since I was at the Art Institute taking classes in weaving and metal work and painting and sculpture and so on, to carry that experience into the neighborhoods.

Ross: Did you have to design the programs?

Heath: No, no, I was asked to teach, because of my teaching experience. At Chicago Teacher's College, we had to practice-teach all the time we were in college. You couldn't just go to classes. Each year I was assigned a different teaching post. First I was teaching at the Boys Latin School, which was on the near North side, and was for the children of the very wealthy, like the McCormicks. It was just for boys. And my next teaching job was at Francis Parker

School, which was set up to practice teaching the way John Dewey thought teaching should be done. And then the third place that I was assigned; you see--the Teachers' College was then a three-year stint--I was sent to the settlement house, to get experience teaching there. And because I was teaching at the settlement house when the Federal Art Programs were set up, they looked to the people in all the neighborhood houses. That's where Viola Spolin and I met, because she was brought in as a drama expert.

Ross: So then you lived at the settlement house. How many people lived there?

Heath: Oh, I think there were probably eight or ten of us at the dinner table at night.

Ross: So those were the people--like the staff--you lived, worked and taught there.

Heath: Yes, room and board were part of your pay. There was the director of the neighborhood house. Jane Addams was at Hull House.

Ross: Did you know Jane Addams?

Heath: Yes. Let's see, at Howell Neighborhood House Gertrude Ray was the director. And many of these settlement houses were supported by the churches; the Howell Neighborhood House was Presbyterian. The Methodists supported another neighborhood house. There must have been--oh, I don't remember now how many, and none of them exist any more. They've all been bulldozed out--even whole neighborhoods are no longer the same. They were all right on the perimeter of the downtown area of Chicago.

Ross: Was that a good program, a good idea?

Heath: Absolutely. I think that we should have something like that now--

Ross: Yes. What was the reason for their demise?

Heath: Oh, the World War II--the war effort. All the emphasis turned away from building of the cultural; from people being employed doing the things that they like doing. The writers, for instance, had been supported, and the theatre people, and Brian, my husband, was part of the WPA chorus in Chicago. It had two functions, the Federal Art Projects. One, was to give people employment; two, to develop talents. Anyone who had a hobby or a talent was brought in as a neighborhood teacher. The settlement houses were the natural resources. They had all the facilities needed for art classes, little theatre, music, gymnasium--for folk dances and sports--lectures, parties.



Ross: They existed before the WPA?

Heath: Oh, yes. They were started at the turn of the century, with the immigration of foreigners. They were started to teach foreigners English and how to become a citizen; but also important was the encouragement of European cultural expression in the New World.

Ross: Right. And then after World War II, they just weren't seen as needed, or what?

Heath: Well, I lost track of what was going on in Chicago in '41. When we came to San Francisco, there was the Nob Hill--no, Telegraph Hill Neighborhood House. I'm not sure whether it still exists or not, does it?

Ross: I don't know.

Heath: The war ended the Depression and the Federal Art Project. Other facilities were used during the Depression of the thirties besides the settlement houses--churches, empty storefronts, camps, parks, et cetera.

Ross: It would be interesting to know, really, why the settlement houses closed. I'm sure it's written about.

#### Contribution of Settlement House and WPA

Heath: I'm not sure that they really have been written up. A few years ago, Dan Defenbacher, who was director of the California College of Arts and Crafts in Oakland, and George Culler, who was then director of the San Francisco Museum of Art, and Bill Friedman, who had been at the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis, were all three here in San Francisco. We had an evening together, after all of them had retired, and Defenbacher was saying, "You know, one of us or someone should do some documentation of those WPA years, because the war came, and it [WPA] just dropped out of the picture. There didn't seem to be any need to talk about it, or preserve it." That wonderful creative period has been aborted. Money was spent for war--not murals--atom bombs. But it really was a renaissance that took place in the thirties.

Prior to this period, people used to say that if one wanted to be an opera singer, you had to go to Europe to study and to be recognized in the United States. Frank Lloyd Wright was one of the people who was recognized first in Europe in 1910. He went to Europe and spent two years, and he was the leader in the field of

architecture at that time, in nations all over the world. He was the top man. And in reading now, in the last month, 1990, since I've been involved in the Frank Lloyd Wright Exhibition at the Marin Civic Center, I've learned so much more about how important he was in his fostering of the arts and crafts in the U.S., and the impact he had on people like Gropius and Corbusier in Europe.

The WPA was important because it employed both recognized and unrecognized people with interest and talent, and sort of democratized art involvement and education. Wright was recognized as a first-rate American artist in 1910. Of course, jazz musicians also were being recognized as American artists in Europe in the twenties before they were recognized here as making important, creative, cultural contributions. Then the painters during the thirties took a very active interest in, well, the democratic notion that everyone should be creative and become an artist--that all people potentially are artists. It's just that they don't have opportunities for that part of their lives to be recognized, in the schools particularly.

See, the progressive schools like Francis Parker also almost died off with World War II. And there began this great conflict between progressive education and just teaching the three R's-- reading, writing, and arithmetic. And to heck with all that folderol about music and art and theatre and so on. Unnecessary. And the emphasis turned to sports.

Ross: And it also had something to do, didn't it, with the concept of public-private school function, also?

Heath: Well, there were two kinds of private schools. There were the private progressive schools, which were quite different, let's say, from the Boys Latin School, which based its thesis on learning the classics.

[Interview 2: April 2, 1990] ##

### Siblings

Ross: Last interview you talked about your older brother Adolph, who worked with chickens on a cancer study in a laboratory at the university and died of cancer. You said that you always felt there was some connection. You also mentioned something about one of your sisters who cried when you left home, because you had read poetry to her, and she would miss that. I have a feeling

that there are more stories to tell. Can you start by telling me the names of your brothers and sisters?

Heath: The oldest was Adolph, and then I came along. And then there was Arlo, and he became--well, he was a salesman all of his life for the Armour Packing Company out of Chicago. He traveled through the midwest, through Iowa and Nebraska and the Dakotas.

Ross: That's the Armour Meat Company, right?

Heath: Yes. They had a meat packing plant in Sioux City, which was where most of my brothers and sisters have all lived. I'm the only one on the West Coast. Then after Arlo came Amy. She married a man who was a musician, played in a jazz band most of his life, and when he wasn't doing that, he was a real estate salesman. And Amy was hostess in my next brother's restaurants for many years, and then when he sold his restaurants, she became the caterer for a club in South Dakota. She is still catering with the club.

Then, after Amy was Elvie.

Ross: Is that the real name?

Heath: Yes.

Ross: Is that a he or a she?

Heath: Man. He's my favorite brother [laughs]. He has a nice sense of humor and he's a beautiful dancer. I remember when he was about thirteen, Elvie became a chauffeur for my mother who went to Sioux City to sell chickens and produce. Elvie drove her and she went door to door to sell eggs and capons to the people in the big homes. She also sold direct to restaurants. When she got big orders, I would help her prepare the capons. Later in 1941, Elvie was drafted.

Then came Earl, and he worked all of his life as an auditor for the Johnson Biscuit Company.

Ross: Did he go to school to do that, then, or--?

Heath: Yes, he took a course after he graduated from high school. But he was also in the army. There were three brothers who fought in World War II: Arlo, Elvie, and Earl. Earl was in France most of the time. Elvie was in India. He was skipper of the captain's yacht that went up the Brahma Putra River, the river in India where they hauled supplies to, where the planes flew supplies over the hump into China.

Ross: And then he was the crew--?

Heath: He was the skipper of the yacht, or the ship, that hauled the supplies up to where they flew over the hump into China to bring supplies. So he was in India for about two years doing that. Then the war ended. And Earl was in the army in Europe in the invasion of--with the English invasion, or the American invasion in Normandy.

Ross: Was he hurt?

Heath: No, he wasn't injured. My brother, Arlo, was also there, and he suffered from severe mental disturbances. He was never the same after he got out of the army. He was very belligerent and hostile, and as a salesman, maybe that--selling things might have assuaged his trauma somewhat, being able to peddle something instead of feuding.

Ross: Did you see much of him after the war--?

Heath: No, just on occasional visits.

#### Assuming the Role of Mother During Mother's Illness

Heath: Then Anna Jane was born. She's the baby. When she was born, my mother suffered a mental breakdown, they called it, and the doctors said she could have no more children. So for three months, she was hospitalized, and it was during that period that I really became sort of the mother in the family, and cooked the meals and so on.

Ross: Do you remember what year Anna Jane was born?

Heath: She was born in 1924. I was thirteen at the time.

Ross: So you had to take over?

Heath: Yes. We still lived down on the farm, and there were all the children plus the hired hands and my father, and I remember making Thanksgiving dinner for eight or nine people, because my mother was in the hospital.

Ross: Was she actually in a hospital?

Heath: Yes.

- Ross: For three months? Was that a mental hospital?
- Heath: Yea. I think it was--it was not only having the last child, but the whole trauma of the farm economy, and so on, all sort of came about at that time. See, the farm was--let's see, when was that foreclosed? I think it was '27. So Anna Jane was three then.
- Ross: Did you go to school during that period of time when you were taking care of--?
- Heath: Yes. I was in the eighth grade. It was in a country schoolhouse where all grades were in the same room.
- Ross: Right. So you were responsible for all of your siblings, and going to school--that was hard.
- Heath: I never thought of it as being hard.

#### Corn Harvesting

- Ross: Was your father kind and helpful in this period?
- Heath: Not really, because his attention was out in the field--he was too preoccupied to pay attention to what the young children were doing. When you live on the farm, there's outdoor work, and the boys--my brothers--were of course dragged into helping with the farm chores. And the threshing and the corn picking--corn husking, it was called--when they ripped the ears of corn off the stalks and hit it against the side of the wagon. Are you acquainted with how corn was husked?
- Ross: No, I'm not. Not at all.
- Heath: Well, there were wagons drawn by horses, and a big backboard was put above the wagon itself, and so you'd throw the corn, and it would hit that board and then fall down into the truck.
- Ross: Now, what was the purpose of hitting the--?
- Heath: Oh, because otherwise it was hard to throw the corn into the wagon without it landing on the other side of the wagon.
- Ross: Oh! I see. So the purpose was so you didn't overshoot.
- Heath: That's right. So you aimed at that board, and then it hit that and dropped into the wagon. And so there was always a big sport,

their having two or three wagons, each in a different row of corn, and seeing who could travel fastest and pick the most corn.

Ross: It must have been kind of fun, actually.

Heath: And so it became sort of a game, and that's what my two older brothers did, and I guess Elvie got involved a little bit in that too, when he was about seven or eight.

Ross: That was corn for fodder?

Heath: Yes. It was hard corn.

Ross: And was it a big crop?

Heath: Oh, yes. In fact, there were two farm crops, wheat and corn. Both were fed to the animals, for fattening the cattle and feeding the hogs, and so on.

Ross: You said everything was made on the farm, that you were self-sufficient. It must have taken a lot of time to take care of all of that.

Heath: Well, in the spring was when the plowing took place--the sowing of the seeds, and then during the summer months, it was weeding the fields.

#### Care of Anna Jane

Ross: But I was thinking of you in charge of the household, and--

Heath: Well, my youngest sister, Anna Jane, was born in August, and school started in September, so most of the month of August I was helping to take care of the baby. Then finally it got to be too much and my father's sister took the baby for six weeks, or two months, whatever the period was.

Ross: Right. When your mother came home--

Heath: Well, we tried--my father tried to hire a woman to come in, they were called hired girls, to help. So there was help, I wasn't alone in doing it.

Ross: Because, what I remember from tales of the large farm, is that you're up at dawn and the women fix the big, hearty breakfast, and another big meal at noon is eaten, and the meal at night is--

Heath: Yes, people were very hungry.

Ross: Yes.

### Canning the Harvest

Ross: It strikes me that that would be a very difficult time for you.

Heath: Yes. Well, you see, that was also the time of the year when you canned the fruits and the vegetables, and the corn that was picked that had not ripened or gotten hard. Canning corn was one of the--I remember hours and hours, sitting scraping the corn off the cob into the two-quart jars. We had one of these old copper tubs, which was put on a cook stove, that was about twenty-four inches long, and maybe twelve inches wide. It would take eight, two-quart jars of corn, and then the pan would be filled. The lids were put on loose, and the idea in the canning was to--well, fumigate, I guess, or to kill any bugs or germs that might be on the corn as it was husked, so the corn was steamed for a couple of hours.

Ross: In that water bath?

Heath: Yes, in that water bath. And then they were taken out of this hot water, boiling water, with big towels wrapped around them, and then the tops screwed down tight to seal them. And then you'd set them aside to cool, and you'd have to check in a day or two to see whether they were really sealed. If they weren't, then small bubbles would form inside, indicating that there was air in there.

Ross: What happened then? You had to redo it?

Heath: Then it had to be used right away, because it was beginning to ferment.

Ross: Ah. So you had corn whiskey!

Heath: Yes. Well, I think it was also if you ate it, that it would have made you very sick.

Ross: Yes. That was quite a skill for women, to do all of that. It was high-tech knowledge in a sense, or--

Heath: Right. Oh, I remember in our basement we had rows and rows of canned peaches and pears, and corn, and meat, pork--it always had to be cooked when it was canned.

### Raising Chickens

Ross: Did you pretty much eat everything from season to season, so by the time your next peaches came along, you were ready for some more?

Heath: Yes. And then periodically--well, chickens were killed, for instance, for food. And in the spring was when the baby chicks, the eggs--we saved the eggs and you look at them through glass, and you could see which ones were fertile, and separate them out for hatching.

Ross: Really?

Heath: Yes, it's called candling the eggs.

Ross: Yes, I remember that term, but you could just--I thought that was some technical glass you looked through, but it's just a glass?

Heath: I've forgotten--it was some kind of a magnifying glass. But the eggs that were fertile always had a little black spot in the egg, and that's what you looked for. And then they were put under other chickens to warm them and to keep them warm until the baby chicks were born. You'd put maybe eight or ten eggs under a hen, and then the hens had to be watched, you see, because they'd get up and go out, and then come back in, and you had to be sure that the eggs didn't cool off, so that was quite a little period there. Twenty-one days, I think it took, to hatch a chick. So for twenty-one days, you monitored the chickens.

Then they also had supplementing hens acting as the--well, I don't know what you called it--brooding, they referred to it. The chicken house had to be kept warm, so there was a heater in the center of the room with sort of a round peaked hat on it and the chicks huddled around the perimeter.

Ross: And what did that do, did that inspire them to lay eggs?

Heath: Well, it helped to be sure that the eggs didn't get cold. Because they had to be kept warm all the time.

Ross: It sounds like just an enormous amount of work!



Heath: There was always work to do, always. There was never an end to work.

Ross: Because between--how many times did chickens get born, what was it you said, four times a year chickens are--?

Heath: I think it's three generations, I'm not sure. Because, you see, a chick born let's say in May, then in four months would be laying eggs, and be fertilized--impregnated by the roosters. There were always a certain number of roosters around. As the females grew up, some of the roosters would be saved. Then the rest of them were sold. That's what you took to market, were the roosters. You never took a female chicken to the market, until they maybe reached the age of four and five, and didn't lay as frequently.

Ross: So you had to chronicle all of that, too.

Heath: So the big hens--well, that was another interesting thing. My mother learned how to caponize a chicken. Do you know what that is?

Ross: Is that castrate?

Heath: Yes, you castrate the little tiny roosters. She would go through the chickens as they were hatched, and she was able to tell male from female. I would hold the little chicken down on the top of the table, and she had a very sharp knife and a little hook. She'd make an incision on each side, just below the breasts of the chicken, in that soft part just below the rib cage. She would go in and remove the little balls from the baby roosters. They were like little tiny peas.

And then, once they were caponized, see, they would double and triple in weight, so a fowl that might weigh four or five pounds would come up to eight, twelve pounds, so they became almost like a turkey. That's what was used for eating, because that provided more meat for the table.

Ross: For goodness sakes. And then they were also sent to market?

Heath: Yes, if you had more than the family could eat, and it would depend upon--I have vague recollections of each brooder season was like somewhere between two hundred and five hundred baby chicks. And of that, a certain number were males, certain number females. And then selling baby chicks to the restaurants also was--

Ross: Babies?

- Heath: Baby chickens three weeks old make a delicious fryer, just marvelous tasting.
- Ross: How big are they? I mean, how many pounds?
- Heath: About a pound and a quarter.
- Ross: So are they like--what do we call them now?
- Heath: They were called spring chickens. That's the term. And it would be more economical--it would be better for the farmer, or the chicken grower, to sell them at that age--well, I'm not sure whether it was that it would be fed for a shorter length of time, but its weight would be a third, let's say, of a full-grown chicken--
- Ross: But wouldn't it be more profitable, wouldn't you get more per weight because of its delicacy?
- Heath: Per pound. Yes, but even so, I don't think--well, I don't know. I can't remember what the chicken prices were at that time.
- Ross: Or that they were valued particularly?
- Heath: Oh, yes, they were valued. Oh, it was considered a delicacy to have spring chicken.
- Ross: Tell me, how did your mother, who grew up in a fishing village, learn these skills?
- Heath: Well, because the farm women--
- Ross: They just knew?
- Heath: And there were meetings, you see. Well, it's a women's farm club, and there were the men's farm clubs, and they got together periodically, whether it was once a month I don't remember, in which they exchanged ideas and ways of doing things, and so on.

#### Family Naming Practices

- Heath: Did you notice that the names of my brothers and sisters all begin with "A" or "E"--Adolph, Edith, Arlo, Amy, Elvie, Earl, and Anna Jane. I don't know why that was.

- Ross: That's interesting. Are they particularly--they're not Danish names particularly. Did you have middle names?
- Heath: Mine was Julia. I'm supposed to--my name, Edith, was the wife of a Danish writer, and I don't know what his name is. But my mother apparently liked whatever it was that he wrote, and his wife was Edith, and so that's why I was named Edith.
- Ross: But everybody got a middle name?
- Heath: I don't remember for sure whether they did or not. Anna Jane, and Amy--I don't remember what Amy's was. Aimee Semple McPherson was the source for that name. [laughter] Wasn't she a--
- Ross: She was this religious--
- Heath: Mary Baker Eddy?
- Ross: No, Mary Baker Eddy is the--
- Heath: Christian Science.
- Ross: And Aimee McPherson Templeton was a religious priestess sort, and she wore white robes, she was in Los Angeles--she was sort of a cult figure. She had a huge following. And it was mainly in the thirties--
- Heath: She was published in the newspapers.
- Ross: Oh, she was very well-known.
- Heath: And so I remember that. So Aimee Semple McPherson--
- Ross: Was the inspiration for that--was that in seriousness? Did your mother and father pursue her teachings? They weren't religious.
- Heath: I don't think so. I think they sort of ridiculed the idea. Here was this woman getting up and preaching. Because they were atheists, or nonbelievers. I think she just liked the name. And then Earl--it seems to me there was someone in politics at the time by the name of Earl. It wasn't Earl Warren, I don't think. That would be a little early. But there was somebody else, it seems to me at the time, that was an Earl, a progressive candidate, I think from Wisconsin, is my sort of vague--or Michigan. Wasn't Wisconsin a progressive state back in those years?

Ross: I seem to remember that, but I couldn't say for sure. When your mother came back from the hospital then, did she seem to be okay and could take over, and there was no other--?

Heath: No, it was shortly after she came out of the hospital that they moved off the farm.

Ross: Oh, they had to go to the foreclosure.

Heath: Yes. And for years she was very, very distressed, I remember that. That was maybe one of the reasons why when I went away finally to Chicago, went away to school, that Anna Jane felt that I had really sort of been the mother in the family, and taken the responsibility for shopping and the preparation of the meals, and mending the clothes and doing the washing and that sort of thing.

### Reading and Education

Ross: Did you read to her?

Heath: Yes. Well, you have to keep children entertained. One of the easy ways is to read to them. So I used the reading--well, not only for her, but I--"now we're going to read about so-and-so."

Ross: Do you know what you read? Did you read *Uncle Tom's Cabin*?

Heath: I haven't the vaguest recollection. I remember reading poetry when Anna Jane reminded me of it. And I also remember that there was what was called elocution contests in the schools, where half a dozen schools would meet, and the children would be declaiming about one thing or another, speeches that they'd memorized. And I remember one session I read something about what was called "Swat the Farmer," and it had to do with the favorite sport of the city people, or of government, which was to swat the farmer.

Ross: My goodness. [laughter] Where did you get that writing? From a newspaper?

Heath: I don't know. It must have been from a newspaper, or--

Ross: From the farm journals.

Heath: One of the farm journals--oh, that probably was Wallace's *Farmer*.

##

Ross: I recall a journal called *The Farmer's Wife*?

Heath: Could be. That sort of vaguely rings a bell.

Ross: Well, I guess we have pretty much accounted for your brothers and sisters. But what about Elvie? Do you ever see him now?

Heath: Oh, yes. He was here for the skiing last Sunday. I was sorry, because I would like you to have met him.

Ross: Where does he live?

Heath: In Sioux City.

Ross: I've forgotten what he does, or did you tell me?

Heath: Well, for a number of years, he was a restaurateur, and then he sold the restaurants. Now he goes to the market in Omaha where used cars are brought in, cars that have been wrecked or need working on, and he'll buy up old wrecked cars and have them repaired and then sell them.

Ross: That continues to be his business.

Heath: Yes.

Ross: Okay, we know your brothers and sisters, and we know a little bit about where they are. (And Anna Jane is living here now, for the time being.) And then, by this time, your family has moved into the small town--

Heath: Yes. Well, Sioux City wasn't a small--well, it was about 150,000, something like that.

Ross: Right. And when you think of your mother and her illness, have you ever thought back to what might have caused her problem?

Heath: Well, I think it was having seven children in thirteen years, frankly. That was one of the reasons. And because--

Ross: And so close together.

Heath: And living on a farm, it was really a very hard life.

Ross: With no relief ever.

Heath: No.

Relationship between Mother and Father

- Ross: Did she have a good relationship with your father?
- Heath: No, it was an arranged marriage, and there was not much affection.
- Ross: So she probably always felt used.
- Heath: Yes.
- Ross: Did she express that to you?
- Heath: Oh, yes. She just hated men.
- Ross: Hated men?
- Heath: [laughs] I guess there were very few men that she admired; let me put it that way.
- Ross: And yet, even after all the children left, she always stayed with him, until he was ninety-something, so that they had a long time together. Did they ever sort of--?
- Heath: Well, for a period of about two years, he lived with his sister-- the same sister that had taken Anna Jane when she was a baby.
- Ross: Was that thought of as a separation for the two of them?
- Heath: I think it was an attempt at a separation. But then he came back to Sioux City, and I wasn't around then, of course, so I would only see them maybe once every eight, nine, ten years or something.
- Ross: Oh, that long, after you went to Chicago, eight or nine years would go by between visits?
- Heath: Well, not in Chicago. I think when I was in Chicago I may have been--in the ten years, let's say, from the time I went, I think maybe twice went back. And one of those was when Brian and I were married. We made a trip to Sioux City for Thanksgiving. He was at the University of Chicago, and we drove out to Sioux City and then went back to Chicago over the Thanksgiving weekend.

Little Money for Travel and School

- Ross: So once having left, you didn't feel real strong--
- Heath: Well, it was a financial reason. Although the bus fares were very low, I had only a dollar a day to spend for books and clothes and so on, so that working in the various jobs that I had, they paid so little that there really wasn't any money. It was when there were bread lines in Chicago.
- Ross: Because this is really--
- Heath: The Depression.
- Ross: And you were probably lucky to have any income.
- Heath: Yes. And what little income I had, you see, when I went to the Chicago Art Institute, the tuition there was like--I think it was around three hundred dollars for the year.
- Ross: That was high.
- Heath: So I would have to save that out of my salary. I think when I was working at the settlement house, I got sixty dollars a month --fifteen dollars a week and my meals. So that I just had enough money to pay the tuition at the Art Institute.

Becoming an Artist

- Ross: Okay. Let's get back to go over the period there. You were in Chicago, and you went to teacher's college, and while at teacher's college you took some art classes because that was part of every teacher's training?
- Heath: Yes.
- Ross: So you became more interested in art at that time.
- Heath: For two years, I was taking art classes at Chicago Teacher's College, and so at the end of the two years--one male teacher and a female teacher said I should go continue my art work at the Art Institute when I left Teacher's College.
- Ross: Do you remember his name?

Heath: Schultz. I don't remember his first name. He was a painter. And then there was Helen Gardner, and she taught history of art. She was the historian. She wrote a textbook that was used by many of the schools of history of art.

So, I think I told you last week, when I met Mr. Schultz in the hallway at the Art Institute one day, I was coming in to class and he was leaving, and I'd been there probably four or five months by then. I stopped him and I said, "What in heck made you tell me that I should go to the Art Institute? I look at the work that I did when I was in your class at teacher's college. I couldn't understand why you should suggest that I continue."

He said, "Well, it wasn't so much what you did, it was your attitude. You had the right kind of an attitude for the art world."

Ross: Isn't that interesting. Were you a little flabbergasted by that, or--?

Heath: Well, when he said attitude--because I loved it. Oh my God, it was my favorite class. I was drawing, once I started having a little bit of art, I'd been working with clay and so on--it was absolutely The End of the World for me.

Ross: Now, he taught painting, but he also--

Heath: Oh, we worked in all sort of crafts, but mostly his training was the field of painting. But as a teacher, an art teacher, you worked with clay, you worked with yarns, paper weaving--we used to cut a sheet of paper into strips that didn't go all the way through, and weave mats out of paper--oh, all sorts of projects.

Ross: Was most of that art training geared to that someday you would be teaching this sort of thing to your little students?

Heath: Yes.

Ross: So it wasn't higher art--

Heath: No, but eventually I would become an art teacher.

Ross: But when you first went to school, you were to be a teacher.

Heath: No, it was just because I liked to read, and I liked history, and I liked geography, and I was going to travel around the world. I was going to see these places that I was reading about.



Ross: And teach--

Heath: And one way that I could see doing it would be as a teacher in China, for instance.

Ross: Oh, I see. You had that idea.

Heath: Oh, yes. That I'd pay my way around the world by teaching.  
[laughs]

Ross: But then, in the process of taking the teacher's training was when you realized you really wanted to be an art teacher, not just a general teacher.

Heath: Well, that was my hope--I was almost embarrassed to admit it, because when I was at the settlement house one day, as I was going up the stairs or coming down, one of the children said to me, "Are you an artist?" And I was so taken aback by that, you see, to be called an artist. I thought an artist was someone who was really so wonderful and so great, and that I wasn't that great. Just because I liked to paint and to do things, did that make me an artist? So I really didn't know how to answer, and I said, "Well, I suppose maybe I'm trying to be an artist."

Ross: But you were an artist.

Heath: Well, I suppose that was what Schultz was referring to when he said that it was the attitude of the artist--that you like what you're doing, and it's very satisfying, and that you're anticipating--you can't wait to get onto the next exercise. So, what are we going to do today? What's the next step? And I'm still that way. Every day I go to the shop and look for what's coming out of the kiln.

Ross: There's always an enthusiasm? You've never been sort of bored with any of it?

Heath: Oh, there have been long periods with problems--you know, things not coming out of the kiln the way they should. The plates would crack in the firing or the kiln dirt would fall down, and the kilns would need repair, so there's so much maintenance and product control that's necessary in ceramics. Ceramics is probably the most complicated art medium that there is.

Ross: So instead of being able to pursue the artistic side of it--

Heath: See, painting is so easy; you can see what you're doing. In ceramics, you can't see what color it's going to be until it's been through the fire. So you're always working from a memory of

what it should or could look like, after you've run your testing. "Oh, so that combination in the kiln gives you that kind of a color!" But it's so infinite, there's no end to where it can go.

Ross: And when you were taking the classes at the Art Institute and teaching at the settlement house, you must have had each new project as an adventure, sort of, whether it be painting or the weaving or--all of that must have been a continuous joy, then.

Heath: Oh, yes. Because, for instance, I remember in the beginning design class, the exercises we went through. One that was probably most fascinating was to draw as many lines as you could, with pen or pencil or chalk or conic crayon, or whatever, but no two lines must parallel. So if you sit down with a piece of paper, and you try to draw lines on a paper with nothing ever parallel, you'll get the feeling of how much fun it is.

Ross: That's great. Do you ever do that now?

Heath: Oh, sure. If I'm stuck on something, I want to see, for instance with glaze, what it would look like on a piece of tile, I draw lines, and none of them would parallel. They could cross, but they couldn't parallel.

Then we had to do the same thing with wire, we had to bend the wire. First you made a tube, or whatever. And then you made a cube that no side was the same length, a wire cube. But no dimension on it could be the same length. In other words, you couldn't make a square box, or a rectangle.

And these are really wonderful exercises, because it begins to give you an insight into how you can invent, how one invents things. Because you give yourself an instruction of some sort: today, I am going to paint (let's say)--oh, today I am just going to make a very moody, moody painting. The next day you're going to make something that's just all light and fun, and so on. But you tell yourself what it is that you're going to do, then you see how well you succeed in doing it.

Ross: Is that how you taught the students?

Heath: Yes.

Ross: Now, when you went to the Art Institute, that was at the same time that you went to settlement house, it was just sort of a part-time job, right?

Heath: Yes. I lived at the settlement house while going to art school. I was there for four years.

Philosophy and Practice of the Federal Art Project [FAP]

Ross: Because last week, when we were talking about the settlement house, you were--I was curious about some of the history of it, and I went to the encyclopedia to read about it, and they--it was really interesting, because the Federal Art Project was with the WPA--did you know Holger Cahill, or was he a Washington man?

Heath: Yes. I'm not sure whether he was born in Washington--that's where the headquarters were. But he traveled a lot.

Ross: He was the head of the FAP?

Heath: The Federal Art Project.

Ross: I read what he said in 1936. He said, "The organization of the project has proceeded on the principle that it is not the solitary genius but a sound, general movement which maintains art as a vital functioning part of any cultural scheme. Art is not a matter of rare occasional masterpieces."<sup>1</sup>

Heath: That's right.

Ross: And it was fascinating to understand that the fact that they hired so many people, and there was always this division of thought about, whom do you hire--because most of them were unemployed people, and they weren't necessarily artists. So that he had this attitude that must have pleased you.

Heath: Oh, absolutely. See, that was the whole thrust, what was so marvelous about that period. It was a renaissance in the culture of the United States. Without that program, I don't think we would have nearly the interest in the arts that exists today. Before that, art was something that was for the few, it was--you went to Europe to become a singer, or a dancer, that artists were rare birds. It was John Dewey, saying that you learned through doing, not talking; that was part of that. John Dewey's way of seeing education was that everybody's an artist, everyone is a genius. And if people aren't creative, it's because in their childhood, they got the notion from somebody--"Oh, you can't draw, you're not an artist." This was why I was embarrassed when the child asked me, "Are you an artist?" Because, you see, that was pretending to be something so almighty.

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<sup>1</sup>Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1986, by Encyclopaedia Britannica, Inc., Vol. 12, p. 763.

Ross: Or was that because no one had acknowledged you as an artist, that it was--you were teaching art--

Heath: Well, I think this child--it was one of my--

Ross: It was one of your students?

Heath: --children, and apparently had been talking with the other children, or somebody, about the question, well, "Is she an artist? Is our teacher?" I guess that's how the conversation came up. And so she asked me, she said, "Are you an artist?"

### Index of American Design

Ross: Well, the statistics were just amazing, because out of that program there were--I should give you--maybe you're interested in these statistics.

Heath: Yes, I am.

Ross: There were 2,566 murals, 100,000 easel paintings, 17,700 sculptures, 300,000 fine prints, and 22,000 plates for the Index of American Design.<sup>1</sup> Now, I don't know what that is, and maybe you can explain.

Heath: The Index I think begins with the collection of drawings of folk art. For instance, some of the barns of Pennsylvania and the east have symbols carved on them that were made by the farmers or whoever built the original barn. Weathervanes, for instance.

Ross: The rooster.

Heath: The rooster on the barn. So I'm not familiar completely--or even, just very simply--with the Index, but it was a project to index the artifacts of the country. In the writer's project, writers wrote about each state and each town, where they got their names, who settled the town, so every town that existed in the United States--in the thirties--was put on a map, and their history of it.

And they are absolutely fascinating to read. When we made our first trip from Chicago to California after Brian and I were

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<sup>1</sup>Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1986, by Encyclopaedia Britannica, Inc., Vol. 12, p. 764.

married, I picked up the books for those states that we drove through, because we could use them just like a map--

Ross: You mean they were WPA sponsored--

Heath: Yes, written by writers on the arts project. And every state had writers indexing, in effect, the birth of each town.

Ross: Do those exist still?

Heath: They're in the libraries.

Ross: That sounds better than Triple A [American Automobile Association] guides.

Heath: I think the Triple A was probably an outgrowth of that kind of thing.

Ross: That's something new to me.

Heath: Yes, it was--a travel agent or a person should know about them.

#### Federal Art Project Salaries

Ross: One of the things that this same encyclopedia article reported is that the people who were hired were paid \$23.50 per week.

Heath: Is that what it was?

Ross: That's what they said, but you were paid less, if you only had a dollar a day.

Heath: The Federal Art Project didn't start I think until '34, '35? It was when--I started at the Art Institute in '34, and the FAP was just coming into being, because in 1936, I was hired to teach art in the settlement house, that was my assignment. I think it was \$60 a month that I was paid then. And that's what paid my tuition, you see, that made it possible for me to--. Everybody had to work if they got paid by the government. I wasn't on relief, though.

- Ross: No, but you were actually--
- Heath: And many people who graduated from colleges, they went onto some federal project that financed their first jobs.
- Ross: Because they spent--the WPA, just for the art project, there was \$35 million spent in eight years. I guess that would be about it. But then the writer here [in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*] speaks about when the money became scarce, they had to lay people off, the artists--there were riots? Do you remember that part of it? And sit-down strikes.
- Heath: Yes. I never was a part of any of them, because I wasn't laid off. I think it partly began because in Congress there were many people criticizing. It was not a popular program for many people, the Republicans particularly, because people were working who really weren't "worthy" of working on the art project.
- Ross: So that was evidently why Holger Cahill made that statement, that it had been the philosophy of the Treasury Department, for instance--that public money would be for outstanding work.
- Heath: Yes. Yet much of what was done was not outstanding, as they said.
- Ross: Yes. And they didn't seek out artists to be a part of the program, at least from the unemployed rolls. And also, I guess, didn't many people work at home?
- Heath: Oh, yes.

### Training Schools

- Ross: So that was all rather unmanageable? I mean, you couldn't really monitor a lot, and I suppose Congress was--
- Heath: Well, they set up the training school in Chicago for people who weren't "official" artists, let's say. It was for the people who had hobbies at home, like wood carving or tatting and crocheting, the women who made clothes and so on. Officially, they were not designers or dressmakers, yet they were making clothes. So all such people were required to attend this school, and that's where I was teaching for three years, and was teaching there when we came to California.
- Ross: What were your students like?

Heath: I had people from teenagers to people in their fifties and sixties. Unemployed high school students, and some who had taken art classes when they were in high school, and so on. But the function of the training school was to take whatever latent talent--if you want to call it that--or desire--that sounded like, everybody had to do some kind of work. You couldn't be on relief without working, unless you were really sick and incapacitated.

So, of course, one of the things you had to answer when you signed up for financial support is, what did you do? What did you like to do? And then on the basis of that, they said, "Well, maybe you better go to the training school and take some of the classes there, and then you'll be placed in a teaching job." And so that's what happened at the Chicago Training School. They were all these ages, men and women, blacks and--at that time there weren't many Spanish in Chicago.

Ross: And many Polish people.

Heath: Yes, Polish and Italian and so on. We were not official teachers, but they were required, I think, to spend a year taking classes, and then they could teach at the same time. They set up classes in basements and storefronts and in churches, and then I would go to visit each one of my students who were teaching to see what they were doing.

Ross: So all of your students were those who were going to teach others?

Heath: Yes. At that point, after I left the settlement house. And that's where I was supervising and teaching adults who in turn, then, were teaching.

#### Training "Unofficial" Artists to Make Art

Ross: In your role, did you run into some exceptional talent that you sort of found?

Heath: I was always delighted in the work of all the people. Sometimes, of course, there were those who had already been working a lot on their own, and were very self-confident, but they usually were fairly stiff in the kinds of things they did. It was different with the people who had no experience in picking up a paint brush and coming into class; I had to teach these adults the way I was taught at the Art Institute, which was to give them these

exercises that didn't have anything to do with whether you were making a painting or a work of art. Make fifty lines on a page with none of them parallel, and that's a game. So you didn't talk about whether you could draw or not, that's beside the point.

Ross: It's interesting: do you think the people who were given that exercise have a better understanding of Jackson Pollock than those who have not had that?

Heath: Of course.

Ross: It's fascinating.

Heath: Yes. That's why Jackson Pollock was accepted so wonderfully, because of this experience from the Federal Art Project, and the teaching and the training, and the sense that everybody's an important person. That you can dance, you can sing, you can play tennis, you can become an artist at whatever you're doing.

Ross: But you must have been a welcome person with your attitude, because I can imagine that some of the people who would be teaching these teachers would think in negative terms, or feel that they had no possibility of teaching anybody else.

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Ross: I mean, you really have to believe that people were going to be artists, or be able to train somebody else, or to--?

Heath: Well, curiously enough, once you tell people what I've been telling you, for instance, that we're not concerned about who's an artist. Everybody's an artist if they want to be, it's the attitude, you have to want to. If you don't want to be an artist, of course you never will be. If you think you're incapable of being an artist, you never will be. So that first of all, you have to have confidence in yourself, or maybe at least the curiosity--I want to find out. Occasionally when I've talked to people about this, and they say, well, they can't draw, they could never be an artist. My psychiatrist friend, for instance, is one of the people who said to me, "Oh, I could never be an artist." I said, "Mike, you don't know whether you could or couldn't. If you haven't ever tried, how can you say that? Because you don't know how much fun it could be."



Improvisational Art and Viola Spolin Theater

Heath: So another game that one can use to illustrate the point, even at parties, you have a sheet of paper and everybody's given a pencil or something to draw with. Then I put a line on the paper and do something, I pass it to you and you put something on, the next person adds to it. And by the time it's come all the way around once, then you begin to see something sort of evolving, where the one person is adding to or doing something to the thing that happened before him. And it's absolutely magical. You can go around and around and around until eventually you have all these compositions.

Ross: Do you see what's been done before you?

Heath: Of course. So, I put something on the paper, and then you put something on the paper, and by the time it gets to the third person--see, someone might just do something up here like this, and then another person would do this, [scribbling on paper] in other words, ridiculing the whole idea, that this is a nothing sort of thing. And then people become interested in what's happening, because always in the group there will be somebody who sort of synthesizes the thing.

Ross: Oh, yes?

Heath: It's a little bit like what Viola Spolin used to do. When I first met her, she was director of Improvisation Theater at Hull House--working with children and adults. Later, she was with the act at Second City--the Chicago club in Old Town Chicago. She wrote a book on theater games. Her son, Paul Sills, started the Compass Players in Chicago. She developed this whole series of exercises that she did with children in drama, and they would make up their own plays and so on.

Ross: Improvisation.

Heath: The improvisational approach. And that's what it's--.

Ross: That's what art is.

Heath: So you see, what was happening in the theater in improvisation, that became again something that flowered after the post-war period, but would never have happened hadn't there been people who had played theater games with Viola Spolin.

Ross: No, that's right. [laughs]

- Heath: It would never have happened, and that's where it began, there in Chicago. She had a following you can't believe at Hull House. Not only children, but adults who took her classes in theater games. And she's continued all of her life, and now she's eighty-four.
- Ross: Where does she live now?
- Heath: In Hollywood. We were down there about three months ago and saw her. She still does this improvisation.
- Ross: Is she a fun person?
- Heath: I'm not sure fun is the right word. Intense, about to change the world. She's going to change the world. And in some ways, I feel the same way she does. What I do is going to change things. Things aren't going to be the same anymore.
- Ross: Did the students really react to this approach? Do you feel that they then went out and were able to do--
- Heath: Yes, they caught on, because it is a disarming approach, and it takes away the fear of being who you are. You're not pretending to be somebody else. You're not going to copy and try to be a Picasso; you're going to be who you are. Whatever you see, when you look at something, what do you see? How did it get to be the way it is? In other words, it changes the way you think, it changes the way you look at things.
- Ross: Did any of your students go on to be artists, any recognized--?
- Heath: The people from the--I don't know of any particular one who became an artist, although there were two of the children that I had at Presidio Hills School who went to art school.
- Ross: I was thinking back in Chicago, during those--
- Heath: I don't know, because when we left Chicago, I sort of lost contact with all those people, and during the years when I was at the training school, I never really got to know anyone personally. It was always a group activity.
- Ross: And then you were going from one place to another, from one class to another.

Moholy-Nagy and the Training School at Batavia, Illinois

- Heath: My last training school was where Brian and I met. This school was west of Chicago in Batavia, Illinois, on the Fox River. Brian was the camp director and I was the art teacher there.
- Ross: Now, wait a second. You're still with WPA?
- Heath: Yes. As a result of what we were doing in Chicago, Moholy-Nagy, one of the people who started the Bauhaus--was part of the Bauhaus in Germany. He came with--well, many of the European architects and artists and scientists who came to this country to escape from Hitler, like Mies van der Rohe, were part of the Bauhaus. Well, Moholy came to Chicago and set up the Institute of Design there, financed by Container Corporation of America, and he was one of the advisors to Holger Cahill in establishing this training school in Chicago and Batavia. There were three or four people, Moholy-Nagy, Holger Cahill, Bill Friedman, and Dan Defenbacher, who was later the art director at the California College of Arts and Crafts in Oakland in the fifties--oh, George Culler, too, you know, from San Francisco Museum of Modern Art in the sixties, who organized this training school. The philosophy was to get people really into doing what they're doing. They need a period of living in the outdoors, or getting away from a big city, especially, like Chicago. Take these people who were at the training school for two weeks out into the country, along the river, and have the music, the drama, the sculptures, all the creative people on the Federal Art Project meet, spend a day--the groups would come out every two weeks, or maybe it was only once a week they came out, and each week there would be another group of people from Chicago, and for that week they sculptured, they sang, they danced, they painted, they did drama, and so on. They were exposed.
- Ross: A student would come for two weeks at a time?
- Heath: I thought it was two weeks, but now I remember going back to Chicago every weekend, so it must have been a week at a time.
- Ross: And what was the name of this particular place?
- Heath: The town nearby was Batavia, Illinois. It was on the Fox River. The buildings were left over from a vacated army post. The barracks had cots, and people slept there, and there were meals prepared. It had not been used for years, since the end of World War I. And you see, we were not yet into World War II when it went back again to being an army training school. But that's

where people would meet. Viola Spolin was there, and I was there, and there were--

Ross: And then all these other famous people that you mentioned were there, and you were there as one of the teachers?

Heath: Yes, VIPs from all disciplines--not only artists, but scientists, sociologists, playwrights, writers--inquiring minds--cross-fertilization was the goal. Education--learning by seeing, participating, interchange and drawing parallels.

Ross: And you were really rubbing elbows with--

Heath: --with everybody.

Ross: What sort of status did these important figures have at camp?

Heath: There was a very democratic attitude--no separation of students and known faculty and guests.

Ross: How do you remember them as colleagues?

Heath: Marvelous experience meeting these well-known people on a first name basis. It was a euphoric time for all of us.

Ross: How did you keep up connections?

Heath: We met many of them again, post-World War II, at the annual Aspen International Design Conference, in Aspen, Colorado, beginning in 1949--through the decades.

Ross: How did they influence your work?

Heath: The influence was in knowing that there was and is a community of creative people throughout the world who "listen to the same drummer," and that I am not alone in my way of seeing and hearing and being. Creative people recognize one another. We may meet only for a few minutes and know where we are coming from--like one of a family with a common heritage--who know truth to materials and find the form that functions and that beauty is in the eyes of the beholder.

Ross: What was important about the Batavia experience for you?

Heath: Associating with like-minded people whose aspirations were to find the source of creativity--how to break down the blockages, to release the native abilities. Being out in the country communing with nature, free to breathe, and that famous people were just like you and me.

Ross: Were they pretty well known at the time?

Heath: Oh, yes. The names now have sort of evaporated. A few names I recall, like Paul Robeson, Martha Graham, and Katherine Dunham. Names are forgotten, but the episodes and experiences are remembered forever. The Depression years of the thirties were probably the most important, satisfying years of my life; they sustain me whenever things are rough.

Ross: Why do you say that?

Heath: In the midst of hunger and starvation, a cultural awakening took place that changed the economy and brought hope for a more human environment--at least a potential maturation. I think there are similarities today in 1992, with people living on the streets, desolate, discouraged with little hope or joy. Insecurity--the "good life" vanishing, schools failing, firms foreclosing, banks failing--we need to look back. The ramifications of that period are so great.

For instance, the Walker Art Center was started during that period. A man who was a classmate of George Culler's at the Cleveland School of Art, Bill Friedman, was sent to Sioux City, Iowa, to start the museum there. He organized an arts and crafts program, at which my sister, Anna Jane, had her first art classes. So you see, the Federal Art Project also funded travel and expertise to a community for cultural development. It wasn't just in the big cities that this happened. The idea was that every town should have an art center. And Bill Friedman--he was a friend of mine who lived and worked here in San Francisco after the war--described going into Sioux City on the train and taking a cab to go to where the meeting was to be held with the city committee on starting an art program in Sioux City. There was a nucleus of citizens already working on their own. Bill got off the train and said to the cab driver, "I need to get to such-and-such address. Do you know where it is?" The cabby said, "Yes, it's the most famous thing going on in Sioux City today." The idea of having an art school, or art center, was new, and it was big news for Sioux City.

Ross: Was that around 1936 or '38?

Heath: Yes. And now Sioux City has a museum as a result of that. They still haven't built their own building yet, but they're going to this year. They were first given space in one of the stores downtown in Sioux City.

Ross: What sort of people were sent to start museums?

Heath: They were art historians--they knew the history of museums in Europe.

Ross: What happened to the program during World War II?

Heath: It came to an end because everyone was put to war work.

### Meeting Brian Heath

Ross: So, Batavia is where you met Brian?

Heath: Yes. He was the camp director.

Ross: Was he just out of school also?

Heath: Well, he had graduated from the University of Chicago the year before and had spent a year back in California as a probation officer. He had first gone to the University of Oregon, and then transferred from there, after four years, to Chicago, and took a written exam, because they flunked him out in Oregon, because he had majored in four different subjects. So he wrote to the University of Chicago, it was the time that Hutchins was there, asking if he could become a graduate student, and they wrote back and said, "Of course, you're welcome." He told them that he had flunked out. So he was given a test when he got there, and he passed the test, and got his bachelor's degree in sociology, and his master's in social service administration.

But in setting up the camp, you see, and in having these visitors all the time, and a new group each week, there had to be somebody running the camp.

Ross: Now, serving as director was after he had graduated?

Heath: No, he was still a graduate student. It was during the summer months.

Ross: Oh, okay.

Heath: Because we met there in early May, it was.

Ross: Of what year?

Heath: Of 1938, because we were married three months later.

Ross: And you were going out to Batavia for two weeks at a time--

Heath: Well, we lived there all the time.

[tape interruption]

Ross: So, Batavia was the training school, and students and teachers came out and did music, drama, and art?

Heath: Participative, yes.

Ross: And it was a joyful time.

Heath: Yes.

Ross: And was it an exciting time for you?

Heath: Of course, but you could see--

Ross: Besides meeting Brian, it was an exciting time. [laughter]

Heath: But of course, it came to be criticized because people were charged with--you know, not doing serious work. They were just having fun.

Ross: And then the sadness of the Depression, the hard times of the Depression, to have fun wasn't something you should be paid for? Was that sort of the basis of the criticism?

Heath: Well, that--it wasn't meaningful work.

Ross: And what did you think of that?

Heath: Of course I disagreed heartily. I think that work should be fun. I don't think that people should work at jobs that aren't fun. [laughs]

Ross: How did the program respond to these critics?

Heath: Well, we were funded by the government so we just kept doing our work.

Ross: What was the effect on the program?

Heath: Personally, I didn't care about the criticism because I knew it was a hopeful, important program and that it brought employment and a sense of dignity to millions.

Batavia Activities

Ross: So, during the day there was school, there were classes, and then was the evening sort of party time?

Heath: No, it was more like a conference, you might say. Talks and demonstrations were given in various media. The idea was to cross-fertilize, so that people who were painters, let's say, would become singers or would experience doing things that they ordinarily wouldn't do. Why should there be improvisational theatre? What's the purpose of it? It was acting out a word, a game to free oneself by being funny--theatrical--overcoming self-consciousness, et cetera--revealing "acting" ability. It was playing charades, improvisational theatre; it was a guessing game to disarm.

Ross: So it was actually an exposure to other disciplines in the art world.

Heath: Yes, and to break down the prejudices people have about who is creative and who isn't, and what is art. There were discussions: What is the purpose of the arts in life? Why? Are artists "childhood prolonged?"

Ross: And they were exposed to some of the best teachers, ideas, and speculations.

Aspen Design Conference

Heath: Yes, the best teachers FAP could get were there as role models. And as a follow-up years later, the Design Conference at Aspen, Colorado, was established and financed by Container Corporation of America.

Ross: Really? Because that didn't start until well after World War II.

Heath: It was--I think the first meeting was with Schweitzer in 1949. I have the book that is sort of the history of the Aspen idea. And the Aspen idea was cross-fertilization of arts, sciences, and professions.

Ross: And the beginning of that kind of thought, ideas about that were--



Walter Paepcke

Heath: Cross-fertilization of ideas, understanding of materials of sound, light, of human behavior, energy, atoms--politics, economy, the individual versus the group--organic design, applied design. This dialogue had its beginnings in Europe with the impressionist artists and scientists--and the industrial revolution. At that training school that took form in the U.S. in the Federal Art Project period of the late thirties, which was interrupted during the war years, you see, and then it was started by the Institute of Design, where Moholy-Nagy was a director, and--let's see, who was the man who was a box manufacturer. Walter Paepcke. Have you ever heard the name of Paepcke? Walter Paepcke was an industrialist in Chicago, made boxes, and for advertising he used, let's say, a Picasso painting in the ad, and all it said was "Container Corporation of America." But Walter Paepcke then is the one who bought land at Aspen, Colorado, and made it possible for the Institute of Design to take their student body to the mountains in the summer months to this one-week conference. It still goes on, and we've attended many, many of those summer sessions. They are the most memorable experiences of my life, every year that we went to the design conference. You fed off of it for months and years later. Because people came from all over the world; it was the international design conference.

Ross: Which was the last one you attended?

Heath: I think the last one was the year that the Japanese artists were there, and all the speakers were artists in various professions in Japan who came to speak. And one of the speakers was a car manufacturer.

Ross: Toyota? Mitsubishi?

Heath: What car do I drive? [laughing]

Ross: Honda!

Heath: The Honda! Mr. Honda. No, I'm calling him Mr. Honda. But it was the Honda Corporation. In other words, the design conference discussed the relationship among industry and commerce and advertising. It was really a philosophical presentation.

Planned Obsolescence

Heath: One year, the theme of the conference was Planned Obsolescence-- how you design deliberately for something to wear out quickly. Someone questioned the motive of designing for obsolescence. And the response was, well, if you didn't design for obsolescence, eventually, if everything lasted forever, business would fail. Because there wouldn't be any new things to buy. So you have to design so it won't last so long, so you have to buy something new.

Ross: That was the concept right after the war, wasn't it? That was coming up right after the war.

Heath: Yes, I'd think the fifties. See, one of the main symbols during the war was you were able to buy stockings, nylon stockings, that lasted forever almost.

Ross: During the war?

Heath: Yes. They were built--who were the people who built the parachutes? They also designed and manufactured nylons. When the war ended, the manufacturer didn't want nylon stockings to last forever. A little flaw was built into the machinery, so that in every so many pairs, there would be this little glitch or something. That was used as an illustration of how you could build in a tiny flaw periodically. It wouldn't happen with every pair--but there would be occasionally a pair of stockings that would run almost immediately. The speaker made a case for doing it that way, so that people would have employment--otherwise they would never have to make another pair of nylons, if they lasted forever.

Ross: I think we're going to stop right here and when we start next time, we're going to start with Batavia, and then we'll find out about your beginnings with Brian also.

[tape interruption]

FAP Cutbacks and Strikes

Ross: But first I want to finish off one thing about the FAP organization. I understand that when they started cutting back on the money and artists were being laid off, there were

protests, and some sit-down strikes, they called it. Was there union involvement--the artists union?

Heath: It was the musicians union.

Ross: Do you recall any part of that history?

Heath: I think the--I have a vague recollection that part of the protest was from professional musicians who felt that the people who were on the Federal Art Project shouldn't be there, because they weren't really professional musicians, and they weren't part of the union. So that the conflict was between these so-called amateurs, who were taking jobs away from the professionals, and that was part of it.

Ross: Well, that wouldn't have been true of artists, but you're talking about musicians.

Heath: Well, there was a musicians project, too.

Ross: Well, this was called Artists Union, and the musicians come under that? They became Local 60?

Heath: Yes, I remember Local 60.

Ross: The United Artists and Professional Workers--

Heath: Because Brian was with--he sang with the chorus in Chicago, with Paul Robeson and that group.

Ross: Because this was--it<sup>1</sup> said that in 1937, the Artists Union became Local 60 of the United Office and Professional Workers of the CIO.

Heath: That's right, I remember that. I wasn't a member, however.

Ross: You weren't a member, so that isn't something that you remember.

Heath: I don't know why I didn't become a member. I think it was because it mostly involved performers.

Ross: Would you have been considered management?

Heath: I don't think I was--I probably wouldn't have been eligible because I wasn't performing as an artist. I was teaching.

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<sup>1</sup>*Encyclopaedia Britannica*, Vol. 12, p. 764.

- Ross: Well, that must have--this was under the FAP where they listed how many murals, easel paintings and things--so it was--the fine artist or the craft artist was certainly eligible for this union.
- Heath: Yes, but see I didn't work on a mural. I didn't belong to an--
- Ross: No, but you were teaching within the FAP program, so you were certainly part of the--
- Heath: Well, I don't know why. I know that there was an artists' union--
- Ross: But you don't remember that part of it.
- Heath: Yes. I think part of it is that I'm just not a joiner.
- Ross: I wasn't asking so much whether or not you joined, I was wondering if you remembered--
- Heath: I remember Local 60. I remember it had to do with people taking jobs away from other people. That if under the Federal Art Project, or under the projects, people let's say, played in an orchestra, or were singers or in the theater--because there was--wasn't there an artists' union for the theater? A theatrical union?

### Artists Equity

- Ross: Yes, the Equity--
- Heath: The Artists Equity.
- Ross: The Artists Equity has been--it's very old, and I imagine--
- Heath: That was already in existence then. And it would be like anyone who was active in the theatre should become part of the union, because that was the endeavor, to get all the artists into the union.

### III LIFE IN CHICAGO

[Interview 3: April 27, 1990] ##

#### Moving Closer to the University of Chicago

Ross: Let's pick up where we left off with the settlement houses. Edith, what do you remember about the workers' alliance?

Heath: Chicago Commons Settlement House was on what is called the near Northside. It was a settlement house like the Hull House started by Jane Addams. (I'm not sure who started Chicago Commons.) It was an Italian neighborhood.

Then the one where I lived and taught for three years was Howell Neighborhood House, and it was part of the Presbyterian missionary program, I think. At least it was supported by the Presbyterian Church.

Ross: So that was where you lived and--

Heath: --and taught art classes. Starting at three-thirty in the afternoons I would have the younger children, as they left the public school. In the evenings I had the high school students and the adults for art classes. I did that five nights a week, and I was going to the Art Institute in the morning sessions. I was at the Art Institute for six years, the first three years at Howell Neighborhood House. Then I moved out to an apartment near the University of Chicago.

Ross: Is that because you were just tired of living in a settlement house or because you needed to move?

Heath: No, I wanted to live in that section of Chicago which was right on the University of Chicago campus, such as it was. It was easy to take the train to the Art Institute so I would go to classes at night at the Art Institute as well as in the mornings.

Ross: So you wanted to live near the University of Chicago. But you weren't taking classes there?

Heath: I took one political science class, but not there. It was in their extension bureau, which was right across the street from the Art Institute. It was a requirement that I have some academic subjects that I had not taken at Chicago Teacher's College. So through the Art Institute I took the political science class at the university extension which was across the street from the Art Institute. And the train, called the IC train, came right to the Art Institute right to where I was living. So I just had a half a block to walk to the train and off the train.

Ross: If you weren't taking classes at the university campus, why did you move there?

Heath: Oh, because there were all sorts of activities going on, lectures that you could attend and so on--

Ross: It was more of a social life?

Heath: And living at the settlement houses, there were people who spoke very little English. There were many immigrants who were learning English so that, except for the staff, I had no contact with people who spoke English. And I did that for three years, so I thought well, I had better get in a neighborhood where I could at least after hours have some other--

Ross: --stimulation--intellectual and cultural stimulation.

Heath: And it was a very exciting place to be because, in fact, that was where Brian was going to school. But I had moved out there before I had met him, because we met out at the Batavia, which we talked about the last time. He was working on his master's degree there, so then when we were married we just continued living in that same section of town.

#### Chicago Art Institute Classes

Ross: Now, let me ask you something about the people you met at the Art Institute during those years, some of the teachers and some of the students or other artists, people who went on to be well known or people who inspired you. Can you think of some of those people?

Heath: Well, the students, I mean my fellow classmates, we were all so busy in those days. Everyone had to--you went to school and you

had a job working because it was in the Depression. So there was very little social life around the Art Institute. Except for just being in the same studio or classroom, I don't remember a single person that was a personal friend at the Art Institute.

Ross: Or any who went on to be or to do things in the art world that would have some recognition?

Heath: I don't remember anyone.

Ross: So at the Art Institute, what kind of courses were you taking?

Heath: I had two years in design and two years in art education.

Ross: Design of buildings or design of fabric?

Heath: Oh, all sorts of materials. I think that was when I was talking about--one of our assignments in the beginning design class was to draw a page of lines, none of which paralleled.

Ross: And the boxes made out of metals--

Heath: --out of wire and making an egg out of plaster.

Ross: One other thing: to get a degree from the Art Institute you had to have a certain amount of academic classes before you were accepted there?

Heath: Well, I had the three years at Chicago Teachers' College. So I was getting my degree in art education.

Ross: From the Art Institute?

Heath: Yes.

Ross: But then they didn't have any of the academic classes like--

Heath: No, there was the university extension across the street.

Ross: And what degree did you get from the Art Institute?

Heath: A bachelor's degree in art education.

### Studying the Role of Art (and Clay) in History

Ross: Were there philosophies of art courses?

- Heath: Well, the most important class that I think I took was the art history for two years, which was twice a week for three hours in the morning with a break. It was taught completely from slides.
- Ross: Showing the great works of art?
- Heath: Well, beginning with the primitive arts, the Egyptian and the making of clay pots around the world. That class gave me a sense of the relationship between the arts and society as a whole. It was not just a class of art objects, but of the type of governments. You know, the political life of the times and so on. So that it was really a sort of world history with the arts being the high points of various periods, various civilizations.
- Ross: And how each civilization used the arts.
- Heath: Yes, how for the most part, in most societies, it is integral, which was a way of life and it was only after the Renaissance and the Industrial Revolution that art became art for art's sake. Always before that, the arts were in the buildings, in the pots, in embellishments in the buildings. So it was almost a teaching of the history of architecture, it was the core--the architecture or the buildings or how people lived, and the artifacts that were created in these various periods. And the difference between the Oriental and the European philosophy and the way of life.
- Ross: You mentioned that course before, not in such great detail, but that was a course that really has stuck with you. It seems to have had a lot to do with your thinking about--
- Heath: History of Art is a study of life and times, religion, and government of a people. You study history and geography and topography of the land, climate, inventions, wars, changing times--all of these things are part of it. History of Art is the summation of all the forces affecting human beings and the artifacts that survive when a civilization is destroyed or changed by religion and wars. The artifact is the history book--and clay is a tablet on which history is recorded.
- Ross: You were taking all kinds of art courses. You were taking painting, and were you taking ceramics at the time?
- Heath: Not much work in clay at the Chicago Art Institute, because it always came at a time that conflicted with my teaching schedule elsewhere.
- Ross: But in terms of that art history class, were you starting to think about what kind of art you would want to be a part of or what was--



Coming Back to Working with Clay

Heath: Well, of all of the materials I worked with, the one that I enjoyed the most was when I first began working with clay at Chicago Teachers' College--not at the Art Institute--and that was where I found that that was the material that I enjoyed most. So when we came to California and into San Francisco, where we lived was two blocks from the Art Institute. In fact, I chose that place to live in San Francisco so that I could walk to the Art Institute, and that was where I took my first ceramics class. And the University of California had extension courses in San Francisco. That's where I took ceramic chemistry and the engineering that went with ceramics, which I didn't get at the art school. In other words, the geology of clays.

Ross: So not everybody would necessarily take that. For you that was an added interest?

Heath: Oh, absolutely. Because that is the most important thing in ceramics, is where does the clay come from and where are your materials. Because the development of societies in every period in history was influenced by the location and kind of clay deposits around the world. Clay is the oldest medium in the arts because the fired pots didn't rot or deteriorate. Our history really is traced through clay. Our history is recorded on clay, the writing on the clay tablets, for instance. The vessels, the buildings, the inscriptions were done in clay or stone--the grandparent of clay.

Story of Early Pot Making

Ross: I have heard about nomads who made clay pots for their own use and when they moved on they just left their pots and--

Heath: I think I told you that story.

Ross: Maybe you told it to me, and I was thinking about it in terms of--

Heath: It was along the Euphrates where the people, shepherds and family, wintered along the river. In the summer months they went up into the hills. They traveled by camels, and were unable to take their storage jars with them. When they moved back on to the river in winter, the first thing the women would do would be to gather the wet clay and make more large jars. They would put the babies in them--to prevent them from falling into the river or whatever, while they dug holes in the sand for firing the jars. The jars

were placed in the holes, filled with dry grass, and a fire built inside. Of course the babies were moved to another jar!

That's a story that I was told while I was teaching at College of Arts and Crafts in Oakland, California. I've forgotten the man's name who came from the art school in Damascus. He was the head of the school. He had a year's sabbatical in the United States. He was the one who told me that story. He was so amazed when at the end of the school year, the students had made such small pots. He was a man in his late forties, and the rest of my students were just out of high school, so everything they made in clay was very precious--even the smallest little pot. He told me about people making these massive jars for storing water and wine and grain and then just leaving them behind when they moved on to the grazing area.

Ross: Were they just built free form, or did they have wheels to form them?

Heath: They built them up in the sand on the beach with round bottoms and they would--well, I never saw any pictures particularly that he referred to, but when you think of the Greek vessels and the primitive pots, the original ones didn't have flat bottoms, because wherever they were made, they had to stand up on uneven terrain, so most early pots were made with round bottoms so that they could nest in the ground.

Ross: Or like the Mexican pots that you can buy now that have that rattan ring on which a round pot sits.

#### Importance of Art Institute Painting Collection

Ross: Is there much more you want to add about the Art Institute in Chicago and your time there?

Heath: Well, I remember the paintings that I liked the best the first time I went through the museum. Because I knew nothing about paintings coming from a farm in Iowa, but I was so impressed by Kandinsky, the Russian painter. He was my first inspiration. To this day I remember my excitement in coming into the gallery where his paintings hung--walking up to them, examining each from center to corner to corner, delighted with the colors, the way they were applied--thinking, "Yes, I can paint--I want to paint--this will be an exciting life for me." My next favorite was Renoir--the ballet dancers.

Ross: Now you are talking about the museum?

Heath: Yes, it was in connection with the school because it is the Chicago Art Institute which has a great collection. It's now separate-- they've built a new art school since I was there. The original school was located just under the entrance. You walked into the front door of the museum and fifty feet ahead was a stairway that went down into the first floor, and that's where the art school was. So every day I was really just walking by great works of art.

Ross: At that time did they have the wonderful impressionist collection?

Heath: Yes.

Ross: You were starting to talk about Kandinsky.

Heath: Yes, Kandinsky I just talked about, and Renoir, and Matisse was a great favorite. When we took the art history class, many of the slides were taken from the collection that was there in the museum. So we could go from the art history class where we had looked at the slide, continue up into the galleries and see the actual paintings or sculpture. So that was, of course, what made the art history class so wonderful and rich.

### Edith Heath's Paintings

Ross: Yes, because I just finished a course in art history at San Francisco State, and it was done all by slides. So many of the slides are disappointing after you have seen the originals. But you were in a very good spot. Did that inspire you to do some of your own paintings?

Heath: Oh yes, of course.

Ross: I had not known that you painted until when you first moved here to the new house, and you hung those paintings up. I was really quite impressed. Were those the ones that you did at the Art Institute?

Heath: Yes, although I did some after I left the Art Institute.

### Searching for Clay in California

Heath: I had gotten so involved in the geology of clay that when we came to California and I had started studying ceramics, Brian and I spent weekends driving to wherever we heard that there was a clay pit because during the war we couldn't buy materials.

[tape interruption]

Heath: There was a clay pit or brickyard fifty miles south of San Francisco so we would go down there and get samples. In many cases, they weren't functioning because it was during the war and the brickyard wasn't working. So in order to get clays, I would go to the brickyards because usually the brickyards are located on clay pits or where there is a clay deposit. So we would pick up chunks of clay or screen the clay and bring a bucket full back to the house, because I had learned from the history of art that potters worked right where the clay was deposited. However, living in San Francisco, of course, there wasn't a clay deposit right there, so I had to find out where was the nearest clay deposit.

Ross: Well, you hadn't even started that sort of a thing in Chicago, had you?

Heath: That was right, because all of the clays that I had worked with in Chicago were just prepared bodies--wet clay ready to use.

Ross: Somebody brought them to you?

Heath: Yes, the school purchased them as ready-to-use clays, and when I enrolled at the San Francisco Art Institute--which as I said was down the street two blocks from where I lived--they had a prepared white clay there also.

### Character of Different Clays

Heath: I worked with that a day or two and then I said to myself, well, I don't like this clay. It has no character.

Ross: [laughs] How did you know that?

Heath: Well, I had some experience. The clay I had used in Chicago was different; it was a prepared clay, but it had a coarser grain texture, and it was not a white clay. And I knew from the history of art class that the kind of clay that one used determined to a

large extent the aesthetic quality of the piece. This white clay was limp and had no texture to it, so I couldn't do anything exciting with it. It was too bland. It had been refined to such an extent all earthy characteristics were bleached out. Historically what happened with scientific development, refinement of all materials became possible. Clays were deironized. By putting them through magnetic screens, the iron and other so-called impurities could be removed from the clay. That decreased "losses" due to iron spots--clay considered more "perfect." The clays used in the industry in the thirties, whether imports from England or France or made in the United States, were, what I called gutless.

Ross: Which were the gutless ones?

Heath: The commercial ones that were prepared for the industry and sold to schools.

Ross: Here from the United States?

Heath: Yes.

#### Development of Chinese Porcelain in Europe

Ross: But the ones from out of the country had more character?

Heath: No, the so-called fine china that developed in Europe--well, that's a long story. The Italians brought porcelain from China into Europe. Marco Polo coming over the Silk Route brought it back from China. That's why "fine" china is called china today. It was made of a white clay, or off-white clay. It was thin and translucent. It was porcelain, and nobody in Europe had seen anything like it before.

Ross: But it was considered fine?

Heath: Yes, well, it was a fascinating import. These dishes were not like the heavy, crude salt glazed pots that were made in Germany, for instance, nor the rough, red clay vessels made and used by the peasants. The nobility and aristocracy didn't use clay pots. They used silver, gold, or pewter: the metals. Their translucent dishes were of a different character from the things that were being made in Europe at that time. White-burning clays are a rare thing in the earth crust. Most clays are red-burning or buff-colored. If you have clay soil in your garden, you can see that it's not white.

Ross: No, it's usually grey.

Heath: And if you bake it, it turns out to be some shade of terracotta color. The grey clays when they are fired, or bake, have iron in them. So white-burning clays at that time were not known, nor used in Europe. Also the white-burning clays are not as plastic. They do not hold their shape as well.

Ross: Are they more brittle?

Heath: They're called short, so that when you try to stretch or mold them, they crack. Porcelain was a wonder to the European potters. The aristocracy began searching for white-burning clays, soliciting and imprisoning local potters to experiment, carry on research. The potters were not allowed contact with other potters for fear of revealing "secrets" in manufacturing these difficult materials. They were imprisoned for life. Kings vied with one another in developing this newfound art form--"Royal Berlin" still manufactures today in Germany.

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Heath: The White Cliffs in Dover provided white clay in England, and in Central Europe, on the border between Czechoslovakia and Germany, there is a region of white-burning clays. That's why the porcelain industries in Europe today are located in areas where white clays are found--also true all over the world--U.S., Japan, Taiwan, and South America. Reading the history of that period, keeping the secrets of how you did what you did was almost like what happened with the atomic age of our period, where governments would try to keep scientific knowledge secret. There are stories of brothers, for instance, or partners in a family who would have duplicate or triplicate keys to the formulas and one could not get information unless all keys and people were present. Each would have a key to unlock the cabinets where formulas were stored. No brother could reveal secrets without all knowing.

Ross: No outsiders could get at the formulas--

Heath: --and many of the potters really were locked up so that they couldn't pass the information on to neighboring potters in France, for instance, from Germany. It was a very interesting period, because any material in the earth that looked like it was white was researched to see if they could make something out of it. There are stories of people mixing a white material and firing it for three or four days, or weeks, and then hoping that this would make it more plastic or sticky. And that was the evolution of what became to be known as soft-paste porcelains. In other words, the "cooling" made a pasty substance. Whereas the porcelains, the

clays that were found in China, had a plastic property when the Chinese dug the clay. So if you find a clay deposit that has the properties that you need, for instance, that it won't shrink too much and it won't crack and it's plastic and holds together, and you can fire it, that clay is a very prized possession.

Coal mines have been purchased in England in order to obtain the clay on top of the coal. Such clay is called a fire-clay--it will have good thermal shock properties--can be used for ovenware.

See, I knew that from my art history, so I was looking for a clay (when I began potting) that nobody knew anything about, that had unique properties that I could utilize and develop, that would be expressive of the region. So I began to work with California clays that had certain properties that I could do something with, that would then turn out to look like something that nobody else had ever made.

- Ross: So that was after you came to California and took the chemistry class.
- Heath: Yes, and that was my reason for going to brick factories or wherever I'd see wet clay, I'd take it and fire it to see what color it was and how it felt.
- Ross: And you were doing this to begin with in your kitchen, weren't you?
- Heath: Yes.
- Ross: We're getting a little ahead of the story. Let's go back to some of the things that happened to you in Chicago before you moved. So I think what we want to do now is to get back to the part where you meet Brian, and you're living in an apartment in Chicago.
- Heath: Well, I was teaching. I've forgotten whether we talked about that last time, I was teaching out at Batavia. Brian was the camp director.
- Ross: That's a good place to begin.
- Heath: Brian was the camp manager. This was part of the program that was set up.
- Ross: And that was where the students could go for a week at a time, and that's where you met some of the important people.
- Heath: Yes, that's where I met Viola Spolin, for instance, who started and was working at Hull House, and became one of my very best friends.

And she's now famous for her work with children's theater, well, improvisational theater. It was her field.

Ross: That's the Second City lady?

Heath: Yes.

Ross: And then you mentioned some people who later became curators and started the Aspen Design Conference. Who were some of those people?

Heath: Well, Moholy-Nagy. You know, the Bauhaus in Germany. He came to Chicago in 1937. It was after Hitler's shenanigans, and many of the intellectuals escaped out of Germany. The Bauhaus was closed, so the people who were there who emigrated were Mies van der Rohe, Walter Gropius, and Moholy-Nagy--the people who created the International School of Architects.

Ross: What was the age of these people?

Heath: Well, I suppose Moholy was probably in his early forties.

Ross: So, probably twenty years older than you?

Heath: Yes. [pause] Well, there were the people who designed the skyscrapers in Chicago and New York.

Ross: At the time that you knew them, were they recognized artists and architects at the time?

Heath: Well, we felt that we were an avant-garde group on the cutting edge.

Ross: So did you have sessions with them? Did you learn from them?

Heath: Well, there were, of course, exhibitions and seminars.

#### Living in the Art Community in Chicago

Heath: On the near Northside of Chicago was the artists' colony, where I was living when I was going to art school.

Ross: So these were people that you spoke with and met with. Was there sort of hanging out at coffee houses and something like that?

Heath: Yes. And going to each other's studios.



Ross: Did you ever exchange art with any of the others?

Heath: I don't remember whether I ever did or not.

Ross: One of my friends in the early days of art, when she was with some of the art communes in upstate New York, talks about how when they would go to dinner at one another's houses, they'd just bring one of their little sketches or paintings, instead of bringing a bottle of wine or flowers. And she said some of the great collections were made that way, and she has a few herself. So I was wondering if that was a part of your--

Heath: Well, we had rent parties to pay for whoever was the host or hostess, who needed rent money, so we all contributed whatever we could, fifteen cents, twenty-five cents and so on.

Ross: And when you said it was a party, what does that mean? Everybody brought something to drink and a few pennies. So there was a real community.

Heath: Yes. Where people lived with improvised furniture--a mattress on the floor and bricks holding up planks for bookcases and that sort of a thing. In other words, you had no furniture to speak of, orange crates and boxes to sit on or sitting on the floor and so on.

Ross: At the time, were you excited about that time of your life?

Heath: Of course, [laughter] this is the life.

Ross: And you recognized that?

Heath: Oh, absolutely. It was the most exciting period of my whole life.

Ross: Because of all of the stuff that was going on?

Heath: The verve and the discussions and the arguments, the political discussions and the--we were going to change the world.

Ross: Now, this was during the Depression, so how to take care of the poor and the society was an ongoing discussion or an argument?

Heath: Oh, absolutely.

Talk of War

Ross: What about the war in Europe? Because this would have been 1939?

Heath: Well, there were those who went to and fought in the Spanish Civil War--let's see, that was 1935-36, and we knew that Spain was being used as a proving ground and that there was imminence of war. Then there was a group who were antiwar.

Ross: Premature antifascists?

Heath: Yes.

Ross: Is that what it was called?

Heath: Yes, something like that. I've forgotten now. And there were the pacifists, of course, who said that war never solved any problems, and there were those who felt they should go and fight in Spain, and those who said that doesn't solve problems.

Ross: And what position did you take? What was your position at that time?

Heath: I'm antiwar.

Ross: Was Hitler somebody who was really known?

Heath: He was known, but I don't think that anyone--at least I didn't have any notion of the Holocaust, of the atrocities that were being committed--of course, we knew about what was called the crystal night, where all the glass was broken in the buildings where the Jews' businesses were attacked, and the book burnings.

Ross: You knew about that, the international news?

Heath: Yes.

Ross: Did that stir you to change your attitude about war?

Heath: I'm not sure that--I don't think that one solves problems by war. I think that sometimes one almost has to say, well it's the lesser of two evils or something but certainly it's barbaric.

Ross: At that time, evidently not knowing that Hitler was such a dreadful person, was really a question for you and your friends whether one should go to war or not go to war?

Heath: Well, especially after World War I when the League of Nations failed and the U.S. refused to sign the--and never became a member of the league, I think. Was that the way [President Woodrow] Wilson's program was? And that whole episode--

Ross: So the idea of going to war, and then that sort of a flop afterwards was indicative of not repeating it? [pause] Well, maybe that's too big of a question. But what you are saying is that it was an exciting time because of what was going on internationally and what was going on just with your work.

Heath: Well, we knew that after World War I, that society changed, that the aristocracy and the whole business about class structure in Europe was demolished, and that democracy was on the rise, and with the woman's vote, that times were changing, and that it was no longer going to be just a man's world.

#### Women's Role in Wartime and Peace

Ross: Do you remember anything about the woman's suffrage?

Heath: Oh, yes. Because my mother was involved. Oh, absolutely, the women's vote was a must, absolutely. In fact, it was really interesting. I think that the women were more positive during the thirties than after World War II when the [pause] idea then was for women to get married. They'd gone to work during the war to work in the war industries like the shipyards in Sausalito. But when the war ended, women went back into the house. And that was to me a very surprising thing that so many women, you know, young women, like myself, they said about moving to the suburbs, having a station wagon--the idea then was to have two or three children and a station wagon and a two-car family and you'd live in the suburbs, and women's place is to raise the children.

Ross: Sort of back to the prewar theory. Do you think some of that came from the men back from the war, after the war effort ended, and there weren't enough jobs for men and women? And therefore, in a sense, there was a society that said it is good for women to go back into the home, but the real hidden agenda was that women should be there so that the men could have the jobs?

Heath: Well, there may have been some of that, but I think that the women really believed that their job was to have children.

Issue of Motherhood

- Heath: I was always asked, "When are you going to have some children? When are you going to stop potting? When are you going to stop doing what you are doing?" And I said, "Look, I've been raising children since I was five years old. I lived in a family of seven children, and I worked my way through school taking care of kids, and I've been a teacher for ten years. I've gone through child rearing; I've done it."
- Ross: So you never wanted to be a mother?
- Heath: No. It would take my mind off what I was doing. I wanted to make an extension in my medium scientifically and aesthetically and socially. There were never enough hours in the day to do all the things I could fantasize about.
- Ross: Did Brian want to be a father?
- Heath: I don't know whether he did or not. The thing is that being the kind of person that I am, I don't think he had much of a choice. [laughter] I mean, I was so wrapped up in creating, in looking at these clays and finding out what they can do that I kept saying, well, maybe the day will come when this won't be as interesting. And I still have plenty of time to decide whether I am going to have children. But by the time then that I got to be into my forties, I just thought, oh, no, I can't start over. Because having a child, it really is demanding. And I can't really understand how women can have children and a career.
- Ross: Well, that's one of the biggest topics today, and I don't think that it will ever be resolved. I mean, it's only women who can have babies, so it's not as though it's a given that you can continue to do everything.
- Heath: Well, I think it's probably more possible for women who grew up in large families and knew what it was like to have children and the care they demanded and how they--
- Ross: --it was easier for women to know whether or not they wanted children?
- Heath: Yes, to know what the responsibilities were. If you grew up in a family and maybe you were a single child or two children, and you never had to take care of children or help with the housework. In other words, I was really being a mother since the time I can remember, and taking care of my younger brothers and sisters and always having to be a part of the responsibility of--

Ross: Their care and feeding and everything. Yes, I remember the first part of our interview when you were talking about that. It's interesting though, because that is a very practical sort of look-see at motherhood. It's also very emotional, meaning that you had the love and the work and the responsibility of children before you probably were prepared.

Heath: Well, also the idea that you can be a Sunday painter, you really can not be I don't think a Sunday painter.

Ross: Or a Sunday ceramicist?

Heath: That's right. I don't think it's something you can do as a hobby. If you are having children, I think that is a primary responsibility of a parent. Just as whatever is important to you, you want to be able to give as much attention and time to that as possible. You don't want to choose equally demanding drives that split you.

Ross: Because of your having to do so much with your siblings and your mother being ill, do you sometimes have a feeling that you didn't get the attention as a child that you--?

Heath: I had no childhood.

Ross: Did you ever yearn for that?

Heath: I didn't know what it was to be a child. I was always responsible. And being a responsible person, whatever you take on to do, you do it to your ultimate best. In fact, when I was teaching, I left teaching to become a potter. Everyone said, "Oh, you're such a good teacher. You shouldn't leave the teaching profession." And I said, "I can't teach and do what I want to do. It requires twelve-hour days."

Ross: You gave everything.

Heath: I just said, "I can't take care of children and do what I want to do, because there are too many times that I would be interrupted in what I was doing." You cannot be spinning a pot on a wheel and have a baby crying and so on, and have to go and take care of it. You just can't divide your time that way.

Ross: It's a little interesting to me to think of you, Edith, being responsible for the children at home, and yet when you chose a career to go off to school, you chose to be a teacher. Was that because there were few choices for women at that time?

Heath: That's right. I took a business course in high school--shorthand and typing and bookkeeping--thinking that I would go into office work, business. But I did that for two years when I got out of high school. I worked for the Iowa Public Service Company, that's what I did, and I decided no, this is not really what I want to do. I want to do something that is more adventuresome and more creative. So I decided no, I am going to go on to college.

Ross: When you were thinking of teaching, were you thinking of little children or high school?

Heath: No, I don't think I wanted to teach the younger children. I didn't mind it, but that was not going to be challenging enough. I wanted to teach older people, or even go and teach in China.

Ross: That's right, you had a dream that you could be a teacher. You could go anywhere in the world. Well, that changed around a bit, didn't it? You've traveled all over, but you haven't been there to do teaching.

#### Marriage to Brian, 1938

Ross: Let's get back to where you're living in this artistic atmosphere just about the time that World War II started. And that's when you met Brian?

Heath: We met in May, and we were married in August.

Ross: Oh, whirlwind. [laughter] Did you fall in love right off?

Heath: Well, I suppose the thing that was attractive of course was that he came from New York City, and his mother typed the manuscripts for the writers in Greenwich Village in New York. She came to California two or three different times with sort of hippie groups.

Ross: The bohemian I suppose--

Heath: Yes, bohemian. They were going to set up writers' colonies in San Diego, California. So this was going back to the beginning of the English women's protest movement, and getting the vote in England and the Socialist movement in Europe at the time in the Scandinavian countries and in England and so on. His mother was a part of that.

Ross: In Europe?

Heath: She was from England. She went to France. She and her sister were the first women typists in London. She was with the foreign press in Guatemala. She took Brian with her when she went.

Ross: How old was he then?

Heath: He was four, when there was the earthquake in Guatemala. He tells that story all of the time, when they were living there.

Ross: What about his father?

Heath: He was in England.

Ross: And did they separate?

Heath: He was married.

Ross: Oh, I see. She had her relationship outside of--she wasn't married either--

Heath: See, that was the period of trial marriages.

Ross: So she's the original single parent.

Heath: And so, that background of his, you see, was so different from my background and of course, it was part of this exciting world. Times were changing. You don't have to get married.

Ross: That's right. That was a part of that time, wasn't it?

Heath: Yes.

Ross: But say five, ten years ago when young people started living together, there was sort of a lot of discussion by older people about, that's not nice. Many, it turned out, had lived together without marriage, and so it all comes around. So Brian went with his mother to Guatemala at four.

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Heath: Well, he was four years old. He was born in 1913, so that would make it 1917. His first language was Spanish.

Ross: Are you and Brian about the same age?

Heath: I'm two years older.

Ross: So Spanish was his first language, and he lived with his mother in New York?

Heath: Yes, in Greenwich Village.

Ross: And was that where his mother was at the time that you met Brian?

Heath: No, she was in San Diego. She was a secretary in the Fine Arts Gallery.

Ross: And when you met Brian he was a student at the University of Chicago. What was he studying?

Heath: At that time he was getting his degree in social service administration, but he had gotten his bachelor's in sociology at the University of Chicago.

Ross: And he was part of the group that hung out. So it wasn't just art students, it was all kinds of students that were hanging out.

Heath: Yes.

Ross: So you met Brian in May and--

Heath: We were married in August and the reason was that--let's see what was her name, Miss Woodland, who was the head of the school at Batavia--knew that I went back to Chicago on weekends with Brian. And she said, "I hope you're not sleeping with him." [laughter] She said, "If you are, you will be fired." [laughter]

Ross: And were you?

Heath: No, but Brian was.

Ross: Brian was--?

Heath: Fired.

Ross: Oh, he was fired. You weren't fired. No, I meant, were you sleeping together?

Heath: Of course.

Ross: But they actually fired him for that?

Heath: No, I think that--[laughter] Well, he was playing horseshoes with some of the workmen at the camp in the middle of the afternoon. And she saw him doing this.

Ross: And he was supposed to be working?

Heath: He wasn't supposed to fraternize with the help.



Ross: With the workers? Were the workers black or were they--it wasn't a racist thing?

Heath: No. [Brian Heath enters]

Ross: It was just between classes then?

Heath: Yes.

Brian: It just wasn't professional.

Ross: My goodness. And you were teaching there--

Heath: See, he was fired in August. So then we decided in order for both of us not to be fired, we decided we'd get married.

Ross: Desperation. [laughter] Isn't that funny. You were going to get married anyway I suppose, weren't you?

Heath: I don't know whether we would have. I think if it would have been possible not to--but you couldn't be a teacher in those days.

Ross: No, that's true, you had to behave. You were a moral, upright character.

Heath: Yes, and since teaching was my profession, I said, "Well, what the heck. If it doesn't work out, we can always get a divorce."

Ross: You actually thought that?

Heath: Yes.

Ross: That's amazing, because divorce in my home town, which was a small town in the valley, was unusual. Divorce was almost not an option for most people, because it was so unthinkable. But you actually could think--was anyone else getting divorces at that time?

Heath: Well, because it was a period of trial marriages. They were referred to as trial marriages because that was Shaw's--

Ross: George Bernard Shaw?

Heath: Yes. And the socialist philosophy is that--

Ross: --that was okay?

Heath: Yes. The socialists were not very romantic. But you didn't get married until you at least knew what you were getting into.

Ross: I see. So even with the legal marriage if it didn't work, well there was always the approval, that wouldn't be such a bad thing--

Heath: In other words, there was a recognition that marriage wasn't the end--

Ross: Did you ever think that you would still be married however many years later? How long have you been married?

Heath: It will be fifty-two years in two months. In August it will be fifty-two years.

Ross: How fast time goes.

Heath: Yes. And Brian's mother came to visit us a month after we were married, and we were having one of our usual arguments. She said to me--well she said to the two of us--"Why did you get married? If you have such violent arguments." Well, the idea of getting married if you were going to argue like that--she, of course, being a woman who didn't get married--

Ross: --a somewhat liberated woman. She was more than a somewhat liberated, wasn't she?

Heath: Yes.

Ross: Was she okay about her position? Did she feel okay about being a single parent?

Heath: Yes. She did later on marry a man, so Brian has a half-sister. But that lasted only for three or four months.

### Wedding Day

Ross: Oh, really. So she was a single parent, or a single woman most of her life. What kind of a wedding did you have?

Heath: We went down to the courthouse on a Saturday afternoon to get our license and there was a waiting line. It was the most motley assortment of couples waiting to be married and we were sitting there looking at this group of people who seemed so strange.

Ross: Like what kind? Do you mean all colors--

Heath: --all colors, and tall women with short men, none of the ideal looking couple or anything like that. At any rate, as we were

sitting there I said, "Look, I know a man who's a minister out at the Howell Neighborhood House. Why don't I call up Roy and see if he'll marry us?" So Brian said, "Okay." I don't know, we paid a fifteen dollar fee or something like that.

Ross: Well, that was a lot. Are you sure it was fifteen?

Heath: Well, it might have been ten dollars. At any rate, I went in and called Roy and said, "Roy, how about performing a marriage ceremony?" He said, "For whom?" And I said, "For me." He said, "Come right out." [laughter] So we went out to Howell Neighborhood House and we stood in front of the fireplace.

Ross: At Howell House? The very fireplace I saw.

Heath: Yes, and let's see, Gertrude Ray, who was the director of the Howell House, was one of the witnesses, and the social worker was a Polish woman, I can't remember her name. But anyway, they were the two witnesses. It was about five, late in the afternoon, at any rate, just before dinner, and down the street was the--let's see what was it? There were all sorts of ethnic restaurants.

Ross: Well, the Greeks are there now. It's just across the freeway.

Heath: I think it was a Viennese place, a Viennese restaurant. It was about two or three blocks down the street, that we went to have dinner, and then from there we went up to the near Northside to another ethnic restaurant where we danced. Hungarian I think it was, what was that Hungarian folk dance? Because folk dancing was big in those days. That was part of the Federal Art Project too. It was the folk dance groups. They were--of course, in a city like Chicago there were many of them.

Ross: So each ethnic restaurant or club would have their own folk dancing. So you danced?

Heath: Yes.

Ross: Was Roy, the minister, with you?

Heath: No, he didn't go to dinner with us.

Ross: Do you remember it as kind of a special dinner?

Heath: Yes. Oh, it was just like it should be, you know. Here you're an American, but you're having a dinner in the Viennese restaurant, and then you went to a Hungarian restaurant or bar.

Living on the Southside of Chicago

Ross: And then where were you living?

Heath: I was sharing an apartment with another gal who was a graduate of the Art Institute, Shirley Hannah. She was the niece of liberal progressive Senator Hannah of Wisconsin, I think. It was just right around--off 59th Street, the Midway, just at the corner of--right across from the science museum, was practically where we lived then.

Ross: So Brian took the place of your roommate?

Heath: Well, I had to go back to the camp, you see, Batavia. So on Monday morning, or Sunday evening, I took the train out and I came in on weekends. I think it was about--the camp closed when the snows began. I think it was the end of September. So for about six weeks I commuted weekends into the city, and Brian was then enrolled at the university. So for the following year he worked for his masters degree, and I was teaching. Then I came back into the city, and the school that I had been teaching at in the city reopened for the fall term, and I continued on at the Art Institute. We found an apartment on the Southside with a pulldown bed.

Ross: --called a Murphy bed or something like that.

Heath: Well, those were called--what were those apartments called? They were called studio apartments.

Ross: And these were the beds that looked like a door, you can open them up, and they pull down.

Heath: It was in the living room.

Ross: I remember those well. And so were you teaching, you were going to the Art Institute.

Heath: Yes. I was teaching from nine to three or four and was at the Art Institute in the evenings. The first three years I attended morning classes at the Art Institute, and the last three years I took the night classes.

Ross: Was that every night?

Heath: Yes.

Ross: So what were the hours then, like seven to nine or something like that?

Heath: Seven to ten, three-hour sessions.

Ross: That was quite a schedule.

Heath: Like, the mornings were nine to twelve. Yes, it was like eight hours teaching and three hours at school, and then the traveling-- I'd get home from the Art Institute around ten-thirty or eleven at night, and then would be up and teaching at nine o'clock the next morning.

Ross: Do you remember those as fun days?

Heath: Oh, yes.

Ross: Did you have any time for the pleasures, like did you go and hear some of the jazz in Chicago? That was about the time that jazz was really--

Heath: Oh yes, it was big, especially on the Southside.

Ross: What were some of the clubs? Do you remember?

Heath: Oh yes, what were the names? What was the jazz player there across from the Midway? I remember going to all the avant-garde films on Michigan Boulevard.

Ross: Chicago was an exciting place.

Heath: I like Chicago. I think it is a very vital city. Of course, Carl Sandburg and Frank Lloyd Wright and *Leaves of Grass*--who was the author?

Ross: Whitman. Walt Whitman.

Heath: No, not Walt Whitman.

Ross: Well, he wrote *Leaves of Grass*.

Heath: No, he was a contemporary of Sandburg's.

Ross: Did you know any of those people?

Heath: No.

Stockyards and Steelmills

Ross: Were the stockyards operating at that time?

Heath: Yes, and the smell was terrible. The stench. The Southside particularly. And then there were the steel mills in Gary, Indiana. In fact, the soot was so terrible that the drapes or the curtains in the apartment had to be washed at least once a month. They would just be black and if you ran your fingers across the window sill you would have soot. It was the most unbelievable smoke-filled city.

Ross: And you were there in winter and summer?

Heath: And the summer of course was so hot, just steaming.

Ross: And the steelmills ran night and day and all year round, so there wasn't any relief of it, was there?

Heath: No.

Ross: Did you use Lake Michigan? Did you go swimming in the lake?

Heath: No, it was really too cold. We were only--you know--across the driveway practically. Midway isn't far from the lake. That was the only thing that made life bearable in the summer months, to go and be able to sit on the shore. And we had a friend that had a boat, so on the weekends we would go up to Saugatuck, which was north of Chicago about--how many miles was it? About a hundred miles. He'd take the boat across and then we would drive up. There would always be about ten or twelve weekend guests, some went up on the boat and some would drive up. And Viola Spolin--and Ed Spolin was the man who she was married to, was sort of this Danny Kaye type of character.

Ross: Like "A little bit of a potato chip and a trifle of the Eiffel Tower."<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>"I snip a bit of potato chip and trifle of the Eiffel Tower." A line from "Anatole of Paris" from the movie *Inspector General*, starring Danny Kaye, 1949.

## IV MOVE TO CALIFORNIA

Deciding to Go to San Francisco, 1941

Heath: But those were wonderful days. And coming to San Francisco was not bad either, because San Francisco had some of that same kind of feeling, that North Beach area of San Francisco.

Ross: Well, when did you decide--what were the factors that got you to go to San Francisco?

Heath: Oh, Brian having been living in San Diego, and knew San Francisco. When we were married he said, "Well, we're going to live in San Francisco when we get through with going to school here in Chicago. That's where we're heading for, San Francisco." So that's what we did. He got a job with the American Red Cross. Because the war--

Brian: It was before the war.

Heath: But the war was imminent.

Ross: What year was this?

Brian: '41. We arrived--Pearl Harbor was--

Ross: December 7, 1941.

Brian: I was hired the preceding August. No, it was a little before that, because up to that point we were up to Tacoma. We were up there for three months and when we got down here, right after the war--or was it right after Pearl Harbor?

Ross: Why did you go to Tacoma?

Heath: The Red Cross sent him up there.

Brian: It was an assignment.

Ross: And just three months.

Brian: They were expanding rapidly, and I was one of the few who had a social work degree.

Ross: Oh, I see. So then you qualified to come to the great city of San Francisco.

Brian: I was going to be a super-duper manager.

Ross: Were you excited about coming?

Heath: Was I? No, I didn't want to leave Chicago. I didn't know anything about California and I loved Chicago.

Ross: But for all of your wanting to be challenged and creativeness and adventure, I would think that would be part of the excitement.

Heath: Well, yes. But I also felt like, now you're being a typical woman, following your husband's wants. So there was a slight misgiving, that I was going to become now a housewife.

Ross: Did you really believe that? Well, in a sense, I guess you had reason to, because you didn't have a job.

Heath: No, then I didn't have a job, you see. But soon as I got here, I got a teaching job almost immediately.

#### Interim in Tacoma, 1941

Ross: How about in Tacoma?

Heath: No, because we knew that was just going to be a interim period up there.

Ross: What did you do in Tacoma for three months?

Heath: I was a housewife. [laughter] There wasn't an art gallery in Tacoma. There was--in the library they had an exhibition of Van Gogh prints and that was some big art event of the period.  
[laughter]

Ross: Were you happy there?



Heath: Oh no.

Ross: Were you hating it?

Heath: Well, it isn't a question of hating it. It just wasn't an artist's world.

Ross: And certainly different from the swinging time--

Heath: And also the army life, the army barracks.

Ross: Is that where you lived?

Heath: No, we had--we rented the upstairs of a house near the camp.

Ross: Because housing, I suppose, was terribly tight, wasn't it?

Heath: Yes.

Ross: Housing during the war, with all of the movement of people into those small areas. It was difficult finding housing.

Heath: And there was a bombing of--it was during the blackout period. At night you had to pull the blinds so that no lights could be seen. Let's see, what had happened? The bombing of Pearl Harbor.

Brian: That was one thing that happened.

Heath: So we went up to Tacoma in August and came down in January, and the sun shone one day. It rained and rained and rained.

Ross: In Tacoma?

Heath: In Tacoma. Rain and fog. And the day we left there were icicles hanging from all of the trees. There was what was called a silver frost. I drove to pick up Brian at the camp, when we left the house to drive down to San Francisco, and we drove through this silver frost through Oregon, which was quite spectacular.

Ross: Dangerous I suppose, because there was ice all over.

Heath: Oh yes, the roads were a bit icy.

Ross: What kind of a car did you have?

Heath: The Plymouth? Wasn't it a Plymouth, a Plymouth coupe?

Brian: It was a sedan.

- Ross: And you drove it from Chicago to Tacoma and then from Tacoma to San Francisco. But you didn't see Tacoma as a resting time or anything, it was just a period of waiting to get to something more interesting.
- Brian: Just a wait stop.
- Heath: Brian's mother knew a painter who had exhibited at the gallery in San Diego, George Post. No, George Post was living in San Francisco as a watercolorist, but his friend Errol Leak, who was studying to be an architect and a painter, was in Tacoma. Brian's mother gave us the address. That was our one connection with someone who might be in the art world. So that was the connection, and it was a very good one because through them we got to know the city, and there were very beautiful drives around the Hood Canal and all the inland waterways and so on. And Mt. Ranier and Mt. Hood were so scenic, it was a wonderful place.
- Ross: But if you didn't see the sun, it must have been a little dreary. Brian said something about while you were there you painted?
- Heath: Yes.
- Ross: Was that because of Errol?
- Heath: Well, in an attempt to try to keep up with--but I don't remember any of the paintings that I did there. I'm just trying to remember what I actually did do. I think I was reading most of the time. I know it was a period of time like none other that I had ever had because for the first time I was at a place and doing something I had not planned on. So what to do with one's time.
- Ross: But you didn't see it as leisure time?
- Heath: No, I remember asking Errol where I could buy some art supplies, although I brought some with me. But I don't--except for enjoying the scenery, it wasn't the kind of life that was very exciting, stimulating.
- Ross: And you probably weren't used to that.
- Heath: It was so different when coming down to San Francisco.
- Ross: What happened when you came to San Francisco? Did you look for an apartment or did you have one lined up? Did you have a car?
- Heath: No, I just walked. Brian was headquartered at the auditorium in downtown San Francisco on Van Ness.

Brian: That was the civic headquarters for Red Cross.

Heath: So I started out from North Beach and just walked up and down the hills, and there were many apartments for rent.

Teaching Art at Presidio Hill School

[Interview 4: May 27, 1990] ##

Ross: When we last talked, we were talking about your arrival in San Francisco. You'd stopped in Tacoma, and then when you got to San Francisco, as I recall, you found where the school was, and started to look for a house. I think that you said that you walked up and down the streets to find a house.

Heath: That's right. We found a house designed by Julia Morgan. It was two blocks from the San Francisco Art Institute, also. So it meant that it was very easy then for me to enroll and pick up where I had left off in Chicago, because I hadn't finished really my work at the Art Institute when we left Chicago.

Ross: You had not--had you gotten a degree though?

Heath: No. I was working toward--I had almost all my work necessary for the degree in fine arts. So I was planning to complete those, but I wanted to have a class in ceramics, which I had never been able to work into my program in Chicago. The only experience I had had with clay was at Chicago Teacher's College, when every elementary school teacher was supposed to use clay with the children. And so I had worked with the clay with the children, but had not really had any professional training, so to speak, in the working with clay. So that's what I wanted to do as soon as it was possible to work it into my schedule.

Shortly after we arrived, I think it was in March or April, and--let's see, I have to sort of remember now just what the sequence of events were, because I very quickly got a teaching job at Presidio Hill School. It was a private progressive school, which carried on the philosophical ideas John Dewey espoused at Chicago Teacher's College, namely that all people are creative, especially younger children--that it's very evident, and that what happens to creativity is that it's destroyed before the child reaches the age of ten, just about. And then the children begin to become very self-conscious and stop doing anything that has to do with so-called art.

Ross: What ages were in that school?

Heath: It was from kindergarten through eighth grade.

Ross: And when you had the job there, were you an art teacher?

Heath: Yes.

Ross: So that you only taught art, and you didn't have to teach other subjects.

Heath: Yes.

Ross: Did you like that?

Heath: Oh, yes, because all the art classes were related to what was going on in the classroom, so that in the first grade, if they were studying the farm life, or Indian life, or the beginning of life in society, then the children would make replicas of that way of life, so that we built tepees. When we were studying towns and cities, we visited the fire department and found out about the policemen and so on--so that the art classes were related to what was being taught in the classroom.

Ross: But let's go back to when you first got to San Francisco, because when you got to San Francisco, your first job as far as you and Brian were concerned was to find housing. So you found this house, and then you found the job.

Heath: Well, first I enrolled at the Art Institute for the summer classes. And at the end of the summer session, I had started my teaching job at Presidio Hill School, where I was teacher for three years.

#### Sewing Machine Becomes a Potter's Wheel

Heath: It was during this time that Brian was with the American Red Cross as regional director. I worked--I got a sewing machine which Brian converted into a potter's wheel, a treadle machine.

Ross: You yourself?

Heath: Brian--he's very good at doing that sort of thing. And so I made my first pots on a converted sewing machine, treadle machine--foot power.

Ross: Now, you were enrolled in the school. Why didn't you do it there?

Heath: Oh, because there were too many students--there were only about one or two potter's wheels, and I think there were probably twenty people in the class, so one seldom got to use the wheel. Also, because I wanted to work with other clays than what they had at the school. They had a clay which I didn't like working with very much. So that was when I started looking for clays, regional clays, to use. So I had a potter's wheel which we had down in the basement of the building, the laundry room.

Ross: Was that a common laundry room, or was it your--

Heath: No, no, just ours.

Ross: How big a house did you have?

Heath: Well, it was a two-story house on Hyde Street. The steepest hill in town. The steepest one that traffic is allowed to travel on.

Ross: And that's Hyde?

Heath: No, I don't mean Hyde; I mean Filbert. It was off of Hyde Street, between Hyde and Leavenworth on Filbert.

Brian: Also, I didn't convert a sewing machine; I converted a Dodge rear end.

Heath: Oh, that came later, when we moved over to 3310 Paradise Drive. Then he used the rear end of an automobile and made a potter's wheel out of that.

Ross: But at first, it was a sewing machine that he converted?

Heath: Yes, a treadle machine.

#### A Home Designed by Julia Morgan

Ross: And you used it in the basement. Well, the house was designed by Julia Morgan. Was it a big enough space so that you had--

Heath: The owner lived upstairs. She was a schoolteacher. She taught English in the high schools in San Francisco. She and her mother lived on the top floor, and they had a--

Ross: Was it kind of like a flat?

Heath: Yes. We were on the lower flat. And being on a steep hill, you see, it was actually like four levels, so that the entrance to the laundry room was right off of the sidewalk that went down the hill --there were steps going down the hillside. So when I got my first kiln, we had to lower it by tying a rope around it and letting it wheel down the hill into the laundry room.

Ross: And you could actually hook it up there? Was it a gas one?

Heath: Yes.

Ross: That's amazing. And the house upstairs was like any other house, and then you just--

Heath: Well, being on the steep hillside, it was oriented to the east, so that the back side of it really was virtually up against the hillside. It was long and narrow, had a walk that came around the side of the house that entered on the level where we were, which had a steel railing on it. And the owner told me when the house-- the house was built shortly after the earthquake. I think she said it was in 1909, and Julia Morgan climbed all around the scaffolding in her high button shoes and long skirts to oversee the building of it.

Ross: Did you like the house?

Heath: Oh, I loved it. It was a wonderful house. It was a redwood shingle exterior that had hinged casement windows that opened up. It was just really a San Francisco house.

Ross: And distinctively Julia Morgan's style?

Heath: Yes. Especially redwood-shingled.

Ross: Yes. Most of her houses, I believe, were in Berkeley.

Heath: Yes.

Ross: So you had--it was pleasurable to live there, then. Had you heard of her before?

Heath: Yes, in our history of art class in Chicago, and the study of architecture. She was--I think then it was more just a passing reference, the naming of various architects, who had been practicing at the time that Frank Lloyd Wright was practicing, see. Who was the redwood man who was teaching at Berkeley? Maybeck. She had been a student of Maybeck's.

Ross: Did you ever meet her?

Heath: No, she died in--see, she did the--after she finished that house, she began working with William Randolph Hearst--

Ross: On the castle?

Heath: On the castle down below Carmel.

Ross: It's about San Luis Obispo.

Heath: I've forgotten now. She had died shortly--we came in '41, and I think she died somewhere in the mid-thirties, is my recollection.

Ross: And what about furnishing?

Heath: Well, much of the furniture was sort of built in, à la the Frank Lloyd Wright way of doing interiors, with the bookcases and the seating and so on. It required very little furniture.

Ross: Including kitchen things.

### The Kitchen Kiln

Heath: Everything in the kitchen was built in too. And I kept glazed materials in the pantry, and I had a little kiln on the sink counter. [laughs] The first one.

Ross: A little kiln, on the sink counter?

Heath: Yes. That's where I ran my glaze tests and clay tests.

Ross: Oh, I see. You weren't actually turning out any pieces of--

Heath: No, when we first started, I was studying ceramic chemistry, and--well, learning how to make glazes and how to make clay bodies, and so on. There are many things in ceramics that are similar to cooking, so that the kneading of the clay, and the making of the objects out of it is not unlike making--well, kneading clay is like kneading bread dough.

Ross: So it's not inappropriate to do it in the kitchen, is what you're really--

Heath: That's right. And there's a stove that you heat things, you see. So it was a very natural thing to--since I had grown up in a family where I had helped with the cooking and baking and canning and so on all my life, so this was just an extension of that experience.

- Ross: You had enrolled in a ceramics class, so were you seriously thinking at that time that that was really going to be your lifetime interest, or was this just more part of your total art education?
- Heath: Well, it was part of the feeling that art should not be for the wealthy, and just art for art's sake, it should have something to do with daily life. In other words, the making of your clothes, and the furnishings in your home and your dishes, everything should be a work of art. And so, it was a practical idea that if you make things that are for daily use, obviously it will be marketed.
- Ross: And your whole identification with ceramics was not to sculpture, or what I think at that time must have been less functional than the sort of--
- Heath: Well, I remember sitting in the staff meetings, teachers' meetings, and making handles for cups. Trying out different kinds of handles, how they would feel. I made a cup that was sort of the shape of an ear, that didn't have a hole to it, that was a contoured shape. The handles for casseroles, or things that you picked up. And so the sculpturing aspect would be the way in which--
- Ross: I think what I was getting at was that you were really thinking in a functional way.
- Heath: Yes, like making vases, for instance. And casseroles, and serving dishes. In fact, when I had the exhibition, when I was invited to have the exhibition out at the de Young--I mean, at the Palace of the Legion of Honor museum, everything that was in that exhibition were sets of one kind or another, like a tea service, a teapot, cups and saucers, cream and sugar; salad service, with a large salad bowl and small bowls to go with it; a set of beer mugs; another large pitcher, water jug with drinking goblets--
- Ross: So you weren't alone in your thinking, then. I had in mind maybe that you were taking a path of ceramics that hadn't been common before.

### The Wedgwood Influence

- Heath: Well, the thing that was uncommon was the kind of clays that I used. They were not white-burning clays that you would assume would be used for china, for instance. They were dark--either black clay, red clay, terracotta, a blue clay, a green clay, and



that was partly influenced by Josiah Wedgwood's contribution to the ceramic industry. The porcelain evolved in China, and it was brought to Europe. So at the time of Josiah Wedgwood, the decorative aspects of what was made in the plant was influenced by the Greek friezes and the Greek drawings. But Wedgwood was interested in modifying the clay from--it wasn't just dug out of the ground and used that way. There was a great deal of research on what could be done with color in clay bodies, instead of it's just being white.

Ross: That's fascinating. Well, let's get back to where we were, about how your life was going in San Francisco in the--what was it, about '41, wasn't it?

Heath: Yes. It was at the time when North Beach was the Greenwich Village of San Francisco, with the artists living in that area.

Ross: You were just up the street from North Beach.

Heath: I was part--yes--one block away. Well, just across from what's now the Transamerica Building, which used to be the farmer's market.

Ross: Oh, which is now the Golden Gateway Center.

Heath: Yes. I was on 55 Clay Street.

Ross: You mean your shop?

Heath: My studio, my first studio in San Francisco. Well, that brings us back now to my teaching.

Ross: Yes, because I have to get something a little clearer in my head. You got to San Francisco, you enrolled in the Art Institute in a ceramics class, you got a job for teaching in the fall at the Presidio Hill School, and at what point and where did you take that ceramics class?

Heath: At the San Francisco Art Institute.

#### Class in Ceramic Chemistry, UC Extension

Heath: The ceramic chemistry was taken through the University of California Extension down on--what was it--downtown San Francisco, the University of California had an extension.

The way that came about was that when I was at the Art Institute, there were a number of students there who wanted to know more about ceramic chemistry than was being taught at the school. So we petitioned the University of California to teach a class--to have a class for studio potters, and we wanted the scientific background, not the art background to ceramics. And so that class was given especially for those of us who petitioned it.

Ross: How many were you?

Heath: Oh, I think about a dozen. There were some people in Berkeley. I became president of the--we started the potter's association, and I was the first president of the potter's association.

Ross: The Potter's Association of San Francisco?

Heath: Of studio potters in San Francisco--or, the Bay Area.

Ross: Did that--were the members for the most part from the Art Institute, or were they--

Heath: The nucleus came from there, but then the word spread and we got-- because I tried to find out who were all the potters in the Bay Area. Carleton Ball was teaching at Mills College. The College of Arts and Crafts, I think Tony Prieto was teaching--oh, I can't remember for sure whether Tony was at Arts and Crafts or not. Because he followed Carleton Ball at Mills College.

Ross: So you petitioned the university. When did you take that class?

Heath: That was an evening class. I think it met--I'm not sure whether it was three times a week, but--

Ross: You were taking it while you were taking the ceramics class at the Art Institute.

Heath: Yes. Well, actually I dropped the class at the Art Institute because I told the man who was teaching there that I wasn't learning anything, that what I really wanted to learn was the chemistry, and I think he said, "Well, there are a great many people who aren't interested in that." So he suggested that we ask the University of California to set up the class for those students who especially wanted that aspect of ceramics. Because the majority--I think there were four of us in that class who then took the class at the University of California Extension, and there were three or four people from Berkeley.

Ross: How long did it take from the time you organized the petition that you got the class?

Heath: Oh, almost immediately, with the fall term.

Ross: Were you surprised to get it that easily? Today I think that might be--

Heath: Well, I think during the war it was such a peculiar time. See, many men were away at war, and the activities going on at the university were probably quite different. I don't know what the male population was then, because most of us who took the class were women.

### Brian's Interest in the Class

Heath: In fact, I think Brian was the only--he went with me also. No, there was one other man. He was also a husband of a potter in Berkeley.

Ross: And Brian took the class because of your interest, or was he also interested?

Heath: Well, he was interested in the geology of clays, and nature of the material, and so on.

Ross: So he has always had an ear and an eye and a sense towards the--

Heath: See, he was a scholarship student from childhood through high school in private, progressive schools in New York City. These schools were comparable to the Presidio Hill School in San Francisco. There was a period of two years when his mother was with the Foreign Press Association in Guatemala. They left after the earthquake in 1918. He was four years old at that time. They returned to New York City where he then was enrolled at the Walden School. They lived in Greenwich Village--the artists and writers colony where his mother typed manuscripts for writers like Henry Varnus Poor and Jack London. His mother's roommate was Bee Stunsky, whose family edited *The Nation*, and knew Irving Berlin.

As a child he was an observer of the bohemian art world in New York. He was "farmed out" to live with different families. Later, in the mid-twenties, his mother moved to San Diego where she became secretary of the Fine Arts Gallery until she retired in 1944. So Brian became a scholarship student there through his high school years. So his background was in a creative environment. He then spent four years at the University of Oregon, studying journalism, psychology, sociology--social work. Spent a year as a probation officer.

Ross: So it was sort of a natural thing for him to go--

Heath: His interest was more of a--well, as a sociologist, not as an artist himself, but as a participant in a cultural phenomenon, an evolution.

Ross: And certainly you were looking for a whole experience with life and art, and so it sort of suited his interest, it sounds like.

Heath: Yes.

Ross: Who taught that class in chemistry, do you remember?

Heath: Dr. Willie Kohn, who was a visiting professor from Israel.

### Using Solar Energy

Heath: His big influence on me was saying to the class--I don't know whether the other people were as influenced by it as I was--that clay someday, in the future, would be fired by sunlight, not by gas kilns or electric kilns--

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Ross: --clay--pottery would be--it would be dried by sunlight?

Heath: No, more than that. The sun would supply enough heat to fire the clay. Well, for instance, mirrors would be used to build up the temperature. We frequently talked about how that might be done. We did some experiments where we would put mirrors lining a tub facing the sun trying to bake clay that way, in a crude sort of fashion. And then when I went to teach ceramics over at the College of Arts and Crafts--I was there for a couple of years--I had the students go out with me one day to dig clay from where bulldozers were cutting roads through the hills in Berkeley. The clay was exposed in the hillside as the bulldozer cut through. We dug out some of the wet clay and took it back to the college. It was beautifully aged, clean, no vegetation--no rocks--just perfect for forming small bowls. We dried and fired them in a garbage can with sawdust to emulate the firing of clay by the most primitive methods.

Ross: Would that be called raku?

Heath: No, because in raku you use glaze quickly fired in a brick oven, you use wood to heat the kiln, but protect the glaze from being covered with ashes by baffling.

We used no glaze, just put the pots upside down on top of some rocks in the bottom of a garbage can, first cutting a hole along the bottom side for use in starting the fire and for the draft. We poured sawdust on top of the inverted pots and then set fire through the hole to the sawdust. When all the sawdust had burned out, the firing was complete. The sawdust became red-hot, the pots glowed. They occupied twelve to fifteen inches at the bottom of the garbage can. The rest of the can was full of sawdust, about twenty inches or more. We started the fire with a piece of newspaper. We had to make a channel in the sawdust for the draft. We placed kiln shelves across the top to control the speed of the fire by varying the opening between the shelves. And it was really amazing how well it worked.

Ross: Really. Well, what about--going back to using the sun to do this job--I'm not sure I connect with that in terms of--

Heath: Well, Dr. Kohn never said how it could be done. He said that that was a direction that mankind would be forced to move into, to generate heat or electricity by the sun.

Ross: Well, he came from Israel, and it was during--

Heath: I think he was a visiting instructor, because he went back to Israel. So I never had any further contact with him after that.

Ross: I was thinking that in Israel at that time, they were exploring sun power, weren't they?

Heath: Yes, that had to do with sun power, and converting sea water into potable drinking water, I think.

Ross: Making something from a very barren land.

Heath: Yes. And so that has influenced me all my life. He said for us to find those materials that help each other to fuse at the lowest possible temperature.

#### Developing Formulas for Clay

Ross: Where were you getting the clay at that time?

Heath: At Niles, where they were making sewer pipe.

Ross: Like where the freeway was being uncovered?

Heath: No, that was later, in 1956, when I was teaching at the College of Arts and Crafts.

We would remove the coarse particles from it. But also, there were--oh, I'm trying to recall now just where--there was the Lincoln Clay Products over in Lincoln, California. I think the clay continued to be mined there through the war. So that was the principal clay that I used to arrive at the formula that now we've used for forty-five years.

Ross: I guess my question was going to be, you could get that formula working with one clay, but you couldn't be sure of it for another clay. Do you have to--

Heath: No, you have--each clay has its own characteristics. This is also getting ahead of my--right now, I'm working on five clays from the Lone district. Each one is a different character.

Ross: So each clay source, or each clay, has to be reformulated, then?

Heath: Well, you have to find out what its shrinkage is, how much heat it requires to bring it to--well, I always like to get the temperature down--get the porosity down to near zero, or zero if I can, so that then it doesn't need any glaze. It can be used, if it's a tile or cooking ware, that you just put glaze on the inside of the pot. The clay is really what gives ware its character, so if you use--for instance, what had happened in the china industry in the evolution from the imports that came into Europe from China, and the scientific approach as time went on was to purify any clay, find the clays that are white-burning, because the most common clays in the earth are not white-burning, they're very rare. And so, when the porcelains came in from the Orient into Europe, there were no white--in fact, the nobility never used clay products. They used silver or gold or vessels--dishes made out of the metals, not out of the humble clay, which the peasants used.

So, over time, the clays became more and more refined, and the--what I call the guts taken out, put through magnetic screens to remove so-called contaminants. And that was the thing that I felt was the rebellion--I said, "I'm going to rebel against this white clay. I'm just not going to use it." It's been used now for 150 years, and you go into a store to buy dishes, and the fine china is white. Occasionally, you might see something that was--a few pieces that might look as if--the inexpensive things, the

things coming in from Mexico, and so on, that would be red. But so-called fine china was always white.

Ross: Had you seen much of the Mexican pottery at that time, like in San Francisco--?

Heath: Well, at the World's Fair in Chicago, I think I mentioned meeting Maria, the Indian potter, who made the blackware. Oh, yes. And in our art history classes, we had studied the clays, the vessels coming from all around the world, really. Every primitive--or, every civilization always had things made out of clay.

Ross: Yes, we had talked about that, but I was thinking in terms of on a commercial level, as commercial as, say, in Mexico where they make lots of it, and they sell it very casually, and--

Heath: Yes. The thing was that they were so softly fired that they didn't have much strength.

Ross: So they didn't last.

Heath: So they didn't last very long. They were very breakable, the earthen wares.

Ross: And the porosity that you referred to is from porous, isn't it?

Heath: Yes, it means porous.

Ross: Do you recall--well, it was probably in the sixties, I remember there used to be a sign on the Nimitz Freeway that said, "Stop casting porosity." A couple friends and I used to chuckle over that sign. There was no commercial name attached to it, or anything. One time, I was at a wedding, and I met the man who had that sign up. He made--I think it was concrete something-or-other. He had this thing about that--he either used concrete products, or he made them, and for some reason, he put up this sign, "Stop casting porosity." [laughter] So when you referred to how you have to get it down to porosity zero, is that what you meant?

Heath: Well, the strength comes from--the more closely united the materials are and fused together, the stronger they are.

Ross: Is there a recipe for your clay? I mean, the clay that you were doing the tests--

Heath: Yes, it's a formula. The first thing you do is to dry it out, and make--well, there are standard size bricks that you make in doing your testing, three inches by one inch by one inch. You make a mold that's that size, has several cavities in it, so when you're

running a series of tests, all the cavities are the same size. And it's a standard measurement in the industry, so that if you're writing an article about what you've done, that's the standard test. So you find out what the shrinkage is, let's say, at three different temperatures, and how high do you have to fire to get zero. And the higher you go, the more it shrinks.

### Chemical Properties of Clay

Heath: So some clays will shrink up to 15 percent or more, usually around 15 when they reach zero. And that amount of shrinkage means that when you're drying a piece, that it's very likely to warp or to deform, or crack in the drying. So the first step that you have to do is to cut down on the shrinkage, so that--well, so that it won't warp and crack. And then, having cut down on the shrinkage by the --the material you use for that is sand or a silica, or any clay that's been fired and ground up, you can add that back in as a fired clay, into the body to control the shrinkage. You make a wet mix with some of the clay that's already been fired to a clay dust, made into a clay dust, and you put that in. That will decrease the shrinkage of the clay.

Ross: So you do mix the clay with some other materials.

Heath: Oh, yes. And then--see, some clays have more glass formers, what we call glass formers, in them than others. For instance, red clays, if you fire them--well, with the clays that I'm working with my own, right now, there are five of them. One of them I get zero at about 8 percent, and the worst one is 30 percent, at the same temperature. In other words, it just doesn't shrink, and it's very porous. So then you combine that clay, let's say, with the one that shrinks a great deal, and is a lower--is nearer zero, so you start by mixing two clays together, one that has more natural glass in it, and the red clays usually do have more, because in their geological formation, the sodium and potassium, which are some of the glass--two of the glass formers--haven't all been washed away.

I often say that the best way to describe clay is that clay is the grandchild of granite. As granite decomposes, or geologically over millions of years, the first thing that's washed out of granite are the sodium--the salts. That's why the ocean is salty. Because of the breakdown of the granite. So you end up with salt water around the world.

Then the next thing that is separated out is the silica, or the sand, so you have sand on the beaches and sand in the rivers.



You notice that as fast-running streams of water, that there will be pebbles and coarser grains, and so on. The smaller grains are just carried farther than the heavier ones, so we have sand on the beaches.

And so when you're potting, when you put sand back into the clay, you're really recycling what nature took apart. So when you call it stoneware, you really have introduced back those minerals that were separated.

Ross: Full circle again. That's interesting. And during this chemistry class, what were the--I mean, that sounds--because you weren't using chemicals in a sense.

Heath: Sure! We used barium, and sodium. Well, sodium and potassium are solubles, so you can't make a glaze out of a soluble material, because as the water evaporates, then that moves to the surface of the piece, you see, and so you don't have an even distribution. So the sodium and potassium have to be fired with some sand first, and then reground, and that's called a frit, which is ground to a powder. Fritted. And frits are numbered so that manufacturers make frits, combining--well, the elements that are usually used are soluble.

[tape interruption]

Ross: How long was the chemistry class?

Heath: How long did it last? It was for a year.

### Chemical Properties in the Glazes

Ross: Everything you ever learned about ceramic chemistry, did you learn there, or have you--

Heath: Well, you then begin reading books. I'm an avid reader anyway, and it was fascinating, because working--it becomes a game, almost, of your guessing what will happen if you move this direction and use this material instead of that material. The colors that you achieve in glaze are based on the combination of minerals that are used in making the glaze. The common materials that are used are sodium, potassium, lead, calcium, barium, lithium, magnesium--there are about eight or nine that have been common ones that are used. And depending upon--for instance, copper, which normally let's say makes green glazes, can make turquoise or grass green or pale

green, or blue-greens, depending upon what glass former is used with it.

So the game is to find out how much of what affects the color. I have what I call base glazes. Let's say one that favors barium is more--I call that a barium glaze, and then there's another one that's a alumina glaze, and another one that's a calcium glaze, and another one that's a zinc glaze. But you always use a combination of them, because you get more interesting effects, and also it melts easier if you don't rely on just one mineral to make the glass.

Ross: There sound like a million variables.

Heath: Yes, because along with having the base glaze, then you can modify that glaze by making it--well, it's usually translucent, so if you want an opaque glaze, that you get--because if you use a translucent glaze, then whatever color your clay is will modify the appearance of the glaze. What I had at one time was like twenty clay bodies and one glaze, because that one glaze when you put it on twenty different colors of clay picked up color that was in the clay.

Ross: Like give an example of that.

Heath: Well, as Wedgwood, for instance, when they put copper into the clay, and you put a glaze on top of that, the copper that's in the clay will tint the glaze. Or if you put cobalt in the body, then when you put the same glaze on top of it, it will be a blue glaze and not a green glaze. So you just need one formula, in effect, if you can change your clays, but when you're actually in production, you can't. Because when you make clay, you make it let's say by the ton, whereas you make a glaze by the pound. So that once I found the clay body, the color which I liked very much, then I just stayed with that.

Ross: And the variations came from--

Heath: Then I began working on the glazes, to change the glaze. But it was always, whatever the glaze was, it was still affected because I chose one of the bodies that I made that I put a lot of manganese into it, and manganese is a black metal when it goes in the glaze, and depending upon what kind of a glaze you put over it, it will either come out a purple color, or a grey, or a dirty color--in other words, it's not a hue, it's not a red or strong blue or a green--manganese is a greying substance. So the first things that I made that were marketed I had used three different bodies, and I made dinnerware on a potter's wheel, and used this one glaze.

I remember walking one night--we were down on--let's see, which gallery? It was one of the galleries that had some of the dishes in the window.

### Glaze Batches

Ross: Some of your dishes?

Heath: Yes. And people walking by said, "Ugh! I can't stand those grey-looking colors. I would never have that dinnerware." Then there were others that would come along and say, "Ooh, that's different, never seen anything like that before!"

Ross: What fun to be standing there watching.

Heath: It was watching and hearing what people would say. And it's still true today. The other day in the shop there were our tile people saying, "Oh, we never sell that glaze anymore, we discourage people from buying it." I said, "Why?" They said, "Because it's a dirty-looking color." I said, "But that's what makes it interesting!"

Ross: This was your salespeople who said that?

Heath: Yes! What they do is, when it's used on the dark body, they put on three coats of glaze instead of one. See, one coat will look one way, two coats will look another way, and three coats of glaze, you obliterate the clay, virtually.

Ross: This is--it's really like dyeing material.

Heath: Yes.

Ross: And in materials, they have the dye lots, and you must have your-- what do you call them?

Heath: Well, they're glaze batches. You make a batch of glaze.

Ross: But I mean, the batch of glaze that always goes on the same formula--

Heath: Well, when we started selling tile, we had what were called the one-coaters, two-coaters, and three-coaters, so if you had a dozen colors and you could--you really had three dozen colors. So you could have your choice, having one coat, which revealed more of the clay, you see, and then you put on a second coat and then it wasn't

quite as dirty as the clay as when it was on very thin. Someday I should show you some pieces to illustrate what the difference is.

Ross: Would that photograph?

Heath: Yes.

Ross: It might be interesting if we could show a photograph, it would show those different numbers.

Heath: In fact, one of the things one does in making a new formula is choose a piece of tile, or a plate or whatever, and you pour one part of it with one coat, another with two coats, and another with three coats, so you could see for yourself which one of these you would prefer as the working model, let's say, or that's the one you're going to reproduce, try to do that. However, when you're working on a dark ground, one of the things that happens is that you can control your colors partially by the weight of the glaze, the amount that you put on, but then in the kiln, if one area of the kiln is hotter than another--it's very difficult to have exactly the same temperature in one area as in another, so there still is variation in the glaze, due to the length of firing. If you reach temperature in one area of the kiln sooner than another, you turn that back, but it's still sitting there soaking while you're bringing the rest of the kiln up to the temperature. During that soaking period, that glaze will look different than in the area of the kiln that has not been soaked.

#### Variation as a Quality

Heath: So one of the characteristics of Heathware--and that's--you sort of court a danger--what would be considered a fault, the variation, and so one of the things we had to do was to educate people that that's the way it was, that's the way we wanted it, we wanted that variation.

Ross: That gave it the interesting--

Heath: But as the years have gone on, the people who are doing the selling and the working at it, they just got sick and tired I think of always telling people there's variation. So over the years we've gradually gotten to the point where we don't have as much variation.

Ross: I was going to say, it's pretty consistent.

Heath: Yes, now it's gotten to the point where I say--well, it's lost all its interest, as far as I'm concerned. Many of the things I wouldn't--

Ross: You wouldn't be interested in any more?

Heath: So that I would choose then that weight of glaze that I liked for myself, and then just glaze it that way. Because the more glaze you put on, the more you eliminate the hazard of the clay showing through.

Ross: So that then you'd get that consistency that you think people--

Heath: But then you lose that wonderful quality that gives you the sense, because in nature, you look outside, and there's nothing that is-- grass is greener in one place than another, the leaves on the trees, the soil you walk on--there's nothing that has that deadly quality of sameness, sameness, sameness. It's like a hospital room, it's all white.

Ross: In the material I particularly know about--clothing from India-- where the Americans label that you'll find variations in the material, that's part of the art. It may be a solid blue dress with these variations, which obviously you and I would like, but others would say there's something wrong with this. And so the same thing is true with glazing and firing and all of that, just takes on a variation.

Heath: Well, there are two schools. With the younger people, and I think that we're coming into a watershed maybe in this decade, that there's been what is called the Southwest look in dinnerware.

##

Heath: In the awareness of--you don't want slick, hard edges. If you're working on a computer all day long, and everything around you is made out of plastic and slick, you look for something that is cozier, for want of a better word.

Ross: Oh, that is interesting, though. So that softness and differences--

Heath: Well, and back to nature. And appreciating differences, rather than sameness.

Happy Accidents

Heath: In fact, it's interesting that the Japanese consider ceramics the highest form, the medium that is most prized and valued, because of its relationship to the earth. They never strive for perfection. In fact, it's considered neurotic--there isn't such a thing as perfect anyway, so you learn to enjoy those things which just happen.

Ross: Yes. And then--remember when I was in Japan, I brought you that Raku pot, and the Japanese ceramicist there was showing us all of this, and then he would talk about "happy accidents." That was--whatever came out, and some of them were happy accidents, some not so happy.

Heath: Oh, I'm so glad when something happens that's an accident, that I say, "Oh, that's wonderful. Now that gives me a new idea of what we can do with that."

Ross: Well, tell me about your attitude, as you were getting into all of this chemistry and such, did you continue to be intrigued and fascinated by--?

Heath: Oh, yes. And the salesmen from different chemical firms would come around and say, "Well, this is the color for this year." I said, "Well, thank you very much, I'll find my own color." The search--as I said many times--if someone's already done it, why repeat it? Why--it's already been done! Let's find something that hasn't been done. Let's find a look that hasn't been seen before.

Ross: Like the sewing, when you were a child, instead of making something that has been done before, let's do something different. So you were never discouraged by all of this detail of--

Heath: No, I expected it. I think that every artist knows, and every composer or writer or whatever it is, you can't be--of course you can be discouraged maybe with comments that the people made, but fortunately, you are so enthralled by the ability to do things and to find out for yourself who you are and what you can do that that's more important than what other people say. So that one has to have the ability to--I don't mean to say that you ignore what people say, you take that--you listen to that too, but that you can't be working for applause, because you're not going to get it.

There will be those rare people who will--. For instance, the first time that I started using gold on the plates, remember about five or six years ago, and I did a little survey in our stores, asking--put some things out for people to make their comments, and

there would be such comments, "Oh, you must be kidding, you can't use gold on stoneware." And then another comment was, "Gold is to be worn, not to put on plates." And then someone else would come along and say, "Oh, it's wonderful, I love it!" So you get all of this--

Ross: Would the people who say they loved it be more of the kind who would wear something like sequins on jeans?

Heath: Yes, like Robin Henderson, for instance, she was a painter, an artist. When she came in and saw the gold, she said, "Oh, it's just wonderful!" [laughter]

Ross: And what does she wear?

Heath: She wears--well, to a large extent, a lot of American Indian things, because she's grown up in the Southwest, and so that's part of her background.

#### Concentration on Ceramics

Ross: During this period in San Francisco when you were teaching, and you were taking--no, by this time, you weren't taking a ceramic class, you were taking ceramic chemistry--did you start realizing that you wanted to do ceramics exclusively--when did that start coming into your mind?

Heath: Well, it sort of happened--in fact, everything that ever happens in one's life is sort of not planned, that as I worked on things and made pots, and friends who were working with me, like Carolyn Williams and Eileen and Rossi Reynolds, they were potters--

Ross: And this you were doing in your basement? You weren't at the school now.

Heath: No, what happened was that Carolyn Williams, who was--she and her--her husband was a foreign correspondent, and they had lived in Russia for many years. When the war broke out, they came back to the states and they had a child who was about seven years old at the time, and she was enrolled at the Presidio Hill School. When Carolyn saw my working in clay, she said, "Oh, may I come and work with you?"

Ross: Meaning at the Presidio School?

Heath: No, no, at home. I was showing her some of the things--I don't know how, I guess I'd invited her to the house. At any rate, she then became a student, and the child was absolutely a marvelous, very creative person who just could draw like an angel, and paint. So after--I've forgotten--this began in about 1941, and in 1944, that spring Carolyn said, "Well, you should take some of your things down to some of the galleries and show them." I said, "Oh, I really don't want to bother with that, Carolyn." She said, "Well, you really should. I have a friend who is coming out from New York who is a buyer for one of the stores, and I want her to see. She's going to be at the St. Francis Hotel. Come on with me and bring some of your pieces."



## V BEGINNINGS OF HEATHWARE

First Exhibit, 1944

Heath: So we went down to the St. Francis to visit her friend, and as we left, the Bronstein Gallery was across the street, and I used to drop in there quite frequently just because I was interested in the kinds of things that they were showing. I had bought a painting, small painting there one day, and so when I came in, the director of the museum at the Legion of Honor was Jerry McCagy. And Dr. Howe, who was the director, was in Europe going through the salt mines to find where the art works had been hidden by the Germans. It was in '44, so the war was sort of drawing to an end.

Jerry McCagy was acting director at the Legion of Honor while he was away, and she was in the gallery when I came in. I had never met her before, and Bronstein asked, "What have you got?" Because I was carrying this box of stuff. I said, "Oh, some of my pots that I've been working on." Carolyn was with me and she said, "Show them to them!" So we got them out and showed them.

And Jerry McCagy was very impressed, and she said, "Oh, I'd like to give you an exhibit." I said, "Oh, I don't have very many things to show." She said, "Well--" this was, I think, in May, or something like that. She said, "Well, why don't we plan it for August? That will give you three months to put it together. We'll need about three hundred pieces."

Ross: And you were teaching and taking classes--oh, my goodness.

Heath: No, by that time I was no longer taking--the ceramic chemistry class went from '41 to '42, or maybe into '43. So by that time I was pretty much on my own.

So I said okay, I'd see what I could put together, and that's when I then purposely made sets, like a salad set and a tea

service, and vases and that sort of thing. And that exhibit then opened in late summer for three months.

Ross: You did get that many pieces done in three months, by yourself?

Heath: Oh, yes. Then the buyer for Gump's--when the exhibit opened, the buyer at Gump's had been with the Red Cross and had gone back to work at Gump's as the buyer. So he knew that I was having this exhibit out at the Legion, so he went out to see it, and he said, "Well, when the exhibit closes, can we have it at the store?" I said, "Do you want all the things in it?" He said, "Well, there might be some of the things that we don't want."

At any rate, when the exhibition came down three months later, they took practically all of the three hundred pieces. I think there were maybe five or six that they didn't take.

#### Ceramic Workshop for Gump's, 1944-1946

Ross: And they were taking it as an exhibit, not to sell?

Heath: No, no, to sell. So Bill said at the time--Bill Brewer was his name--"You know, we've been trying to set up workshops for people to make things, because we can't get imports, and we have a ceramic workshop down on Clay Street, but we haven't gotten any pieces out of it that we could use for the store. Would you take it over and see what you can do in that space?" And it was another potter who had been working in there, and she just--he said, "She doesn't make anything that will sell."

So I said, "What are the strings attached?" They said, "You pay the rent," which was fifty dollars a month--can you imagine! Clay Street, between Montgomery and one block down--Tadich Grill was right there, was on the alley right next to where we were.

Ross: Oh, Tadich's has moved--

Heath: Yes, since then, but it's where Tadich's was. And the farmer's market was down in that area. So I went in and took it over, and who was it, Ron Partridge, I think it was--do you remember Imogene Cunningham, the photographer?

Ross: Yes.

Heath: Well, her married name was Partridge, and she had two sons, and one of them was a geologist, and he was a friend of the potter who had

been using the space, and he came in and introduced himself. He said, "What are you going to be making?" I said, "Oh, things for Gump's." He said, "You'll never make anything with this equipment here. It's just terrible." The kilns and so on. I said, "Looks fine to me! I'll surprise you. Two weeks from now, I'll make my first shipment to Gump's." And I did.

Ross: In two weeks. What was it?

Heath: Bill said what he wanted, he said, "Whatever you make, make three of them. Don't just make one." In doing a window display or whatever it was, if you had just one of everything, he said, "It doesn't make for a good exhibition. You have to have nucleuses of things. So make a minimum of three of something."

He was the one who really encouraged me to do sets, because he liked the salad sets, and he liked the tea service. He said, "If you want to try to do a dinnerware that will sell just as a regular dinnerware, we could do that too." So that's then what I set about doing, was to see if we could make six-piece place setting of dinnerware with a creamer and sugar--and a teapot, the salad bowl and so on, and that's what we did.

Ross: And this was all hand--

Heath: --made on the potter's wheel.

Ross: Were you doing it all by yourself?

Heath: No, I had two students who had been--I had been teaching the ceramics at the Labor School--

Ross: Oh, this is another activity of yours.

Heath: Yes.

#### Working Group of Five

Ross: You were doing this all the time that you were also getting out the three hundred pieces?

Heath: Yes, teaching at Presidio Hill. And I was asked to come and teach a class at Presidio Hill. Margaret Depatta, the jeweler, was teaching there at the time. They had quite an art department at the Labor School. So the students that I had there, there was a Chinese girl and a black girl, who's now Pearl Drob Jackson, who

when we moved to Sausalito and started the dinnerware plant there, she was our first glazer. And the Chinese girl. The students I'd had at the Labor School became the workers for the pottery on Clay Street, because the school was just three or four blocks away from there.

I think there were four of us. And then, a young man came who had been discharged from the army, had been wounded in the army during the war, and been in the hospital, and he was a student at the Art Institute. He came to work. He made the clay, because by that time when we were starting to really make the dinnerware, we really had a little production going.

Ross: I was going to say, you now have your factory.

Heath: [laughs] Yes.

Ross: What year was that? This is '45, then.

Heath: Yes. And the war ended then in the summer--Hiroshima was what, sixth of August? And then the bombing in Nagasaki was three days later in August, August ninth. Anyway, then Brian was out of the Red Cross, and he came to work.

Ross: You mean he quit the Red Cross?

Heath: Yes. So there were five of us then--six of us, I guess, because there was Pearl, and Nikki Harimake. She later went to work in an architect's office as a draftsman, and I think she still is working there. I guess there were five of us.

Ross: Including Brian.

Heath: Yes. So he became sort of the business manager, the account-keeping, shipments and orders, because then the buyer at Gump's, the buyer from Marshall Fields came--

Ross: Let me ask you a question: up until this time, it had been exclusively for Gump's?

Heath: Yes. And then the buyers came from--Neiman-Marcus buyer came, and wanted us to do things for them, and the Marshall Fields buyer from Chicago came--they saw it at Gump's, and then Gump's sent them down to the studio.

Ross: What were those initial pieces? Do they look anything like--?

Heath: They became the prototypes for what--

- Ross: They were the prototypes. Like the coffee cup with the handle halfway down?
- Heath: Well, they had to be modified somewhat, because on the jigger wheel you can't have things that belly in and out, that's smaller at the top. So the cup then had to be--
- Ross: More fluted?
- Heath: Well, it had to be--instead of the ones when I worked on the potter's wheel I had a tendency to turn the clay in so the cup was smaller at the top, more of a barrel shape, which you can't do in production.
- Ross: But you weren't in production--I mean, weren't you still hand--?
- Heath: --throwing at that time, but as we went--well, then I skipped another year ahead--
- Ross: I mean, what I was referring to were the pieces that you first produced for Gump's, were you on a wheel--were you hand-throwing them?
- Heath: Yes. Well, Pearl and Nikki could also--see, I had taught them how to throw, so there were three of us who were throwing. Brian helped to develop the clay-making. The way I had been, when I was working pretty much alone, I had some drums that were about eighteen inches deep and twelve inches in circumference with a tight-fitting lid on them that I would dump the clay materials into, and roll them down the floor and tip them upside down and stir the clay up that way. And then I had a measured amount of water--I knew how much it would take to wet that through--and I would put that in the bottom of the garbage can and then dump these dry materials in on top, and they would stand for three or four days, and the moisture by capillary action came to the top. And then the whole mass was this soft, wetted material that you then could wedge--which is a way of compacting it and making it into balls and so on, ready to throw.
- Brian made a--sort of like a churn, but it was horizontal, with a paddle through the middle of it, with a crank on the end, and we put the dry materials into that, and cranked it, the barrel.
- Ross: Did he invent that?
- Heath: Yes. He devised that. So he devised all sorts of gadgetry of one kind or another, to facilitate the making of things.

So then--I'm trying to remember the name of the man who was the art student who had come out of the army--he became the clay maker. He did all the wedging of the clay, which was really--for three people throwing, that was almost a full-time occupation, was wedging.

Ross: He must have developed quite a few muscles.

Heath: Yes. And then he learned to throw too, along with--and--

Ross: Was this a pretty compatible group? You were how old at that time, you were in your--?

Heath: Yes. Let's see, it was 1944, '45; I was thirty-three.

Ross: So you were young enough to be having a good time with the young people, and--was it sort of a very serious outfit, or were you--?

Heath: Oh, yes, and we were sort of--well, in the swim of things, because we were the important designers for Gump's, and there were ten of us. There was Carlton Ball from Mills--

Ross: Now, where does he come into this, because you have five people--

Heath: No, no, I mean other people that Gump's had had--

Ross: Oh, you were not an exclusive thing.

Heath: We were sort of their stable, who made things for the store.

Ross: They weren't in your studio, though.

Heath: No, no. But they had their workshops down the street, Nils Fredrickson and John Carliss were making printed fabrics for clothing and for scarves and belts and so on. There were some--the Packs, Rhoda and John Pack--was that his name?--they made leather clothing, women's clothing. Then there were the Reynoldses who did greeting cards--no, the Holmeses made--they were all couples, interestingly enough, man and wife teams. Rex and Rosinda Holmes made greeting cards, and scenes of San Francisco that they printed.

Ross: And all of this was little cottage industries to supply Gump's, so that they could have some good things to sell?

Heath: Yes.

Ross: That's interesting, because Gump's had such a wonderful reputation. Now it seems to be less. But it all must have come from their ability to promote and to develop local talent.

Heath: Yes. Then of course, as soon as the war ended, and it took a while for the European countries to get back on their feet and back into production, so there was a period in the late forties when the imports were very slow coming in, so it was really a wonderful period for the craftsman, particularly in the San Francisco area. Museum exhibitions were held of local craftspeople's work, and the modern museum in New York, you see, were featuring the crafts of America.

Neiman-Marcus and Marshall Fields Buy Heathware

Ross: I interrupted you to clarify something back when you said that then Neiman-Marcus and Marshall Fields saw the work--

Heath: And then they ordered work. And America House in New York, and there was one other.

Ross: You didn't have an exclusive agreement with Gump's to preclude--

Heath: No, they sent the people. They wanted us to succeed, and they did this--they sent the buyers to see all the craftsmen who were supplying things for them, because they were interested in seeing that they were encouraged to go on with what they were doing. As a matter of fact, I remember having quite a discussion one time with a young man who had come out from Chicago from the--where Moholy-Nagy in the Institute of Design had been established, and he said to me, "You know, you were just in the right place at the right time, or you might never have gotten into doing what you were doing."

And at the time I thought that this was--because he was having a difficult time getting his--he was a photographer, a very good photographer. He was just having--it was in the early fifties--difficulty in just getting enough work as a photographer, and Gump's had never had a photographer as part of their stable, as I call them.

Ross: That's a good word, good term. And so then you--what happened with Neiman-Marcus and Marshall Fields--could you keep up with that much?

Heath: Well, since we were making dinnerware, see, someone could be making plates all day long--we got to be very good. In fact, I had set for myself when I was still teaching at Presidio Hill before I had this setup--

Ross: Oh, you weren't teaching at Presidio Hill--

Heath: No, by then I gave up, when I went to work for Gump's and they said that for fifty dollars a month, I said how could I go wrong? So then I had to get a replacement.

Children's Art Exhibit at the de Young Museum

Ross: Was that difficult to leave the school, or were you so enthusiastic--?

Heath: Oh, everyone out at the school was very disappointed that I was leaving, because--well, I am a pretty good teacher. In fact, we had an exhibition of the children's work from the school at the de Young Museum. I saved three paintings from each child every year, so that I was there for three years. On the third year I had the work of every child in the school, nine pieces that they had made. I'd become quite good friends with a couple of the curators at the de Young, and so they asked to have an exhibit of the children's--they saw the children's work. And the way the exhibition was hung, we started on one end of the room, and the nine paintings made a column, starting when they were in the first grade, the second grade, and the third grade. And then the person who was in--the children who were in the second grade, they were second, third, and fourth year. And so on, all through the eight grades.

Every child was represented in the exhibition. And there were some ninety of these rows, that's how many children there were in the school. And it was really a remarkable exhibit, I just wish I had it today. It was so--and people who were teaching art in the public schools came around and saw it, and they just didn't believe that these children were able to do these things, that I must have given them all kinds of help or something.

Ross: So they--the progression--

Heath: Yes, you could see the progression of every child over the three-year period. It was--well, as I say, I just now wish I had a photograph of that exhibition.

Ross: You don't have a photograph?

Heath: No, I don't.

Ross: Does the museum, do you think?



Heath: No, I don't think--well, I don't know, I never even thought to ask them.

Ross: I bet they do. I can't imagine that they wouldn't have it for their files. That would be fun to know, wouldn't it?

Heath: Yes, it would be. Miriam and Charles Lindstrom were the two people at the De Young who were instrumental in--they taught children's art at the museum, and so that's why they were particularly interested.

Ross: And this was at the end of your term?

Heath: Yes, that was the year that I--the summer that I went--or I guess it was in the spring of '44.

#### California Labor School in San Francisco

[Session 5: June 16, 1990] ##

Ross: I would like you to tell about your teaching at the Labor School in San Francisco. What was your involvement there?

Heath: I knew--I had met Margaret Depatta, who was the jeweler, who was teaching jewelry at the school, and she asked me if I would teach a ceramics class, because they were trying to get music, all the arts covered, dance, music, ceramics, sculpture, jewelry, and so on, along with all the political science courses or classes that were being taught.

I really don't know very much about the beginning of the school because it was in existence when we came to San Francisco, but it was an interesting place to work, because many of the artists who had been on the Federal Art Project were now teaching at the Labor School, and so I met many of the artists--most of whose names I've forgotten by now.

Ross: But some of them you knew back in Chicago?

Heath: The only one that I knew in Chicago was John Carliss, who was a classmate of mine at the Art Institute. He was a graphic artist.

Ross: Did you teach in the nighttime?

Heath: Yes. It was a night class. I think it was two nights a week.

Ross: Did you get paid?

Heath: Yes. Oh, it wasn't--it was just a token payment, it was more of a volunteer job than a paid job.

Ross: Do you know if the students paid to attend?

Heath: Oh, I don't know; I don't think they did.

Ross: So it was a labor-sponsored school. And how long did you teach there?

Heath: I don't remember whether I continued teaching after I started actively working for the Gump's store. I think that probably I was too busy, that I didn't continue on with it. I can't remember how that--.

Ross: But you started working there during the time that you were teaching at Presidio Hill School.

Heath: Yes, I know that--I was involved in so many things that I had to give up something.

#### San Francisco Potters' Association

Ross: Well, what were all the things?

Heath: Well, I became very active through the potters I knew in the Bay Area, and we decided to start the San Francisco Potters' Association. I was elected president, and there were about--oh, I think twenty or thirty people who were teaching at various schools, teaching ceramics, plus people who were practicing, like Carlton Ball and Toni Prieto and--oh, there were several people from Mills College.

Ross: You mean practicing--what do you mean by practicing?

Heath: Potting.

Ross: Oh, so they were learning.

Heath: They were professional potters. They were selling and exhibiting. It was a professional potters' association. You had to pass a jury in order to be admitted. In other words, people being a part of

the association had to have exhibited in a number of exhibitions to be eligible to apply.

Ross: When you formed that, did you have to set up the rules of membership? Were you part of the very beginning?

Heath: The organizing group, yes.

Ross: And so you and your group set standards?

Heath: Yes, essentially.

Ross: Did you have a model for that, or did you make that up?

Heath: I think it was sort of patterned after the guilds of Europe, of the potters' guilds, in an attempt for the handcraft people to organize themselves into a body to exchange information and to help promote sales of each other's work.

Ross: And to have some control on quality?

Heath: Yes.

Ross: Did you pay dues, did people pay dues?

Heath: Yes. It was a very nominal sum, I think like three dollars a month, or something like that. The association still exists. They still have their annual ceramics sales--for many years, it was held at the de Young Museum, and then in more recent years it's been at the Hall of Flowers in Golden Gate Park. I was never part of it after the show went to the Hall of Flowers.

Ross: The one that they have now is essentially a sale, was it then?

Heath: Yes, we had a sale once a year, and awarded prizes.

#### Award for Decorative Arts

Ross: Did you ever win a prize?

Heath: Yes. I won the--joined the San Francisco artists association--the women artists--and I won the award for the decorative arts, which was a tea service, teapot and four little tea bowls and saucers, plates.

Ross: Was that anything like you produced--

Heath: It became the prototype for production later on. I think that year, it was in 1946, I think, or '47, and the teapot that I did at that time served as a prototype for the teapot we now make. In fact, all the things that I threw I still use as prototypes. Even today I'll go back and be reminded, "Oh, yes, that's a nice thing. We should make something like that."

### Twenty-first Century Plate

Ross: So your design holds.

Heath: Yes. Because you forget about what you did, until you go back and look, and you suddenly are reminded that, "Oh, that was a good idea, I should follow up on that now." I do that with glazes a great deal of the time--to look at the early glazes, because--just to see what was there that was overlooked at the time, that one didn't follow through on.

Ross: That you liked then, and that you may have forgotten--

Heath: Yes. In fact, I did that just today, I was talking with a--oh, let's see, how did that come up? We were having a meeting with--it's too complicated to explain, but at any rate, the way it came up was that I had sent some plates to New York a couple of weeks ago for a tile exhibit there. It was an invitational show for architects in New York City, and designers. While the exhibition was about tile, our salesman, Jon Brooder, said, "Well, let me take some of the dinner plates--some of the new plates that you have been making. I think it would be interesting for them to see what we do."

Among those plates, the one that they were least interested in, was a plate that today I describe as the plate for the twenty-first century; quiet, unspectacular. I think that in looking ahead nine or ten years from now, we will be forced to be more rational. We are living in such a mixed-up, chaotic period in the arts, in politics, economics. Everyone is standing on his head or doing something weird in the way of creativity. We are wasting natural resources. We must learn to conserve. No longer can we throw things away. People will become more sober-minded and make things that are really needed, instead of just having a good time or "getting rich quick."

The thing that I'm interested in getting started on is manufacturing extruded clay blocks for affordable housing. The need for housing is so great.

Ross: Right. But tell me about that plate of the twenty-first century.

Heath: Oh, yes. For the architects in New York, that was at the bottom on their list, of what they were interested in. They were much more interested in the--well, I had a combination of eggplant or aubergine, and a forest green glaze, glamorous, rich, used on plates and bowls, and that color combination they liked very much. But the plate that I say is going to be the twenty-first century is a very muted, soft, not spectacular in any way, but just a very sophisticated piece--understated, essence of good potting, everlasting.

Ross: Did it have any shape that would define it?

Heath: No, it had more to do with the quality of the glaze, or the character of the glaze. When that came out of the kiln the other day, I said to myself, "Aha, you're going back to where you were in 1945 in your simplicity and muted colors." Because I've been going through this crazy year of--well, as I say, eggplant and forest green and raspberry and cranberry--every color possible--embossing, texturing, actual volcanic ash floating on glossy surfaces--too much.

Ross: Sort of glitz?

Heath: --and opal blues, all bright colors. I'm tired of that, I'm beginning to be tired of it. Ceramic overload!

Ross: And maybe others will be too.

### New Glaze

Heath: This is a glaze that will be so universal that it can be used in many, many ways, in tile as well as on walls and floors. It's a beautiful subtle ceramic shade of no color--and soft finish--that will have a great appeal, I think, not today, but there will be in time. There was a man in our store today who said, "Oh, this is just wonderful!" But the New Yorkers ignored it. So the difference between New York and San Francisco is interesting.

Ross: Well, let us get back to--we were talking about the association, the potters' association, so that was one of your activities. You taught in the Labor School, and were you in any political movement at all, because certainly the Labor School was of a political nature.

Heath: Yes. Well, I've never really been involved in any political group, mostly because my time has been taken up on other things, not that I wasn't interested, because I was. But I think I'm just not much of a joiner, because I didn't stay with the potters' association either for very long, maybe a period of five or six years. And then, there were just too many hours spent in developing glaze formulas, or working on solving problems that had to do with production, and so on, so that the twelve-hour days didn't allow much time for extra-curricular activity.

Ross: And at this time, you're working in the Clay Street studio.

Heath: Yes.

Meeting Jay Gustin at the San Francisco Gift Show, 1946

Ross: At what point did you decide to leave San Francisco?

Heath: To move to Sausalito?

Ross: Yes.

Heath: Well, after the war ended in 1945, and Brian then wanted to leave the job that he had with Red Cross--

Ross: But I thought that he had already left the job and was working on--

Heath: Not until after the war ended. So there is a period from August or September of '45 until--let's see, it was January or February of '46--that I met a couple--we were at a party on Telegraph Hill with a number of artists and craftsmen, like Rhoda Pack and her husband who were making leather clothing, jackets and skirts. All the craftsmen who lived up and down Grant Avenue and in the North Beach area--we were all meeting there. I met a man by the name of Gustin and his wife who had just come up from Los Angeles to San Francisco, and he was going to be the representative for his father, who was a distributor in housewares.

So we met Jay and Yvonne Gustin at that party. We were exhibiting with all the businesses who were starting back up into selling, because during the war, there were no exhibitions held for merchandising. In order to have buyers come to San Francisco instead of going to Los Angeles, which had been the practice before the war, because most of the manufacturing of clothing and ceramics was done in Los Angeles. A Mr. Schuman, I think his name was Adolph Schuman, who was president of the clothing manufacturers in

San Francisco, organized the January show of 1946, and wanted to use some kind of a gimmick to attract buyers to San Francisco. So he asked the ten people who had been supplying Gump's with their arts and crafts to exhibit at the Whitcomb Hotel as a drawing card to get buyers to come to San Francisco.

And the night I was setting up for our exhibit, a man and his --it turns out it was his right-hand woman, she was his representative from New York--came by the room where we were setting up the show and asked if--he said, "Gee, this is nice stuff. I'll buy all of it." He, of course, was a little bit high --I don't know whether I should be telling you this, whether it's fair to him--but at any rate, I said, "Well, look, if you're interested, come back tomorrow morning when we have the exhibition all finished, and then we can talk."

Well, he didn't come back the next morning. So it was at this party in San Francisco where I met his son and his wife, Jay and Yvonne Gustin, and Jay said, "Oh, you insulted my father." I said, "How did I do that?" And he said, "He wanted to talk to you about being your distributor, and you just ignored him, cold-shouldered him." And I said, "Well, I'm sorry, but when you're setting up an exhibition to have people come around is a little bit bothersome."

And he said, "Well, he's really interested, he wants to represent you nationwide." I said, "Well, we can't make enough for national distribution." He said, "Yes, but he'll help you make it possible." So I said, "Okay, the next time he comes up to San Francisco, let's get together and we'll talk."

So three or four months later, he was up, and we met.

Ross: Did you feel that was really going to happen, or did you still think that was sort of flighty talk?

Heath: Well, I thought it might be, but on the other hand, when Jay--Jay had been in the army, and he had just been discharged, and he told his father that he didn't want to continue in his business unless he got some products that he was proud of, that he didn't want to sell the kind of nick-nacks that his father had been selling.

And so I felt, well, this is another generation of salespeople, and that his taste level was different than his father's, so I thought that he was probably--he was going to see to it that his father did it.

So that's what happened; he [the father] co-signed a note with us at the bank so that we could buy--

Ross: Now, this is Jay?

Heath: His father.

Ross: Oh, his father signed! So he did come in three months.



## VI MOVE TO SAUSALITO, 1946

Expansion of Production

Heath: We and Gustine got together, and we were going to draw up a contract, but he said no, he didn't want to draw up a contract. He said, "If we have a good working relationship, no contract can be better than that." And he made a very nice proposal. He said, "I'll get one store in each major city in the country to represent you, and get them to assure us that they will buy"--I think then it was \$750 worth of merchandise each year, commit themselves to that. And he said, "If they don't take it, I will. And it will take five years before we'll know whether you can do it on your own."

Ross: Now, this was to produce the things that you had done for Gump's?

Heath: Yes, but to translate it now into a semi-mass production, because there weren't enough people who could throw on a potter's wheel to do it that way. So we found a place--Brian went looking for a place to move out of this workshop in San Francisco, and found this loft on the top floor of the--which is now the Village Fair Building, in Sausalito. The top floor--that's where--it was a pattern shop for building the liberty ships that were built in Sausalito during the war, and the top floor--it had no columns or piers, it was just a big wide-open space, so that's where we moved to and set up jigger wheels, and we got four new kilns, and ten people to come in, artists who lived in Sausalito. That's where we--

Ross: And you trained them, then?

Heath: Yes. Some of them were potters; a couple of them had just come out from Alfred University in New York, the ceramics department there, Hal Riegger and Francis Scott were two of the people.

So we commuted from San Francisco to Sausalito for about a year, and then--

Ross: How did you commute?

Heath: Oh, we drove. The Golden Gate Bridge had just been completed. Well, just--what was the date when it opened? 1938 or 1939.

Ross: So you just drove--

Heath: Yes. We lived on Russian Hill then.

A number of the people who worked at the shop lived on houseboats in Sausalito, so one day one of them said, "There's a barge for sale down at Gate Five Road." Gate Five referred to-- when they built the liberty ships, the entrance to the shipyard was Gates 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5. So at Gate 5 there was a barge for sale, that was 100 feet long and 24 feet wide, which was about the size of a lot, you see. And it was \$3,000. We'd been looking at lots in Sausalito, thinking of building there, or buying a piece of lot to build on.

#### Building the Houseboat

Ross: To build for your personal home?

Heath: Yes. And knowing all the people who were living on the houseboats, it was really a wonderful experience. Since my grandfather in Denmark had been a fisherman--

Ross: It all fit in. [laughter]

Heath: Yes. So we bought the barge, and we built a house on it.

Ross: Oh, so the barge was literally just a flat--

Heath: No, it had a deck house on it, but it was just sitting on blocks. It had been cut free of the barge already, so Brian and Eral Leek-- an architectural student friend of ours, who worked at the shop, he was our--I've just forgotten what we called him, but he was the one who processed the orders as they came in. His wife was a painter and an art teacher.

So we bought the barge together, the four of us. And Eral, being an architectural student, designed the type of house that should go on it, and so between the two of us couples--they lived

on one-half of it, or one-third of it, and we had the other two-thirds of it.

Ross: Well, what sort of a house was built there?

Heath: It was a regular--it could have been built on ground. We looked at it just as if it were a piece of land. So it was designed as if it had been on land. It was 100 feet long and 25--we built right to the boundaries of the lot. [laughs]

Ross: That's amazing. And what did you have then?

Heath: We had--see, the upper part of the barge, and the lower part, which had housed the water tanks and the engine, because it was a barge with its own power, but the engine had been removed, so the lower part of the barge was also another 25 feet wide and 100 feet long. So it was--in square footage, it was a big house, it was about 4800 square feet, which is a sizable place. They had two children, Eral and Kenny, and they used the downstairs for their bunkrooms. I used the lower part partially as a studio, I had my potter's wheel down there, and worked on projects that I didn't have room to work on in the building in Sausalito. And the potter's wheel is still down in the bottom of the barge.

#### Floating the Houseboat to Land in Tiburon

Heath: Later on, about three years later, we bought four acres on San Francisco Bay, and floated the houseboat around, and jacked it up and put pilings under it.

Ross: That was your house on Paradise Drive?

Heath: Yes.

Ross: That looked like a boat, sort of.

Heath: From the shore, it looks like a boat, but if you approach the house from above, it looks like a house on land, with a patio alongside it. You came down the hill--in fact, we had to bulldoze out enough flat land alongside in order to have an approach to the house, a patio area. Because the hill came right down into the bay, we had to bulldoze back about twenty, thirty feet, and 100 feet--well, more than that, 200 feet long on the shore to create a patio area.

Ross: Now, why--you were living on this barge with the Leeks, and then three years after that, you and Brian decided to leave Sausalito, you didn't want to stay there--

Heath: There was a great outcry against people living on the waterfront of Sausalito, and emptying their sewage into the bay, and it was the beginning of the BCDC, the Bay Conservation and Development Commission, who outlawed the emptying of sewage into the bay. So, there were all sorts of proposals made trying to find a means for the people living on the houseboats to empty into the sewer. Of course that just seemed an impossible thing to do. So we looked around and found this beach property along Paradise Drive, where we could jack up the barge and house and put pilings under it. It would then be high enough out of the water to get fall to a septic tank.

Ross: Did you create all of that? Did you think about that? That seems like such a far-out plan. Wasn't it seen as quite a--?

Heath: Well, I think there's a great deal of difference today about the way people think about who should be doing what.

##

Heath: Well, it seems to me in retrospect that everybody we knew were making things and building things for themselves. It was a big do-it-yourself period. All the people who lived on the waterfront were all improvising housing of one kind or another. It was after the war, and all during the war years there was no building going on, because there weren't materials available. That's one of the reasons we bought the barge: there was all this lumber that had been left from the shipyards that was available. The big timbers and plywood were there for us to use. It was just piled up, just as they were dismantling the shipyards. There was all this lumber and building materials that had been used only for three or four years during the shipyard days, and that's what we built the house out of.

We tried to find out what the problems would be: jacking it up, floating it around the Tiburon Peninsula, locating a house mover and then getting quotes on how much it would cost. We had to bulldoze a basin to float in close up against the hillside, but it was fun doing all of these things. We didn't have to get a building permit in those days. If we wanted to do something, we just went ahead and did it, and felt confident that we could do it. After all, people had been building their own houses for centuries.

Ross: People had been building their houses for centuries, but then they didn't float them around the bay--

- Heath: Oh, yes, I think people who lived along the waterfront, of all civilizations had been very resourceful people.
- Ross: Who improvise--
- Heath: My grandparents in Denmark lived in a very similar situation, because when my mother came out after we built the house and were living on it, she said, "This is just like Denmark!"
- Ross: Oh, she did come out.
- Heath: Oh yes, many times. And she went with us to Europe. Well, she called up one night--this was when she was eighty-nine years old-- she called and said, "Why don't you meet me in Denmark?" And I said, "When?" And she said, "Next week." [laughs] So this was a little short notice, but I said, "Let me think about it. Maybe we can get away." So she flew with my cousin from Sioux City to Copenhagen, and then Brian and I came a week later and met her in Denmark.
- Ross: I remember that.
- Heath: That story. And then she took us to the place where she had grown up as a child, which was along the waterfront in Denmark, and pointed out where the school was and so on. I felt just as at home there as she did when she came to our house along the beach.
- Ross: Isn't that amazing. As I remember, there was quite a bit of public attention to this whole project.
- Heath: Oh, yes, it was in the newspapers, all the time, the fuss about those artists living on the waterfront in Sausalito, and how anti-social they were, or--.
- Ross: But the project of moving your house also got a lot of attention, didn't it?
- Heath: Oh, yes. There were newspaper articles about it.
- Ross: And did you do the designing of it?
- Heath: Yes.
- Ross: And the Leeks sold their portion of it to you?
- Heath: Yes, because--see, their children were about five or six years old when we first bought the barge, and when they reached--seven years later, when they were getting into their early teens, like thirteen and fourteen, there was no public transportation on Paradise Drive,

and so Kenny or Eral were constantly taking them to scout meetings, or to dance classes, or to art classes and so on, and so they got tired of acting as chauffeurs for their two children.

Ross: But they did move to Paradise Drive with you initially?

Heath: Oh, yes.

Ross: But all the time you're doing this, changing your personal housing, you were busy meeting all the production deadlines?

Heath: Yes.

#### Change to Jigger Wheel Production

Ross: And you had a staff of how many at the time?

Heath: Initially, there were ten of us. When we left San Francisco and the studio there, there were five of us. So when we came to Sausalito, five more people joined us in starting--because we started from scratch in making all the molds, and learning how jigger wheels worked, and how to glaze--well, the glazing remained pretty much the same way--and I used the same clay formulas and the glaze formulas. So it just meant the translation of the shapes from a hand-thrown form to a piece that was carved in plaster, and when you make the translation from a piece that you shape by hand--you can curve it, make belly shapes, and more complicated shapes by hand than you can when you form it on a wheel over a mold, because then it has to have straight sides with a little taper to it. So the designs were modified to accommodate to the new way of manufacturing, in effect.

#### Controversy Over Handmade and Machine Made

Ross: I think you had mentioned once that it was sort of like a different idea, or that it was saying you're no longer doing handmade pottery, and you got into some sort of a--kind of a hoo-ha, didn't you?

Heath: Oh, yes. Well, that was partly one of the reasons why I left the potters' association, was that if you were--you couldn't be a good potter without making the whole thing from beginning to end. If somebody else worked on the piece, it was no longer yours. In

other words, you were the master--you knew everything about the piece, and therefore if you went to another way of shaping the piece, where other people could shape it, because they couldn't throw, but they could use a machine and pull down a tool that would shape the outside. A jigger wheel is industrial adaptation of a potter's wheel.

So, if you couldn't shape it free-hand by yourself, at least you could do it on a tool, that meant you were one step removed from being an artist, or a craftsperson, because you were now introducing a machine to do the job. And another person, who wasn't concerned at all about the shape, or who had nothing to say about the shape would participate in the making of it.

The same way in the glazing of it, and in the trimming of it, and the firing and so on. So that the things that an individual studio potter would do from beginning to end--there are about sixteen steps you go through in the shaping and making something out of clay--that could be done by sixteen different people, instead of one person doing all sixteen. So to that extent, you no longer were a craftsman, you were now an employer employing people, and so that was a no-no.

Ross: Well, how did that manifest itself? Did you get into some sort of a discussion about it, was it a debate, or was it--?

Heath: Well, I remember--we had been sending things to New York, to America House. That was an organization that had been started by Mrs. Vanderbilt Webb during the Depression years. She saw quilts hanging on lines out in the country, upstate New York, and there were potters who worked up there in the winter months, when they couldn't be out in the fields, they made ceramics. So she bought things from the craftspeople in New England and brought them into New York and sold them, and that was the beginning of America House.

And there were many craftspeople who during the Depression had worked on the Federal Arts Projects, which included all the crafts, who were now looking for markets for their work. So America House was established as a national organization for craftspeople. The curator at that time was Mary Wright; she was the daughter of Frank Lloyd Wright. And she wrote to me and in effect sort of scolded me. She said, "You're selling out." [laughs] "Now you're going to be making things for the mass market, and it won't be the same thing."

Ross: Were you crushed by that?

Heath: Well, I was a little bit--well, I was sort of halfway amused by it, because the idea of making things on a potter's wheel in an industrial society really was an anachronism as far as I was concerned. It was okay to do it while I was learning, and getting the feel for the clay and so on, but after all, a machine doesn't have a mind. The machine doesn't decide what the shape is going to be; a human being has to decide that. So I felt that I was as much in control of what was made as I ever was. Just because I asked someone to help me didn't mean that I had released all responsibility for the piece, because they were assisting me.

Ross: Well, I feel sort of appalled by that, because all the great artists had help, didn't they? Rodin, and--

Heath: Of course, which is another thing, you see, that Rembrandt, after all, when he was painting, he had a whole school working there, and there's always this debate: was that painting all by Rembrandt himself, or who were the people who were involved? So I knew that part about the history of art and the craftspeople before the Industrial Revolution.

And so, I said, "Well, good design doesn't depend upon whether it's made by hand. In fact, there are some very junky things that can be made by hand, not good at all, so just because you make it by hand doesn't make it good, or a work of art."

Ross: Does it also have to do with your feeling that artistic things should be available at a price that more people can afford?

Heath: Of course. And also, the museums also were playing a very profound role in the whole thing, because the museums were--. They had what was called the everyday arts, exhibitions of everyday art, which included everything from flatware to glassware to dinnerware to automobiles to--anything that was manufactured. And things were juried as to whether they could get in--whether they had sufficient quality to be considered of good design, let's say, for want of a better word. And it still rages today, the argument about, is something that's made by a machine a work of art?

Ross: Then what about photography, or--?

Heath: That's true.

Ross: Or any of those things that take a human eye and mind, it seems, to make those mechanical things work.

Heath: Yes.



Ross: How far did the argument go, or you said that you left the potters' association--

Heath: Well, my response to Mary Wright was that, I can't by myself make very many pieces to supply the market, and I think my ideas are good enough, or at least I want to make something that the china industry does not make for tableware today. There are two kinds of products on the market that one can buy. Those are the cheap things that are easily broken, throwaways, and then the carrying on of the china look that came from Europe. And I wanted to make something that was for the American way of life, not the kind of dishes that were used in Europe among the aristocracy, but was much more peasant-oriented, and yet could be for Sunday best as well as for everyday use.

And that's what I wanted to do. And I couldn't do it if I made only the number of pieces that one single person could do. And the museums were exhibiting all the--it was at the time when Charles Eames in furniture design came out with his designs, and Birtoya with his chairs, and--well, all those things that are associated today with that period of what was called the "good design". Good design shouldn't cost any more. You remember Richard Gump wrote a book called *Good Taste Costs No More*.

Ross: So then, did that sort of dialogue continue, and did it become--?

Heath: No, she just wouldn't--she wouldn't take what we made.

Ross: She really rebelled about that.

Heath: Yes, she said, "You now can go into the department stores, you're not part of the crafts movement any more." So that was the result of that. But, the museums took another attitude, that the crafts organization did not take, and organized good design exhibitions, where things made on the machine were shown. So that it was only among the craftspeople that there was this division. And then the craftspeople, they wanted to be considered fine artists, see, as distinguished from good industrial designers. The industrial designer was different than a fine artist.

Ross: And you were, in their eyes--

Heath: An industrial designer.

Ross: It's a fascinating sort of idea, isn't it? Did the association here take the same stand that Mary Wright took?

The Market for Heath Pottery

Heath: When I got that letter from her, I just decided, well, I don't have time in the first place to get bogged down in worrying about what people were going to say, that I've just got to do what I've said that I would do, and Mr. Gustin is willing to sell it in the Marshall Fields in Chicago, and Bloomingdale's in New York, so I couldn't--

Ross: That was pretty good stuff.

Heath: Yes. And Neiman-Marcus in Dallas. So--well, if there's a market for what we make, and people like it, and certainly, what we're trying to do is to create a thing that would not have been designed in Europe, that would have a different look from the European design. Because the potters who were at the Bauhaus, for instance, in Germany, worked in porcelain, and they were much more identified in the shapes that they designed, with the china industry of Europe.

In other words, I don't like highly stylized things. I like things that are easy, the soft shapes, not shapes that are--well, it's more like a folk dance as compared with ballet. In the ballet, you're up on your toes all the time. And that's extremely disciplined, and I didn't think that the American way of life was that disciplined. The people here are much more easygoing, more humane, and less concerned about status and so on. In other words, I was trying to do something that was more egalitarian rather than aristocratic.

For anybody who would like it, I didn't care whether they were rich or poor. In the beginning, Gustin sold to the department stores, and gradually over a short period of time, he found that the shops where the things sold best were usually very near a university, where the audience were the students and faculty. So that for a long, long time, about a period of fifteen years, our best accounts--like Fraser's in Berkeley, for instance--were in university shops.

And those shops were started because the architects couldn't find the kind of products in the market generally, so they carefully selected furniture and dishes and glassware that their clients could buy. They had a role to play in designing a contemporary house, they wanted furniture that would fit a contemporary house, and not something that was an antique or that belonged to another century or decade. And so we were sought out to fill that market that the architects needed.

Then, as time went on and the imports began coming back into the country, and in about fifteen years after the war ended, around 1960, that whole picture changed. The architects got too busy to run their little shops. Their wives maybe continued it, or their children gradually took it on, but some of the children didn't want to do it, and like in Berkeley, Fraser's finally sold out.

Ross: Was Fraser an architect?

Heath: No, he was--well, in a way, he was. Fraser designed--there's a flatware that's on the market called Fraser's, do you know the design?

Ross: No, I don't think so.

Heath: He was a designer rather than an architect, and he bought things from Europe that were of good design. But he did it because he himself was a designer, not an architect.

Ross: Okay. But there was your product, and it fit in and was sought after. Now, do you think because it was available near a university that it sold or do you give credit to students for having good taste, or where did that come from?

Heath: No, I think that what was taught in the schools, that after all, this was what was being exhibited at the museums, so if you were in a cultured environment, learning about what belongs--study architecture, or thinking about building a house of your own, and you have an architect-designed house, because I think professional people or graduates of universities build different kinds of houses than the tract houses. There were some good architects who worked with developers in building housing around the country. I think it was Levitt in New York, and Quincy Jones I think worked with Eichler, the Eichler houses down around Stanford.

Ross: Right here in Marin County.

Heath: And Marin County too. So that there were some developers who used architectural plans, and so if you had a house designed like that, then you wanted the appropriate furnishings to go with it. Now, architects are building such weird things [laughs], that it's a wild period.

The Heath Ashtray

Ross: One of the things that your pottery is best known for is the ashtray. It is a unique piece, as were some of your other things. But that one was designed--you designed that--?

Heath: Well, that came about because when Brian was with Red Cross. He spent so much time on the phone, and being a smoker, he would have to put a cigarette down because he had a pencil in his right hand, so he said to me, "I want an ashtray that will hold my cigarette up so it won't go out while I'm on the phone." And then one day there was a wet clay bowl that was sitting on a counter or shelf, and he cut V's in notches, and he said, "That's what I mean. That's the kind." Because a cigarette, if you put it down on a cold surface, the condensation puts the cigarette out. So you need a way of pinching the cigarette, so it's held in the open space.

It was interesting, we suddenly got huge orders from the city of Seattle for ashtrays. I asked Gustin, "Why are we getting these?" The fire marshall of the city of Seattle ordered every public building to have one of our ashtrays. He called it a "safety" ashtray. And so--well, at one time, the ashtray represented 25 percent of our business. For years and years, we were making, I don't know how many a day, it was just amazing.

Brian had devised a method for cutting--for biting out the notches that would just pinch the cigarette. Instead of just cutting them informally with a knife, he bent a piece of tin, and developed a machine for punching out the V's. You stepped on a treadle which pushed a cutter, sort of like a Rube Goldberg thing, that bit out a bit of V-shaped clay.

Ross: So, in a sense, that famous ashtray was designed by Brian.

Heath: Yes.

Ross: Oh, that's a wonderful story.

Heath: Well, I mean the idea for it. Now, the placement--initially I had slots for six cigarettes--three on one side and three on the other side. And then--you see, when they were formed, you had to take a sponge and sponge out each one of these, because the cutting actually left a sharp edge in the clay. Because it took much time sponging out each one of these little slots, I reduced it to three slots instead of six. I never liked the looks of it as much after I did that, but I figured that nobody--rarely, sitting at a desk would you have more than three cigarettes going. Even if you're

interviewing someone, there would still be room for you and the interviewee.

Ross: Did you smoke?

Heath: Yes, I smoked as much as Brian did, if not more, almost.

Ross: And that was a lot.

Heath: Then when the surgeon general's report came out in the middle of the sixties, both of us almost overnight stopped smoking. Because we believed it.

Ross: But it's interesting that two bright people--you know, when you think of it, what cigarettes do, it seems like sort of elementary information right now. Back then, people hadn't given it any thought.

Heath: No. And it was interesting too that one of the favorite housewarming gifts for somebody to give their host was a Heath ashtray.

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Ross: And it was a popular wedding gift. I think that part of that was that it was an affordable gift, and people then liked the idea that it was a "safety" ashtray.

Heath: Yes, it prevented fires. A forgotten, pinched cigarette would burn out when the hot ashes were choked in the cold ceramic slot if left burning. And it was used in many photographs, on the coffee tables and when architectural magazines were showing a house, invariably there would be a Heath ashtray.

Ross: Did you get credit for that?

Heath: I don't think--sometimes, perhaps, but not always. But it just became a very symbolic thing that--Heath ceramics: "Oh, yes, you make that ashtray." As if we never made anything else! [laughs]

Ross: Yes. What were the other things that you were making then? Full dinner sets?

Heath: Yes.

Other Heath Pottery

Heath: We started with--I think there were eleven or twelve pieces. There was the six-piece place setting, with the dinner plate, salad, bread and butter, cup and saucer, and a bowl, were the six pieces. Dessert bowl, or cereal. And then there were two serving bowls, and a creamer and sugar, salt and pepper, and a platter. Those were the first pieces we made for probably the first five or six years, and gradually then added the teapot. Oh, the ashtrays came after the twelve pieces of dinnerware. We made three sizes of ashtrays, for the individual and--

Ross: Group?

Heath: [laughs] A small group, and then finally a party size, which was about a ten-inch one. The first individual one was maybe a two and a half-inch circumference which only had two notches in it, so that it was used at the table, so that two people sitting next to each other could each use it.

Then we did casseroles, and we ended up by having five sizes of casseroles, beginning with the half-pint as an individual, and the lids for all of them. So we had a pint--a half-pint, a quart, two quarts, and five-quart size. That was a party size. And what came after that? That was probably up until 1960, the things we were making. Oh, we did add, too, when the party casserole came out, a party bowl, a punch bowl, and a very large salad bowl. And an oversized buffet plate, so that you could put everything that was served at a buffet onto one plate, and that was a twelve-inch plate.

Ross: You also made, I think, what you called an egg bowl?

Heath: Egg bowl, that was good for beating up a couple of eggs for scrambled eggs.

Ross: It was fair-sized. One has a handle on it--

Heath: Yes, and the pouring bowl.

Ross: The lids--that reminds me of a story. Julie Shearer, who's at The Bancroft Library and who's our editor, told me that when she first was married, she went to your seconds shop, and what she bought as dinner plates were the lids. The lids, upside down, served very well as--

Heath: Yes. Well, the lid was meant to be a serving piece, or cake plate.

New Techniques for Throwing: The Roller Jigger

Ross: Oh. So it was a pedestal.

Heath: Yes, it was a pedestal plate. And that was an interesting development. We made that knob as the piece was formed. I taught the men who were jiggering to throw the knob. The jigger man would squeeze the clay between his fingers and shape the knob, so that aspect of the lid was the thrown piece. That was so we wouldn't have to attach a knob afterwards. Because of the undercut, you couldn't make it on a jigger wheel and be able to bring the pulldown back up, because there had to be an undercut to reach under. That was shaped by hand.

And after they learned how to do that, we made candle holders the same way, only the candle holder had a sturdier base. It wasn't a lid, but the way it was shaped was the same way as the knob on the casserole.

Ross: Each step of the way, did you design and did Brian get involved?

Heath: He usually built the kind of equipment that we needed to do something. For instance, on the notching of the ashtrays, he designed that, and he designed on the jigger wheel, you have a profile of the object to be shaped. The edge shapes the piece. Later on, there was a development in ceramics that is called the roller jigger. Instead of having a profile tool, it was a roller where the wheel was spinning that shaped the piece.

Those machines were very expensive to buy, so Brian made them. The year when I was at Wedgwood in England--Brian saw some machinery out behind the building that had been discarded by Wedgwood. He looked at them and thought he could make something out of them. And so he had a number of them shipped to Sausalito from England, out of which he made our roller machines.

Then he also designed and built a number of kilns that we used.

Ross: Well, it seems to me that that would take a certain kind of engineering knowledge, and certainly an understanding of all the aspects of the clay, so the two of you together figured out how--

Heath: How to do it. We would have discussions, and I would say, "Oh, you can't do it that way," and he'd say, "Yes, it can be done that way." [laughs]

Ross: So in a sense, this was a partnership of both your artistic and his--

Heath: For instance, in making the cups. That one became such a riot, because I had seen pictures of how in England in the china factories, in shaping a piece, a bowl, where you had to shape it from the inside out--see, many shapes are made upside down on a turning wheel, like plates and shallow platters and shallow bowls that were fairly open, would be made upside down. The bowls that were made right-side up, there was always a question of how to do that, because if you take a ball of clay, when you're throwing, you throw it into the mold, and then the pulldown comes down and is supposed to bring that clay up around the sides as it's spinning. The wheel will begin to chatter because the clay isn't centered as it is when you're working on a potter's wheel. So, you get wrinkles in the clay and trap air. In other words, jiggering, while it seems like practically any fool can do it, it does require a good deal of skill.

So, I had seen the pictures of cups being jiggered somewhere in a big factory, and what they would do was to make a pancake of clay and put it over a lump, a dome shape, this pancake, and give the clay a sort of a shape as it caved in around this lump. And then they would pick up this pancake form that came to the top of the cup and shape it. I said, "Oh, you can't throw a lump of clay into a mold and shape it, it just won't work."

Well, it does work. If you have the right--if you have a nice plastic clay that yields readily to the touch, then you can take that irregular lump and make it into a fairly nice round ball. And if you aim it right, it will land right in the center and you take your thumb and make a hole with that, then you can bring the tool down and bring the clay up along the sides okay. But if you have a clay that is very short--what we call short means that it tends to crack, or it doesn't yield readily, and it develops cracks as you try to bring it up, and it won't work.

And that's the difference between a porcelain body, let's say, and a plastic body, is that to get translucency in a clay, you need the sort of clay that is very fine-grained texture, and the shaping of porcelain--most of the time it's cast as a--it's poured into a mold as a slurry, rather than being made on the spinning wheel. And so to jigger a porcelain cup is almost impossible without doing it that way, of first making a pancake and getting the shape, because it has to be so thin. And then placing that inside of the mold, and then the tool can just press it back against the wall.

Ross: You were saying the cups got to be a funny--



Heath: Well, because of all the arguments about--you have to have a dome on which to shape the pancake first. But as it turned out, the clay body that I developed really takes the shape very easily, in fact, almost too easily, with the result that clay that takes it easily then also easily gives up the shape. So it's a trade-off, that once you've made the shape, then unless it dries evenly, it's likely to deform and warp. Whereas a stiffer clay like the porcelain that's shaped that way, it is subject to warping too, but not as readily.

Ross: In doing the cup, then, did Brian design something to make it?

Heath: No, he just took the lump of clay and threw it in there. [laughter] And brought the tool down and sure enough out came the clay. Well, sometimes you do get wrinkles in the clay, if the clay is a little too firm, and that becomes a problem too in the work, because then you try to make clay a little bit softer for the small bowls and the small cups, and the mugs. Then that gets mixed up with the clay that's firmer for making plates, and because of the difference in the amount of moisture in the clay, it will crack, because water occupies space in the clay. If you have more water in one part of the clay than another, as it dries it has to shrink, and it will shrink more, and it will pull apart. So, working with two consistencies of clay in the factory, you have to guard against getting the two mixed.

Ross: It's interesting that you say that you have one consistency for a cup and another for a plate, and yet in a set of dishes, they all--the finishes all look alike, and it all seems like it's one--

Heath: Yes, you wouldn't know when you started out, whether one was made with soft clay and one with hard clay, or with more clay. Same way with tiles, you see. In shaping a tile, you want a clay that is fairly stiff, so when you press down on it and make its shape, it doesn't warp easily.

Ross: Back there when you had ten employees--was the production then very different from, say, what it is today?

Heath: Well, the roller jigger machines, which we have now had for the last fifteen, maybe twenty years, go much faster, because being a roll instead of the edge of the piece shaping it, the roller covers a larger proportion of the clay immediately, whereas the knife, the tool, an edge tool, you have to wait for the complete revolution to get back to the same place, where the knife edge is touching it, shaping it.

So you can make--oh, I don't know what is the difference, but like where you could make maybe fifty by hand--maybe more, maybe

100 by hand jiggering, and with roller jiggering you could make 500 in a half a day.

Ross: That's a huge difference, then.

Heath: Yes.

Ross: Does that mean fewer--the same amount of people, or--?

Heath: No, no, in fact, when you're hand jiggering, it takes two people: one who slaps the clay into the mold, and then the person who picks up the mold and shapes it. So you have a two-man team, whereas with the roller jigger you just have one. He just slices the clay and puts it in the mold, and it does it itself. You don't have to pull down a tool and keep it from chattering and so on.

Ross: It's almost--well, it's difficult to sort of visualize what you're talking about, but I can--

Heath: I've been wondering whether you did.

Ross: I'm trying to figure it out. I know I've watched people at the hand, at the potter's wheel, and such that I have that in mind, but I think this other business is kind of remote in my vision.

Heath: Well, maybe I shouldn't spend too much time trying to explain it.

Ross: No, not at all. I think that people who are going to be listening to the tapes or reading the book are going to be people who understand what you're talking about. That will be the difference in how the production could go, from 100 pieces versus 500 pieces, that made quite a difference--certainly in profits, for goodness sakes.

#### Brian's Role at Heath Pottery

Ross: At this time, now, Brian had taken over the business part totally, so was he managing all the financial end and the ordering? When he left the Red Cross, and he came to work, it was just a natural--

Heath: Well, he had been sort of doing my books, so to speak.

Ross: At Clay Street.

Heath: But his work was in the office and in inventing the machinery, or finding the means by which something could be done. But in the

marketing, I worked with sales and marketing and what to design for the market, and talking with Gustin, so that the administration crossed over in some ways. And if you're going to make that piece, how much is it going to cost to make it, how many man-hours, and who's going to do it, and so on.

Ross: And that was the combined conversation--

Heath: Yes, and with whoever is supervising the various aspects of the work. We now have staff meetings every day for about half an hour, sometimes they go on for two or three hours, with all the people who--especially after we started making tile, and then began making restaurant ware, and special jobs that require different supervision.

Ross: Did you ever--did it ever come up that you and Brian would always work together on this, or did that just sort of evolve? I mean, that you would be a team working on this? How did that all come about?

Heath: Well, I think he found that what I was doing was more interesting than the work that he was doing. That, in administering and being an administrator in a social work agency, or being a social worker, is quite a different thing, where you're working with problem-solving of human suffering, and so on. It's a different thing than working with an inanimate material, or not a human material. I think he found it more interesting, and also because I was so involved. If he wanted to see me, he'd have to see me at the pottery shop.

### Long Work Hours

Ross: [laughter] Well, what kind of hours were you working when you first went into the shop in Sausalito?

Heath: Oh, all hours. Oh, many the night up until midnight, and up at dawn. But for me, you see, if you grow up on a farm, anything from then on is not work. On the farm, you're there all the time, day and night, having to be responsible for something or other.

Ross: Did you always--did you ever think, what have I gotten myself into, during this time that you had this contract to produce this much to fulfill your agreement with Mr. Gustin? Did you ever think, oh my goodness, this is more than I want to do, or I'm tired? Did you think in terms of--

Heath: No, I'm always challenged by "can you do it?" Of course.

Ross: Of course you can do it.

Heath: Of course.

Ross: And the amount of work wasn't something that you resented after a while?

Heath: No. Oh, there are times, of course, when I get very weary, and I say, "Oh, gee, what am I knocking myself out for?" But I wake up the next day and there's something new coming out of the kiln; I have to see, now what happened? In other words, the interesting thing about ceramics is, at the time when you're making it, it changes so from the time it was just a lump of mud into a finished piece, each step along the way is fascinating to see how it changes. And then you're always waiting for when it comes out of the kiln, what will have gone wrong with it? Or, what went right with it? Because there are many steps along the way where it can be damaged, or something happens.

Ross: But after all, you were producing, say, five hundred pieces a day. Now, how exciting can that be after a while?

Heath: Well, if you're involved in--at the time that that's going on, there are other--these fifteen other operations that are taking place, so that you're really--everything is always moving, wherever you go in the building, there is something different that's happening along the way. And the people who are doing it, their attitude towards what's being done, and as you walk by and you look--and then there's the conversation about what's going on. Or, if there's something that isn't going just right, what can be done about it.

Ross: And then you did the marketing and there was always a new design that you were thinking about?

Heath: Well, the marketing takes place as sort of making an estimate or assessment of--well, if there's anything new that the buyer sees that might be--or the sales personnel, they might have suggestions, why don't you try this? But most of the time, one is limited by how many changes you can make in a day. If you're making--now we make around, let's say, I think it's about ninety shapes with about [laughs]--we never discontinued a glaze unless we just absolutely had to, so by now we probably have, oh, fifty or 100 glazes. So to make just one of something, you have to have 9000 pieces. We have made 100 glazes in the course of forty-five years. All the pieces cannot be made daily. It probably takes at least a month to fabricate a "run" of every shape--from say a half dozen five-quart

casseroles to 1,000 mugs and/or dinner plates. That is one of our worst misfits.

### Replacement of Individual Pieces

Ross: Say that again?

Heath: Well, if you have ninety shapes available--well, let's say we try to keep active glaze colors to like thirty at a time. Then if it's a reorder on a glaze that is not as popular now as it was, let's say, twenty years ago, and there are a few customers here and there who break some cups and saucers, or need a plate, then you have to go back. So we say, okay, anyone who wants a replacement of a glaze that no longer is an active color, we'll make it in a time of the year when things are normally a little bit slack. So we'll say okay, in the month of January, while we're waiting for the January markets. The stores order in January for the first six months, and then they order in July and August for the Christmas trade. So we do discontinued glazes, what we call discontinued glazes, let's say in January.

But we are spread much, much too thin, and we shouldn't really be doing it. But it's just hard to say no to someone who says, "Oh, gee, I just--"

Ross: Oh, isn't this the idea of open stock?

Heath: Yes.

Ross: Do you promise that if somebody buys a set of dishes, they will always be able to replace--?

Heath: Well, I don't know whether it's known that we do. I don't know what the retailer tells the customer.

Ross: I remember years ago open stock was a very important aspect. If you bought something, you wanted to be sure that--

Heath: That you could get a replacement for it. Well, there are three glazes that I've never been able--that finally I've just said--I don't know what's wrong, but we can't make them look like they used to look. Partly that the minerals are exhausted from a certain deposit, let's say, that you can't get that talc anymore from that particular deposit or mine, or you can't get whatever the material was. For instance, there are some materials that are soluble in water that are used for glaze making. The soluble materials have

to be made into a glass, melted with other materials that are rendered insoluble when fired. They are then shattered and ground to dust for glaze batching--they're called frits. They're partial glazes. Because things like sodium and potassium and calcium, which are soluble in water, you can't use in a raw glaze, you have to use it in a frit form.

So it's in buying the frits from the manufacturer, the source that they use to get their borax, let's say, whether borax is mined in northern California, wherever it's mined, can make a difference. If that deposit is exhausted, you get borax from another place, and it may have minor traces of elements that weren't present in the other one, and that will have a profound effect upon the color. So over the years, just off the top of my head, I think of three: one just a couple of months ago, after trying and trying and trying, I said, "Vivian, we just can't make any more of this glaze--I can't match it. We can't afford to do it." I made thirty-six pieces, thirty-six attempts at this, or whatever it was. "And I don't know what the answer is. I don't know why it doesn't come out the way it used to. I don't know which material has changed. We'll just have to tell the customer we can't do it."

Ross: And you had the piece that you were trying to match?

Heath: Yes, they sent back the piece to match it. And we just couldn't--the blue just came out the wrong shade of blue.

Ross: So that was the end of that.

Heath: Yes. And then we had a red, we called it--hmm. It was a beautiful red, too, it was an iron red, and I used a frit in it, and when the company that originally made the frit went out of business, and they sold the formula to another company, to make the same frit, it never behaved the same way. We just could not get that red. It was a very interesting brick kind of a red color, but there was something about it that we never could duplicate.

Ross: Wait a second; I missed something. Did you say that you bought the formula, or that--?

Heath: No, the company that originally made the frit sold out. And then when they went out of business, they sold their formula to another frit maker. The one we originally got was a frit manufacturer in Ohio, and they sold out to a California frit maker.

First Employees in Sausalito

[Session 6: August 25, 1990] ##

Ross: We have talked about all the pieces that you make, full sets of dishes, and other accompanying pieces. Who were the people working for you, how many, and what the work situation felt like to you. Was it a good crew?

Heath: Well, as I recall, there were four people in the studio in San Francisco who also came to Sausalito. One was Pearl, she was then Pearl Jackson, is now Pearl Drob, who was one of the glazers. She was a black woman. We had a Chinese woman who worked with me in San Francisco, Harimake was her last name. I'll remember her first name. She later became a draftsman in an architect's office in San Francisco. Pearl later married a white man who was a glazer in our shop, and she and her husband--he works at a hospital in San Francisco in photographing, as I understand it, things that have to do with research.

Ross: But both he and Pearl had worked for you?

Heath: Yes. He was one of the glazers here. And then there was Brian, of course, and myself. That made four. I can't remember--

Ross: You said that four people from San Francisco came here with you, so there are two more to go.

Heath: No, I think I was including Brian and me as part of the four. And then we hired the man that Pearl married.

Ross: Did they meet in your shop?

Heath: Yes.

Ross: Oh, so they were both working for you, and then they married?

Heath: Yes.

Ross: Oh! Romance.

Heath: Yes. Let's see. There were a number of--two or three people who were living on houseboats, one was Gwen Tompkins, and her husband Warick, who lived on the *Wander Bird*, which was a boat that had been bought by an American in Europe, and he wrote a book called *The Wander Bird*, and they came into Sausalito. In fact, they were the first ship--it was a large sailboat--that began the sailboat

installations in Sausalito. At that time, there was no yacht harbor here.

Ross: Now, that was around 1948?

Heath: '46, '47. And in the late forties was when they built the--Herb Madden filled the spit of land that's on the shoreline of Sausalito now. And that became the breakwater for the harbor.

Ross: So it was that recent that the Sausalito harbor was developed?

Heath: Yes, it's a postwar thing.

Ross: Was that opposite your shop at that time?

Heath: Yes. We were on the third floor of the Village Fair building.

They were filling the land, and that's where Gwen Tompkins was--see, the Tompkins landed here and were stranded here, really, during the war, because he used to teach boys how to sail out of Europe, and that's where he had been for a number of years.

Ross: What was their nationality? What country were they from?

Heath: They were Americans. He was one of the so-called "Communists" in the United States. That became an interesting story, because later on Gwen organized a strike against us.

Ross: Oh, okay. We'll get to that very soon. [laughter]

Heath: Anyway, she was one of the people that came to work, and Toshi Monroe, who was married to Keith Monroe, the sculptor; they lived on a houseboat. In fact, she was the one who, when we were looking for a place to buy or to rent or build here--because we were commuting from San Francisco on Russian Hill--and she said one day, "There's a barge for sale down on the waterfront. Why don't you go look at it? I think it would make a wonderful dwelling." So we did. Well, we ended up buying that houseboat.

Her husband Keith was given a grant to study in Europe. He spent a year in Spain, learning to be an ironmonger--working with iron among the people who made--Spain was famous for the iron works that the craftspeople fabricated. These ornate railings, and that sort of thing. So he was in Europe while she was working for us.

Let's see, who else was there? True Blackburn, who came out from Parsons [School of Design] in New York, did design--

Ross: True Blackburn?



Heath: Yes.

Ross: That's an interesting name. Is that a man or a woman?

Heath: Man. Who else? So we had True and Pearl--oh, the jiggerman and trimmer, because a jiggerman and a trimmer in a pottery, we learned at that time, worked as a team. That was a man who shaped--or person who shaped the ware--

### Early Equipment

Ross: Is that the jiggerman?

Heath: That's the jiggerman. And the jigger wheel is an industrial adaptation of the potter's wheel. On the potter's wheel, the two hands shape the clay. On a jigger wheel, you have a mold for one side of the piece, and you could use a hand to shape the inside, the other side, but you make a tool that is like a hand that works up and down on an arm, and that's a jigger wheel. So this arm is brought down into the revolving mold, and you throw a lump of clay in there, just as if you were throwing it on a potter's wheel. But instead of a hand shaping it, this arm comes down and presses the clay along the edges of the mold.

Ross: And is the arm--is that automatic--or that's controlled by the jiggerman?

Heath: In industry today, the jiggerman pulls down the profile. It is done automatically, but we hand jiggered, because that was a machine that Brian could build.

Ross: I was going to ask you, did you get a patent on what Brian invented?

Heath: No, because they're simple--see, a jigger wheel is sort of like a lathe. It's a vertical lathe. So lathes, shaping things on a lathe, for instance, you cut a wooden shape--put a block of wood on a lathe, and you make a bowl out of it.

Ross: But I guess what I'm getting at is, this worked for your factory in doing this, your plant in doing this. Did others adapt what Brian had--

Heath: Oh, that was what was the beginning of the Industrial Revolution in England. It began in the potteries, with Josiah Wedgwood.

- Ross: No, I meant when Brian figured out how to use the jigger for making the cups--
- Heath: Oh, we knew how--see, he made my potter's wheel also. He made it out of a rear end of a Ford car. [laughter]
- Ross: What do you mean, the rear end of a Ford car?
- Heath: You should ask him what it is. The shaft on which the wheels spin on the car.
- Ross: Oh, the drive shaft.
- Heath: Yes. You make it perpendicular instead of running horizontally, you take one wheel and you turn it up on edge, and then that spins, and that was my first potter's wheel. Well, actually, the first one was a sewing machine.
- Ross: This sounds like your whole plant started with bits and pieces of equipment and--
- Heath: We were penniless people, so we built practically every piece of equipment we could. At that time, we didn't build the kiln, but we could have. We've since built our own kilns. But potters have always historically made their equipment to fit their particular way of shaping clay. So the jigger wheel was just one of the methods.

The other method that was very common and is the most commonly used by beginners is casting. You make a liquid--you put enough water into the clay and compound the clay body so it can be poured like a thick cream or slurry into a mold. Then you let it sit for fifteen or twenty minutes, depending upon how thick you want the clay to be, because the plaster mold takes the water out of the clay; it forms this shell, and then you pour out the excess. So casting requires the least skill of all in making ware. Once you have the mold made, you just fill it with what's called slip, and let it stand for however long you want. If you want a very thin piece, you only let it stand for five minutes, and then you empty it.

#### Early Handpainting of China

- Ross: I remember that housewives did certain kinds of mold forming and then hand painting, for their own enjoyment.

Heath: Yes. In fact, that's a very interesting history of ceramics in the United States. The World's Fair in 1895 in Chicago, there were-- I've forgotten the number of women, something like two thousand or whatever--showed their wares that they had made in their own homes. Many of them were the wives of men who worked in potteries, and they took the pieces that the men had formed, and took them home and embellished them. That was the handpainting on china that was done by the women. That exhibition from the World's Fair in 1895 then traveled in Europe, because that was a unique thing to have happened. It was the wives of the potters in the United States who changed the standards of what was being made, because the mold-maker was the designer, but not an artist. Many of the pieces that had been made for household use in the United States were rather-- considered crude stonewares. So that's why the china that was imported into the United States from Europe became known as fine china, because it wasn't being made in the United States, until the women began this handpainting, and the refinement that took place.

Ross: That was in 1895? That must have gone on for a long time, then.

Heath: It had been going on for about--well, I think the first potteries in the United States were about 1850 or thereabouts, but that's almost the same time as the Industrial Revolution in Europe.

Ross: But I was thinking about this handpainting of the china, because I remember my husband's mother had bought a set of Haviland china with no decoration whatsoever--

Heath: And decorated it.

Ross: She was going to decorate it, but never got to it. She eventually gave it to me, and I was supposed to handpaint it! But as I tried, I realized that it was better white than anything that I could put on it. So I think that craft probably continued.

Heath: Oh, it does, it still continues today. And I often wondered, did the women have small kilns, or was the ware taken back to the pottery to be fired? I haven't really tried to find out; I learned what I learned from the *Encyclopedia Britannica* about this whole movement. And it doesn't go into how they fired the dishes.

Ross: Certainly it had to be more than your kitchen oven.

Heath: Yes. You had to have at least red heat. When you apply gold or platinum or copper on a plate, that's the temperature at which it fuses onto the piece.

Ross: Amazing. Because you can think of how many housewives--or, I shouldn't just say housewives--people thought that they could do a lovely job of this, but with no more instruction than even--

Heath: You know, I'm not sure how hot an oven you can get in a cook stove with wood. Maybe they were able to do it in the oven at home. Because that was always one of the problems of being sure that it was water-tight. I mean, that it wouldn't wash off afterwards. And that's always been a concern if you buy painted florals or--

Ross: Anything that is going to be exposed to water--

Heath: And the harsh soaps and so on, that it will wash off if it isn't fired on hard enough. And I think that's one of the reasons why people are told, don't put gold or anything that's gold or platinum in the dishwasher.

Ross: Have you ever tried to do those things yourself?

Heath: Yes. Well, I put our gold-embellished dishes in the dishwasher, but as people say, "You can afford to do it! Because if it washes off, it doesn't matter."

Ross: Well, no. What I meant there was, did you ever try to handpaint this ready-made porcelain and fire it yourself? This was not--

Heath: No, I use a glaze, so I would do glaze on glaze, in effect. Because the hand painting is mostly just the--for instance, cobalt oxide or copper oxide thinned out with an oil or a medium of some kind. They experimented with different ways of putting it into solution. So it doesn't take very much to show up when you use just straight cobalt or copper, if you paint it on top of a piece of china.

But it's a little bit like if you're a watercolorist, you use a lot of water with a bit of color, and you paint that on paper. So handpainting on dishes is a little bit like a watercolor technique, whereas if you use glaze on glaze they both have to fire at the temperature that the glaze will melt, and that's a much higher temperature than for just--if you want to put a spot of color onto a plate, you can do it at a much lower temperature.

### Generations of Potters

Ross: Back to the subject of your employees at the beginning in Sausalito.

Heath: We had ten ultimately. Oh, that's where I said--we got a jiggerman and a trimmer who had been working in the potteries in Ohio--

Ross: Two people that had worked together?

Heath: A man and wife. He was the jiggerman and she was the trimmer. They were the two skilled people that we employed.

Ross: How did they happen to come to you? They came sort of as a team?

Heath: I've forgotten--yes. I think they had been working in a pottery in Stockton, and somehow heard about us. Oh, there was also a technical porcelain across the bay in Richmond who went out of business I think in the fifties. So technical porcelain--that's how they came.

Ross: What's technical porcelain, just another--?

Heath: It was more like utensils for grinding--had tough glazes on it, to use in laboratory work. And for hotel ware. It was a very thick porcelain.

I think that was where they came from. Because then, as they got older, their daughter and her husband worked for us also--because that's a tradition in the potteries, one generation after the other. The English potters who came to the United States and their children--and I think that their grandparents had come from England and worked as potters in Ohio or Pennsylvania. So there were three--we've had three generations.

Ross: What was their name?

Heath: The first group was Kinsley--Norman and Lelah Kinsley.

Ross: And they were probably originally from England?

Heath: No. Their parents were, I think. And when Norman and Lelah retired, then their daughter and son-in-law came to work for us.

Ross: How long did Norman and Lelah work for you?

Heath: Probably fifteen years. In other words, when they started working here, their daughter was a child, and then she grew up and went to work in a pottery in Stockton, and that was where I get the Stockton connection. I think the man she married was a jiggerman in Stockton.

Ross: And did the daughter become a trimmer?

Heath: She became the trimmer, so we had a second team of jiggermen and trimmers. And then we had a third team--the son and daughter were --after all, we've been doing this for forty-four years, so the first--Yes, another decade, let's say. And now the latest group--see, if each one worked a decade, ten to twelve years, we would be on our fourth decade now of craftspeople in our shop.

### Teamwork

Heath: And now we have--the trimmer is from Pakistan and the jiggerman is Mexican. So they're not a team anymore, and that makes a great deal of difference. Because, you see, the trimmer, if the jiggerman doesn't shape the ware nicely at the edge, where the mold and the tool meet, it puts more work on the trimmer. So the wives would bitch at their husbands if they didn't jigger properly--make that ware correctly. The right thickness with the right tool. Now, we don't have that discipline, so we have much, much more difficulty in keeping ware really well formed, because you have to set the tool to the correct thickness, and the tool has to be filed periodically, because it tends to wear, so the thickness changes. And if you don't have someone--the trimmer--riding herd on the jiggerman, then you get ware that's too thin or it's too thick, or the edges--

Ross: Then doesn't the trimmer have problems--

Heath: Well, since he's Pakistani--yes, he won't complain to the Mexican. He will come to me and show me the--see, he learned his trade in Pakistan, so he was a skilled trimmer when he came here. And he knows how the ware should be, so when it comes to him not properly shaped, he says, "Don't tell the boss," or he comes to me to complain about it, and then I have to go to whoever is the manager to--.

Ross: I can't imagine how it would be--these people work side by side?

Heath: Well, about twenty feet apart. Because the ware is shaped and put on a cart to dry, or it goes through the drier. And it's trimmed--it can either be fairly dry or semi-dry. For cups, you have to remove them from the mold probably an hour or half-hour after they're formed in order to keep them damp, because you have to stick the cup handles on.

[tape interruption]

- Ross: But it's hard to think about--part of my conversation today has to do with you and Brian working together. I think couples who work together--you know, you live together, you work together. Now, when you're telling me that you had Norman and Lelah--
- Heath: Oh, we've had many, many teams work here. Right now we have a glazer, and his wife is in the--she's the one who makes up the glaze lists and fills the orders. In other words, she checks the quality control, and her husband is the glazer. Let's see, who else do we have right now, Jon? [directs question to Jon Brooder, employee in the room at the time.] Oh, we have a sister and brother, my niece and nephew.
- Ross: Oh, your nephew is here too?
- Heath: Yes. Well, he has been for twelve years.
- Jon: And you have your sister.
- Heath: And now I have my sister. So that's--well, the potter who is the trimmer, who is Pakistani, we have three Pakistani--two brothers and the trimmer, who is a cousin. And they were potters in Pakistan. Their families had a pottery there.
- Ross: Somehow when we think of families in the United States, in the more modern area of work, couples don't work together as much as they might have in the past. I may be wrong about that.
- Heath: Oh, I think that's quite true, although many people do meet on jobs and marry.
- Ross: Yes. And in many jobs, they don't allow--like in what is called a downtown job, it seems to me they--or in big companies, they have certain rules.
- Heath: Yes, because it can create problems. Because if one gets fired, and the other one doesn't, and so on. It makes it more difficult to fire--
- Ross: Nepotism and such. But for you, that has worked out okay with your employees?
- Heath: Yes, because for instance the man who became foreman when we built this building and moved over here, was Mexican, also from the pottery in Stockton, and his wife, who was a trimmer, and he became the manager, and they worked here--
- Ross: The manager of the whole plant?

Heath: Of the forming end of the department. See, we have--the department is sort of broken into two parts, from the wet stage up until it's ready to be glazed is supervised or run by one person, and then from glazing to kiln stacking and kiln firing and sorting, that is supervised by a second person. Because one, you can't wear that many hats. That's one of the problems in this shop. In many jobs it's just one person who's doing it, so you can't have a supervisor for a trimming department, because there's only one trimmer! Or there's only one mold-maker, or two mold-makers. And one clay mixer.

Ross: So one supervisor has to know all the jobs to be able to oversee the whole process?

Heath: Yes. So that you almost have to have these family connections in some way. [laughs]

Ross: And in your experience, there hasn't been any--nobody has bopped the husband over the head with one of your fine pots, or something of this sort--

Heath: Well, I've just said thank goodness, we've been lucky enough to have as many couples as we've had, because it really is, I think, almost necessary in a shop that's this small. We have now--of course, we have the tile department, but in the dinnerware department, I think--what do we have, fifteen people in dinnerware?

Jon: More. We have twenty-two, I think.

Heath: Twenty-two in dinnerware, and eight or ten in the tile department.

#### Edith and Brian Working Together ##

Ross: I wonder, how much was the fact that you and Brian were together as a couple was setting the stage also. I mean, there was an acceptance of that and an understanding.

Heath: Yes, because then it sort of--the running of the plant divided itself into Brian being responsible for the equipment, either inventing it or making it, or finding somewhere where there was a used piece of equipment that can be modified or such. He supervised and designed the building of a number of kilns that we have also built. And then my area is in the glaze and body formulations, and the chemical end of the thing, and the design, and knowing the market--what's likely to sell or not sell, in order



to kind of be ahead of the market, to know what to make that has not yet been on the market, that has its own look.

Ross: Well, then, that was the division of labor between you and Brian. What about the business and financial matters--is this something that you share, or how do you involve yourself in it? I sense that Brian really does the finances.

Heath: Yes, because from the very beginning, I never had time to keep books. When I was making pots and glazes and shaping and marketing and writing up the orders and shipping, he started keeping the books, and got the auditor, because when you're in business, you have to have an auditor. He was doing that during the war years when he was still with Red Cross, and I was a studio potter. He just continued that, you see, when the war ended, and he came to work. The war ended in '45, August, and a couple of months later he decided he'd rather work in the pottery than be a social worker.

Ross: Well, in some of the business, or where it's particularly an artistic thing, do you and Brian usually agree about how you will go about it, for instance? Sometimes the money matters can determine what--

Heath: Oh, they're excruciating!

Ross: --be done, and I was going to ask how you deal with that and how-- if there are differences--



Photo pages:

- Page 1      Top: designed by Heath for the traveling exhibit of Frank Lloyd Wright entitled "In the Realm of Ideas," held in Marin County in 1989.
- Bottom: photo used by Heath for promotion and advertising. Edith took the photo from the Marin Headlands, then added the rim of a Heath plate and the cup.
- Page 2      Edith Heath chemical testing the glaze, circa 1965.
- Page 3      Top: Brian in his office, circa 1990.
- Bottom: Edith at the potter's wheel, circa 1990.
- Page 4      Edith trimming on the wheel.
- Page 5      The famous Heath ashtrays.
- Page 6      Fashioning the ashtrays.
- Page 7      Brian and Edith at home in their condo, 1989.
- Page 8      Tiburon condo, 1989.
- Page 9      Top: The barge house.
- Bottom: Brian and Edith Heath, 1960s and 1950s.



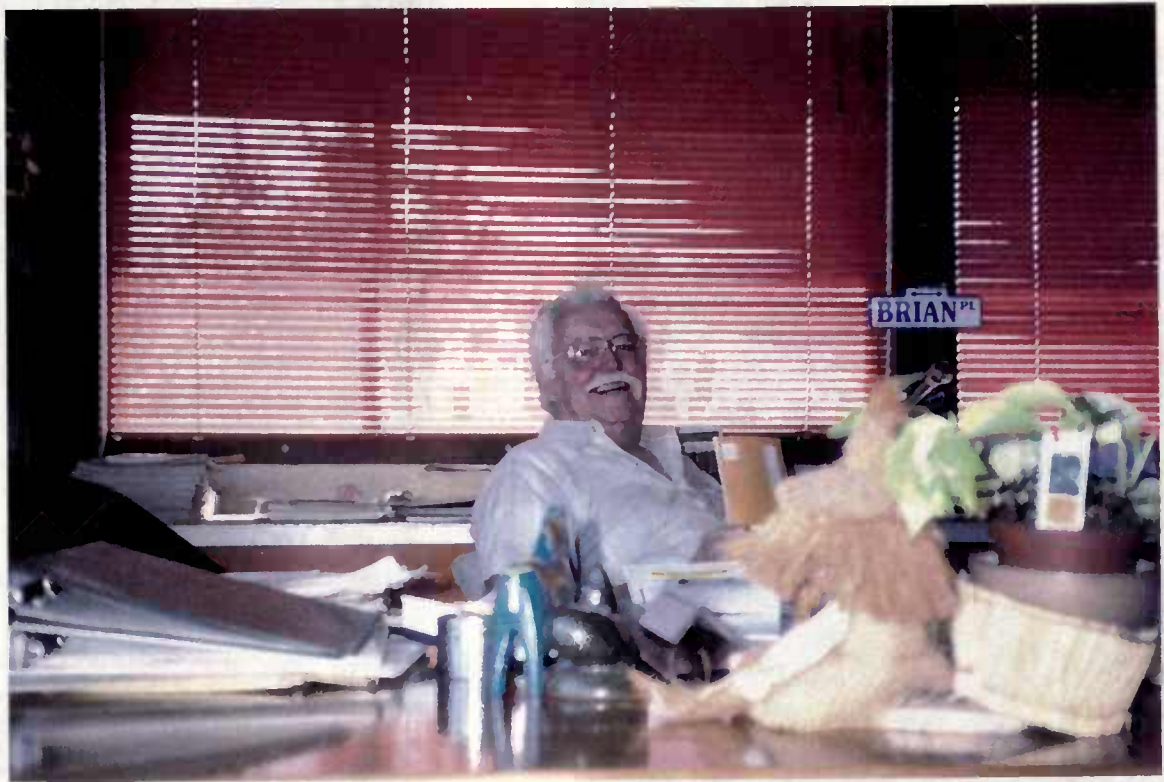


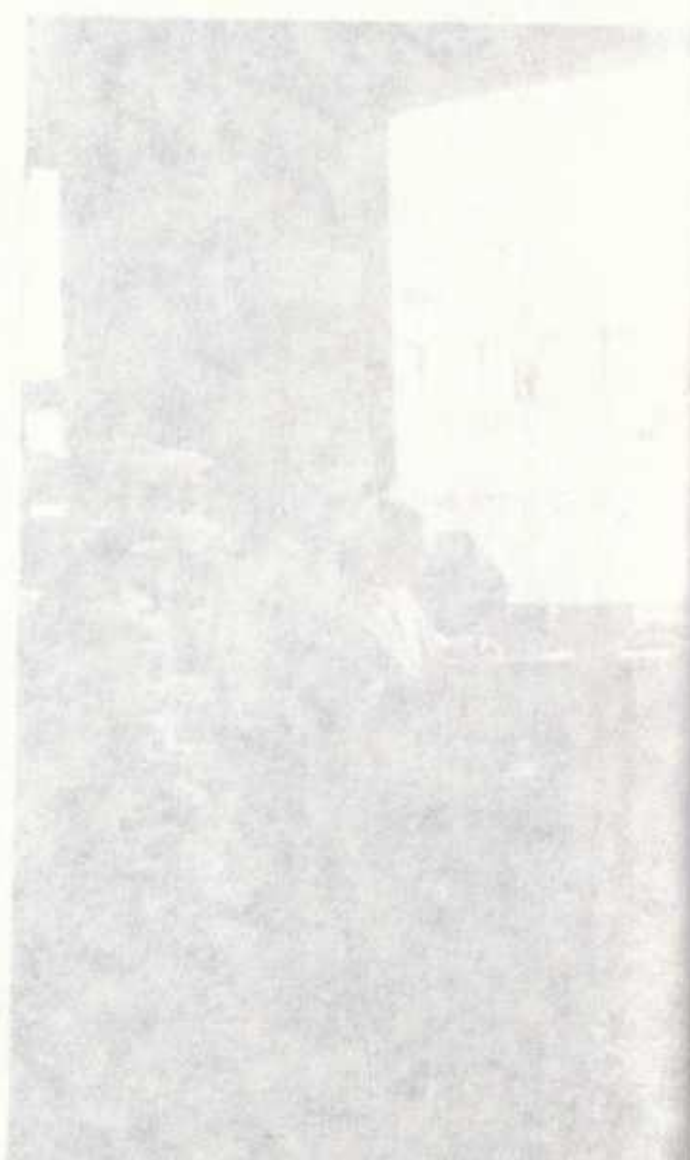






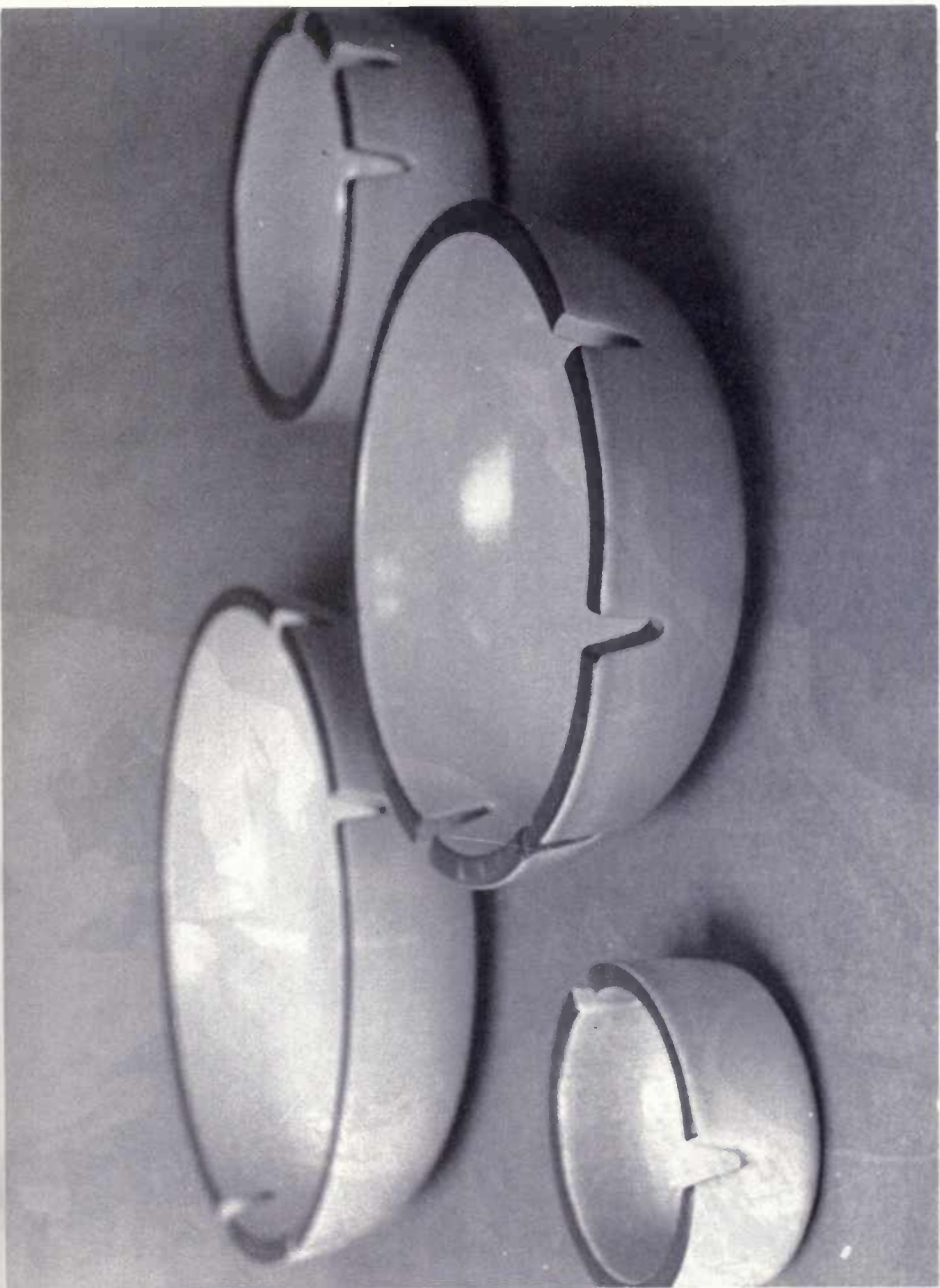




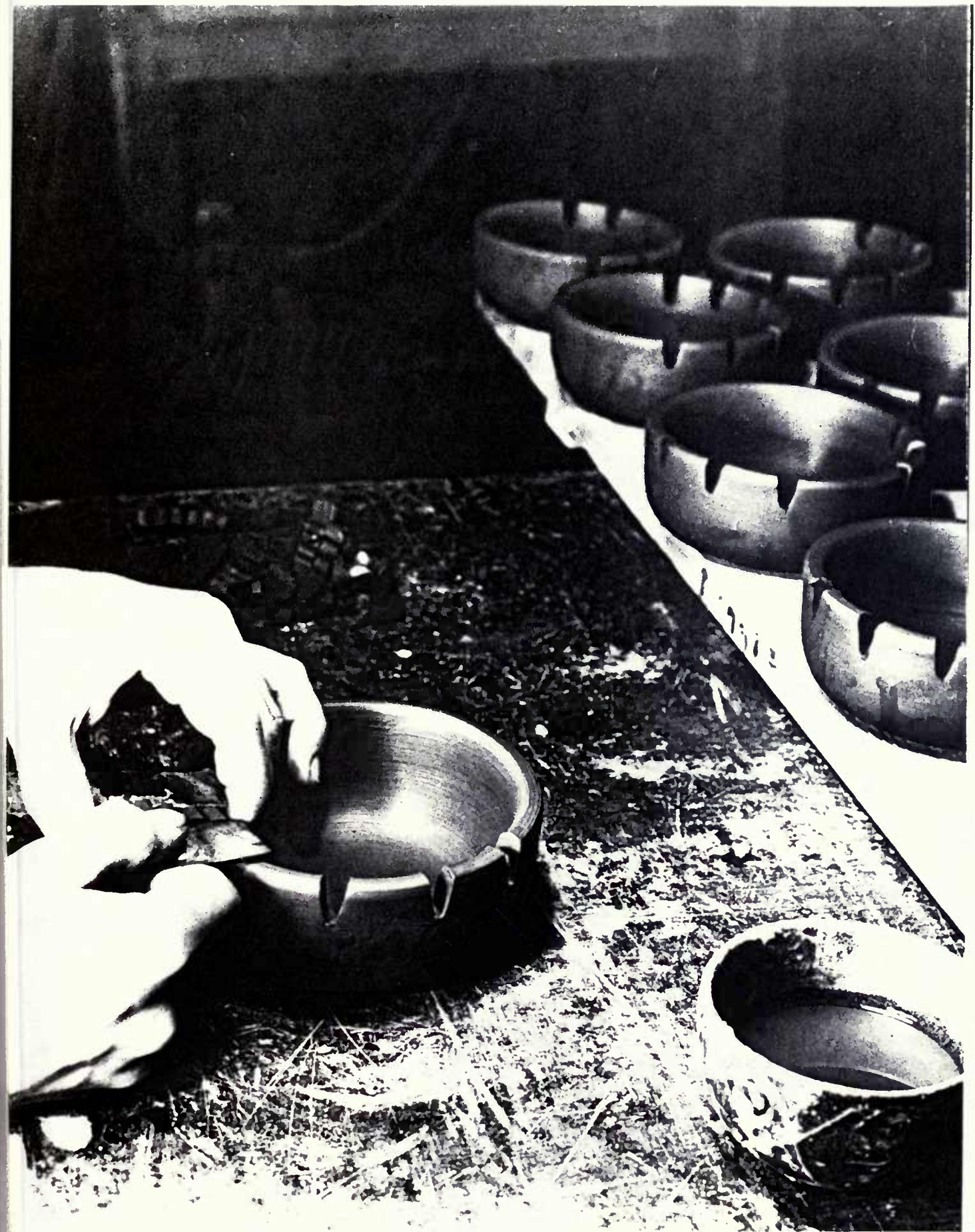






















1989  
NEW CONDO  
TIBURON







HEATH'S  
BARGE HOUSE



BRYAN & EDITH

← 1960's

↓ 1950's





## VII THE SALES FACTOR

Nelson Gustin as Distributor

Heath: Well, we were fortunate in having as our distributor a man and an organization who guided us very, very much in the beginning.

Ross: That was Gustin--

Heath: Nelson Gustin. And you see, it's now his grandson, David, who is still the N. S. Gustin company, and his daughter-in-law, Yvonne.

Ross: He's still involved with you to this day?

Heath: That's another family arrangement, you see. Because--see, during the war, Gustin's son, Jay, was in the army; his daughter-in-law had an Egyptian mother, and an American father, who was the first American to go to Egypt to sell Camel cigarettes before World War I. So she was Nelson Gustin's daughter-in-law, lived in Egypt until she was seventeen or eighteen. She was born there, and when the war broke out--it was World War II--she came to the United States. He brought her to the United States for safety.

Ross: This was Nelson Gustin?

Heath: Yes. His son married Yvonne Gustin, who was--oh, I guess her mother was Greek, really, but she grew up in Cairo, at any rate. Now, Nelson's son died about a year ago--he was N. S. Gustin Jr. But he died a couple of years ago, so his wife, Yvonne, and his son, David, now run the business. His daughter-in-law, and his grandson.

Ross: So these people are involved in making--or helping you--

Heath: Oh, that's right. Now, in the very beginning, you see, the arrangement that Gustin made with us, he cosigned a note for us to

borrow the money to start the business. Then he said, "I'll buy everything that you make for the first five years, and it will be my responsibility to see that it's sold, and if it isn't, you just pile it up in your shop--" and it took five years before he could-- our sales kept up with our ability to produce. And at that time--

Ross: It took five years for him--

Heath: For him to match the sales to our production. So he, in effect, carried an inventory.

Ross: Oh! You were producing more than he was selling.

#### Vina Zolla, Special Sales

Heath: That's right, than he was able to sell. Or, he made the initial sales orders, he hired a woman specially who--because he said, "We have to have a special salesman who understands the craft," and he hired a woman by the name of Vina Zolla who was a light opera singer. She sang light opera and traveled with the Chatauqua--. Let's see, who was the tenor at that time? At any rate, during the Depression years, the Chatauqua shows were curtailed because of the Depression, so she couldn't get a job as a singer, and went to work selling for distributors. I've forgotten the name of the firm who was considered the high-style, high-fashion home arts or dinnerware--sales organizations. In other words, there were the-- sales organizations are known either for being high-fashion, high-style, or in between, depending upon the quality and character of the goods being sold.

And what Gustin was selling was made by people who were not particularly designers. In fact, a lot of the things he made were made in garages in Los Angeles by women who were casting things and painting them. During the war years, there were something like five hundred small potteries located in people's carports in Los Angeles.

Ross: During World War II?

Heath: Yes! Because people couldn't get imports. So these people would buy molds and they'd buy casting slip and pour the slip in the molds, fire it, and buy glazes. They were absolute amateurs. And as soon as the war ended, within a year, all five hundred of them had disappeared. Because the men came back from the army, the women didn't do it any more, and that's what happened.



Ross: And also imports--

Heath: And they made the things that people like Gustin were selling.

Ross: For goodness sakes. You must have been quite a find for him.

Heath: Well, you see, he saw us at that opening exhibition where the ten craftsmen in San Francisco were selling to Gump's. See, so when he looked at this, he said, "Jeez, this is nice stuff!" [laughter] But he said, "I need somebody to sell this who knows how to--who knows this kind of--"

Ross: He sounds very aware.

Heath: Yes. So she flew by plane to every major city in the United States, and he chose what he considered the right store that that should be in, like Marshall Fields in Chicago, and L. S. Airs I think was somewhere in St. Louis, or Kansas City. I can't remember all the names now.

Ross: He was a real marketer, then.

Heath: And so Vina Zolla was constantly in contact with me, and up here talking about what was selling and what wasn't selling, and what people like.

Ross: What was she like?

Heath: Oh, she was a wonderful person. She worked for Gustin and finally retired at the age of eighty-five, and when she left Gustin, that was--let's see, that must be nine or ten years ago now. But that's where--if we hadn't had an organization like the Gustins, we would not have been able to do what we did, because they were so specially interested in what we were doing. It became complicated as the years went on, they took on more--when they took us on, we were probably number ten in the suppliers. Now they have thirty, and as they took on more different kinds of products to sell, they had less time to spend in selling Heath. So that our orders have really now in the last ten to twenty years been reorders, they have not had the time or the personnel to develop new accounts. But I also think that selling dinnerware became much more competitive. As more imports came into the U.S., we became more and more economically impacted by lower wages in foreign countries.

Different Types of Shops

- Heath: The whole marketing, when the suburbs grew up, Marshall Fields had three or four stores in the suburbs. Well, the suburban shops never carried anything in depth. Orders in depth were made by the parent store, and then farmed out to the suburbs. And that's become increasingly impossible--we were too small to be able to be split that finely, divided. It just doesn't work for someone who's the size that we are, to be in umpteen million little suburban shops.
- Ross: That's an interesting idea to think about, in terms of the shopper.
- Heath: Yes.
- Ross: I mean, that's the big reason to go back to the main shops in the cities, the suburban shops really don't carry--
- Heath: The other shops that really made it viable for us to do what we were doing, was that the architects postwar again couldn't get the kind of furnishings they wanted for their buildings--
- Ross: Oh, I remember you said that.
- Heath: They set up little spaces close to their shops. Many times, it was right next door to where they had their office, where they'd have the Eames chairs and the Knoll furniture and the Heath dinnerware, and the Swedish imports, or the Scandinavian and so on. So, these shops in many cases also were near universities, because the architects' clients in many cases were professional people like professors and lawyers and doctors and so on. So it was this--like Berkeley, for instance, was the center of--where we had a shop.
- Ross: I think we talked about Fraser's as an example of that.
- Heath: Yes. And of course, those shops don't exist anymore, or if they do, they're so few and far between.
- Ross: So, the Gustins and Edith and Brian were the team that made the decisions. I was asking the question about who won out in case of --I mean, disagreement between what you wanted to produce and what Brian would say financially was possible, or if there were ever those disagreements about how--
- Heath: Oh, there's always--there's been more or less a problem about what to make, but dinnerware is distinguished by the fact that if you buy dishes that are your so-called good dishes, you want to be able to replace them. If you break something, you want to buy a

replacement. So the assurance that a distributor has to--or a store has to make to a customer is to make a distinction. In other words, if you buy a pre-packaged import (or it could be locally made too), if it is not an open stock item, it may be good for only a year, two years, three years. No longer available means the customer will have to buy another dinner service.

So we are in the group that has to be depended upon, and guarantee that replacement is always possible. So once you had a certain number of customers, let's say, you could almost depend upon a reorder business.

Ross: Oh, yes. So there was a given production.

Heath: Well, our production was limited. In other words, we only have so much kiln space, and once you fill that kiln, that's the top production you can have, and how many stores can you cover. And as the years have gone by, you see, our dinnerware production has now become almost completely reorder, which drives you crazy, because we get orders for two cups, or six plates--in any of all the glazes that we have made over the years. We're so fragmented in supplying these reorder things, and it means that Gustin doesn't really pursue selling new things.

Stores will say, "We don't want you to make another new thing." The woman at Fraser's used to say, "Stop, Edith! We don't need another design or another glaze. I pride myself on being able to stock everything that you make, and I don't have shelf space to carry all the different things! Sort out the things that are your best sellers and discontinue the others." But we never were able to do it, because there was no--we made so few things all the time that we never had made a lot of anything until we got into the restaurant business.

Ross: But how boring that would have been for you.

### The Seconds Store

Heath: To not be able to have new glazes? Yes. So that there would be times when Gustin would say, "Well, we need a new glaze; why don't we try a new glaze?" Or I would come up with something that I thought--you really ought to show this. But we've always had a seconds store, you see, in connection with our business. So we could continue making things and just sell them in our seconds store. We did not have to rely on everything that we made becoming

a part of the national market, and that has in a way also helped to save our lives, that is--economically, I mean.

Ross: Have you had a seconds store from the time you started production, like at Village Fair?

Heath: Of course.

Ross: I didn't remember that.

Heath: Yes, that's what became Trade Fair. Remember Trade Fair in Sausalito? Maybe it was after--

Ross: Was that the one on the boat?

Heath: Yes, on the ferryboat.

#### Sausalito Artists' Sales

Ross: So you produced in the Village Fair building and sold seconds in the Trade Fair building.

Heath: Yes. Before the Trade Fair--that's another interesting piece of history. We were on the top floor of the Village Fair building--

Ross: With your production?

Heath: Yes. And on the second floor, there was a furniture maker, Conover, who made bent iron furniture. Well, it was patio furniture for outdoors, with canvas strapped around a metal frame. It was very simply designed. So he was making that on the second floor, so he also had things that went wrong, had blemishes or something they couldn't sell or market as a first. And there was an empty lot next door to what's now known as the Village Fair building, where the liquor store is--that was an empty lot. So weekends we would take our dishes down to the empty lot--

Ross: Just an open lot?

Heath: Yes. And Conover would bring out his furniture, and all the artists in Sausalito who wanted to would bring their jewelry or their paintings or their sculpture, and over a weekend, Saturday and Sunday, we had the artists' sale of their products.

Ross: Who organized that?

Heath: Well, we started it, because we had to do something with our things we couldn't ship. So people would come up to the third floor and buy--we had a little seconds area up there where people could buy, and then sometimes they'd buy firsts. So that's what we took down on the weekends, you see. We started one summer in May or April. It was beautiful weather, and so we just--we set up tables.

Then later, an architect friend of ours designed a very simple canopy. There was a concrete wall that was the back of the lot, that was probably twenty feet high, so he was able to make an attachment to this concrete wall of some beams coming out, and then we put a canvas over it, so there was some protection in case there was rain. But it was--then we'd box it up on Sunday night and take it back up indoors.

Ross: Did you rent that lot?

Heath: We must have paid something for it.

Ross: Somebody must have owned it, and you had the rights to do so. And then, so you organized that--

Heath: Well, it didn't take much organization, because--

Ross: No, but then how did you decide who else would come and sell there, like the jewelers--?

Heath: Oh, because here was Toshi Monroe, who's married to the sculptor--I mean, most of the people who were here were artisans of one kind or another.

Ross: So they were people you knew and--

Heath: And they just spread the word "Come on, tell Keith to bring over some of his earrings," because he also made earrings and bracelets.

Ross: But it wasn't like the flea market today--

Heath: No, there were maybe--

Ross: --where you would just have anybody--you had quality things.

Heath: Yes. They were the artists' things and it varied. Whoever felt like coming and bringing things for a weekend, they would do so. The one that was constant was Conover with his furniture--and Conover bought the ferryboat, by the way. And he bought it specially because his mother came out from Chicago, and she wanted --she thought it was a wonderful business. He outgrew his space in the Village Fair, and moved down to Gate Three along the waterfront

to make his furniture. So for a while, through the winter months, she said she would take it indoors, because we couldn't use the empty lot when it was raining in the winter months.

The Ferryboat Berkeley

Heath: So she took it indoors at Conover's furniture place, and then the ferryboat came up for sale. They bought that, and made it into a retail shop on the waterfront.

Ross: The Trade Fair.

Heath: And that lasted until '72, I think, when the boat went down to San Diego to the Marine Museum there. It's part of the waterfront marine museum--they have a historical boat museum there like we have in San Francisco.

Ross: So it was a historical boat--

Heath: Yes. It was called the *Berkeley*. It was one of the last of the-- when they built the Golden Gate Bridge and the San Francisco Bay Bridge, then it was no longer needed.

Ross: So it was a ferryboat.

Heath: Oh, yes. It plied between Berkeley and San Francisco.

Ross: By that time, when the Conover's sold it, had it sort of run its course in Sausalito, or why--it seems that--

Heath: No, he was retiring. His mother had died, and he had a heart attack.

Ross: Oh, so it was time for him--

Heath: Yes. See, that was in '72, so that existed, the empty lot that we had used, maybe for five or six years, and then that building, the liquor store, was built there. So that was no longer--that doesn't exist anymore.

Ross: So then that decided you on--made it important to find another place to sell. That's an interesting history.

Heath: Yes, it is an interesting--.

Sausalito Art Festival

Ross: So, at that time, you knew many of the artists--it was a true artists' colony then--

Heath: Yes. In fact, the Sausalito Arts Center, the organization of the Sausalito Art Festival was done by the group in our shop--Toshi Monroe and Keith and the architects, we started the art festival.

Ross: What year was that?

Heath: Must have been '78 or '79. The Sausalito Art Festival this year is going to be the 38th, or is it the 40th? So it would be closer to 1950, maybe.

Ben Irwin I think was the first architect who designed it. It was down where they were building the--filling the land for the spit out in front, that's where it was held for the first--out in front of our building, before the yacht--

Ross: And where the Spinnaker now is, the Spinnaker restaurant?

Heath: Yes, that area through there. Of course, the Spinnaker's halfway out. It took years and years to fill that land. It went on--I don't think the Spinnaker was built until about--oh, the middle of the fifties or sixties even.

Ross: So you and your group at the shop started the Sausalito Art Festival?

Heath: Yes. I think it was Toshi Monroe--well, it was the artists who were wanting to--and we had our seconds, you see, that we had to sell. So it was just, well, why don't we do this for one weekend and see what happens?

Ross: And you called it the Festival, and now it's--

Heath: No, when we first started, it was just a bunch of artists selling their stuff on the weekends.

Ross: Yes, but the Sausalito Art Festival--

Heath: Oh, that was a--as a result of our having such good success with our weekend sales, we said, "Why don't we have an art festival and invite all the artists, and just have a week of the art festival?"

Ross: And does it still last a week?

Heath: It's about four or five days, isn't it? Something like that.

Ross: Because I went with you one year, and it was quite a happening.

Heath: Oh, now it's completely different from what it was in the beginning. It's become almost a carnival.

Ross: Because they have music and performances--

Heath: And dancing and--

Ross: --lots of food. I guess I remember that more than I remember the art, as a matter of fact.

Heath: Yes.

Ross: But you people started it out of your shop--all the artists--

Heath: Well, by that time, you see, we were building a houseboat, and all the people living on the houseboats were artists, so they were our friends. So we just said, well, why don't we have a week of the arts.

Ross: Did you get the city involved?

Heath: In the beginning, the city wasn't involved. In fact, I think now, they--oh, maybe that's the answer. I've forgotten what year the city finally took it over, because it reached a period where it was so much work to do, and it wasn't--the people--the artists now were moving out of Sausalito, it was becoming a tourist kind of center. In fact, we probably are as responsible for it becoming a tourist center as anybody, in what we were doing.

Ross: With the festival?

Heath: Well, no, with selling Heathware. The national renown that we got, that people came from all over the United States to visit Heath Ceramics.

Ross: Oh, you did get that attention.



Heath: Oh, absolutely. We were in national exhibitions in museums all across the country.

Museums Exhibit Crafts ##

Heath: Well, you see, during the Depression years, the craft movement began in the United States--well, the arts and crafts movement began. Then the war interrupted much of that, so when the war ended, the museums began their exhibitions, called the everyday arts. In other words, the focus was on--the attention moved to the potters and the weavers and the furniture makers, and the craftsmen, many of whom went to school during the thirties in the Depression and then lived through the war years, and then the museums--I don't know which was the first museum. I think it was the Museum of Modern Art in New York and the San Francisco museum, but they sort of all had this--the Akron Art Institute, the Cleveland Museum, the Syracuse Museum--well, the Syracuse Museum had--because Syracuse is located in the middle of the pottery district in the United States.

Ross: Is that Syracuse, New York?

Heath: Yes. I think it's had ceramic exhibitions going back long before, because they organized the national traveling show for national ceramics, and the craftspeople--that was for the craftspeople, not for the industry alone. In fact, I'm trying to remember back, I think it was the result of this exhibition in 1895 that the women, where they were doing the handpainting--that's when I think the Syracuse Museum came into the picture, because there was a woman by the name of Rubinow who was instrumental around 1906 or somewhere in there in promoting ceramics. She established an endowment or awards for craftspeople for china painting, and she herself was a potter.

I'm not sure what the influence was, but because of the Federal Art Projects, the museums had become more involved in American artists generally, that museums up to that point had been just like for the ballet and the opera, you went to Europe. See, now it was a recognition that there were artists and craftsmen in the United States, and so what were they doing? There were painters and sculptors, but there were--the industrial design movement also began, you see, designing of cars, and designing of refrigerators and stoves. So there was industrial design of furniture, and there was the handcraft designers. So, what the museums were doing was, they had exhibitions that--for instance, good design costs no more, or--well, I should show you--get out all

the various brochures and catalogues that the museums put out during that period of time. You should have a list of that.

- Ross: So, what you're saying is that with Heath ceramics being exhibited in all these museums--
- Heath: Well, that was the transition, and it was an important period because if the studio potter could then--who had been a studio potter that became an industry, it was the first time almost.
- Ross: So people seeing this in museums then were excited about or came to Sausalito; they were going to go to Heath Ceramics.
- Heath: Yes. It was one of the places when you visited San Francisco, you came to Sausalito--drove across the Golden Gate Bridge to this quaint little town--
- Ross: Where there was this quaint little potter.
- Heath: Well, no--lots of artists.
- Ross: But as you said--
- Heath: But we were sort of centralized around someone who was shipping all over the country.
- Ross: Yes. And you were probably the most prolific shipper, you might say, of all the artists in Sausalito--others weren't doing--
- Heath: Well, I don't know of anyone else. In fact, there was a potter--I don't know whether you've ever heard of her--[pause] one of my best friends for so many years--was living with a man, Martin Mattell, who had come out from the Institute of Design in Chicago, he had been a student with Moholy-Nagy--we discussed that period too, didn't we, in Chicago?
- Ross: Yes.
- Heath: At any rate, he was living with the woman whose name I'll remember in a minute, who was a potter, and he said to me, "You know, if there hadn't been a war, and if the breaks that you got through Gump's and the exhibition, nobody can do today what you did. It will never happen again." And I think--at the time, I said, "Oh, Martin, [laughs] anybody can do it if they want to." But I really

now in retrospect think that there were so many things in our favor, over which I had no control, that just happened. It was a confluence of many, many things. And when I look back over, every decade has had its own unique kind of economic forces and cultural forces affecting it, that we've gone from being a studio potter into producing--let's see, we made the coupe shape from 1947 to '60, and then I designed--put the rim on the coupe, I was explaining to you earlier today--

### Restaurants Use Heathware

Ross: Is there a name for that also?

Heath: I called it the Gourmet Line at the time. But it didn't--for years and years, Fraser said in Berkeley, "Don't make another thing, Edith!" So it just didn't get picked up, didn't sell very well, until the restaurant--Don Olsen here in Sausalito designed Victoria Station restaurant, and there were three Marin County men who were behind this idea of the Victoria Station restaurant. So, Don the architect living in Sausalito, said, "You have to use Heath dinnerware in your restaurant."

I said to Don, "Don, I don't know whether we are good enough to be in a restaurant! It will probably--it's not strong enough to be a restaurant ware." And he said, "Well, people have been using it for years and it's true, and they still have it, and it hasn't broken."

Ross: It doesn't break; it's probably as strong as any other.

Heath: So I said, "Well, I know that it's quite good, but I don't know how it compares with the normal restaurant ware." So I was terrified, and the idea of our doing restaurant work, and what would be the repercussions? What if they take it and it all breaks? Of course, fortunately, they started with first one restaurant, then two, and then three, so we got some feedback on how good it really was, and it was remarkably good.

Ross: So the restaurant ware and--

Heath: And they chose the rim line. So then when people began seeing it in the restaurants, and saw how strong and functional and good it was, then we got other restaurants, and then people who wanted--so it then became the most popular thing we were doing.

Ross: So that was another factor in your progress in sort of the flow of what's happened to you in all these--as you were saying--

Tile Production, 1977

Heath: Yes, and then simultaneously with that, having worked a good deal with architects in making tile--well, the first architect that bought Heath tile had been with one of the oil companies in Europe, Holland or Dutch--some Dutch company. He had lived in Europe for many years, and had tile floors, and in the Middle East, in the Arabian countries. And he had to have a house, when he built his house in Sausalito, it had to have tile in it.

So his wife came to me and said, "Can't you make some tile for us?" And I said, "We really aren't set up to making tile. Let's try using the jigger wheel and see if it works. We'll make a square instead of a circle, we'll put a square cavity in the mold, and we'll spin it on the wheel and make a flat shape, we should be able to do that." And we were able to do it.

Ross: So the tile was another part of your development.

Heath: That we made in '57, before we moved into this building. And it didn't have enough texture, being just smooth, so she said she wanted some texture to it. So we experimented with--I said, "I don't want to imitate a texture. It's going against the flat plaster, so unless we carve some circles or do something--." She said, "Well, I'll figure out a texture." So she brought in a steel brush and she stippled the face of all of the tiles, and we cut a diagonal groove across the tile, on the face, so it had this diagonal groove with the stippling.

So that was our first tile job, and it was installed up here in Sausalito. So as a result of that, I thought, well, let's try casting tile. Maybe we can cast some in molds. And then we moved into this building. Leon Galletto I'd met in Pittsburgh at a national ceramic meeting, and in the design section, they had a European--let's see, there were three--I've forgotten who the other speakers--Leon came from Denmark. He was a Frenchman who had worked in a pottery in Copenhagen.

And I represented the American designer, and what we talked about was the need for the industry to have studio potters work in the industry to set a direction. It was then when--he had been in New York for a few months at that time, so he came to California. Specifically, he was going to work for Heath Ceramics.

So I said, "Well, really, Leon, we don't need another designer--there isn't anything for you to design. Gustin won't even take the things that I design now. They just say, 'We've got enough.' People just like what you do and they want to reorder that, and don't make anything more. So there's really not any room. I don't know what kind of a job you would have here. You don't want it." Because he himself was a potter, and a would-be designer--I mean, a studio potter.

But I said, "There is an area in which we could do some exploration, and that's in tile. So if you want to come in and fool around and work with me on it--" He got a job as a maitre d' at Sally Stanford's restaurant, so for a few months he came in and we tried to figure out ways of making tile, because we didn't have a press, and we couldn't make it on the jigger wheel, because we needed the jigger wheel for making plates.

So when we built this building, we had a little extra space where we explored the possibility of casting tile. But it was a very tedious and not a very good way of doing it, so we had to set up--Brian invented what he called the ribbon machine. He took a wringer of a washing machine and out of our pug mill, we had these sausages which we'd slice, and then put the slices through the wringer, and made a plaster bat that was three inches wide, or a little bit more than three inches, because when the clay shrunk and was fired, it always shrinks. So it was made three and a quarter-- a plaster thing that was thirty-six inches long and three and a quarter inches wide, and the clay then fed out onto these plasters. We had a lot of these; that's where the tile dried.

And then we could take a cutter, you see, and cut them to different lengths.

Ross: You could have used a pasta machine!

Heath: Well, he developed a device for--you could cut three-inch lengths, so we designed the three-by-three, the three-by-six, three-by-nine, three-by-twelve, and three-by-eighteens, we made some of those. I guess we made three-by-fifteens too. But the architects were afraid of using the long, skinny pieces.

But the three-by-threes and the three-by-sixes became great favorites, so that was the beginning of our tile--.



## VIII LABOR ISSUES AT HEATH CERAMICS

[Session 7: September 21, 1990] ##

Brian Invites Pottery Workers Union to Heath Ceramics

Ross: We were talking about the people who worked in the plant. Early in the interview last time, you spoke of--I think their name was Tompkins--Gwen and Warick Tompkins--

Heath: Gwen, yes.

Ross: And at that time, you said something about, "Well, we'll have to talk about that later," because she was a radical, evidently, and she is the one who--you mentioned--who organized the strike at your plant. Over the years, I have heard people talk about the strike, because I've always been involved with union people and such, and I think there is a story to tell there, and I'd like to hear it.  
[laughter]

Heath: Where do we begin?

Ross: Well, I would suggest that--

Heath: I'm curious to know what have you heard? Pro and con?

Ross: Well, both. Very much both. There's the union person who never crosses a picket line, never asking what the reason is, and maybe for selfish reasons, if I'm going someplace and there's a picket line and I want to go in there, it has to be pretty serious for me to not cross over. On the other hand, I live with a man who I claim has that Pavlovian reaction to a strike. So, the reaction by people like that is the same, don't cross. There is some problem with the strike, and I don't think the strike won out at your plant, or whatever.

And then there is a union leader who tells another story, about that it had--that it might not have been a justified union effort. So, having said all of that, and I'm sure that's not the way it's supposed to happen, meaning I shouldn't be telling you what I know--but that--

Heath: But I'm curious. In fact, there was a woman who lived in Sausalito who went back to school when she was about forty-five or fifty, and her field was sociology, and she chose the strike at Heath Ceramics for her doctorate. And she said that it was a strike that split the town of Sausalito down the middle. It became such an apparently horrendous thing that it was--because, you see, the strike went on for about--well, it was almost six months, I think. During that period of time--well, let me go back to the beginning.

Ross: What year was that?

Heath: I think it was about 1955. It was at any rate early in our--during the first nine or ten years of our being in business.

It began because Brian was also a pro-union man himself, so at some point early after we started in Sausalito, Brian was saying, "You know, the people really ought to have a union here in the shop." He was suggesting that.

Ross: And how many people did you have in the shop?

Heath: Oh, about ten. At any rate, there was always a good deal of discussion among all the people who worked there, who were progressive, liberal. They called in the organizer for the pottery workers union from Stockton--I think, because there was a pottery in Stockton--to come and talk to the people about what the pottery workers union was all about, and who was paid what. Because that was one of our problems, of knowing what is a fair wage for people working at the shop.

Ross: Now, when you say they called in, who was the "they?"

Heath: Whoever--I don't know who--

Ross: Somebody in your shop?

Heath: Yes. Invited the organizer--

Ross: And with the blessing of Brian and--

Heath: Yes. So when he came, he said, "There is--" and he had heard what the labor rates were in our working picture and so on, he said, "There isn't anything the union can offer you that's better than



what you have. In fact, it would be regressive for you to work--" in other words, they paid less than we were paying. Now, that may have been because it was in Stockton, and the working conditions there--the labor rates--but people living in Sausalito, it's a different group of people. And, to a large extent, they were all people in the arts, so they had had training in art schools or somewhere along the way.

But we were all really learning to do things together, except for this one couple I told you about last time who had been working in pottery since they were fourteen or fifteen back in Ohio, and had come west--I said that the jiggerman and the trimmer usually worked as a team, and this was a husband and wife--

Ross: That was Norman and Lelah Kinsley?

Heath: Yes. So they were the only people really who had factory experience, and had worked in potteries for twenty-five, thirty years, and knew all the ins and outs. And they were a great help to me and to Brian, and how these things are--what is the machinery that's available to do what.

#### Mine, Mill, and Smelter Workers Union

Heath: At any rate, whatever our pay scale was for them, they were very happy with the thing. But to hasten the story along, after about-- I'm not sure whether it was three or four years, after the--they chose then the Mine, Mill, and Smelter Workers Union.

Ross: Wait a second now. Who--the workers?

Heath: Yes.

Ross: But I thought you said the union leader--

Heath: They didn't join the--the pottery workers union said there's no point in organizing--taking you on as an organization. So then Gwen Tompkins got ahold of the Mine, Mill, and Smelter Workers Union, and of course they were eager to--you know, who--Mine, Mill, and Smelter Workers was the most left-wing union I think at the time, and they were I think headquartered down near Phoenix. Do you know about them?

Ross: No, I don't.

Heath: Well, at any rate, they were a very radical group. When they came in, they immediately, in order to give the workers something they already didn't have, was the seven-hour day and strict seniority. Those were the two things that we couldn't come to an agreement about, because in strict seniority, the only people who knew how to jigger and trim were the Kinsleys. And if something should happen to them, and strict seniority, then who was going to step into their shoes? Because there wasn't anyone else who was trained who could work at the machine and know what condition the clay should be in, and so on.

Ross: So they weren't talking about strict seniority within a job description, they were talking about--

Heath: No, because every job was a different job. No two people did the same thing. Well, the glazers, we had two or three glazers, and they glazed. But it was such a small shop that people were shifting from one thing--but the people who did the forming, that was that team, and they formed everything that was made in that shop.

So we said, "Well, we can't accept strict seniority, because then someday if something happens to the really skilled people we're dependent upon, we might as well close the doors."

The other thing was the seven-hour day. Now, the seven-hour day came about because we had worked out--over the years had evolved a system whereby a glazer could glaze fifty place settings a day. That was 300 pieces. So, as the years went on and the people who were glazing became more and more skilled, they could do more than 300 pieces in a day, because some of--we said, "Well, okay, if you've done your 300 pieces, go home." [laughter] What a mistake! Because then, they became the cream--you know, that wasn't fair, if they could--. So other people wanted--

Ross: Meaning it wasn't fair because they could speed up their work and be out of there, and the others were still there glazing?

Heath: Because they didn't have a numerical count on what they were doing. For instance, if you're a packer, how many pieces a day can you pack, and then can you go home? So we had to establish then some kind of a--which was establishing a piecework system, in effect. So we realized--and there was only one person who did it, and that was Pearl Drob, and she was really so adept and so skillful--

Ross: At doing--?

Heath: At the glazing. So that she could finish her 300 pieces with such ease, and the others were just--and it was also related to, you

couldn't hurry so that they'd come out seconds and be misglazed. So there were those people who just couldn't do as many pieces a day as she could. So then, the problem was, well, shall we pay Pearl more? Shall we go on a piecework system? And so we finally came to the conclusion, there's no way that a pottery this size can really arrive at a way of measuring each job, because for instance clay making: how many hours does it take to make a batch of clay, and what is the pay scale for that? Because we pretty much had-- everybody was paid the same amount, regardless of what your job was, in order that people--

Ross: So their hourly wage was the same, or their monthly--were you paying by the hour or by the month?

Heath: By the month, or two weeks, or whatever it was. Because we felt that every person was vital, so whether you were a packer or clay mixer or whatever, that everybody was as valuable--each person was valuable. So that the only incentive was this going home idea, and a seven-hour day. And that sounded so wonderful, that we'd be the first business in Marin County to have a seven-hour working day.

Ross: What was their working day before that, eight?

Heath: Eight. Well, we had two break periods--they worked actually seven and a half hours, because there were two fifteen-minute breaks, one in the morning and one in the afternoon.

Ross: And then an hour--

Heath: For lunch. So, Brian and I said, "Well, why don't we just make it a cooperative and have a profit-sharing system, and then divide up whatever the profits are? If we can't have a seven-hour day, let's find some other solution." Well, then, that was a big hassle about, no, they didn't want profit sharing, because maybe there wouldn't be any profits. [laughs]

So it just became one of these things that finally--we began negotiating, I think it was in May. In June was the design conference at Aspen. So Brian and I said, "Well, let's just leave. Let people just--we'll just close the shop and have someone just come in to answer the phone," and so on.

Ross: Now, when you did something like that, was that with agreement--

Strike, 1955, and Reaction

Heath: Well, we always had two weeks off in the summer anyway, for vacation. So we just lumped that together. And we told everybody, we said, "Well, when you guys decide what it is you want, then we'll re-open the shop." When we came back, they had decided they were going to have a strike. They were going to force us on a seven-hour day, and strict seniority.

So we said, "Okay, if that's the way you're voting, we have no choice but just simply close the shop." And so we virtually did, until--. They went on strike, and they sat out on the steps, like Madame Lafarge, that was Gwen Tompkins.

So it went on from--we came back from the conference, it was the end of June, and from then until September, Brian and I--there were four of us in management, if you want to call Brian and me part of the management. We made what we could make, the four of us, and we concentrated on ashtrays, because at that time it was the one thing we made that was the same that we could all--could make the best use of our time and our ability to glaze and fire the kilns and so on. So the four of us then just carried on by ourselves, and then people came from all over the--it was amazing. A potter came from Canada, a woman who had studied ceramics in New York and was working at the Modern Museum, and she heard about the strike, and she came out. These people came--they said, "Let us just work here. You don't have to pay us."

Ross: Is that right?

Heath: Yes. It was really quite remarkable, and it was so heartening, that we were getting these favorable responses as word got around as to what it was all about, and that's why the picking up our shipments, you see--theoretically, what's the union called that picks up, does the shipping?

Ross: UPS?

Heath: Yes, but their union? [pause] Oh, dear. People who are--. What union do the--

Ross: Oh, the Teamsters?

Heath: The Teamsters shouldn't have crossed the picket line, you see. And they said, "Well, this is a bum beef," and even Harry Bridges went along and said it was a bum beef.

Ross: You had essentially six picketers, then?

Heath: Yes.

Ross: Now, how were they--did they try to keep people from going into the shop?

Heath: Yes, they would walk up and down with their signs. See, they had to go up that flight of stairs, on what is now the Village Fair building.

Ross: So people came from Canada and from New York and they--

Heath: And Rhode Island School of Design. At any rate, so they crossed the picket line and went to work with us. So we became seven. See, we had been four, and then we became seven, and we'd had ten, so the people out on the picket line, of course, resented this very much. There was always name-calling. When I'd come to work, Gwen would call me all sorts of names.

Ross: How very unpleasant for a shop that had once had a camaraderie, you might say, and an understanding, to a sort of drag out personal battles, then? Did it become sort of a personal, one-to-one--

Heath: Oh, it was very hurtful. Judy Stone--do you know Judy Stone?

Ross: Yes.

Heath: She came in one day, during the strike, and she wanted to know what was really going on.

Ross: She's a journalist. She's now a film critic, but what was she then, do you know?

Heath: I'm not sure whether she was a reporter. I think she was still doing films at the time, I'm not sure.

Ross: But she's of the sort who would be wanting to know as far as--

Heath: She wanted to get the lowdown from the inside, and really what was going on. I remember telling her the story and just crying. Even now I can hardly talk about it.

Ross: It must have been very painful.

Heath: So came December, the rains began, and the people picketing then were doing it in the rains. Mort Sahl--I told you that story?

Ross: No, I don't believe so.

Heath: Oh. As part of his routine at the hungry i, was one of his sardonic little things about, "Do you know that great strike going over in Sausalito?" [laughter] "Organizing the people--they drive up in their Porsches, the employees are on strike, drive up--" making it a very hilarious kind of situation.

Ross: Oh, he had that ability. Had he been over there to see this, or how would he come to that?

Heath: Well, we knew him, because his wife was a roommate of the daughter of Viola Spolin who started the improvisational theatre. Well, her daughter-in-law had been a roommate of Mort Sahl's wife in Berkeley, and so we had met--he had been at our house a couple of times, and whenever we went to the hungry i we went and had a little bit of chat. So we never really were personal friends--and he knew what the strike--that was just the sort of material, of course, that he would relish.

Ross: Well, it does sound ominous, this huge strike going on in Sausalito. What was Judy Stone's response to it? Did she ever write about it?

Heath: No. Well, she was extremely--she said it was a very unfortunate thing that had happened.

#### Division in Sausalito

Ross: Well, she's the sister of the former I. F. Stone, and I was wondering if at any time he--even though he was international relations mostly, he also was interested in domestic things--whether or not she fed him some information about it for his bigger stories about unions and economies and this--

Heath: Oh, I'm sure that it might have been discussed, but I don't know whether--. I do know that they had a fundraising to raise money for the strike, in which Pete Seeger participated, with the strikers. But how much he knew about the beef, I don't know.

Ross: That's interesting. And was that a successful--?

Heath: It was in Sausalito; I presume it was some--I was very surprised, really, at what happened.

[phone interruption]

Ross: So the fundraiser for the strikers took place in Sausalito, and the town and everybody was well involved with--?

Heath: Well, that's where the division within the city, you see, took place, that there were these who were violently opposed to what the strikers were doing, and those who were pro-strikers.

Ross: How much chance did you get to tell your side of it?

Heath: None. We didn't even try to, except in discussing--you know, talking to friends about what was going on. In fact, many people that we knew through the political organizations and so on, we lost a number of friends who would never speak to us again.

Do you know Alexander Saxon?

Ross: No.

Heath: He's written two or three books. Well, they came up--well, it's not really very important. It's just that they were friends we had known in Chicago who came to Sausalito to live. He was a writer; she was a social worker. Had been a classmate of Brian's at the University of Chicago. They came specially to--in fact, they lived with us while they were finding a place to buy in Sausalito to live. When the strike began, they just cut us right off, and never again--.

Ross: Well, that's really--because I was trying to think, is this 1955 sort of the time of the McCarthy--?

Heath: Yes, it was.

Ross: I mean, there was a lot of fear but also a lot of "stand by your cause," and a lot of political action.

Heath: Oh, absolutely.

Ross: And I suppose one wonders how much all those fires built--

Heath: Well, it was the time of the Hollywood Ten, and--.

Ross: So people were really in the mood to protect the underdog, if they thought that was--

Heath: And we were part of the establishment.

Ross: Sure. You said that Bridges didn't think it was a fair strike. Did he ever make any public note of that?

Heath: Yes, he told the Teamsters it was okay, as far as he was concerned, to cross the picket line.

End of the Strike

Ross: Ah. So that was one of his unions. So, what happened, then? What developed?

Heath: Well, finally, when the months rolled by, and I guess bit by bit, the people who were on strike agreed that it was a bum strike, and they wanted to come back to work, but Gwen wouldn't--she was the union organizer for them, and she wouldn't adhere to it. So they would call us up and say, "I want to come back to work, but I can't, being a member of the union." So there was agitation within the six or whatever number of people there were in the union, pro and con. It finally whittled down that Gwen was the last one. The other five said, "Look, we're quitting. We don't want the union, we're going to go--we want to go back to work."

Ross: Did this include Norman and Lelah Kinsley?

Heath: Well, it must have.

Ross: Yes, because they were a part of the group--

Heath: And they were the first ones who--as far as they were concerned, it was a bum beef, but they were loyal union people, because they'd been members of the potters workers union for fifteen or twenty years, so they were loyal union people. Even though they were opposed to it, they were not the majority.

Ross: It was a real hard tug for them, I think.

Heath: Oh, it was.

Ross: Did they go back to work, then? You rehired them?

Heath: Yes. And so finally, I think it was on December 23, or just the day of Christmas or the day before, that finally Gwen came in and she said, "We give up." So we said, well, we would hire back all the people that we felt had been sympathetic with the problem, and had really not wanted to go on strike, but did so because of the loyalty to the union, but that we would not hire Gwen back.

Ross: You told her that?



Heath: Yes. We said, "Gwen, you've caused too much heartache and too much trouble, that we just can't do that." And so that was the end of the relationship with her.

Ross: Did she ever go on to work in a pottery plant again?

Heath: No, she finally moved off the *Wander Bird* houseboat up to one of the little towns, Inverness--up in that area--not Inverness, but in that area, at a hotel up there where there was a restaurant that she worked in. So she continued to live there.

Ross: Well, that was a pretty grim--

Heath: Indeed it was!

Ross: --history for a small plant like yours. But it was really over the seven-hour day?

Heath: And the strict seniority. And they did not want a profit-sharing plan.

Ross: Which had been offered to them.

Heath: Yes.

Ross: Did they know something about that, or why on earth--why would they think there would be no profit if the plant was running and they were working?

Heath: Well, there was so little profit, really--.

Ross: Now, a seven-hour day--maybe you said that, but I wasn't clear on why that wouldn't work?

Heath: Because we couldn't make enough pieces in the day on seven hours. Then it would have to be a price increase in the ware, or some other means of raising enough money to warrant.

Ross: So you wouldn't have time for production. And, obviously, seniority as you've explained it, was not an option.

Heath: Not in a plant where--

Ross: When they came back to work, the five or whatever, did they then stay for quite a while, did things go smoothly?

Heath: Yes. In fact, True Blackburn was there for--I think he retired finally about four or five years ago--he had been there thirty years or more.

Ross: What was their salary? Did you make any concessions at all, or did you continue to pay everybody the same salary in the plant?

Heath: I can't remember what the aftermath was, because as the people came from--well, one man who came from Canada, from Vancouver--see, I taught for two summers up at the University of British Columbia, taught ceramics, and that was why the people up there knew about the strike down here.

##

Ross: Did he stay, then?

Heath: Yes.

Ross: And the woman from New York also?

Heath: Yes. She later on, a year or two later, she developed cancer of the brain and it was a very sad thing, a young woman, she was barely thirty. She died. I'm just trying to recall what happened regarding a wage raise and so on, because it was shortly--we built the building, we moved out of the third floor of the Village Fair Building in 1960. We had bought land from the government that was left, sold off after the shipyards were discontinued--discontinued building ships in Sausalito when the war ended, and we bought an acre of land at that time for \$7,000, which was a remarkable buy! But it was such a junkyard, because of dismantling the shipyards, there were lumber and beams and material piled up just everywhere, so it was a very ugly--looked like a junkyard, that whole part of Sausalito.

Ross: What I want to do is to get to that when we get to the new building, but let's finish the strike.

Heath: Oh, yes. I'm just sitting here trying to recall, because we did not have a union, but we tried still to--we did set up a profit-sharing plan, and there are so many things that happened in the next two or three years, with the moving out into the new building, designing and building the building, then moving into that, and the profit-sharing plan that worked moderately well, I think.

But to conclude about union matters, after we moved into the new building, I had this invitation to go to England with Wedgwood, in Wedgwood making Heath pottery in England, and that was in '65.

While I was away--I was away for about nine months--and Brian was with me for a good bit of the time--he came back twice while I was working at Wedgwood in England. The people who were left in charge when we were away created so much--they tried to be more efficient than Brian and I were, so that if people were late in the mornings, they weren't permitted to enter the building.

When we went away, three people were left to sort of run the plant in our absence, and Leon Galleto became the dominant person in the trio. So people didn't like that situation, and they decided they were going to have a union to protect themselves--

Ross: Once again.

Heath: So again, we had another union coming into the plant. That was in the early seventies. We still have the union.

Ross: So they did come in then.

Heath: But no--then the next union that came in was not the Mine, Mill and Smelter Workers, but the Longshoremen. It was not the pottery workers, because we still had a better deal than anything they could get from the pottery workers union. But the Longshoremen were more sympathetic to what we were doing, but they still didn't know how to really negotiate for skills. The system we have now and have had for twenty-odd years was my proposal. One of the things I proposed, in order to have people feel that we had at least some kind of a progressive idea, that each person would get a raise based on longevity of service.

#### Salaries and Benefits

Heath: So each year, the people who had been there the longest, they automatically just got an increase in wages, instead of negotiating a union contract periodically, every one or two years, and so on. Maybe by having some built-in evolutionary pay scale, that that would obviate the need to always be haggling about--because union meetings and union contract arrangements are still very painful to go through. Because you see, I think to the people who work in the shop, because of the reputation we have, they think that we are very wealthy, or that we make lots of money, because our prices are

high, comparatively, to other products that are made. But we still do it in such a way that it's far more of a hands-on approach than the businesses that we are competing with, so that I think that for people who aren't really informed--although we try to keep people informed all the time of--

Ross: You mean people in the shop?

Heath: Yes. The union people as well--anyone--about our finances--we say, "You can look at our books anytime you want to, it's open for you to look at." But they don't want to look at them. They say, "That's your business. You make the profits. We don't want to look at your books."

Ross: That's interesting, because you wonder how they can negotiate a contract for members without some knowledge--

Heath: Of what goes on. And I think that's probably one of the most difficult arrangements. Now, there are many people who work at the shop that, so far as they're concerned, they're members of the union not because they feel that they need a union, but because it's a thing to do, sort of.

Ross: And because it's there, and you can't hire somebody who doesn't join, and they have to pay union dues.

Heath: That's right. But we have so little turnover in help, you see, that it's the same people who are there all the time, and as the costs of living go up in Marin County, it does become very difficult for people to make a living and do the kind of work they do at our shop, and still live in Marin County. So people are commuting from long distances away, because they can't afford to live nearby. Property values have gone up, the rents are such, so it's--every year it becomes more of a problem of how long can we really manage to have a factory in Marin County?

Ross: So your salaries have had to reflect the cost of living.

Heath: The other thing that also has become very horrendous is our medical costs, because the medical plans that we carry, and dental and eye care and so on, as well as life insurance for everybody--

Ross: Oh, you have life insurance?

Heath: Yes, so if someone dies, the heirs inherit--I think it's a ten thousand dollar insurance policy that each person has.

Ross: So what you have is what the union requires?

Heath: Well, to a large extent, they were things that we had already--we already had a health plan. In fact, I don't think there's really very much that the union has done that wasn't already in existence. What they did was to codify it, and they made it more rigid, so that for instance, we had what's called job bidding. That is, if a job opens up or someone leaves, then people working in the shop can bid on the new job, if it's of interest to them. And everyone is paid the same, once you reach a certain--the only difference in pay is based on longevity of service.

Ross: For everybody in your shop?

Heath: Yes.

Ross: Even the man who carries the sack?

Heath: Yes. And I get blamed for that many times, and Brian said, "It's your fault, for saying everybody should be paid the same!" And I said, "Well, I feel that--" I still feel that every job is important.

Ross: Is essential to the final product.

Heath: Yes. And to distinguish, so that the starting wage, of course, is lower than somebody who's been there for twenty years or ten years and so on, but eventually they too--so that the starting wage is low, but they still get all the benefits of the health plan and the insurance, and so on. And so that has really been, I think, the thing that people working at the shop over periods of time, they learn how important medical care is. That is a very important thing in a person's life.

Ross: Yes. And I think more and more, as medical costs go up for everybody, you hear people speaking of staying in jobs where the medical plan or the retirement plan or whatever affords them the security from some of the risks that life these days--

Heath: Yes. Well, and medical costs are just inordinate. I can't off the top of my head remember now how much it's gone up in the last three or four years, but it's doubled and tripled.

Ross: Yes. What plan do you have?

Heath: Oh, we've had shifting--so that--

Ross: They have a choice?

Heath: Yes.

- Ross: So that it could be Kaiser, they could have another health plan. Do you have Kaiser?
- Heath: We did--well, then some people go to Kaiser.
- Ross: So, in terms of the strike and the town of Sausalito in 1955, you were rather important to the city in terms of just the art festival and all the things that were going on. Did newspapers carry the strike story, and did people--was it really quite an attention-getter?
- Heath: I don't recall that it was much in the newspapers.
- Ross: So it was mostly localized?
- Heath: Well, it was just word of mouth. After all, Sausalito is a fairly small town.
- Ross: Right. What happened, by the way, with your seconds shop? Did people come, or was that also--?
- Heath: Well, that continued from the Village Fair days.
- Ross: But I meant during the strike, did people stay away, did they not cross the picket line?
- Heath: As far as I recall, I think that people still came in. I don't recall--
- Ross: And Fraser's could still sell--
- Heath: See, the seconds were sold through a trade fair, not directly in our shop. It was in the same building, but down on the ground floor. So I don't know that people necessarily associated--well, I don't know. After all, this is almost forty years ago.
- Ross: And say shops like Fraser's in Berkeley who were so well known for carrying Heath pottery.
- Heath: Oh, that was a remarkable thing, that during those months when we were on strike, our distributor, the N. S. Gustin Company, was worried that we would lose all our retail accounts, but the minute the strike ended--and all accounts were notified of our strike--they all came back. We didn't suffer from--no. Many of the shops were not getting what they were waiting for.
- Ross: But it certainly speaks well for the product.
- Heath: Yes.

## IX NEW BUILDING AT THE OLD SHIPYARDS, 1965

Tearing Down Government Structures

- Ross: Well, that's an interesting history. So, let's move on to the actual plan and the design of the new building. You were talking about the purchase of the property for \$7,000, and what a mess it was. As I recall, that was an area where there was nothing.
- Heath: The footings from the building--the concrete footings that stuck up out of the ground--
- Ross: From what?
- Heath: From the buildings that were torn down, the foundations.
- Ross: From the shipbuilding?
- Heath: Yes.
- Ross: So the government tore that down?
- Heath: Yes.
- Ross: Why did they do that?
- Heath: Because there was no longer--shipyards had come to an end.
- Ross: But was there no way to use those buildings for anything?
- Heath: There was only one building that remained that we used, and that had been the fire station. We made clay there, because as our business grew down in the Village Fair Building, there wasn't room any more to mix clay there. We had to have more space to do the various things that we needed to do, just the sheer inventory increase.

Ross: Well, it seems that after the war it was sort of the way of the military to tear down the buildings. For instance, Camp Beale, which was an air force base, I believe, up near Marysville. My own father dismantled buildings and brought the material home to Turlock and built a duplex. The idea was that the government wanted to get rid of everything, as though war would never happen again and they would never need this. It was that--maybe it was an agreement or a way to restore the country without all those ugly things that war had required. Do you know anything about that?

Heath: Well, there were many war industries that as soon as the war ended, that went out of business.

Ross: Yes, but in terms of--for instance, why did they go to the trouble of tearing down that building, instead of say, selling the land and the building, and somebody--

Heath: I don't think there were many buildings that--for instance, the loft where they laid out the pattern for the ships, they needed a large, open space for making the drawings, the templates for shipbuilding, and they used the Village Fair Building, that's what the top floor was used for.

Ross: I remember that.

Heath: And so there weren't any really official--there was the acetylene building--I've forgotten what that was used--well, acetylene torches were used for welding all the parts in the shipyard, and the acetylene building was so heavily built out of concrete that that remained. That was on the property that we bought. And the fire station. The fire station we used then for clay mixing, all the years of--starting I think in--I think we bought the property in '47 or '48--

Ross: Oh, you had bought it that early?

Heath: Oh, yes, right after we came. Because we knew when we rented the top floor of the Village building, we had a five-year lease, and then we had another five-year lease, and we knew that eventually we'd have to--that that space would not be large enough for us, and if it was a viable business at all, that we would have to have more space. So that was the reason for buying the land.

Ross: And lucky you did.



Moving One Section at a Time

Heath: Oh yes, we had to. That was pre-planning. The thing that delayed it so long was that it was such an ugly area, that I just hated to put a building in there in the midst of all this dump and this junkyard. But finally it got to the point in the late fifties when we had too many orders and we just simply couldn't fill them in that building, and we had to build in order to grow and have the room.

Ross: So did you keep your plant going in the old area?

Heath: In downtown Sausalito, yes, while we were building the plant up at the north end of town. And then we gradually over a period of--we moved the mold-making and the clay preparation first, because we had to have extra molds in the new building. So we moved in I think about four or five different shifts. First, got all the clay-making equipment installed and the mold-making, and then that part of the group where the people worked in the old shop came down to the north end of town and worked there.

Then the next thing that was moved was the forming equipment, and then finally the glazing, and then the packing and shipping.

Ross: And where was the firing being done?

Heath: Oh, and the kilns--well, as soon as we started forming--

Ross: Then the kilns got moved? So you didn't ship materials back and forth?

Heath: No, no.

Ross: That must have been quite a--

Heath: Oh, that was a nice little game that was played there.

Edith Designs the Plant

Ross: I was going to say, that is quite a logistical--

Heath: Yes. Well, you see, I had designed the building so I knew exactly where everything was going to be, because we wanted to have as little waste space between one phase and the next phase. You see, when you make a piece of clay work, it's handled a minimum of

sixteen times, so you want to have as little waste space between one activity and the next one and the next one. So I designed it as sort of a doughnut, with a hole in the middle. That was an interior patio with the light coming in from all sides, so the central patio would light the activities that were--and everything was lined up against the walls with the light, the windows--

Ross: Sort of at your back.

Heath: Sort of--yes. So you're working with--looking outdoors across your machinery.

Ross: Yes. Let me ask you, in the design--was this the first thing that you, Edith, had designed?

Heath: No, we designed the houseboat.

Ross: Oh, yes. And you built that.

Heath: Ourselves.

Ross: So this was--I guess I wasn't thinking--sure, you did, because the houseboat was essentially a flat piece of land on which you built a house. But now you're building a plant where you anticipate staying and having many employees and activities, and yet you're talking about the pleasantness of working, the patio--was this sort of a Frank Lloyd Wright--

Heath: Yes, very much so. The same way--the houseboat, too, is similar with much windows and looking out to the bay on the one side and into the hillside.

Ross: So you knew that you were going to do the plant design?

Heath: Oh, no one else could, because they wouldn't be as intimate with what had to take place, so I had to do it. We worked with Marquis and Stoller, who was the architecture firm, and they said, "Well, you make the floor plan." So I started by just cutting up pieces of paper that were the size of each piece of equipment, and the carts that would be needed to move things from here and there, so that the space was planned on the basis of the actual size of the--where the jigger wheel was going to go, and the carts, and where the kilns were going to sit, and how much space they occupied. Because that determined how big the building, the perimeter of the building--

Ross: So you started with the inside needs, and then--

Heath: And with counting the number of carts, how many plates you could get on, how many molds you could get on a cart. I still have the plan and all the little bits and pieces of paper and the plan that was worked out. And when Marquis and Stoller saw that, they said, "You don't need much help from us!" [laughter] Because the other thing is that since it was on the filled area, in terms of earthquake, it was very critical as to the kind of building that would go onto that ninety feet of fill that was under us. We had had borings taken, and twenty-nine feet deep was sort of coarse rock and gravel, and then underneath that was just mud for ninety feet.

Ross: Ninety?

Heath: Yes. When they built whatever buildings were left from the shipyards, Toshi Monroe told us that at the time when they were building the shipyards--she was one of the people who worked in our shop whose husband was the sculptor, and she was born in Sausalito. She said she watched as they drove those pilings, and they drove three thirty-foot lengths of pilings down into the mud in building the shipyards. So many of those pilings were still there, you see.

Ross: Which you could use.

#### Building Weathers the 1989 Earthquake

Heath: Which we were--we knew where they were located, so that the engineer who worked with us on planning the perimeter of the building--he was our engineer, Bill Gilbert--said that he would do it like the Tokyo Hotel, that the slab would float and the perimeter of the building would be on a continuous foundation, separate from the floor itself, so in an earthquake, the perimeter of the building would be free to move independently of the floor.

Ross: Have you had to test this?

Heath: Yes, we had the earthquake, remember this year?

Ross: Yes, well, but did that affect you particularly?

Heath: Oh, of course!

Ross: I was thinking that it wasn't so much.

Heath: Oh, well, it's remarkable that there was so little damage.

Ross: It worked.

Heath: It worked! The earthquake was around 5:05 in the afternoon, and most of our kilns had already been turned off by that time, but there were two kilns that were still going. I wasn't in the building, I was over on Paradise Drive that afternoon, working, so I wasn't in Sausalito during the earthquake.

Ross: Was Brian there?

Heath: Yes. He was just leaving the building, driving in his car, and then he came to an intersection where he saw these wires--the telephone poles weaving back and forth and the wires swinging down in front of the car, and realized--first, he thought there was something wrong with the car, the way it was behaving, and then he realized that it was an earthquake, and there was a police car right behind him at the stoplight where he was, and he motioned for him to go.

##

Heath: The people who were left at the shop turned off the kilns and ran out of the building.

Ross: Oh, they did turn them off.

Heath: And as they got out into the parking lot, all the cars were jumping up and down like this, but inside of the building on this floating slab, it wasn't vibrating. So outside was worse than being inside. So, as soon as the earth shaking stopped, then the question was, shall we now turn the kilns back on? Because if they didn't, it meant that everything that was in the kilns would be underfired and you can never reclaim it if it's that late in the firing. So it was a question--and also not knowing whether anything tipped over in the fire either.

Ross: And also not knowing the severity of this whole--

Heath: At any rate, they turned them on, finished the firing, and the next day, there was one top shelf that had collapsed, and that was all.

Ross: Amazing!

Heath: And it was a shelf that had some casseroles that had the lids on top of them, and the posts were just too tall so whatever little shaking there was, the posts tipped over. There were some lost, but it was very minor.

Ross: And what about in the rest of the building?

- Heath: Nothing happened. Not a single thing. No windows broken, no nothing.
- Ross: I have been in your shop, and there are more goodies that could fall down--all the plates, and all the things in the seconds shop, and they all held their place?
- Heath: That was what was so remarkable. Here the cars in the parking area were all jumping up and down, but inside there weren't any dishes that fell down.
- Ross: Amazing. So, that was part of the design--
- Heath: Of the building originally.
- Ross: And thank goodness.

#### Influence of Frank Lloyd Wright

- Heath: Well, you asked the question about Frank Lloyd Wright, who had influenced it, not only in the design, but in the engineering, because Bill Gilbert was a big fan of Wright's way of building too.
- Ross: So, did you design the whole building and build it right up or--
- Heath: Yes. We knew that--Bill said that to have the building be as lightweight as possible, so I--
- Ross: What does that mean, lightweight?
- Heath: Not use materials that are heavy. In other words, whether the roof was made out of--and the walls were made out of, it should be as light a weight as one could get.
- Ross: Give an example of what would be heavy and what would be light.
- Heath: Oh. Well, a light--if you had one sheet of plywood; in other words, you couldn't make a building with just three-quarter-inch plywood--or a metal building is lightweight. The corrugated lightweight. Not stone, or concrete, or heavy timbers.
- Ross: Or cement block.
- Heath: That's heavy. Yes. So, I designed the building, because I wanted good window space, and window space that was four feet off the floor, so people working--because most of the jobs you're standing,

they can stand and be able to look out. And the machinery could be pushed up against the wall, you see. So, the building was designed on ten-foot module--well, it was really a six-four, so every six feet, there would be six feet and four feet, six, four, six, four--that's the rhythm in the building.

### Trof-Dek Roofing

Heath: So we put up all the posts first, which were tied down with big anchors into the concrete fitting, and then the ceiling--we found in Berkeley a plywood firm that was making what was called a Trof-Dek roofing, with design development--had come from England--in which plywood with--they used eighth-inch plywood shaped like a beam, twelve inches deep, the sides of--there was a two-by-six at the bottom of the beam, and a two-by-eight at the top, and then the plywood went between this eighth-inch plywood.

Ross: So there's a space between--

Heath: It's called a Trof-Deking. Very lightweight, and would span up to sixty feet without posts. So that's what we designed with the idea that there would be no interior posts in the building, just the walls that carried the spans, so that there would be flexibility.

Ross: And did this trof roof serve as a lighter material--

Heath: Yes, and it came to this building site having been fabricated into four-foot widths, so there would be three trofs made four feet and sixty feet long, so it was just raised up and laid on top of the building.

Ross: How did they get it here? Sixty feet, you said?

Heath: On trucks.

Ross: On a longbed truck?

Heath: Yes.

Ross: And then they had to use these cranes to get it into place?

Heath: Forklifts.

Ross: That must have been--

Heath: And that roof was put on I think in a matter of a couple of days.

- Ross: Now, that was something new to you. Did you have a lot of--what were your feelings about the tried and true--
- Heath: In fact, there were already three buildings--the Berkeley Plywood, I think it was called, only made three buildings with that kind of a roofing.
- Ross: What happened?
- Heath: There wasn't any--it had such limited use.
- Ross: Why would that be?
- Heath: Well, you wouldn't use it in a home necessarily, and it isn't strong enough for a highrise, because it's eighth-inch plywood, is not--I guess it's quarter-inch plywood--
- Ross: So its real advantage, then, was the fact that you could have--
- Heath: It's lightweight--
- Ross: --and make it so long without support in between.
- Heath: It's a rare occasion that there would be use for such a design. I'm not sure what the history is, why it was developed in England necessarily--I think it was used maybe for barracks buildings in Europe, in England. Barracks buildings would be a place where it could be used, in place of the metal buildings that are usually built for such purposes.
- Ross: And you just did research on this, and you came across--
- Heath: Well, we kept asking, "What's a lightweight roofing, what can we get?" We talked about--I'm trying to go back and recollect now the evolution, but the minute we heard about this thing, we said, "Oh, that's just what we need." So once we had the floor plan and the modular system, the only thing the architects changed in my design was the entrance to the building, a recessed entrance, this doughnut shape with a recessed entrance at the front. I had it twenty feet wide, and they said, "Well, the proportions are a little off. Why don't we make it thirty feet." So that was the only thing they changed.
- Ross: So they did all the details of--?
- Heath: Well, they made the drawings, the working drawings and the engineer work, with the engineer, put the whole thing together. And then later on, ten or twelve years later, when we added the tile plant to the building, then I called them, I said, "Well, now we've got

to have an addition to our building." He said, "You don't need to call us." [laughter]

Ross: What a compliment!

Heath: He said, "If you want any help, you bring us the drawings and show us what it is, and we'll have a look at it." And they said, "You know more about what it should be than we do." In fact, he called me up when the [California] College of Arts and Crafts was building a ceramics building at the school, and they got the commission to do the--or at least they were bidding on it--and they called me up and said, "Would you help design the pottery building for the College of Arts and Crafts? We don't know what kind of equipment they use or how they do it."

It's like designing a hospital, for instance. It's so specific.

Ross: Did you help with it?

Heath: I said, "Well, if you get the bid, and you want my advice or help, I'll be happy to do it." But they never--I don't know whether they got the--they said, "Well, will you put in a good word for us with them?" So I talked with somebody over there. I said, "I'm calling you to recommend Marquis and Stoller, they helped me very much in building our building in Sausalito."

### The Design Process

Ross: In the planning process, tell me about it in terms of your enjoyment or your--how much time and what--because it sounds like a colossal project.

Heath: Oh, it's great--if I hadn't been a potter, I'm sure I would have been an architect. Because it's a putting together of many elements. See, that's what you do in ceramics is you put together a fantastic--it is the most complex fabrication there is. Steel is somewhat like it, glass-making is related to it, because it has to do with materials that come out of the ground that you then fabricate, so that the steel and glass and clay are all considered really a ceramic industry, because all involve heat. That's what the word "ceramic" is, what is the Greek word, ceramos is fire, or--? Something related to fire.

And architecture is like that. You have many elements that you have to put together, the materials used in the floor, the



walls and ceilings and so on. So to that extent, the complexity is what's fascinating.

Ross: But if I remember correctly, you didn't have formal education as an architect--?

Heath: Well, yes, but when you study art history, which I did at the Art Institute for two years, every--twice a week you spent looking at slides of not only painting and sculpture; in fact, much of art history has to do with buildings, as you well know. The cathedrals, the castles, all the--

Ross: But the actual materials and things--I mean, the detail that--

Heath: Oh, that's what you do. I remember doing Roman floor plans as part of an art history class. Oh, yes, it's to a large extent involved in architecture. You see, the thing that's common also to both is that clay was a material that in fact--clay, the written history of clay--I mean, the history of the world really you find in the clay. Writing on clay tablets, the building of things out of clay--stone was used, and before stone, people lived in caves, let's say. So that clay and architecture sort of go hand in hand through history.

Ross: But it's still amazing to me that you can feel that--you can design that building with such detail--I know that it must have been a great delight to you to be working on that.

Heath: Well, it's like playing with blocks, sort of. If you know the size, and you've got the catalogue, you're going to buy that piece of equipment, that kiln will occupy that much space, it weighed so much, and so therefore what was the requirement from the engineering point of view. See, the kilns, where the kilns sit in the building, the slab there is like three feet deep. So it's a huge space that takes this big heavy weight.

Ross: Did you supervise the pouring of the concrete stand?

Heath: [laughs] I was there all the time. Hanging the beams, repainting everything so that when it went up it was already finished.

Ross: It was finished! I remember. When I was helping Brian build the tennis court, and we were laying cement or whatever it was, there you were and there was this happening--had I known then what I know now of that, I would have probably been more understanding of your saying to Brian, "That's not the way to do it!" [laughter] And of course, it buckled, didn't it?

Heath: Well, Bill Gilbert engineered that, too. So if it buckled, you see, there is a big rock outcropping through the center of that

hill, so that on either side of the length of it, is where the hill begins to go down, so that there isn't rock all the way underneath the tennis court. It's up to a certain point, and at that point, we had to put a deep beam wall--that's why there's that space underneath the tennis court. That heavy wall that comes down, and then the rest of the tennis court is cantilevered over the top of that. So where the break occurred was--although it was fairly well engineered for the cantilevering of that roof, there was just--that shift, I think, was really minor. And the tennis court is how old now?

Ross: Fifteen years?

Heath: Something like that. And I think there's been about--at the far end of the cantilever--see, there are posts there, and I noticed the other day when I was over there that there has been a settlement of about a half an inch right there.

Ross: Right. But during the building of your plant, you were there every day?

Heath: Well, just as I was at the building of the tennis house, too. I got a great vision of something else [laughing] to do over there in my head that's related to these little things out here.

### The Building Process

Ross: Oh, yes? How long did it take to build the building, from the beginning to the end?

Heath: I think we started in September--or we started the planning in early--in the winter months, during the rainy season I remember. Early in 1960. And began working with Marquis and Stoller I think around March, hoping that we'd start in the summer. But to get all the permits to the county and so on, that we really didn't get our permit to start building until late September. And we were putting the roof on the day before--two or three days before Christmas. And then it rained.

Ross: I was going to say, that's a pretty rainy time.

Heath: Yes. But we were lucky that there was no rain at all between September and December 22 or 23. Most of the roof was on, there was only one little section above the entrance which we used--that area that we use as a lunch room.

Ross: And the building is thirty years old. Did you make any mistakes?

Heath: It was too small! [laughs]

Ross: How soon was it too small?

Heath: Almost immediately, but that was the size of the lot, so there wasn't anything we could do. We had a big debate about whether we should have a continuous kiln that fired twenty-four hours of the day, and having a night crew, and that meant that if we had a continuous kiln, it had to be much longer than any single kiln, and there just wasn't room for a continuous kiln.

Ross: How many acres is that--?

Heath: It was a half-acre to start with, because then we bought the two parcels that were adjacent to it later on, when we did the tile department. So we added to it at that time.

Ross: I guess when you first built the building, it was the only building there--

Heath: Yes, practically. And they were beginning to clean up the area, so that it wasn't quite so disreputable looking.

We bought the half-acre first, and then we bought what was maybe an eighth of an acre. That was to give us a part--we were required--see, when the original building was built, we built right to the perimeter of the property. That was no longer legally allowed in Sausalito, to build right on the property line. So they required that if we built onto the building, that we had to have-- I've forgotten what it is--20 percent open space, or maybe even more. And so the second parcel we bought really just made it legal. Very little of that space could be used for building.

Ross: After the fact, could they do that to you?

Heath: Well, any addition that we added--the addition would have to provide for open space.

Ross: Could the open space be for parking--

Heath: For parking, yes. So on the purchase of the second piece, it didn't give us enough to be able to enlarge at all. It really gave us parking space, and some office--that's where Brian's office is. That double section in there. And then we had to buy the third parcel, which had two metal buildings on it. That was owned by a firm in Chicago that was left over from the shipyard days. McDonald Engineering owned that piece of property with the two

metal buildings on it, and they had not used it at all after the war ended. So we bought that parcel, and then incorporated those two metal buildings into our first building, connected them.

Ross: So initially, your building was a one-story?

Heath: Yes.

Ross: And then you built onto it. And you have those catwalks and the big offices--

Heath: We had to build--the two metal buildings weren't adequate for what we had, so we did build another whole section that goes with those. That is not as well designed, because it just--the requirement of the city or the county for open space, there was just no way that we could design that to be as efficiently laid out, so there's a great deal of waste space walking back and forth from where the press, where the tile is--from clay mixing and the pressing of the tile, and then we have to go to the far end to glaze and then bring it back, because the only place there was room for the kilns was in the center.

#### Tile Plant Design

Heath: So for a tile plant, the best design is starting at one end and exiting at the other end. So the raw materials--at one end you start forming the tile, and then into the dryer, out of the dryer, and into the glazer, and the glazing into the kiln, from the kiln to the packing, and out the door.

Ross: But you did it in a circle.

Heath: Well, that was for dinnerware production.

Ross: Oh, I see. Now, you're talking about the addition. Are those two quite separate operations?

Heath: Yes. The only thing that's common is that, to a certain extent, some of the dinnerware glazes are used on the tile, so the glazes are duplicated. We don't use any of the glazes I designed for tile for dinnerware, because they're much too abrasive. And they're different, in order to take traffic, so they're not suitable for dinnerware glazes, but you can use a dinnerware glaze on tile that's used, for instance, on walls or kitchens.

Ross: As long as it doesn't have to be walked on.

Heath: That's right. Or bathrooms, and so on.

### Use of Extrudable Material

Heath: Right now, so far as building is concerned, I'm working on these extruded shapes, because wood--the future, we cannot build wooden houses as we have.

Ross: "We"--our society?

Heath: Our society, the world. The forests can't be cut down. We've got to have the forests. So the most inexpensive material that's abundant in the world is clay.

Ross: And it's available everywhere.

Heath: Everywhere. So the country that has made the greatest use of clay as a building material is Italy, and they extrude shapes and prefabricate buildings much as in prefabricated wooden buildings that have been designed. And people like Buckminster Fuller, who designed the dome, that clay is an extrudable material.

Ross: Can you explain--extrude means you press out--

Heath: To press, or something that's pressed, like toothpaste is extruded.

Ross: It seems like such a strange concept from--

Heath: Yes, metal is extruded. Anvil iron.

Ross: So now the clay would be--

Heath: Extruded. And you can extrude--well, sewer tile, for instance, made out of clay, is extruded around--and there are various dimensions. And cement--there are cement extrusions. Roofing tile, the Spanish type, is an extruded shape. Now, the early tiles that were formed in that half-round were formed over people's thighs. You took a cut of square clay and laid it on your thigh, and then pressed it down like that. And put it in the sun to dry. So that was the beginning of using clay as a curved shape on roofs. Because in Europe, the roofs, the materials that are used for roofing are slate to a large extent. There are areas of Europe where slate is mined.

The Ribbon Technique

[Session 8: January 12, 1991] ##

- Ross: We were talking about the building and the architecture, design, and so forth. You said that you outgrew it immediately, and you had to add to the building. Let's talk more about that.
- Heath: The original building was completed in 1960. We had a small area where we made tile by putting the clay through what was like a clothes wringer. Brian developed a system for squeezing the clay through the wringer, and then we sliced the tile into plates. This we called the ribbon technique of making tile: we took an extrusion of a round pug and with a wire made slices of clay three feet long which we put through the wringer on plaster, plaster that was three and an eighth-inch wide, which then we could trim along the edges, so that when the tile shrunk and was fired, it would come down to being nominally a three-inch width, allowing for the grout space. So it was two and seven-eighths in the front and sides, and this ribbon we could then slice into three-inch lengths, or six- or nine- or twelve-, fifteen-, eighteen-, twenty-one-; and the longest we made were twenty-four-inch lengths by three-inches wide.

Tile for the Los Angeles County Museum, 1962-1972

- Heath: We did that for about two years, I think. The L.A. [Los Angeles] County Museum, I think, was under construction. They wanted us to make tile for that, but a three-inch module was just too small. So we arranged to work in a plant in Los Angeles where they had a press, so for the period between 1962 to 1972, a ten-year period, the tile was made in Los Angeles.
- Ross: Let me interrupt you one moment. Up until 1962, you had been doing strictly--
- Heath: Only dinnerware. We did one job that we talked about last time, for the man and wife who had lived in the Middle East.
- Ross: Oh, so that was actually the decision to start, or you sort of moved into it from their need.

Heath: Yes. The idea of making architectural tile grew out of that experience. We had made the tile on our jigger wheel, with a six-inch-by-six-inch cavity cut into a plaster circle which we filled with clay, rather than pressing or casting. So that the ribbon machine was the beginning of developing a modular system for tile. Most building materials came in eight-foot lengths and four-foot widths, like plywood, Masonite, plasterboard, and Celetex, the structural module at that time for contemporary architecture. Post and beam construction on four-foot centers was the new architecture of that period.

Ross: What did you call it?

Heath: Post and beam construction. Posts were four feet apart, secured to headers that carried beams resting above posts at four-foot intervals. This was--I'm not sure who--I have to try to think back as to who really began this system of architecture. I thought, well, if we make tiles that are a three-inch module, they will all fit into one foot, and the one foot could go into four by eight feet. For instance, kitchen counters were usually two feet wide, and many of the dimensions in architecture were based on this four-by-eight-foot module. So that was the reason for developing--it could have been four-by-four tile, that would divide into twelve inches, which came fifteen years later.

We started with the three-inch module. The tiles that were on the market at the time were four and a quarter and four and a quarter. It had been the accepted size tile for bathrooms for a long, long time, before the advent of plywood. So the use of the three-inch module was new, as far as I knew, in the tile industry.

So, when the museum in L.A. wanted to use the tile, they wanted twelve-by-twelve tile. Our distributor had a pottery in L.A. that was not fully occupied, so he suggested we use that plant to make the tile for the L.A. County Museum. So he made twelve-by-twelves there on a ram press for us.

#### New Technique at Pasadena Museum of Art, 1969

Ross: And what was your arrangement with that shop there? You just rented the space and the staff--

Heath: No, he figured out the cost of manufacturing the tile, and we paid him for making the tile. And that was where the tile was made for the Pasadena Museum about eight years later. We designed the tile for the Pasadena Museum of Art in collaboration with the

architecture firm Ladd and Kelsey, the whole exterior of the building. And in that case, we developed a five-by-fifteen-inch tile. The fifteen-inch module worked because the tile setters didn't have to cut tile on the job. My idea was that tile should be designed to "fill a space" as in filling a space within a canvas. The architects gladly concurred.

Ross: After it was fired and ready to be put--

Heath: That you designed the tile so that it would fit the common dimensions that were used in architecture.

Ross: And that was sort of a new idea?

Heath: I don't know of anyone who was using that system, or thought that way about designing tile. But at any rate, whatever job was coming up, if there was a dimension within the architectural layout, for instance with the Pasadena Museum, a fifteen-inch length worked better than a twelve-inch length, or a nine- or an eight-inch. Originally, the architects had thought about using a four-by-four on a diagonal, a relief tile that was an imitation of stone, and they wanted me to press clay onto a stone, and cut it into four inches, and then set it on a diagonal. I tried that, and I thought it was so fake that I just said, "I can't do that." And they said, well, they wanted something that was evocative of Hadrian's tomb in Rome--that was the kind of feeling that they wanted for the museum, the exterior of the building.

I said, "Well, let's try to get it through the glaze and the color of the glaze, and not through a three-dimensional copy taken off of a stone impression." So I made--worked on glaze formulas that were organically dynamic using one glaze that would melt earlier than another, so that when it melted, it would break through the more refractory glaze that was superimposed on top of the other. As glazes melt, they boil. A lower melting glaze would boil up through a stiff glaze that is on the top, creating a volcanic bubbly eruption frozen in time. So that was what we ended up using for that building.

Ross: Did they like that immediately?

Heath: Yes.

Ross: What colors were they?

Heath: We initially, because the building was to cover one square block, they thought that--and it was in a residential neighborhood--that it would be too bulky to make it all in the same color. So they suggested that we use three--four colors, a quadrant. In other



words, a fourth of the building would be one color, and each block another color. And when we tried that and put it on the model, I said it just didn't work, and they agreed that it didn't work. So it was all done in--the glaze that melted first was a black onyx glaze, and on top of the black onyx we tried a green, a blue, a red, and a beige or yellow, let's say.

And the one that was chosen was the red over the black, so it was a brick red glaze over the onyx, the onyx bubbled through the brick red color. On the skyline where the building was built, the hills in the background in Pasadena had that same kind of a purpley-red-plum color in the distance, so the silhouette of the building against the mountains--it was very handsome.

#### AIA Award, 1971

Ross: Stunning, I would think. And that remains today?

Heath: Yes. And I think it was on the basis of that tile and that building that finally in 1971, the AIA, the American Institute of Architects, gave me a gold medal for work in ceramics. The Pasadena Museum was completed in '69, and it was in '71 that I was given the gold medal.

Ross: Tell me about that. How did you find out about it, or did you know that you had been nominated for that?

Heath: Oh, yes. The Bay Area architects--many of them were friends of ours. And so they submitted my name to the committee that each year decides--each year the AIA awards not only to their own members, but to anyone who's making a contribution to the field of architecture. No one in ceramics had ever gotten the award before. Usually they award landscape architects or interior designers or other people related in architecture. It was the same year that Ansel Adams received a medal--Ansel Adams, the photographer.

Ross: And was there a ceremony that you went to?

Heath: Yes. That year the national annual meeting of the AIA, was in Detroit, Michigan. The other man--other person who was on--there were four of us who got the awards that year--Esherick. He was the man who made furniture, and did interiors and sculptured stair railings and this sort of thing, in contemporary architecture.

Ross: And you, and do you remember the fourth?

Heath: And Ansel Adams, and the man at *Sunset* magazine. *Sunset* magazine was given an award for their presentations and articles that had to do with architecture. [Bill] Lane was his name.

Ross: Lane. So he was the publisher. I think he has just retired. So that was rather prestigious company, wasn't it?

Heath: Yes.

Ross: And you went to the presentation ceremony?

Heath: Yes.

Ross: Was that sort of a highlight for you, did you consider it real special?

Heath: Well, of course it was. It was a landmark, but it was in doing the tile for that building--I don't know whether we talked about this before--it was during that--that building was made out of--the structure was cement block, and then the cement block was gunited with--do you know what guniting is?

Ross: Yes, I do.

Heath: The spraying of cement to create curved walls. So that the cement block, instead of coming together at a right angle, the right angle was made into a big curve, so the tile--the walls of the museum are curved, undulating, meandering kind of system.

Ross: Does the interior follow the outside?

Heath: Yes. Well, it was the outside where the tile was used; the interior where the paintings and things are hung followed more the --now, I'm trying to remember whether they echoed the exterior of the building or not, or whether they are--isn't that terrible? It's been so long since I've been there, I can't remember.

Ross: You may have to take a trip!

Heath: At any rate, I thought there must be a better way of using clay than just pasting it on top of the gunited wall over cement block. It seemed so--[pause] labored, to get an effect. And so ever since then, I've had to think about how to use clay in a way so that both the inside and the outside are made out of clay blocks, so that they could either be glazed or not glazed, but--

Ross: But that's sort of the cinder block idea, isn't it?

Heath: Yes.

Ross: Which has been used for--I remember the dreadful Robert Taylor homes, the low income housing in Chicago, which was so highly criticized because they used the cinder block as a building material. It was totally uncozy, you might say. It took on the smoke and all the sort of unpleasantnesses of the household somehow, or it would seem--maybe that was just a radical attitude about it, but it was seen as part of the problem for low-income people, to have to live in this situation.

Heath: There was also that philosophy in architecture, that the minimal was the most. Do you remember ever hearing that expression?

Ross: I've heard it but I don't think I understand it.

Heath: Well, make the most beautiful thing out of the least. Less is better, sort of. Rather than going beyond the elemental thing that--in other words, in dinnerware, just the material and the glaze is enough, that you don't need all the embellishment of florals and so on. Just appreciate the material for what it is--that clay is clay, and cement is cement, and glass is glass, and--

Ross: So the cement block was sort of on that same theory?

Heath: Yes, the cement block is an excellent material. It is what it is. And since we don't have much stone in this country, it's the--I remember when first meeting architects from Europe coming to the United States, they're always amazed at houses built out of wood.

Ross: I remember we talked about that in the last session, and that was what brought you to your current thing. Even back then, you were thinking that instead of pasting tiles on the cement that's over blocks, that there must be a better way to do it.

Heath: Yes. Well, that was my schooling, in effect, when I went to the Art Institute and was in Chicago at the Institute of Design with Moholy-Nagy, that was the philosophy, of learning, to appreciate each material for what it is. Now, of course, architecture today is almost retrogressed, and I think it began with the excess in--I'm not sure the dates now, something like eight or ten years ago in Venice when the subject of the exhibition was "The Presence of the Past."

So architects were looking back into the past, and their buildings were revealing the presence of the past. And of course, when you go down that road, when you get into all the illusions and references to things that have already been done, you don't--so you have columns and pillars and arches that are not structural, they are mere facings.

Ross: Sort of reminders of the past.

Heath: I think that--well, I don't want to get into a discussion of it.

Ross: Well, actually, what I'd like us to lead into--because that was-- the Pasadena Museum--was really a feather in your cap in many ways, wasn't it? I mean, that was a wonderful thing to do.

Heath: Yes, it was, because it was--for a period of three or four years while it was under construction, there were many of the tile plants that were making bids and submitting samples for it. I remember we were at the state fair that opened, I think it was in August, and the director of the then-Pasadena Museum of Art--what was her name?--Moore, I think, came up to me and she said, "You got the job!"

Ross: Oh, right there at the fair?

Heath: Yes. She said, "The committee met--" they'd had any number of meetings, because the board of directors and the board--the committee--couldn't make up their minds which tile. So they called in Philip Johnson to be an outsider to look at the submissions.

### Philip Johnson

Ross: Who was Philip Johnson?

Heath: Oh, you must know Philip Johnson, the architect who's the--well, he designed the Neiman-Marcus building in San Francisco. You know where the City of Paris was?

Ross: Yes.

Heath: And he saved a part of the City of Paris--the handsome glass corner, with no other windows in the building at all. Oh, Philip Johnson did an all-glass house, his first house sitting on a hillside. There are famous photographs of it in wintertime, with snow everywhere--it's just all glass.

Ross: The whole house is glass? Where is that?

Heath: I think it's in New Canaan, Connecticut.

Ross: Anyway, so he was called in to be the final judge on the tile selection?

- Heath: So he looked at all the submissions, and then he chose the Heath design.
- Ross: That is really something. And did you have time to do other jobs while you were doing that, or had you gotten--
- Heath: Oh, yes, because that went on--the initial presentation, from the time we first started working on it until finally the tile were executed, was a period of probably three years. So during that time, we did a number of jobs in Los Angeles. Usually they had to do with exteriors, because the same architectural firm, Ladd and Kelsey, who did the Pasadena Museum, also did many other buildings in Los Angeles, and so our tile were used on a number of them.
- Ross: But you were still at that point, during that period, producing the tile down south?
- Heath: In Los Angeles, yes.
- Ross: And then when did you--
- Heath: When Gustin finally had to have all the space in his plant he said that we would have to find another place to make the tile, because they needed all the space for their own products. So then we decided to add on to the building in Sausalito. We bought two parcels--well, we first bought one parcel, because the land where the shipyards had been in Sausalito was now being sold off--this was in, let's see, the war was over--we bought the first parcel in 1947, so this would have been--I think it was around 1970 that we bought--
- But by that time the zoning ordinance had changed in Sausalito. It mostly just gave us some parking space. So then we had to buy the next parcel of land next to us in order to get enough space to make the tile.
- Ross: So what you built then is what you have today?
- Heath: Yes.
- Ross: And has that been adequate?
- Heath: No.

Oklahoma Plant, 1981-1989

Heath: For a period of about eight years, we made tile in Oklahoma, in a plant that had been built by the--what was the name of the Indian group there, the Indians who did the long march--

Ross: Cherokee Indians, weren't they?

Heath: Cherokees, yes. There was a pottery plant in Illinois that had the Bureau of Indian Affairs build the building to make dinnerware. The Indian nations were looking for industries to employ their people. But after the building was built, the owner of the pottery plant, who lived in Illinois, had a heart attack and the members of the staff didn't want to go on with the project. The building that had been built had not been used. The Indians began looking for another tenant, and they sent out a form letter nationwide to many potteries to tell about this space that was available.

We knew that we needed to have more space. We didn't like having it that far away, to supervise it, but it was all equipped--it had the kilns, the presses, the dryers--almost everything that was needed for making tile. So by renting the space, we got the space as well as the use of the equipment. But it proved to be a very difficult thing to supervise long-distance, so we were spending time going back and forth. The only reason it worked is because my sister, Anna Jane, and her husband, Jack, took it on as a project, but when he died last year, we finally gave up--

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Ross: So was one of the purposes for that being done--it was through the government, wasn't it?

Heath: Yes, the Indian Bureau.

Ross: The Bureau of Indian Affairs. And their desire was to have it continue, partly so that it would give jobs to that community?

Heath: Yes.

Ross: So then it was difficult to manage, but you said your sister and her husband--

Heath: They did really quite well. The problem was that, since we were on the West Coast, and most of our jobs came through West Coast architects, to have tile manufactured in Oklahoma and then shipped back to California was always a problem. So we tried to use the plant in Oklahoma for jobs that were in the East--New York, or

Florida, or Illinois--anything east of Denver, let's say. We tried to have any jobs that we got that were east of Denver made in Oklahoma, and anything west of that we would make in California. But it was always a problem, and either we were too busy here, or were filled up, and then we would try to have it made in Oklahoma. We might make part of it here and they would make part of it there, and to have the things match was a problem.

Ceramic Buttons and Anna Jane

Ross: Now, what background did your sister and her husband have in tile?

Heath: Well, my sister had worked at--they were living in Chico, and she had spent about three years coming down from Chico to work in the plant. At that time, we were designing buttons. We went through a phase--I wanted what was called kiln-fillers, something that was small that we could put in between the dinnerware.

Ross: Not to waste a bit of space.

Heath: That's right. And also, the nice thing about doing something small like that was it wasn't a big investment, but you could experiment a great deal. So we made buttons that started at a quarter of an inch and went up to--oh, some of them were like two and three inches, and belt buckles, and jewelry of that sort--let's say beads, extruded beads. What we experimented with was different colors of clay and ways of embellishing--using different colors of clay superimposed one on top of another, by using in effect a sort of squeeze bottle, but instead of squeezing out one stream, it squeezed out let's say four streams. So when it deposited these four streams, you got a different design inside. Let's say you pour a mold with a red clay, and then you use a black clay and put these four extrusions of clay into this red, and create all--wonderful effects with it.

So it was a fun period, but everybody thought we were a little bit nuts.

Ross: And your sister was helping with that? She was coming down from Chico--

Heath: Yes. It was really because of her being there, I tried to think up something that we could do that would justify her coming and doing something creative and experimental.

Ross: And had she artistic background?

Heath: Well, she had taken some classes in Chico in ceramics. But no, her background was in--the man she married, they were very fond of horses, so that anything that had to do with horses was really their business. But she has a nice sense about invention. She's very free to try things. So you give her an idea, and then she takes off.

By doing the buttons we learned a great deal about the chemistry and what things--because when you're doing dinnerware, it's such a conservative kind of thing. You can't really do very much experimenting with it. Once you've settled on your shapes and the glazes, because the stores would say, "Look, we don't want any other color; we like the colors we have, don't make any more, we just want to stay with these." So the potential for creation is very limited. Once you design something that has an audience, and it's a reorder business, stores are very reluctant to take on something new, because that means they have to develop another clientele who likes that particular thing.

That was the nice thing about tile. We could be creative in what we did because every job is a new job. You're not repaving the same--once the job was paved, then that's it, then you go to the next job and the next job, and so on.

So the dinnerware was a nice reorder business, and a kind of cushion that made it possible to do other things. The first thing was the tile, so the next thing, I said, "Well, let's get into buttons and jewelry and that sort of thing, maybe that's an avenue that might be fun to play with."

Ross: And was that successful?

Heath: Oh, it was fun. But the problem was in how to merchandise it. Because buttons are sold by computer--I mean, it was--the button industry--well, I don't know how to express it. It is so computerized that it was hard for us to fit into anyone's distribution plan.

Ross: Is that because there's such a variety of them?

Heath: Well, because--I'm not sure why it is. Buttons are small things. It doesn't take a big space in order to do it, or many people to do it. It, like dinnerware, is something that people learn to use--for instance, in trying to work with designers of clothing, what kind of buttons do you want? Well, many designers didn't use buttons because their customers won't buy something with a button on it. If you lose the button, it's a problem, so zippers were in.

Ross: It's a very custom thing.



Heath: In many instances, the buttons for men's shirts or for cufflinks and so on were more marketable than buttons for women's clothes. There was a shop in New York City--who was the woman writer from Oakland, the poet? Gertrude Stein. It was called--oh, dear. The name of the shop was from one of her writings, I can't remember now. And they did a very nice business with the buttons, it was all custom buttons. But there aren't many shops like that, and there aren't many where only buttons are sold. When you walked into that store, there were shelves and shelves and shelves--and people came in and sat at a table and took down a box of samples and looked through the buttons. It was really a fun kind of thing to be in.

So eventually, when we got busy--let's see--oh, then the Oklahoma thing opened up. That's what interrupted the button making. We went to Oklahoma in '81, and were there until last year, 1989, when Jack died.

Ross: So again you're coming up with the same problem of not enough space.

Heath: That's right. And what to move--whether to find another place to do tile. It's easier to move tile out and use that space for dinnerware.

Ross: What were the kinds of jobs that your tile fulfilled? One of the reasons I ask is because I remember coming to your place in '69 or '70 with a friend from New York to select tiles for a table I was going to make, and we couldn't zero in on any one, because we loved them all. They were all these little--I think one- or two-inch tiles, very small. And I remember we just randomly picked out enough to cover the table. I enjoyed and appreciated that table for many, many years. But those little pieces of tile--now, I don't know who it was besides myself that bought them. Tell me about the clients who would come in and buy.

### Special Designs: Tile and Dinnerware

Heath: Well, the nice thing in being in a place like Sausalito is that Marin County is--Heath Ceramics I'm sure would not exist if it had not been for Marin County. Because there are so many people here who are creative and do things for themselves, and we've always had a nice relationship with anybody who wants to have tile and do it themselves--install it themselves. In fact our first--as I've said, the first job we ever did in tile was when the architect and his wife who had been in the Middle East wanted tile--it never

occurred to us to make tile until they came and asked if we would do it. Even today I was thinking that it's amazing how people come to find solutions or want something done, and we talk about it, and we end up by doing it. Like when the designer, Susan Lochhart, at Taliesin West--the Frank Lloyd Wright school in Phoenix, Arizona--wanted to do a design, a pattern for dinnerware. Many of the Frank Lloyd Wright houses have now become or are becoming historical monuments, and they have books and memorabilia that are sold through the gift stores. One of the things that she wanted was a design that Frank Lloyd Wright devotees might want for dinnerware, and she asked if we would make it?

So I said, well, that should be very interesting to see what kind of an audience--because historically, the people who have had Wright houses have bought Heath dinnerware.

The first time we went to Mexico was back in the early sixties, and on the way we visited the Taliesin West. And sitting on the fireplace was a Heath teapot. As I found out later, there's a Frank Lloyd Wright house in New Jersey that just this last year has been donated to a museum, and the whole house is filled with Heath dinnerware. So they want to carry Heath dinnerware in the museum shop.

So when I was asked to do the design for Susan Lochhart, I said, "Well, you know, many of the Frank Lloyd Wright--" She said, "I know. I grew up with Heath dinnerware; my mother and father had it. It never occurred to me that you might even consider putting any pattern on it." I said, "Well, normally I wouldn't, but let's see what happens."

Ross: Now, when was this?

Heath: Two years ago. Or maybe it's two and a half, three years ago. As it turns out, it's not really been a very successful venture, but nevertheless, I always find it interesting to see how diverse the American public is, and who likes what. So I've become much freer in my old age in doing things that I would never have done, let's say when I was forty years younger.

Ross: Really? Like--?

Heath: Well, like embellishing clays. For years, people would ask us, would you put a decal on here with our name, or a crest or something--I said, "No, we don't do that kind of thing." And for years, we made ashtrays for Westinghouse because the architect on the buildings would specify our ashtrays for their office building. We didn't want to put Westinghouse on it. So they said, "Well, look, why don't you make an indentation in the ashtray in the

bottom where we can glue in a patch that says Westinghouse." So I said, "Well, okay, if you want, I can't object to making the groove there for you if you want to paste it in." And so for years we did that.

But now I've gotten to the place where I feel that after all, dishes have food on them, like how many hours out of twenty-four hours? Most of the time they don't have food on them. So they're around you, they're in your house, they're in your cabinet, you're picking them up, looking at them. Maybe having something on the plate when they're not covered with food is permissible.

So, to that extent, it comes back to that early thinking about less is better. The least is the most. Or making the most of the least, something like that.

Ross: I want to get back to when you were doing those tiles, and like the ones that I bought, you were saying, well it was fun to do that, or it was good to do that because you had a community who was willing to try and experiment. But those were--each one seemed like a piece of art to me. And I'm not sure how they were done, why they were done, and for whom they were done. You know the ones I'm talking about?

Heath: Well, I think I know. Because in my thinking about the relationship between material and the finished results, that the finished results should reveal the origin. In other words, when you look at a piece, you should be aware this is clay, it's not plastic. There's a difference between clay and glass and metal, let's say, or whatever. So first of all, the clay--the body--is very important, because in the crust of the earth, one of the most common material really is silica, which is sand. I think about 60 percent of the crust of the earth is sand. And then about 25 percent is clay. So about 80 percent of the skin of the globe of the earth is made up of clay and sand. And so all the other elements and minerals are of--I think the third most common material is iron.

So you go down the list until finally there are the rare earth, but in all the materials of the earth are gold, silver, platinum, copper, cobalt, manganese--and they're all the materials that are available for a potter to use. And each one has its own unique characteristics, and I like to play with them, and expose what manganese does as compared to iron, or cobalt, or copper. The only way you find out is to use it as raw as you can use it. You don't combine it.

You try to--it's like in cooking, let's say, the difference in the taste of a carrot versus another root plant. And so--unless

it's a job that is already specified it's going to be so-and-so, and then you repeat it and repeat it, but when we're just experimenting with things, which usually are the things that one buys in little small bits and pieces, they're not large orders, they are works of art, just simply because they are what they are.

Ross: Well, in these pieces, I remember it was like each one was done individually, and I'm sure it could not have been done individually, but maybe they were. Some of them had--it was like a drop of this or a drop of that, and it was almost like a Rorschach where it fell, or where--

Heath: When you apply glaze to clay, you can pour it on, you can spray it on, you can paint it on. One of the different ways is that you can spill something onto a piece, or you can draw--you can use it as a canvas, and do portraiture. Or you can do flowers. But whatever happens between clay and glaze, there's a sort of secondary aspect that takes place between where glaze leaves off and clay begins.

In other words, when you put glaze down on top of a piece of clay, there is an interval where the two meet, where one ends and the other begins, that always leaves something that you don't expect. So when we're working with glazes, or with any material I think--now, what are we going to see here that you don't expect to see? There's always chemically, because the thinnest thinnest something is different from a thicker thick, so when you put one thing on top of the other, it is more--there is a point where one begins and gets--when it goes from thin to thick--it changes.

Well, even if you're painting a wall, let's say with paint; if you're putting your paint on with a brush, you can have brushstrokes. If you have a dark wall underneath, and you're painting white on top of it, you'll see those brushstrokes. Now, you can either make that a feature of painting the wall, or you can put so much paint up on it that you cover up all the brushstrokes. And I say, don't cover it up. In other words, let whatever is the result of applying the material--if you're using a brush, let it look like you used a brush. Don't make it look like you sprayed it.

Ross: Okay. I still go back to my question: how could a shop afford to have such individual happenings in these tiles? Or didn't it happen that way?

Heath: Oh, that's the fun part. That's what I suppose makes the difference between an enterprise that is set up with the idea of making money, or if you are involved in doing something not for money--sure, it has to pay for itself. But, the reason you do it is to learn something, to invent something--and everything that

you--not everything, but to a large extent, there's an evolution that takes place between the first time you try something and you see, oh, that's what happens. Well, now suppose that I do it this way, then what will happen? Then what? So you keep on sort of building one gesture or--well, the thickness of the material. I suppose I spend more hours with a hundred millimeter measurement, and checking the specific gravity and how much water to put in it or not to have in it, in order to see what will happen. Hours are spent finding out--oh, that's how much water we have to have to make it look like that. Right now, one of the problems I'm having with the white glaze that I'm working on, a new one, is that we use spray guns mostly for what we do in production, and each person who picks up a spray gun, whether he puts the gun too close or farther away, it makes a difference.

Ross: So this is instead of having a machine like a robot in which it's all on measurement, measured time, you still do it with hand-held--

Heath: That's right.

Ross: And it makes it a very different individual thing, then.

Heath: And the thing is that you reach a stage where--there's always a debate about how rude or crude to let it be, or how refined. In other words, how expertly can you use that spray gun. Because you can use a spray gun to create mountains, to do landscape. The way you do the airbrushing that the nuances--in fact, the work that we're doing recently, we have two jobs. One is for the Olympics in France in 1992. CBS [Columbia Broadcasting System] sent us the emblem that's to be used with CBS, and they say, "Can you do something with this to make it less boring?"

Ross: My goodness!

Heath: So when I looked at it, I said, "Well, that's easy enough. We'll just use the spray gun and side spray it with some white for snow, and we'll give the illusion of the mountains with snow on them, and we'll bury the CBS logo--"

Ross: Oh, that's wonderful.

Heath: "--and let it come through the mountain, the snow." And that's what we did, and they loved it. [laughter]

Ross: You've already done it?

Heath: Oh, yes. And forty different firms were competing on this. We're number two right now. But the thing is that the woman who designed the logo, I had asked could we, instead of having the square

corners on the logo, could we round them just a little bit so that we can put them on our--we're using our rectangular press plates as one of them, because the logo is a rectangle. Our square plates have rounded corners, so I thought, well, if we round the corners on the logo, it might be less--might feel more comfortable or rational to combine. They said, "You can't touch any part of that logo. It has to be hard-edged. It has to be a square--" they have hundreds of pages of attorneys' fees and so on locked up into the cost of that logo, and not anything can be changed.

So I said, "Well, can we fog it?" So, the person with the final choice on it is the woman who designed the logo, and I understand that the competitor is a Japanese firm, and they're doing a decal, very hard-edged. It will probably be very nicely executed--

#### Art Community in Sausalito

[Session 9: January 20, 1991] ##

- Ross: You mentioned that the art community in Sausalito was so receptive to art, and that people were ready to try things and do it themselves, and such. I thought it would be good to sort of go over what some of those things in the community were, because you were there--I think you got to Sausalito in 1958--
- Heath: No, it was earlier than that. It was 1946. Because we made our first shipment in March of '47. It's forty-five years.
- Ross: Okay. And that's a long time to be in one place, even if you were just living here, but as a visible--
- Heath: The first three years we commuted from San Francisco to Sausalito. We continued to live on Russian Hill in San Francisco. Then we bought the barge and built the houseboat.
- Ross: Right. And then who were--you knew the artists and some of them were involved with the craft art. Were there some people in your circle of friends, like in the Sausalito area or in the San Francisco area that have gone on to be people who are now well known, but you knew then?
- Heath: [laughs] Oh, it's so far back that I have to stop and think who they were. Because many of the people who were--for instance, Yanko [Jean] Varda--. Do you know Varda? He was sort of the Picasso of Sausalito, and he lived on a houseboat with Alan Watts.

He did collages. I have one of his here somewhere, if you want to see it. At that time, he was doing collages. But he would teach classes on the houseboat, and he became a big party-giver.

Ross: And where is he today?

Heath: He died about three years ago. He was getting off a plane in Mexico City at Christmastime, and he wandered away from the plane, not into the waiting room, and they found him--he had died of a heart attack as he was leaving the plane.

But Sausalito was known as an artists' colony, and so there were many people that I didn't know personally who were painting and sculpting. The one other potter that was a friend of mine was Mary Lindheim. Because when Sausalito became too expensive for people to continue to live there, many of the artists moved over to the coast and away from the city, to Stinson Beach and--

Ross: Sausalito wasn't particularly high-priced then?

Heath: Oh, no, it was very inexpensive. In fact, we rented the whole top floor of the Village Fair building for three hundred dollars, and now probably that whole floor rents more like thirty thousand dollars. Because it's made up of all these little boutiques, and I'm sure that each pay probably three thousand each. I don't know, I shouldn't be guessing, but--

Ross: Well, it probably could be, because it is a very popular place now. Many changes since when you first came there.

Heath: Well, even yesterday we stopped, there's a pet shop in the shopping center north of Sausalito, and the woman in the pet shop was saying that, when we were going to pay for our things with a credit card, she said, "Oh, please don't give me a credit card. I have so many expenses that I just can't afford to take the credit card." And I asked her how long she'd been there, and she said twenty-six years. I said, well I imagined that the rent has gone up probably very much, and she said yes, she paid three hundred also when she was first there. Now she pays twenty-seven hundred. And so that's the sort of thing that happened in the Sausalito and Mill Valley area--well, all of southern Marin.

Ross: So do you think many of those artists who were once there have moved on to less expensive places than Sausalito?

Heath: Yes. They still have the Sausalito Arts Festival every year, which has maybe a nucleus of--well, the building across from where our shop is, there are a number of studios in that building. There are probably a dozen artists who rent space in that building.

- Ross: But Marin County has become a very expensive place to live, so a struggling artist on the way up--
- Heath: Yes. In fact, many of the people who used to work for us who lived in Sausalito had to move out and commute as far as Petaluma and-- well, with forty to fifty miles away, and from--the Latinos who live in San Francisco come over from the Mission area.
- Ross: And they come over to do what?
- Heath: Well, they work in the pottery.
- Ross: So most of the artists probably no longer live in Sausalito, but they sell their--
- Heath: Many of them are now dead that we used to know then. Every day you hear of someone else that's gone. The world begins to take on a different kind of feeling.
- Ross: Do you know some of the artists now, and how would you say Sausalito is now compared to when you were there as a new group of artists?
- Heath: Well, there's Walt Kuhlman, for instance, who teaches art up at-- what's the college up in Santa Rosa? Junior College. And he has his studio across the street. That's his painting there, the black one on the wall, which I bought. He lives in Sausalito still. And there's Gene Tepper, who's an industrial designer, who also is in that same building. I'm just trying to think who still may be living in Sausalito--he lives on a houseboat.

#### Sausalito Houseboats

- Ross: Did you ever get into Sausalito politics? I don't mean that you ran for office, but were you--I remember when Sally Stanford was mayor, and there were some very--some of the issues of the houseboats and things. Were you politically involved at all with any of that?
- Heath: Well, I don't think so really, because we knew early on when we built the houseboat, built our house on the river scow, that it was necessary to be someplace where you didn't empty into the bay. So that shortly after we finished building the houseboat, began looking for a place where we could take the houseboat, put piers under it, and take it out of the water, and put in a septic tank.



Ross: Proper sanitation.

Heath: And so that's when we bought the land over on Paradise Drive.

Ross: But there were many people who resisted that.

Heath: Oh, yes, for a long time. It went on for oh, ten, fifteen, twenty years, with people who lived on the houseboats. Well, it was difficult to know how to solve the problem of the sewerage, and--

Ross: Well, did they ever solve the problem?

Heath: Yes, I'm not sure just--well, I shouldn't even talk about it. There's the collection point, I think, where people--where everything flows to, and then it's collected from there.

Ross: Because in this day of environment awareness, I would think that it would just be a very unpopular position not to--

Heath: Yes. Of course, there weren't nearly as many houseboats then as there are now. In fact, when we built at Gate 5 Road, there were--well, there's Varda and Alan Watts in one houseboat, and Toshi Monroe and her husband, who was a sculptor, and let's see. Enid Foster, who was a painter, was on the same pier with us. Who else was right immediately there? Because the people that lived along the waterfront in houseboats, they were either people who were fishermen or built boats, things connected with the bay, the small shipyards, ship building yards that were still in Sausalito.



## X INFLUENCE AROUND THE GLOBE

Loyalty Issues, 1950s

Ross: What about the time of the McCarthy hearings? That was a time of great turmoil in the Bay Area for many people, and you and Brian were radicals, I would have called you, at your time in Chicago. Were you at all involved in that, and did you ever have any confrontation with the HUAC committee?

Heath: Well, I was asked--well, there were a number of people who were employed by us, of course, who were suspect. I remember one day as I was leaving the house, that's over on Paradise Drive, starting up the stairs when two young men in suits stopped, came down, and asked me about this man. And did I know where he was? I knew where--he left for South America--but they said they were with the FBI, and they wanted to locate where he was. I said, "Well, I'm not going to tell you. I know where he is, but I'm not telling you." And let's see, what were some of the other--

Ross: Had he gone there because of the hearings?

Heath: Yes. Because he was--

Ross: He had a past that he needed to protect.

Heath: Yes.

Ross: When you said "I won't tell you," what was their response? They didn't subpoena--

Heath: Well, they started to say, "Well, don't you think as a loyal citizen--." In other words, they tried to embarrass me by saying that I should cooperate with them. And I said, "I don't think that's part of a democratic society's demands." Anyway, I said, "Whether you think I'm disloyal or not, I'm not going to tell you."

Ross: And that was it?

Heath: That was it.

Ross: Because many at that time, when they refused to--or when they said, "I don't know," they were given subpoenas to come in. I think in some cases maybe it was more of a threat than they ever followed through on.

Heath: And then in 1956 or '57, I was teaching over at the College of Arts and Crafts in Oakland, and in order to be a teacher there, I had to sign a loyalty oath in order to teach, which I really didn't want to do, but which I did, because I didn't see any way to avoid it.

Ross: The actual confrontation about the loyalty oath, the biggest of which I guess was at UC Berkeley, that must have been about '49 or '50.

Heath: It began in the early fifties, I think, but it reached sort of a peak in the mid-fifties. I'm not sure, when did McCarthy finally--was discredited?

Ross: I don't remember the exact date, but--

Heath: It was in the late fifties. I think there was still the atmosphere for years afterwards. I think that people felt very constrained.

Ross: Yes, quite bruised by the whole experience. And there was a strong group in the Bay Area that were, you might say, victims of that--those hearings.

#### More on the Aspen Design Conference

Ross: This switches a bit, but you've spoken about the Aspen Design Conference. That seems to be an important time for you in the sense that--

Heath: Well, I think historically it was a very important thing that happened.

Ross: Were you in on the first one?

Heath: No, the first one, I think, was Albert Schweitzer, the doctor in Africa who started the medical school. He was the first speaker to the first conference.

Ross: A medical doctor was the first?

Heath: Yes, but the unique thing about the conference was that it was an attempt to bring all the disciplines together, instead of the artists being separated from the industrial designers from the scientists from the doctors from the dancers and the musicians. It was an attempt to have all creative people--whether they were philosophers or designers or doctors or potters--it was a cross-fertilization program from one discipline to another, to see how they paralleled or what they had in common, and the need to broaden one's knowledge of what was going on around us.

It became the International Design Conference. At first it was just, I think, the American designers, and some of the industrial designers out of Chicago primarily, who were instrumental in starting it. The first year Brian and I attended was either '50 or '51, and I think the first one was in '49. Well, I have the book here, *The Aspen Idea*, I can look up the date. [1949]

Ross: No, that's okay, we can get it later. But you were invited to that, or how did you decide to go?

Heath: It was open to anyone in the arts and sciences, and art sciences professions, who wanted to attend. It was a wonderful way of meeting people from--and in the beginning there was a small group of people, maybe fifty or sixty. Eventually it grew to a hundred and two hundred and three hundred, and finally it was up around eight hundred, and then it no longer was the same sort of thing.

Ever since the beginning, we met people from all around the world, so whenever we travel and go anywhere, we're always looking up the people we met at the design conference. So it made you feel that--well, as C. Wright Mills, a sociologist who was one of the speakers one year, said, that the subject had something to do with neighborliness, or the neighborhood. And C. Wright Mills said his neighbors were in Poland or in Hungary or in China--they were all neighbors. There wasn't just the person who lived next door. And that was the feeling, too, that we were all brothers and sisters, in effect, from around the world.

Ross: It must have been a very exciting--

Heath: Oh, it was, and we met all the people that we know here--the intellectuals who were speaking on the radio and television. Like Bronofsky, for instance, who died a number of years ago, but just this week on--they're replaying a number of the lectures that he gave in a series when he was a guest at Berkeley, at the University of California at Berkeley.

- Ross: Even for me, it's amazing how many people I've met over the years who are now in either government or journalists or writers, and to hear them in public seminars and things, it's quite a rich time, isn't it?
- Heath: Yes. Well, it makes the world seem very small.
- Ross: Yes. It also says something about who you associated with, doesn't it?
- Heath: As Yanko Varda said one time, he said, "You know, there are 1144 people, all who know each other in the arts and industry, and all the rest of the people in the world are background." [laughter]
- Ross: Who said that?
- Heath: Yanko Varda.
- Ross: Yes. I always heard it as four hundred, but then it was 1144 in the art world?
- Heath: Well, it was just some imaginary number. Once we were getting on an elevator in Mexico City at Christmastime, and where we stopped, there were three people from San Francisco, we all knew each other. And there we were, meeting. Like when we went up the Great Wall in China, we bumped into Walter Landor and his wife.
- Ross: My goodness!
- Heath: Yes. [laughs]
- Ross: My word, that is a small world. So you've lived a rich life of associations with people who would be in public and who travel in sort of the public life. How many Aspen Conferences did you go to?
- Heath: Oh, let's see. Last year I think was the--I've forgotten the date, whether it was the forty-second or -third or something like that. Well, in the last few years we have not gone as often--we used to go every year, every summer, for at least twenty years, it seems to be.
- Ross: And you always drove?
- Heath: Yes. Because that was a chance to--well, we were usually taking someone else with us on the way, or bringing someone back on the way. People who had come from the conference. I remember the year that a designer from Arabia in Finland was at the conference, who was a ceramic designer. He drove west with us, coming back. And the woman who was designing in Sweden in the ceramics industry. So

we met many people in the ceramics field who were doing what we were doing, in making--designing for dinnerware, the so-called Modern Artists, contemporary artists.

Ross: Versus the traditional?

Heath: Yes.

Ross: The drive to and from Aspen, you had your Citroen automobile. How did you and Brian happen to have that car?

Heath: Oh, dear, I can't remember.

Ross: That's a French--

Heath: Brian, I think, had been reading about cars when he read about the Citroen. So in 1960, when we were going to France--that was our first trip--he made arrangements to buy one, which we then drove through Europe, and shipped to New York, and then drove west after we came back. We flew to New York and waited there for the car to come in by freight.

Ross: Oh, that's how you happened to have that.

Heath: Yes. But we bought it in Paris, Brian picked it up in Paris. We had already started a tour around Europe, and I had a nephew who was stationed with the army in Germany, so I met with him in Cologne while Brian went--flew into Paris to pick up the Citroen, and then came back to Cologne. That first trip, we drove, I think it was twelve thousand miles through Europe, from Italy up--the boundaries were sort of Italy, Helsinki, Finland, and Scotland and England, and southern France, and into--we went as far as Barcelona into Spain. We made this whole tour around that part of Europe on that trip.

#### U.S. Museums Exhibit Good Designs

Ross: What were some of the museums that you were involved with in those years? You've been in so many of them, is there any way to sort of zero in on--?

Heath: Well, in the early--during the late thirties, before the war broke out, the modern museum had been built in New York City, and the modern museum there had showed automobiles, for instance, in the museum as part of the design program. In other words, the Museum of Modern Art in New York wanted to look at anything that was manufactured, any objects, whether they were made by single craftspeople or by industry. And that included things like the telephone, for instance. The development of the telephone, how--what was the design of the telephone when it was first invented.

There was a book that was published in the mid-fifties, Don Lawrence was the author, which dealt with crafts--it was called *Craftsmanship in a Changing World*.

##

Heath: Then the war came, and during the war years, the museum sort of--as many other things--just coasted along, but as soon as the war ended, immediately the museums around the country picked up on this idea that good design should be for everybody.

Ross: And was it necessarily good design from the United States?

Heath: Most of it, yes. There were some international design things, but most of the museums here in the United States were focusing on American designers, and products made in the United States, singling out those which were well designed, not something that was going to be outmoded in a year or two, but of long-lasting value. That's why things like Revere copperware was one of the things that were being--. The denim jeans that were made here in San Francisco.

Edgar Kaufmann: Traveling Design Exhibit in Europe

Ross: By Levi?

Heath: The Levis, that was the beginning of them. And this sort of culminated in this traveling exhibition that went to Europe, I think it was in '57, put together by the modern museum in New York. Edgar Kaufmann was the curator who chose the artists and craftsmen to represent it. There were fifteen crafts people. That included Charles Eames and his wife, and--

Ross: Were you a part of that?



Heath: Yes. Well, because I had met Edgar Kaufmann in about 1945, I think, when he was looking for things for the modern museum--for an exhibition in the modern museum in New York. I had the studio down on Clay Street then.

Ross: So was that one of your main first exhibits?

Heath: Yes. My very vivid experience with Edgar was about three or four years later, I think it was '48 or '49. We were both asked to be on a jury, ceramic jury, up in Portland, Oregon. So he flew out from New York and we drove, three of us in 1950, up to Portland from here. I had just bought a Rambler; that was the first small car that was made in the United States. We drove with the top down through California and talked all the way. And on the way, he said something about, "Well, you know, you're a classic."

I said, "You must be kidding. How can you be a classic, we've only been on the market for a few years." He said, "It doesn't matter. Any dinnerware that's made from now on, the question will be asked, how does it compare with Heath?"

Ross: Really?

Heath: Yes. And he said, that's what a classic is, is something that is singled out as--used as a yardstick, that other things are compared to it. He said, "You will be a classic."

Ross: That's great. Then that exhibit--it was a traveling exhibit, the one that Kaufmann put together--

Heath: In Europe, called "Craftsmanship in a Changing World."

#### Heathware in Other Countries

Ross: Was it only in Europe, or did it travel through the United States?

Heath: No, that show traveled only in Europe. But there were--every country I think--we were sending articles to South America, to Brazil, to Sweden--

Ross: "You"--Heathware?

Heath: Yes. Because the museums then that--this became a very important part, it was all tied up with architecture, of course, because with the new architecture, what were the objects--the products that would fit into this new design, this new house, this new building.

- Ross: So these European countries and South American knew about Heath?
- Heath: Yes. In fact, a friend of mine told me about a friend from Palo Alto who had just come back from Sweden, and she had bought a piece of pottery while she was there. When she showed it to my friend, she said, "Well, that was made in Sausalito!" [laughter]
- Ross: Oh, my. Were you selling there then?
- Heath: Well, that's what happened. When I had the studio in Sausalito, there were people--and starting as soon as the war was over, people traveling through the United States, because the United States had not been damaged by the war--
- Ross: I remember that people came from far away, and they searched you out. But then did they also--some of those people buy to take back to other countries to sell?
- Heath: Yes. For instance, one of the big department stores in Stockholm was where this woman from Palo Alto bought the Heathware. There weren't many pieces, probably, maybe half a dozen, but it was to illustrate what was happening in the United States. Because during the war, Europe had been so damaged that it was quite a number of years before--with the Marshall Plan and so on--before people could begin exporting back to the States. So that was really a marvelous period for American designers, because there wasn't the competition from all over the world that has since come about. In fact, Martin Mattell said to me one day, "You know, if you hadn't been making-- if it hadn't been for the war, nobody would ever know about you." [laughter]
- Ross: That's in contrast to what Kaufmann said, isn't it! So "Craftsmanship in a Changing World" was one of your first big exhibits?
- Heath: I think the Akron Art Institute, the Cleveland Art Institute, the Buffalo Museum, the Chicago Art Institute, the San Francisco Museum--they were all in on this act.
- Ross: They all had it.
- Heath: Yes.

Attitude Changes About Design in the 1960s

Heath: And that continued up until about the beginning of the sixties, when there was this--and it's interesting to guess why it should happen, but with the Vietnam War and the attitude of young people toward anything that was part of institutions, was--well, it was frowned upon. In other words, we were identified by then, I think, as part of the institutions--

Ross: Or the establishment--

Heath: The establishment. And so I think there were many buyers also who became concerned about this sort of elite group that existed within the United States who were always exhibiting and--along with the architects. But the younger people didn't have a chance. There wasn't anyone to pick up--there wasn't an Edgar Kaufmann then who went around looking for a potter or a weaver or whatever it was.

Ross: Because he had enough by that time? He had enough people to call on?

Heath: Well, no, it was by then there were so many imports of well-made potters, that the museums then began featuring from all around the world, the products that were being made. So it was no longer easy, and to that extent, Martin Mattell was correct in saying that the confluence of the times were just right for certain things to happen. And that after--there would never be another, let's say--well, Heath Ceramics, that would get the amount of attention that we got.

Ross: Well, according to that then, with the anti-establishment attitude of young people, then--

Heath: Well, they refused to--they began to buy castoffs. That's when the tatty jeans, the ragged jeans were--

Ross: But also, wasn't that the time of the street artists blossoming?

Heath: That's true. But I remember one of my students at the Arts and Crafts who had been in the Korean War came back. The G.I.'s who came back from the Korean War were then in their early thirties, who had their G.I. bill to pay their tuition into schools. And among them there was this one guy who now is a very well-known artist who was throwing beautiful pots, and then he would take his fist and just destroy it.

I said to him, "Bill, why do you do that?" And he said, "Well, it's too good. It has to--you have to destroy some things

that are good in order to force yourself to develop something else."

Ross: My goodness.

Heath: He said, "There's validity in destruction." That was his--those were his words. And I had to stop and think about it. And I suppose that's quite true; that if something becomes very accepted, that it's hard for the people who come after to make--to find a way. They--well, I know, I was very badly criticized for being part of the establishment, that I was no longer an artist, that I had sold out.

Ross: But that had mostly to do with your mass production, didn't it?

Heath: Well, of course.

Ross: That seems to be a different thing from what your--what was his name?--the man who punched his whole hand into his work? Don't you think those are two different things?

Heath: Well, I suppose in a way, it's sort of happening now in the ceramics field, that if you look at the work that's being made in schools, in the ceramic departments, they are anything but formal shapes. The abstraction that the painters picked up on during this same period--this is when abstract expressionism came in--and the potters who then were in the school, they weren't about to make vessels or vases or pots, functional pots. They were artistic expressions that shouldn't have any function.

Ross: No function?

Heath: Non-functional art. In fact, that was the big debate between what's fine art and what's a craft. Is making things in clay, that's a craft, that's not a fine art. And the people working in clay wanted to be known as fine artists. So they began destroying their nice wheel-made pieces and cutting them--bashing them and bending them and twisting them and so on. And that's what you see a good deal. And also, they're part of the influence in what was happening in ceramics in the schools here, or among the artists. Well, they finally began calling them--let's see, what was it?--artist-craftsmen. So there was the Society of Artist-Craftsmen.

And I think the Japanese attitude towards ceramics also had a marked influence on American ceramics of the studio potters, which --like a tea bowl, tea ceremony bowls, which were hand-built, and not formal shapes, became a--I'm not sure what you would say--well, certainly a thing that influenced the ceramics from 1960 on, or maybe mid-1960s.

Ross: Well, it seems that the Japanese focus their attention to a particular form or particular kind of clay or their raku. I remember looking at small bowls and realizing how expensive they were. This was when I was in Japan, and observing how the Japanese may have in their homes just one or two bowls, and they saw in these a beauty and something that I didn't recognize. But I would look at some of the work that even the street ceramicists or potters were doing here and it was hard for me to distinguish the difference. Is this what you're talking about?

Heath: Yes.

Ross: And yet, the Korean War vet who punched his fist into his work, you said he's well known today? What kind of work was he--

Heath: Yes. He went into painting after that; he didn't stay in ceramics. Because in painting, he could do what he couldn't do in ceramics, I think.

Ross: You mean in a more abstract way?

Heath: Yes.

Ross: Well, what would an example of an abstract--

Heath: Well, Peter Voulkos, for instance, his work. The exhibitions where there'd be a crack right through the middle of the plate. I remember going to an exhibit at the San Francisco Museum of Art of Peter's stuff, and he had two or three very large plates, and they all had a break through the middle that had occurred during the firing. It wasn't what he had planned to do, but they were works of art. The whole character of the things were in the--

Ross: As the Japanese would call them, happy accidents?

Heath: Yes.

Ross: I see. But that was still a plate--it was still a functional piece of--was it to be used in any functional way?

Heath: Well, you could use that big platter certainly for a fruit bowl or--

Ross: Right. Well, would you say--I keep going back to the Korean vet who then became a painter because there was--did you say more expression in that, or--?

Perfect Pottery Versus Imperfect Pottery

- Heath: Well, it's more immediate. See, in ceramics, from the time you start working with a piece of clay and it comes out of the kiln, there are so many steps that it has to go through, the way it's dried, whether you bisque fire it or don't, and the glazing. And the fire affects what you're doing. After a while, you learn to know that when you do so-and-so, what it's going to look like when it comes out of the kiln, but to a large extent, there is even today, it's a maddening thing in the industry that--how hard one struggles to make a perfect piece. But it's a snare and a delusion, because there is no such thing as a perfect piece of pottery. Because the fire and--there are so many things that can influence it.
- Ross: And yet your plant can continue to put these out in rather uniform--
- Heath: Yes, but I have a difficulty every day of my life with, is this a first or is it a second? Because a pinhole, and it's a second. I hate it. But it's--if people refuse to buy it when this pinhole is in there, there's no point in your shipping it. You can't force it down their throats.
- Ross: And for you, the pinhole is okay.
- Heath: Yes. Or even if a piece has a break on the side from having been dyed too fast on that side. It created a crack if it isn't a crack that was due to a hit or a bump that would then grow and become bigger, there's no reason--you can go on using it for years and years and years. That crack will never open up. Because it's fired into that--it's like having a little indentation in the piece that was meant to be there. So the difference--but there are people in our store--if I would try to send a cracked piece into the store, they'd say, "It won't sell, Edith, don't bother."
- Ross: I guess they know, because they're in the line of sales.
- Heath: They know. And then every now and then, I remember one day the young man who painted that painting on the wall there was in the shop and--
- Ross: Who is that?
- Heath: [pause] Oh, dear. Dal Henderson, who teaches painting down in Fresno; Fresno State. He was in the shop and wanting to barter some pots, some plates and cups and saucers, for a painting that I wanted of his, and so it was fine with me. And lo and behold, what

did he choose? Because I said, "Choose whatever you like." And he chose pieces that had been tests, that I had written on, clues, what formula it was, and maybe the glaze had been slopped on just casually or had been brushed on or whatever. And every single piece that he chose was the farthest away from being a perfect piece.

Ross: That's interesting.

Heath: I said, "Dal, you don't have to take those pieces, you can have any of these pieces!" [laughter]

Ross: But perhaps it was because it had more of your mark--

Heath: He said, "I don't want those perfect pieces."

Ross: And it also had something of your mark on it, don't you think?

Heath: Well, it was that, but I think there's just that kind of a feeling about, this is something that is alive and has an extra meaning that doesn't have anything to do with what's good and what's bad, let's say. Or in a craft, that what is more important is the spirit of the thing, the way it was done, the reason it was done. It was testing something, and maybe the glaze blistered or it didn't--so on. And they are live pieces; they're quite different from a piece that is a stereotype, let's say.

Ross: Do you find in the shop where you sell so-called "seconds," do you find that there's a whole--

Heath: There are those people who of course like those things. A plate that is burned on the side in the kiln and has blisters; to some people, because they have that attitude towards ceramics that the Japanese have, that that's part of the--that's one of the things you want to know, how did it happen?

### Tlaquepaque Pottery

Ross: Yes. Did you happen to know Ken Edwards from Tlaquepaque, Mexico?

Heath: Yes.

Ross: He did those plates with the birds and the snails. I remember it must have been 1964 I went to Tlaquepaque the first time, and I picked out--I didn't have any money, so I picked out what they called seconds and thirds, and I brought home a set of those. I

used them over the years, and then I wanted to increase my supply. I went to Macy's, and bought a couple of pieces. I brought them home, and the comparison with those wonderful old pieces and these slick new ones was something that was sort of--made me feel like I didn't have anything very special. I had watched the men working in the shop. The first time they were sitting on boxes, and they each had their own imprint. They were hand-painting.

And years later, I was there and I encountered Ken Edwards. He had a totally new design, and he said that they were getting bored with what they were doing, and they were trying to do this new thing. Do you know anything about him these days, or where he is? He was the American who went to Mexico and put some commercialism to the Mexicans' pottery.

Heath: Oh, the chief thing that he did, which was very important, was that the glaze that was used on the pots were lead-glaze, and they weren't fired high enough; it wasn't a balanced formula with the lead and the silica, so it was really a health hazard. But he took the shapes, he kept the shapes that they were making, and the designs they painted on the plates, but he changed--he made the glaze formula fit and balanced. They fired the pieces so that they were much harder, and made a stoneware out of what had been a soft earthenware. So he did a very nice interpretation. He took actually what they were making and just fired it hotter. He got the kind of kilns that were necessary to do that, because they didn't have the type of kilns that they could bring the fire up to the temperature to vitrify it.

Ross: He must have, in many ways, made it possible for many Mexicans to make quite a much better living for themselves through that, because that became quite a big business.

Heath: Oh, of course. And every country around the world that imports to the U.S., Italy and Portugal and South American countries, let's say third world countries, where they didn't have the ability or the money to buy a kiln that could fire higher, those things were forbidden to be imported to our country. So that they had to change their way of potting.

#### Wedgwood Experience ##

Ross: Well, actually, I think maybe it would be a good idea to finish off this interview with your Wedgwood experience, of which we know very little.



Heath: Well, let's see, how will we come into that? Oh, that was in the sixties, the turning point, let's say. Well, it ended one phase of Heath as it had been, because we built our building in 1960 and moved from the top floor of the Village Fair building down to north Sausalito. When we had finished that building and started production there, we made our first trip to Europe.

About two or three years later, one day in the mail came this letter from--I'm not sure whether it was an attorney, but someone asking us if we would be--that there was a European firm that was interested in working with us in manufacturing, and would we be interested? They wouldn't reveal who it was. First of all, would we be interested in working with any European firm?

We of course said we were--

Ross: You said of course you were--why would you do that?

Heath: Want to work with a European firm? Well, by that time, I was interested in our getting outside the United States with what we were making. The potteries in England frowned upon imports coming in from other countries. So the only way that one could really get into the European market was by having it made in Europe, so then it would give employment to the local people.

Ross: Let me ask you: would they have imposed high tariffs?

Heath: Yes. But not only high tariffs. They just--they want to protect their local potters, their local industry. They don't want to import. So I thought, well, the thing to do is we have to manufacture in Europe if we want to sell in Europe. So in response to this inquiry, we said yes. We were then told that it was Wedgwood of England, and the man [Arthur Bryan] who was then the director of Wedgwood was the first non-Wedgwood director.

Arthur Bryan, Wedgwood Director

Ross: Meaning--what do you mean, the first non-Wedgwood director?

Heath: That the Wedgwood pottery since the time of Josiah Wedgwood, going back to its beginnings 200 years ago, whatever, had always been a Wedgwood.

Ross: Meaning that was the name of the family, or--?

Heath: That was the Wedgwood family; yes. Arthur Bryan was now the acting director, was the director. And he had lived in the United States for--maybe it was five years--but at any rate, he was selling Wedgwood in the United States. He had been elected by the family to come back to England to be the director, but while he had been in the United States, he found that Heath Ceramics was the product that he would like to see made in England. So he was asking for--well, it was a way of getting Wedgwood out of the nineteenth century and into the twentieth century. When they came to the United States to sell, as he had been trying to do, they found America by that time was so modern, so-called, dedicated to the modern look that they couldn't sell the old Wedgwood.

Ross: Now, the old Wedgwood was--do I remember--it's that blue and white--

Heath: Oh, they had dozens and dozens of patterns.

Ross: But that was sort of the old traditional--

Heath: But they had been trying to design something for the American market that would belong to this new look. So his hope, and he expressed that in his letter to us, that if I came there to work, that it might help them to design more effectively. And I said, well, I would rather just try to make what we were making in the United States and not develop something else in England.

Ross: Well, unless I misunderstand, why would he think that you, Edith Heath, potter, who had wanted to get your stuff into England and was finding it difficult to get it there, would want to come and help them design this competition?

Heath: Well, he didn't know that about me. No, no.

Ross: But why wouldn't he have--why would you want to help them design something that would essentially be competition for you here?

Heath: Well, that was one of the questions that was raised. He said, "Well, why don't you come and work with us for a period of time? We'll pay your lodging. Bring with you the dyes and the molds, and especially bring your casseroles, because we want to compare your thermal shock resistance to the work that we're trying to do in developing an ovenware body."

And I said, "Well, Arthur, I don't know how good it is." He said, "But it's been on the market for twenty years and if you haven't had a lot of returns, that's the best demonstration of the quality of the work."

So Brian and I went to England in 1965. We arrived there in June, thinking we might be there three months or so. Well, as it worked out, it stretched into nine months. The problem was that since we were not making a traditional clay body formula, I couldn't use their kilns and fire with their things. They had to have another kiln, because I had developed this clay body formula to fire at a temperature that was not typical in the industry.

Ross: And it was hotter than the Wedgwood?

Heath: No. They made a white--the difference between, let's say, stoneware and china is that china is fired hard without any glaze on it, and then you fire the glaze at a lower temperature. So we couldn't--the clay body that I had couldn't go up to that temperature. And also, since it was a stoneware, the glaze and clay have to mature simultaneously. They didn't have a kiln which could do this.

So first of all, they tried to find out if there might be another pottery, because in this part of England in that area, there are potteries in every little town around there. It's a pottery district.

Ross: What town was this?

Heath: Well, it's in the Midlands of England. Stoke-on-Trent is the region. One time--I'm not sure how many potteries there were in that area--historically--well, I can't even guess. Anyway, it doesn't really matter. Where was I?

Ross: You were saying that they had other kilns.

Heath: Yes. Oh. It was then twenty years after the war had ended, and an ordinance had been passed by the British government that all the potteries had to convert to a cleaner fuel than the coal in twenty-five years. The potteries used coal. And because of coal smoke, people never saw the sun excepting in the month of August when they cut down--closed all the potteries. And the incidence of silicosis and disease, the death rate of the English potters was very high--I mean, very short-lived.

And so the ordinance was passed, twenty-five years after the war ended, they all had to convert to a cleaner fuel. And gas had not yet--I guess it was just about to be discovered up there, between Scotland and Denmark--or Norway.

Ross: Scotland and Norway?

Heath: Yes, it's that far, in the north of England, in the North Sea. Wedgwood had built a new plant and moved out of their old beehive kiln area just before the war began, so they were the one pottery who had anticipated that the change had to be made in the pottery district for health reasons. And actually, the whole Wedgwood family was a very progressive, enlightened group of people. Charles Darwin's mother was Josiah Wedgwood's daughter, Susannah.

Wedgwood built canals to carry things to the market, like down to London. Prior to that, people just made pottery for the neighbors. It was a barter system. Or a man and a horse drove from town to town with pots in his wagon, and sold to the people. And it was with the building of the canals and the shipping of the ceramics into London that was part--had to be part of the Industrial Revolution.

#### Testing English Market for Heathware

Heath: So, at any rate, now coming back to what was happening, the many potteries that went out of business began turning to Wedgwood. So Arthur thought, well, maybe we'll pick up one of these small potteries and convert it into firing the way that we need to fire. But we didn't find one. And then they bought a kiln for me, and I had a special room in the big plant. They employed about 2,000 people. I was to make, I think it was 3,000 pieces for a market testing in England. They would choose four cities--Liverpool, London, Edinburgh, and I think there was one other--to see whether there was a market for it in England. So that's what I spent the nine months doing.

Ross: Now, what kind of--you were using stoneware then?

Heath: Well, I tried to replicate the body that we made here, with using a fire clay, and the same materials as nearly as possible that were mined there or were available in England. But I was never able to get the same look as I had here.

Meanwhile, while I was there, they were working on this ovenware body, and they used our casseroles made in Sausalito to compare for thermal shock. So when they put them through the autoclave, which is the tub in which you test for rupture and breaking, they would compare their ovenware with ours. So Arthur suggested that we use that body; when it proved out that it was a good body, and that we'd make the Heath shapes in that body for the English market.

So that's what we did. And by March, then nine months later, we had 3,000 pieces, and I came back to the States, and they conducted their market testing. The way they did their market testing, they never told anyone that it was a test. If people bought and then it proved that it wasn't economically viable to continue producing it, they had an understanding with the store that people could replace the ware with something else. He said, "To just ask people if you like this or not, which of these glazes do you like better, this one or this one; that's no good for a market test, because it's too easy for people just to say, 'Well, I like that;' but unless you buy it, it doesn't mean anything."

So they gave it a month, which I thought was too short, because if you see something for the first time, how many pieces do you expect will sell right off?

Ross: Like how many paychecks do you have to wait for before you can save to buy it?

Heath: Especially in conservative England at that time. So, as it turned out, Arthur said, "Well, the test wasn't good enough to continue with it." And also, he still hoped to find another pottery plant in which to make it, so he said, "Let's just postpone doing anything about it until we see what develops." So one year went by, and then two years went by, and then it became much more of an emergency, the potters in England asking, "Arthur, can't you possibly make our things for us?" They just were not able to convert. And he became so involved in doing that, the administration in the plant said, "Look, we can't cope with Heath at this point. We've got to settle among the potteries in England, so let's just forget about it."

So then finally in 1969, we went to England and he said, "I think we've just got to forget about it until we see what happens in another few years from now." And anyway, he said, "I think what we should do is to send people, send our designers to work with you in Sausalito, instead of your working here, and so we'll consider doing something of that kind."

And then a few--two or three years later, they bought Gladding McBean in Los Angeles. And at the time they did that, he said, "Now is the time for us to use your shop clays as a research center for redesigning things for us to manufacture in the United States, and then we'll take--" the one product that Gladding McBean was making--that had been on the market for I think about forty years, thirty or forty years, they would manufacture in England. But as it turned out, they sent a whole crew over to work in Glendale at the Gladding McBean plant.

It only lasted for about four or five years, because the pottery was located just off Griffith Park in downtown Los Angeles, and with the toxic conditions around the potteries, they would have to discontinue manufacturing. So the plant was closed down, and they sold it off, and it's--now they're digging out truckloads of soil where the pottery was--that's contaminated with all the toxic materials from the ceramic industry, especially lead.

So then that venture fell through. So that's sort of the end of the story, as far as Wedgwood is concerned.

- Ross: I want to go back, because I don't quite understand what your agreement with Wedgwood was. Who was to benefit from your going there for nine months? You, or Wedgwood?
- Heath: Well, I think it would be both. In other words, we would get in the European market, and they would--
- Ross: Wait a second. You mean because they would let you produce through their plant?
- Heath: Yes. We would be manufacturing in England for the English market, the same product that we made here.
- Ross: And Wedgwood's role in that would be what?
- Heath: Well, they would hope that they could then sell Heath made in England in the United States, but the buyers who came to Wedgwood said, "We can buy Heath in the United States. We don't have to buy that from England. We want what Wedgwood has always made." And so it didn't help them to get into the twentieth century. What people came to Wedgwood for were more traditional things.

Now, they have since made a copy almost of what we have, of Heath, one of their own designers, that then was made in Japan. But it's coming off the market too, because--well, I'm not sure why, excepting the whole marketing of dinnerware now is so different that that's one of the difficulties for small industries: it's hard to compete with the big industries because of the advertising and the brochures and the pre-planning and programming that you're going to make X number, and it's going to be this glaze. You don't wait for the market to tell you what they want; they program what they're going to sell, and their salesmen go out, and they make deals with the store: "If you take this, you get it less 50, less 20, less 10 percent." In other words, you buy two million dollars worth, and then they guarantee if it doesn't sell, we'll take it back, that sort of thing.

Ross: What went on--how could you and Brian both be away from your plant for nine months?

Heath: Well, he wasn't--I was away most of the time. He came back and was here for--let's see. We went in June, worked through June, July, and then the plant closed in August because all the businesses, all the manufacturing closes during the month of August for people to have their vacations.

Ross: At your plant, at Heath?

Heath: No, no, in England. Well, not only England, but in--

Ross: All over Europe.

Heath: Yes. So during that month of August, we went traveling through Europe to visit places that we had not been before, and then came back to Wedgwood in September. Brian left shortly thereafter and came back to Sausalito, and I stayed on there then.

Ross: But you had a good enough staff here that you could continue the production--

Heath: Well, by that time--yes, I think so, because we had just moved in-- we had been in this new space for about five years, and by that time the number of orders was such that it wasn't a--in other words, we had a market. We were an established manufacturing business. And we had the same distributor that we had started out with in '45 or '46.

#### Working and Living in England

Ross: Tell me about your life as a person working in a plant in England.

Heath: Oh, it was quite different, because of course, there's the class system. So--

Ross: How did you encounter that?

Heath: For instance, I would carry my own things from the kiln to the laboratory for testing. They said, "You shouldn't carry that; you should have somebody carry it for you." I said, "Well, that's silly, I do this all the time."

Ross: Perfectly capable.

Heath: Yes. And one day when I was carrying things, Arthur Bryan was looking out a window of his office and he saw me out there, and he just couldn't stand it. He came down and he took--I had a tray like this, or a vessel like this I was carrying. So he took one handle and I took the other. He said, "If you insist upon doing this, everybody's looking out of the windows here at what you're doing. I've got to show that I'm as democratic as you are!" [laughter] "That I can do it too." So the two of us paraded--because the building was about, I don't know, a couple hundred feet long, and all the windows and everybody looking out laughing.

Ross: Oh, that's funny. So in the class system meaning were workers and there were--

Heath: The supervisors.

Ross: The supervisors and there were the artists, and there were--

Heath: The designers. But it was a very marvelous experience, because they were so curious, because most of their designers, in fact I think all of the designers at that time, were men. And so later on, the wife of one of the designers who came here and spent a couple of weeks in Sausalito with us, later on went back and designed an interpretation of Heath that was produced in Japan. So that--and as far as I know, she's the only female designer. Of course, I've not been there now for going on close to twenty years I guess.

Ross: Did you make some long friendships?

Heath: Oh, yes, we still exchange Christmas cards. And Arthur Bryan, when he comes through periodically, we see him. Now, you know, Wedgwood was bought up by the Irish glassmaking firm three or four years ago, and it was going so badly economically that now Wedgwood has bought it back. So I don't know what's happening. That just happened recently.

Ross: And is Arthur Bryan still the head?

Heath: I don't know--I think he was paid off when Wedgwood was sold.

Ross: Was living in England an interesting experience?

Heath: Very! A high point in my life. I lived in the hotel in Stoke-on-Trent, the historical center of the pottery district. Had a big English breakfast--and very formal dinner--fresh flowers, white linen, for nearly six months.

Ross: So you didn't have a housekeeping house.



Heath: No. But all the meals were there, and the train station going to Barlaston was right across the street, so it was about three miles to the plant. So I'd take the train down in the mornings and then come back in the evenings. In the evenings, I did a lot of watercolors.

Ross: Oh, you painted while you were there?

Heath: Yes. A number of these things that are around here are things that I made at that time.

Ross: So you saw it as kind of a holiday?

Heath: Oh, I had a ball. I didn't have to keep house or do any of those things.



## XI ARCHITECTURE

[Session 10: February 10, 1991] ##

Architectural Interest

Ross: I think what we should start with is that part of your architectural life.

Heath: [laughs]

Ross: It would be very interesting to talk about, from the beginning, your decision to build what came to be known as the tennis house. I think that that's an interesting part of your creative work. I remember how that came about; I remember visiting you while you were working on the tennis house, and being quite intrigued by your method. And there were several things there that took place that I was quite amused at. So is it okay to talk about that, and start at the beginning?

Heath: Yes.

Ross: Had you been thinking of doing something like that for a long time? You might explain--because this was on property that was owned by you, and your barge house was down by the water--

Heath: On the beach.

Ross: And this piece of property was up above.

Heath: Top of the acreage, yes. Do you want to talk about the tennis house, or do you want to talk about my interest in architecture?

Ross: I think your interest in architecture, which obviously led to--

- Heath: Because you see, that goes back to the first thing that I really designed, the pottery plant in Sausalito.
- Ross: Actually, it probably does work to go back to if you had training in architectural drawing, and then what that brought you to.
- Heath: I think the understanding--or the appreciation of architecture goes back to my history of art at the Chicago Art Institute. For two years, you see, we looked at slides twice a week, three hours at a seating, from Egypt to the twentieth century. We studied structure, engineering, materials, function, artifacts. The first housing was a cave, in effect, for people to live in. And then the cave became a building that looked like a cave, with the aspects of the cave. But it's through the history of art that all the arts are studied. They say architecture is the mother of the arts. It's around architecture that all arts and crafts are oriented, because it's where you live, it's where you do business, where you play--what you do and make. Study of architecture includes the furniture, the furnishings, the flooring, the materials used in the building, et cetera. I learned world history and how people lived and died through history of art.

In fact, one learned a great deal about political systems and the people who were commissioning buildings to be built. I think art history should almost be a required subject for everybody, because in studying it, you learn why things look the way they look, really. And why, for instance, in Europe no housing has been built out of wood since the forests were denuded back in the Dark Ages, virtually, when all the trees were cut down to build ships. Wars, really, are what denuded Europe.

- Ross: And then as a student in art history, were you called on to make drawings, and were you taught to do architectural drawings?
- Heath: Yes, that's the way art--you had homework always, having to illustrate what was the uniqueness of the engineering of one building to another. In other words, doing the floor plan of a Roman house, let's say, or a Roman dwelling. That was part of-- just as when you were studying a painting of a period, the painting was taken apart, down to its structural elements, so that you would take a painting and reduce it to its structural lines and balance and arrangement of color. And how to be innovative in interpreting what you were looking at; not only what the painter himself may have been thinking about.

So that history of art is really understanding humankind, mankind, and all the forces that are at work. As I was saying yesterday to some people in the shop, we were talking about glazes and clay bodies. We got into a big discussion of why I used that

clay in the glaze instead of this other one, and why we used volcanic ash in a glaze when volcanic ash was not a pure refined material that you could predict that every time you used it it would be the same, because it isn't. Volcanic ash is the explosion of the minerals of the earth, and they are a glass. When the volcano ran down the side of the mountain, that was glass or glaze. And that we virtually live on a--the earth is a ceramic ball, with the fire in the middle.

So with that kind of an understanding about how things get to be the way they are, I had a feeling that if I set about doing something, that there are no prohibitions.

### Landscaping the Tiburon Property

Ross: No limits?

Heath: No limits. The only limitation is if you don't like to read--and I love to read--[laughs] I have too many books around to get through them. So that when we bought the land, the four acres over on Tiburon, over on Paradise Drive, I knew that I had that whole four acres someday to do something with, and that I could spend a lifetime at it. So that the first thing was the planting of trees. I think we discussed that, didn't we, at one time, of going to--

Ross: No, we haven't, but that would be nice to do, how you really landscape--

Heath: The land was denuded, there were about three shrubs on the whole four acres.

Ross: At the Tiburon property?

Heath: Yes! There was a lot of poison oak.

Ross: The house--the four acres in Tiburon, what year would you have started all of that?

Heath: Well, we bought the land in 1950.

Ross: 1950, okay. And there were only shrubs--

Heath: Yes, there was nothing much--three Toyon trees. So the first thing was to bulldoze back the hillside that came right down into the bay, to create a level space off of which we could bring the barge in and have a patio next to the barge. Otherwise, if we hadn't

done that, we would have been just sidled up to the side of a hillside, and to come out of the barge we'd have to walk--we'd first have to go upstairs to get on to the land. So the first thing that was changed was the topography of the land, in preparation for bringing the barge in.

And then, one of the friends that I made when the war ended, when I had the studio in San Francisco on Clay Street, was Robert Royston, landscape architect. (That's when I was making the dishes for Gump's store when the war ended.) The upstairs space above me was occupied by Royston--what were they then?--Royston, Eckbo and Williams, the landscape firm.

So when we came to Marin County, they were some of our first friends, the landscape architects. And then we met other architects through them. So when we bought the land on Paradise Drive, I had asked Bob Royston to do a grading plan for the hills and for the roadway, which he did. But most of it was concerned with the development of the land just adjacent to the bay, that is in the lower level. He had not drawn any of the plans for the upper acreage, excepting to indicate that there should be trees planted, and we should go to the nursery, to the state nursery near Davis, I guess it was, and get trees to hold the land, because it was subject to landslides.

#### Historical Background of Marin County

- Ross: Let me ask you, when he was designing the lay of the land, or the landscaping of the excavation, did he also design the road up to the top, then?
- Heath: Well, there had been a road cut down through to the beach by the former property owner. A Dr. Lawton had bought that property--no one had ever lived there since the Indians. It was part of the Deffenbacher estate. See, Deffenbacher's wife was the granddaughter, great-granddaughter of the--who was it--Colonel Reed--
- Ross: Oh, I think so. Reed was known about Tiburon--Reed of Reed School--
- Heath: Yes, the Reed School. So that it was the Reed family who were given the Tiburon peninsula by the Spanish government back in--1840s--for services rendered in war with Mexico. In fact, when we were in Spain on our first trip, there was a library, an historical library in Seville. We had to get permission to go to the library,

because it was only open to students of geography. We walked in, and here was a map--one of the first maps ever made of the coast of California. The land grants were made by the Spanish kings to English army people, and Colonel Reed was one of them for the Tiburon peninsula.

And who was the colonel who got the Sausalito, southern Marin peninsula? Richardson. So Captain Richardson and Captain Reed were the two Englishmen who were given southern Marin properties. And I thought, isn't that a kick! Here's a king in Spain who gives land to an Englishman, in California, and the Indians are living there. Never did the Indians say, "This is your land." Isn't that weird? Ownership of land conveyed by a king 3,000 miles away who had never even seen it. Reed's son-in-law sells it a hundred years later to a Dr. Lawton who never lived on it. We bought it from Dr. Lawton--we were the first landowners to live on this four acres.

Ross: They owned California.

Heath: But they were given it by a Spanish king who said, "You can have that piece of land." That's the way the boundaries--that's the way countries were established--ownership of land, just taken--stolen--the Indians driven off or killed.

Ross: Anyway, back to Royston.

Heath: [laughter] And landscaping and so forth. So the road had been cut down to the beach by Dr. Lawton, who had bought it in 1937 or '38, and the war broke out in '39 or '40 or '41. His son was drafted and was killed in the army in the war. So when the war ended, he didn't want to build there, because he had planned that his son would live on one half of the acreage and he would occupy the other. So there were two sites that had been bulldozed, two level areas, one was for his son and one for himself.

#### Developing the Tiburon Property

Heath: So he put a "For Sale" sign up on Paradise Drive, and when there began to be concern for garbage disposal of all the boat people who were living on house boats in Sausalito--and we were one of the boat people--it meant that we had to find some way of taking care of our waste. We couldn't empty it into the bay.

Ross: Right, and I remember that was one of your decisions.

Heath: So that was why we bought the land over on the Tiburon peninsula, and jacked the barge up and put piers under it and put in a septic tank and all this sort of thing.

And it was always with the thought that the barge in Sausalito had been a temporary dwelling, as you know, there was no place to rent in Marin County after the war.

Ross: Oh, but when you got it here, you saw it as your permanent home?

Heath: Well, it was--but it still was considered a temporary thing, that eventually someday we would build a house up on the hill. But the years just went by and went by. We were too busy doing what we did. We built the studio when we built the carport, where I first had my kilns, and potters wheels, as a separate entity from what was going on in Sausalito.

Ross: Did you do that just so that you could have some private workplace?

Heath: Yes. Well, and also to be able to do testing and finding out about materials. So I did that for two or three years, but it became--I was spending so much time in Sausalito that eventually I stopped using it pretty much. I moved the potters wheel down into the lower part of the barge, and it's still there, and sold the--no, I brought the kiln into Sausalito.

So years went by, and finally I said to Brian, in the late seventies, "If we're ever going to build anything on this land, we'd better do it." He'd been wanting for years to have a tennis court, so I said--

#### Advice from the State Nursery

Ross: Let me pause right there for a minute, because after Royston and company did the landscaping, they suggested that you plant trees--

Heath: Yes, they also gave us a planting plan, for the lower part, the lower acre.

Ross: Okay, because you proceeded to build quite a beautiful deck and trees and things, and today that whole lot is covered with beautiful trees and wonderful shrubs. So that was all part of the initial plan?



Heath: The lower part, up to where the carport is. But the rest of it just--we had gone to the nursery to get the trees to control soil erosion.

Ross: And what kind of trees were those that they recommended; a variety of kinds?

Heath: There were a variety of things, and also for wind break, in order to protect the things that couldn't stand wind. And the materials that were specified by the--it was the state nursery people who specified what we should get. And years later, when the school was built next door at the Navy Net Depot, one of the scientists who was brought there to study the origin of fishes was looking for a place to rent or live while he was working at the school, and he looked--walked through our property and said it was absolutely amazing. He said, "You have an arboretum here, this variety of trees. How did you get acquainted with so many different kinds of trees for different reasons?"

So I explained that it wasn't my knowledge, it was the knowledge that had come through using the resources of the state nursery. And the climatic conditions dictated what kinds of things would grow and so on, so the trees--when I planted the trees, because we didn't have a planting plan as to where they should go up above, excepting for what the nursery said, "Plant this in a lower elevation than that." So the order of where they had to go was spelled out by the nursery people.

And I think we got three hundred plants--

[interruption]

So in effect, what I'm saying is that--how many years from 1950 to 1975 or so--twenty-five years, the trees had been planted knowing that eventually there would be a building sitting here, and we wouldn't cut down any trees. That's the reason for this long discussion because back then, I visualized the kind of house that would sort of hug the side of the hill, what had then been a site prepared by Dr. Lawton to have a house sitting on it. That's where we put the tennis court.

#### Building the Tennis Court and Tennis House

Heath: It was on what he had had bulldozed and prepared for a building site. But that platform was meant to hold a house, so if we wanted to have a tennis court, there couldn't be a house there; so the

house had to follow around the hillside below the tennis court. The way that was designed was my having in effect a laborer-- because we didn't bring in a bulldozer--and between the two of us, we cut the shape of the land. Well, we benched it, so I said, "This is going to be an enclosed space on three levels." Not a house; an enclosed space on three levels.

Ross: [laughs] Okay, let's just wait a second, though. Because at the time you said Brian always wanted a tennis court, obviously that was what was going to happen. And you had decided the tennis court would be there, and that came first.

Heath: Yes.

Ross: The tennis court was made first, and Brian did that.

Heath: No--

Ross: The two of you did it--

Heath: Yes, but the space wasn't quite large enough for the size of a tennis court, so an area had to be built out for one corner, and in building that out, we had to prepare the space underneath to lead into the house that would be on the hillside.

Ross: Okay. So the house was always planned as--

Heath: As an integral part of the tennis court, part of the tennis court became the roof of the entrance to the dwelling that was on the side of the hill. So the three levels that I talked about were-- there was the level just below the tennis court, which was six feet below. That was a bench that was created.

Then we went down another four feet I think it was, to the second level, and that's where the kitchen and dining area are. The upper level was--I considered it for people playing tennis, so that they'd come in to have a drink and sit up on this upper level and look out across the bay.

The level below that was where the kitchen and dining room were, and then we went down another eight feet to the lower level. That was the area that I was going to use as my studio for painting, or anyone who wanted to paint could come and work with me. One wall is designed with a plywood section that lifts up and forms a big easel that's four-by-eight feet, and someday maybe-- although now, it's getting dimmer and dimmer in the past.

Ross: But you and just a laborer worked at carving out--

Heath: Yes, and then we had specialists. For instance, the plumbing was designed and the septic tank by--well, to fit the codes that were required there. So the specialists were the plumbers and the septic tank people, and the electrician. And the engineer--

Ross: Oh, there was an engineer. Was Royston involved at this point, because--

Heath: No.

### An Evolving Plan and Permit Problems

Ross: Now, let me stop you there, because I remember that there was some problem in that you had gotten to a certain point in your house, and one of the contractors went down to get a permit for some of the building, and lo and behold, a total permit hadn't ever been filed, so that there was a stop-building order or something. Tell me, what happened there?

Heath: Well, the house as it was engineered, by the time the--

Ross: I mean, did you have a plan, a total plan before you started?

Heath: No, I had the plan for the floors, and the walls that were related to the floor. In other words, when the concrete was poured for the floor, it came up and formed the--you see, the cut that was made below the tennis court had to be buttressed, so there was concrete poured along the back wall, and then a bench was made there for people to sit on. Under that bench were the columns that went down to bedrock, so that the engineering was the most--we had an engineering plan.

Ross: What were the borings, were they--

Heath: They were thirty-six, eighteen-inch circumference holes with a wire cage in them that went down to bedrock, so they were of different depths when they came in with the machine to drill the holes for the columns. In fact, that was the most expensive part of that whole house. That in itself, the drilling of the--there were twelve holes on each level, the paving of the floor of the house and the walls. So that once the walls and the paving were put in, all that was left to do was put on a ceiling. These were all tied together, because I wanted an open space, I didn't want a feeling of walls. So everything above that was essential to the foundation, was glass. There was cement block masonry that carried

the sheer walls, provided the sheer, and then it was just window posts. The posts between the windows are on five-foot centers.

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Heath: See, that could have been an open pavilion, in effect; as a tennis house, or as a recreation building. There was no reason to treat it as a residence, or as a three-bedroom house or whatever. It was designed really as a pavilion. When I said it's an enclosed space on three levels, and with a view overlooking the bay, it really was a pavilion-like recreation building.

Ross: And had you gotten a permit to do that?

Heath: Oh, yes, you had to have the engineer's drawings, and the permit for all of that. The whole house on the upper level has--where the fireplace is and the cooking, there are two--well, it's hard to describe, but there are just two slabs, masonry slabs, that carry the ceiling in the center of the open space. And then on the corner, on the second level, are more masonry wall--that's all masonry when you go down from the first floor, it was all poured in place. So that really, it is not a house. It is a masonry wall--

Ross: It's almost like a retaining wall.

Heath: That's what it is. It's a retaining wall and the flooring, and then we made a ceiling over the lowest level--that ceiling is an outside deck. So in looking back, it was the sort of thing that could only have happened once you had the engineering spelled out what the house would eventually look like.

Ross: Oh, I see. So--because I do recall that sometimes I would come over and you'd say, "Well, I think I'm going to do this room over here," and you'd put up some planks. I remember one time I held one so you could get a visual feeling of if you made this space at this angle or at this height, how that would visually affect the whole.

Heath: Is that when we put in the catwalk?

Ross: Maybe it was the catwalk; but I do--

Heath: See, I wanted the windows on the lower level to be a continuous sixteen feet. Then I realized that when you were outdoors on the roof of that part of the house, you couldn't get to the other side without some connection, so we made a catwalk so you could walk from the roof outside across to the dining, kitchen and other areas. And it took me the longest time to figure out how that should work, because it had to work from the outdoors as well as

indoors. That was the point that I spent more time on than anything else. In order to keep that open, that sixteen-foot ceiling inside, and still make that bridge, I don't know whether you can--without having been there, I don't know--this is not a very adequate explanation.

Ross: No, I've been there, of course, and I remember that I was always surprised, because this thing seemed to just sort of grow--

Heath: That's right.

Ross: --this creative happening. I would come over to play tennis, and there was always some new--

Heath: Extension somewhere.

Ross: --extension, or "Is this the way I want it?" or--and I, as a non-architect--or not involved in building but always intrigued with it, it just seemed it was crazy, in a way, and yet I thought, what bravery to be doing this.

#### Influence of Frank Lloyd Wright's Fallingwater House

Heath: Well, you see--one of the things I've always liked about Frank Lloyd Wright's buildings, having spent a weekend in the Fallingwater House in Pennsylvania.

Ross: You spent a weekend there, in the house?

Heath: Yes. I was the guest of Edgar Kaufmann who--it was his father who had the house built, and he was a young man studying architecture at the time that that house was built. And he was the man who was to a large extent responsible for Heath Ceramics getting the kind of reputation it did in the early days, and the early exposure, through the museums. Because he was one of the curators of the Museum of Modern Art in New York.

And being in that house in Pennsylvania, which is built cantilevered over waterfalls, and hugs--is an extension of the rock, and coming out from the hillside, the terrain there--that was in the back of my head in doing the tennis house. So if you look at the floor plan for the Fallingwater House, or how it got to be the shape that it is, then that's the inspiration or the understanding that this could be done, that it was possible to build this way.

- Ross: When you were building the tennis house, it looked sort of like an artist at work the whole time, just being inspired by what you wanted to do, and what would work, like you were at an easel or something.
- Heath: Well, and the whole tiling of the floor, since it's not a house with any right angles or rooms, it's a faceted building. To lay a grid on the floor of a faceted building meant making a decision as to where the right angles were going to be. In other words, where was the tile going to begin--
- Ross: You mean the tile was determining where the angles would be?
- Heath: No, the angles--see, on the side of the building that faces the bay where you sit and look out, there are five--the wall bends five times to form--it's not a round--see, that could have been built as a circle, that part coming out over the hillside.
- Ross: The circle being towards the bay--
- Heath: It could have, yes. That whole thing could have been, and at one time, I was debating about making it like a vault, that whole lower wall, and having it round in the front. And then I thought, well, I really don't want it to be a circle. We'll just follow the hillside. That's the way the hillside bent, and so that's the way it--. I've never stopped to think of it now that I'm trying to explain to you how it came about. I just know--
- Ross: You just know what happened, and that it--
- Heath: Yes. And whatever the terrain dictated was what came about.
- Ross: But the dictation was also by you.
- Heath: Well, I knew that I wanted to use tile, so at some point, one of these facets had to be the point which would be the right angle that you'd start laying the tile, starting at that point and moving back. And then they would have to be cut as they came into other places.
- Ross: Was this an absolute joy for you to be taking time--
- Heath: Oh, I said, it's like making a painting on a hillside. That's what you do, if you're drawing--and now when they talk about the war in the Middle East, drawing a line in the sand, that's sort of the idea. And architecture is really that way. For instance, when Frank Lloyd Wright designed the [Marin] civic center, the dimensions and so on were determined by the topography of the land.

Ross: I would say that few people have--few architects--have ever had the real--I would call it luxury that you had to be able to plan as you go, you had no restrictions of property--I mean, you didn't have an owner down your back saying--

Heath: Yes. But I had a husband who was saying constantly, "Why do you have to do everything!? Why can't you--"

Ross: Hire somebody.

Heath: "--hire an architect!" And I said, "Because, then I would have to explain to him what I wanted to do, and if I have to explain it to him, then why have the architect do it?" Although I did have the architect--I drew floor plans and so on, but my renderings, while very legible, didn't have the specifications written in such a way that it would be approved by the county--by the building commission.

So Claude Stoller had one of his architects take my drawings and draw them.

Ross: But didn't it come--you must have gone down to city hall with enough drawings initially to get them to give approval, because--

Heath: No, because I had the engineer's drawings.

Ross: Yes. But then from that point on, they didn't accept your drawings for the house, or at some point, didn't you have to pause in your--

Heath: The house has never been completed. So that if we wanted to sell it, there is no closing off date for the completion of the house.

#### Conforming to the Building Code

Ross: It never had the final inspection?

Heath: It never had the final inspection. We did have the inspection that spelled out what we had to do in order to meet the closing off, like the height of the railings that--the railing on the deck that is the roof of the house, the railing that I designed that was four inches lower than it should have been--

Ross: Then the county would grant a permit?

Heath: And by having to bring it up to code, it meant that when you were sitting there, that railing would just be in my eyesight. Being

that I'm a short person. So that when I'd sit there, I said, "I don't want that railing there, so I have to constantly be looking over it--I'm going to have to design it so that you can look in between it." Same thing happened inside the house too, as to where the roofline--how low the roofline could come down without cutting off your view of looking out. It had to be a very gradual peak, because if it came down too steep, if you were standing at the upper level, you couldn't see out, because the roofline would be too low.

So these were the sorts of things that you could only find out as the thing was being built.

Ross: Did you get a lot of cooperation from the city inspectors? Were they sympathetic to your--?

Heath: Well, the engineer said to me, "You know, you can't have that railing that low. It will have to be higher. You won't get approval for it." And I said, "Well, let's see what happens."

Ross: And what happened?

Heath: I said, "The worse that can happen, they'll tell me that I have to make it higher," which they did. And I did. Because by that time it had become so--you know, why fight about it. How many times am I actually going to be sitting there and looking out?

Ross: It's your practical nature, Edith.

Heath: And who else is taller than I am, or shorter, so that was sort of a silly kind of thing, to just--although it is the kind of thing, for instance, that people have condemned Frank Lloyd Wright for many times. They say that he made his doorways much smaller, the ceilings too low, because he was a short man. And it's true, when you go through the house at Taliesin, a six-foot person has to duck to go through.

Ross: Is that right?

Heath: Yes.

Ross: That's sort of arrogant of him, isn't it?

Heath: Well, yes it is, but--

Ross: On the other hand, maybe it's arrogant of you to have made a railing of--



Heath: But have you seen some of the houses in England that were built, let's say, around the fourteenth and fifteenth century, those little cottages? And you have to duck to go through those doors, because people at that time didn't live to be as tall as we are now.

Ross: That's true. But see, that's sort of what I was getting at. You can call--or I can say, wasn't that arrogant of Frank Lloyd Wright, or wasn't that arrogant of you to do that, but on the other hand, does our society, do our city engineers, do they allow for that much individuality? You're building it for yourself. There's nothing that has to do with safety in those railings.

### Safety or Creativity?

Heath: Well, a door, for instance, by code should be a minimum--the opening should be a minimum of six-eight.

Ross: Is that because people are that tall?

Heath: That's the average. In other words, a six-foot person would have eight inches of clearance above his--so if you were six feet four or six feet six and so on, then when you walked under it, it--

Ross: Yes. But see, then, what if Frank Lloyd Wright said, "I won't invite tall people," and Edith Heath says, "I'm only going to invite short people to sit on my deck,"--

Heath: [laughs] Or taller people, so they can look over the railing!

Ross: [laughs] But it does seem sort of like that's at loggerheads with the creative individual.

Heath: You see, how was that standard arrived at, that a railing should be thirty-two to thirty-six inches?

Ross: The only thing I can think of is that if it's a railing that keeps people from falling off, if they sort of figured out that if it's not high enough--

Heath: But the only way one would fall off is if you bent over it so far that your belly would rest on the railing, and your feet would kick up behind you.

Ross: But that would be a short person, but a tall person, it might hit them so that they could--

Heath: Well, I think really it's a silly rule.

Ross: Well, that's what I was getting at--

Heath: But nevertheless, that's what the code is. It has to be thirty-two to thirty-six inches. If it's lower than that, it won't pass the code. How many people have fallen off a railing let's say that was thirty inches?

Ross: I have no idea. I can imagine that a railing may be regulated in terms of its firmness and its ability to not fall when somebody leans on it, that might be a rational and reasonable request; but I don't know. I just think it's interesting that people--

Heath: Well, for instance, one of the problems for instance, in building or designing a house, if--one doesn't have the freedom unless the code spells out--you know, all sorts of details that are spelled out in the code, that I'm sure do not pertain in Europe. Well, for instance, wherever there's a body of water in the United States, you're supposed to have a railing between the public and the waterfront.

Ross: A protection.

Heath: So that people won't accidentally fall off and walk out. When you go down to Italy, and all the waterfronts--

Ross: Yes, and people don't--I mean, look at the broken sidewalks or the cobblestones, things like that--

Heath: Yes, here you can't have a warped tile, because people will trip on it.

Ross: That's right. And that comes to our--

Heath: Safety code.

Ross: --lawsuits. You can sue people and hold others responsible for your clumsiness or whatever. If you go outside our country, to Mexico or anywhere, people are expected to sort of take responsibility for their own care. Here, a banana peel is a cause for a suit. It's kind of too bad. Well, your house, I think, is just a marvel, and I think that the creation of it must have been-- I mean, you had all the freedom you wanted for design--

Heath: Well, there are things about it that I'm sure has an amateur quality about it, that it's not the finest of cabinetry--

Ross: Well, the cabinetry was done by you.

Little Use of Local Craftspeople

Heath: Well, there's so little of it in the first place. One of the things that's always impressive when I go into a Wright house, at least ones that were built early on, is his collaboration with local cabinet-makers and sculptors and glassworkers, so that he was able to design windows with colored designs. There was a great collaboration between Wright and all the craftspeople, so that the cabinets that are built, and the door openings, they're really so beautifully thought through, every--even the doorknobs and the faucets in the sink.

Ross: Why didn't you do that? Why didn't you call in these craftspeople?

Heath: Local craftspeople?

Ross: Yes, following the example of Wright.

Heath: Well, who are the--who works in glass around here--now, I think, today, there are certainly people who are working in stained glass--

Ross: Sure, or, say, cabinet-makers.

Heath: Well, what cabinet-makers there are are guys who are building chairs and tables that are sold through furniture stores. They're not built-ins. See, I'm talking about the cabinetry that's built in as a part of the house.

Ross: Yes, I am too, but you're talking about--

Heath: Well, Art Carpenter. Do you know Art Carpenter, who lives over at Stinson Beach, or has his workshop over there? He builds beautiful furniture, but it's not built-ins.

Ross: But wouldn't he have for a price?

Heath: But in his own house that he designed and built, he has things that are built in, that are--it's been years and years ago since I've been at his house, but it was a drum shape that was wood, like a big barrel, using wood in that--

Ross: It wasn't a wine barrel, was it?

Heath: No, just a huge--I mean, using the idea of a wine barrel, wooden keg, was the basis for the house.

- Ross: The reason I'm asking you that is because when you mentioned that some of it is amateurish, you did have the option to go searching for people who would make it more--maybe refined isn't the word, or more whatever. In our area, there are all kinds of craftspeople who do glass, do cabinet work, but you chose not to use them.
- Heath: Well, it's like in this condominium. That was constructed on site in the way that you're talking about, but those bookcases there, for instance, are just freestanding, inexpensive bookcases. Mostly because I didn't know how many bookshelves I would need.
- Ross: Okay. I would suggest, from knowing you and knowing how you created the house, that that was your joy, to create it yourself, wasn't it?
- Heath: Of course.
- Ross: So that's really--Frank Lloyd Wright didn't do the work himself.
- Heath: He did much of it--
- Ross: He probably did the pencil work, but you were out there with your trowel--
- Heath: Actually doing it.
- Ross: You were actually doing it; that's a great difference.

#### Frank Lloyd Wright's "Build It Yourself" Houses

- Heath: Well, what he did do for many people was just design a house where the owners could do their work. He has many, many--in fact, he has more houses that were built by his clients themselves, going and doing the actual--
- Ross: Were these clients skilled people? They weren't--like, Rosalie Ross, wouldn't have asked Frank Lloyd Wright to do a house that I could build, because I don't have any skills along that line.
- Heath: Well, of course. Oh, but he would design it so that you could. You mean the actual sawing of the wood?
- Ross: Yes.
- Heath: Well, there's a very nice book, I should give it to you to read. There was a newspaper man in Wisconsin, out of Madison--that's

where Frank Lloyd Wright's first workshop was on his farm, west of Chicago, or in Wisconsin. The newspaper man went to Wright in 1937, I think it was, during the Depression, and said, "Could you design me a house that I can build myself?" And Wright said, "Yes." So he designed--and he said, "I can't pay more than," I think it was five hundred dollars? Or was it five thousand?

At any rate, he designed the house, and he and his wife, they used the farmers to dig the--apparently there are areas of Wisconsin where there's limestone or rocks that you can build out of. And they built the house, the farmers helped them dig up the rocks. During the season when they weren't farming, they were helping with the construction of the house. So--

Ross: Okay. But you're still talking exception. See, I was talking about the house and you were saying that, well, there are some amateur things about it. You really could have had somebody come in and do it, but this was your choice. You really wanted to do every bit of it, I think.

Heath: Yes. Well, for two reasons: one, we'd never had a lot of extra money to do anything, so in the pottery, just as in the building of the house, I never borrowed money to do anything.

Ross: Well, this is your Danish mother background.

Heath: Yes. So that we never have done anything--

Brian: And my parsimony.

### Lighting Problems

Heath: Yes, and he was also parsimonious. And there are some things that, you don't have to do it today. There are parts of this condo that may never be completed, for two reasons: one, that in order to complete it, I have to have time to think about how it should be completed, before I could ask anyone to come in and do it.

Like the lighting. I hate the lighting in this place [the condo]. I've not found a satisfactory solution to it. And so it's incomplete. There's nothing on the market that will do what I want to--because I've looked everywhere to find the kind of--there's track lighting, if you want, let's say lighting that focuses on paintings. And the track lighting, even though it's very nicely designed and engineered and so on, I don't think it's for homes. I

think it's for office space or for retail stores that you get that kind of lighting.

Ross: Well, you will probably find exactly what you want, or you'll build it yourself someday. I feel--see, the tennis house over there really is your creation. And I--

Heath: Lighting it, the night lighting is just awful in the house.

Ross: Over there?

Heath: Yes. Because I just haven't found a good--I know if you were just talking about bright lights to illuminate the place, that's one thing. But if you want the kind of lighting that is related to the activities that take place in that area of the building, then it's something else.

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Ross: A crucial thing. People like myself or most people I know would say, "Oh, I'll just call in somebody, because I can explain to them what I want, and then they'll get it done for me." But that's not your style.

Heath: Well, I did go talk to Freda Koblic, for instance, about lighting.

Ross: Who's Freda Koblic?

Heath: She works with acrylics and plastics and designs. I think lighting fixtures, you might think of her--finds light solutions, let's say. So that she's designed lighting for--I think she did some of the lighting for Lincoln Center and--

Ross: Oh, so she's big.

Heath: Well, no, she's just an individual, and she does special commissions for lighting.

Ross: Yes, must be pretty big in her field in order to do the Lincoln Center.

Heath: Yes. And you see, if you're designing lighting, let's say, for an opera house, or a public building, it's quite a different thing than designing for a home or a residence. And anyway, this was a nutty house--is it a home or isn't it? Is it a tennis house or a recreation building; what kind of a house is this? So what kind of lighting do you want in it?

She was there mostly in the daytime anyway, and it has all this glass, so at night all of this glass is black. The lighting at night is a real problem, because windows are wonderful in the daytime when you can see out, but when nighttime comes, they become a black wall.

Ross: But lighting probably isn't as much of an answer as some sort of a covering at night that--

Heath: Well, that's another thing that is used, that's why we have the kind of vines we have here, so that at night it isn't a black wall. So then this louvered fenestration is a solution. That's really what I should do with the tennis house, is put in this kind of louvered fenestration all through the place, but there's so much glass and it will cost a small fortune to do it.

Ross: Well, there are probably some other solutions, like those little blinds that draw--

Heath: Yes, but you spend every day opening and closing them and adjusting them.

Ross: That's true. Well, I think that the house at Paradise Drive is like a work of art, and I think sometimes it's your masterpiece.

### Gaudi Influence

Heath: Well, it's a little bit like Gaudi, for instance, what he did in Barcelona. All of his things certainly are in the background of my thinking.

Ross: Have you ever seen the inside of a Gaudi-designed house?

Heath: When we were in Barcelona, the big park, for instance--

Ross: Yes, but one of his houses?

Heath: Inside? I don't remember that we ever did go inside. On the outside--

Ross: I don't know that it was ever offered to see the inside; they were very well-known locations there in Barcelona.

Heath: Well, there are many, many houses in--but I can't remember. Actually, I think the outside is probably more interesting than the inside, I don't know.

- Ross: Maybe it's like Frank Lloyd Wright's Marin County Civic Center, it's the outside that is the fascination. The inside is quite ordinary. Well, do you think you will ever complete your house over there?
- Heath: [laughs] Right now, the man who's living there wants to buy it, so--
- Ross: Is that the young man?
- Heath: The filmmaker, yes. John Schulberg. So I don't know where--
- Ross: I'd rather buy it.
- Heath: The same way with the barge, what's going to happen with that, because it's now almost fifty years, forty-five years, since it was built, and it just really needs to be overhauled, in effect.
- Ross: Yes. But do you think of that as something that you need to take responsibility for?
- Heath: Well, the people who have lived there since we moved out, believe me, have virtually no sympathy for the inside of that house. Neither does John Schulberg. I mean, the kind of furniture that he has are odd bits and pieces of antiques that he's picked up here and there, and it has very little relationship to the inside. The only things that feel appropriate are the things that I left there.
- Ross: That must sort of bother you, then.
- Heath: Oh, it does, terribly.
- Ross: I mean, I think that that's--I was there, and it seems to me that it sort of vulgarizes a wonderful design and a creative piece of art, that is like--. The only thing I can relate it to is, you know those South Pacific drawings on velvet, and then you put it into a really beautiful old Victorian house, or a modern house or something, where there's such extreme styles.

#### Furniture to Fit the Space

- Heath: Well, antique furniture always bothers me. Unless it's the--I saw some pieces in Sausalito recently that had come from, I think it was Lithuania or one of the Eastern Bloc countries. They were so beautifully done, when they did the painting on furniture, the peasant painting on furniture.



Ross: Oh, yes. Sort of primitive painting.

Heath: Yes, like carving on them. And they were so beautiful.

Ross: Were they colored, or was it carving?

Heath: Yes, colored, the paintings. And I thought, well, now there's a piece of furniture that was made, let's say 125 years ago. It's not furniture that's made today in Lithuania. They were antiques, houses that had been--the furnishings had been taken out of them. And I almost bought one of them, thinking that it would work okay in this environment.

Ross: Well, antiques--I mean, old doesn't necessarily mean that it doesn't fit into modern houses, of course.

Heath: Well, when you think of antique furniture, you think more of--at least I do--the French.

Ross: Yes, but you still have Japanese antique furniture, old, that's--

Heath: Well, some of the Japanese things, the chests--they're mostly chests of drawers and so on. Because furnishings in the past have been more or less part of the architecture, or people sat on the floor. You didn't have furniture.

Ross: Certainly Frank Lloyd Wright did that. I remember the first house you had in San Francisco, when I asked you if you had furniture for it, you said, "Well, it was a Frank Lloyd Wright design and most of it was built in, and we didn't need much."

Heath: That's true.

Ross: In the very simplistic style of living.

Heath: Well, because he built in the chests of drawers and the places to sit, and the activity areas--the only thing that was really separate was the dining table and chairs.

Ross: And beds.

Heath: And beds, yes. And some of those were built in.

Ross: Yes, I remember that. Now, the tennis house, how much furniture is there as part of the house? Most of it? Because I remember couches built in.

Heath: No, the only thing that--probably are the few bookcases. I guess that redwood bookcase--no, I brought it over here. That was the

one I took out of the tennis house. No, the only things that are-- the tables and chairs that I took out, the only things that are left there are--well, I guess just the desks, and the white desks and chests of drawers, the office furniture, sort of.

Ross: Do you miss that house, being able to have it as your own?

Heath: Well, I would like someday to--of course, if it's sold, I won't have that opportunity, of really furnishing it--I mean, having the built-ins. Once you make up your mind what it's going to be used for, is to have it be a part of it. Because that's what happened really to most of the Wright houses. As they were sold and the original people for whom they were built died off or whatever, they were all changed around afterwards. Now there's this movement to bring them back to what they looked like originally, as museum--as part of the living treasures.

Ross: Well, in a way, though, an architect who builds a house for a person does it in supposed close harmony, so their living needs will be satisfied. But each time the house changes, people's needs change, so it--

Heath: Yes. And when you're younger and have children, it's different than as you grow older--

Ross: That's right, and it doesn't make--I mean, I don't imagine there's any architect who really expects their house after, say, fifty years to have been exactly as it was. It just seems that that's part of who lives there.

#### Frank Lloyd Wright's Furniture

Heath: Yes, the chairs, for instance, in most of the Wright houses, although it's amazing, they are more comfortable than I thought; in the last couple of years, we've had opportunity, because of the traveling exhibition of Wright's, to see the furniture and to actually sit in the chairs rather than seeing pictures of them. And for the most part, they are more comfortable than one would expect.

Ross: They certainly don't look very comfortable.

Heath: I know they don't, but those barrel-vaulted--those barrel chairs and so on, with the round seat and arms coming down like this, so when you sit down into them, they have an enclosing--

Ross: They're rather confining, aren't they?

Heath: Yes, but they're remarkably--the size and shape, at least for me, I felt really quite like our cat who goes inside of a bowl, the way the cat crawls around in--

Ross: Yes, but this goes back to the fact that short people--

Heath: Feel differently about sitting in a piece of furniture--

Ross: Well, Frank Lloyd Wright was short, and you're short, so--

Heath: Well, he was five-eight; that's not really that short. He wasn't five feet two, as I am.

The other thing that was interesting, when he designed the dining table and chairs, he had six children with his first wife. The design of the dining room included the different sizes for the age of the child, so that there was a chair for the baby. But they were the high-backed chairs and his thinking was that this should be a time for conversation and enjoying one another, and that the backs being as tall as they were, they kept the conversation within this configuration, so that there was room for the six children and their mom and papa. So there were eight chairs with high backs. And it's amazing, when you sit around the table like that, and some of the restaurants do that, in a way, where they make booths that are separated really by the--isolates one table from another, that it has that imposing--

Ross: I can see that in terms of privacy in a restaurant, and I can see that it provides kind of a wall-like quality in an open space; that's great.



## XII RESTAURANT BUSINESS

[Session 11: March 10, 1991] ##

Heathware for Victoria Station Crafted in Los Angeles

- Ross: Edith, I don't think we have discussed very much about the restaurant business, although you alluded to it, but one of the first businesses was the Victoria Station, right?
- Heath: That's right.
- Ross: Were there other restaurants that you got involved with?
- Heath: Yes, but that came later. The first five, six years it was only Victoria Station, because they were building so many restaurants. They eventually had about 110 all the way across the country, and in Hawaii and Canada, so that there were far more restaurants than we could--we couldn't take on any others. In fact, we had to start another business to make the restaurant ware for us, because we weren't able to make it.
- Ross: And that was when you used some of the other facilities, one in Los Angeles, and didn't you even do some out of Oklahoma?
- Heath: Yes. Well, that was the tile; that came later. No, the plant in Los Angeles was started by a woman who was a real estate woman. We were looking for a place as a back-up to make the restaurant dinnerware for us. The man who built our last two kilns, or the kilns that we used when we moved into the new building, was in Sausalito repairing one of the kilns, when this came up, the prospect--
- Ross: Now let me interrupt. When you say "the man who built our kilns," you mean the craftsperson who actually put it together, and it was his skill to make the kiln?

Heath: Yes. Whenever you buy kilns, they're always made to order. They're not something that you just go out--unless you buy a used one.

So he was back repairing one of the kilns. See, we'd had the kilns for about ten years. We'd moved into the new building in 1960, and this was in 1970 when Victoria Station was begun, or '71 I think it was. So we asked him, "Would you be interested in making dinnerware for us in Los Angeles? It will be very simple. About five or six pieces is all the restaurant will need, and it won't require constant training for new people. It will be an easy thing to do, once you get the basic rudimentary knowledge that's needed."

Ross: Was he in the pottery business?

Heath: He'd make kilns; he built kilns.

Ross: So he should know how to do that?

Heath: Yes. And he was constantly called in to--if the kilns didn't fire right, what do you do about it? So he had to have some--I'm not sure how much pottery background he had, but at any rate--

Ross: What was his name?

Heath: Mr. Mendell. At any rate, he said that there was a lot for sale next to where he built his kilns, and that he could build a building there and make the ware. So he investigated when he went back and found the real estate woman who was handling that piece of property. When she learned what he was going to do, she said she'd like to be part of it, because there would be a need for someone to run the plant, so she became--she was a--

Ross: What was her name?

Heath: Lorelei Young. She came up then to work in Sausalito with me for a month, or she would come up periodically. I taught her how to glaze, and all about glaze mixing, and the formulas and so on.

Ross: Did she have any background at all?

Heath: No, she didn't. Later I went down and worked in the plant with her when she was ready while they built the building. We needed to make molds, so I took the design blocks and profiles to L.A. So I spent off and on, during that first year, probably a couple of weeks out of every month helping her get the factory going.

Ross: How big a building was that? Did your company put up the money for it?

Heath: No, she did it, along with the man who was the kiln builder.

Ross: So the two of them were--

Heath: Well, there was actually a third partner, an engineer that came in. I think he was a friend of hers, who had worked in--well, he'd worked in building, helping engineer the kilns--I'm not just sure what his connection was, but after about two years, she told the two men--they were complaining about things going wrong, and being very annoyed with all the details of the business, that it wasn't as profitable a venture as they had hoped it would be, and so she told them, "I don't want to listen to your complaining. I'll just handle it myself. Goodbye." So she cut them out of the picture.

Ross: Did she buy them out, or did they just--

Heath: Well, she had put up most of the money, I think, anyway, because she had the real estate, and built the building. In other words, she had made the financial investment, so they really didn't have any right really to complain. They were the ones who had made the initial approach to her, but they were not very cooperative.

Ross: Did she have other employees?

Heath: Yes. Well, it started with probably four or five, and gradually maybe up to ten by the time that--

Ross: Oh, so it was a real operation.

Heath: Yes. And she was able to build the building and learn enough--she was a very fast learner. She found the people that were needed, and was able to be in production within a year, which was quite remarkable. She was a very energetic gal. It turned out that--I don't know whether we should go into this or not--but five years later, she wanted more business than the Victoria Station, so she wanted us to exhibit at the Chicago restaurant show to find more restaurants for her. That's how we got into more restaurants, also. So we picked up a second large account, which was TGI Friday, another chain.

Ross: Thank God It's Friday.

Contract Problem with Universe Ceramics

Heath: So after a couple of years, she made a contract with TGIF for \$2 million, and cut us out of the picture without telling us about it.

Ross: Oh, my.

Heath: That was because they threatened or--they said the dinnerware was too expensive, and she said that she could make it for less, and that was the reason for cutting us out. We were taking a 17 percent override, or commission, on having supplied her with the restaurant accounts, and helped in trouble-shooting. So she made them--she just took that 17 percent and gave them a discount of 17 percent, and made the contract.

So we had to go to court, and even though we had had a contract that said that she could not make things for other restaurants without first clearing it with us, the contract had expired and we had not renewed it. So we lost the suit, and we were reimbursed for about \$60,000 that was the profit that she had made during the period when the contract was still in effect.

Ross: But she was using your molds and everything.

Heath: Yes.

Ross: Was she allowed to continue?

Heath: Yes. The judge said that as long as--see, one of our pleas was that she had modified the formulas sufficiently, or she tried to modify the shapes so that she could say that it wasn't Heath design, because she labeled them Universe Ceramics. And she took the Heath off of it. The judge ruled that we couldn't hold on forever to our designs because it was to the benefit of the country to have good design made by more than one person, or one organization. And also that we had let the contract expire, and even though the ware looked like Heath and people would be confused--that was our plea, that people would be confused by it because the changes weren't sufficient to--that people would look at it and say, "That's Heath," which they did.

But the judge still ruled that the only people who would recognize it as Heath would be people who were knowledgeable in the trade. A public wouldn't know; the people who had never seen Heath before wouldn't make that identification. Only the knowledgeable people could say, "Oh, that's Heath." But as long as she sold only to knowledgeable buyers that knew that it really wasn't Heath, they



wouldn't be confused because the public was not buying. That was the argument that our attorney was making, that if it were sold, let's say, in a retail store, that would confuse the public.

So the judge said, well, as long as it was never sold to anybody else but people who knew Heath, which were people in the restaurant business, then no one would be confused, which seemed like a strange ruling.

Ross: Yes. Well, it does to me. But then has she continued to do this?

Heath: Yes.

Ross: What happened to your contract with her?

Heath: All relations were broken off.

Ross: Victoria Station went bankrupt about that time anyway, didn't they?

Heath: Well, about three or four years later the restaurants were beginning to suffer from lost patronage, the ones who served red meat. When chicken and fish became the health food to eat, that was what created the demise of Victoria Station, because it was completely a beef house. Their specialty was roasting, they only had three things on the menu, also the raw beef was in glass domed refrigerators in the waiting room, so everybody could see it. Also the meat was cooked where people could watch, and when you walked into the restaurant, there was this marvelous fragrance of roast beef. It was a great hit wherever a Victoria Station opened, besides being designed out of railroad cars.

Ross: I remember it being quite a nice experience eating there.

Heath: Yes.

Ross: So is Lorelei continuing to operate?

Heath: As far as I know. She had it up for sale two or three years ago, when the Victoria Station accounts were discontinued. I've forgotten how that worked, whether we retained the last Victoria Station accounts, and she--see, she didn't have a financial arrangement with Victoria Station.

Ross: That was with you.

Heath: She didn't try to break that contract.

Ross: And TGI Fridays continues to use this--

Heath: Yes, they made the deal with her.

Ross: So you just lost out.

Heath: Yes.

Ross: How did it happen that the contract lapsed?

Heath: [laughing] Because we're very informal people! You know, all the years we've worked with the N. S. Gustin Distributing Company, which is now more than forty years, we never had a written contract with them. They sold Heath to retail stores.

Ross: As you were telling the story, I was thinking that this was not your usual happening, and there must have been a lot of faith and trust on your part to sort of talk to--

Heath: Well, it would never have occurred to me that someone who was really taught everything that she knew about ceramics by me would do this kind of thing. I just couldn't believe it.

Ross: You must have felt personally sad.

Heath: Unbelievable.

Court Decision: Good Design Can Be Copied

Ross: Did it go to court so you had to testify?

Heath: No, we brought suit, we brought the suit. But her attorney, a Texas firm, brought up these points about you can't claim ownership to a design forever, and Felix Frankfurter in the [United States] Supreme Court had made a decision--didn't I talk about this once before?

Ross: I don't believe so.

Heath: There was a man in Chicago named Stieffle who designed lamps for Sears Roebuck, who ran into a similar situation as we did. He wasn't able to make enough lamps for them, so Sears Roebuck had the lamps made by somebody else for them. He went to court and went all the way to the Supreme Court. Justice Frankfurter was on the court at the time, and he was the one who made this ruling that for the public to have good designed products, it was necessary for other people to be able to copy what was being made.

Ross: How do you feel about that?

Heath: I disagree with it entirely. Why can composers have claim to their music, or authors, but potters can't? I don't know of any lawsuits where a company has copied someone else. There was another case that came up after ours with the--what was the game that was played for so many--Scrabble. Scrabble was invented by a Berkeley professor, I think, back in the thirties. Someone copied the Scrabble game, and he lost the suit too, for the same reason, on the same grounds.

Ross: So if you have a copyright or a patent, then you're not really protected?

Heath: I think there's a limitation of twenty years.

Ross: In a way, it sounds sort of socialistic in the decision, in that it is better for everyone that good design should be available to the masses, one might say. In that sense, it seems rather fair but to the designer it doesn't.

Heath: Well, what I would say, "Well, okay, if it's okay for them to copy, then at least we should be paid a royalty." That would be the least.

Ross: But you totally lost that case.

Heath: Yes. And I think the only way our attorney said that this could ever be changed is Congress has to make the decision to bring it up with the Supreme Court again. In other words, if we want to change that ruling, it would have to go--in fact, I thought of going to Barbara Boxer, our congresswoman, and talking to her about it. Our attorney said that it would take years and years and years to get anyone in Congress to take action on a thing like this, and of course, it would take a lot of money for us to do it.

Ross: If you decided to take appeals all the way to the Supreme Court? Wouldn't that be one way?

Heath: But to get the rehearing of the Supreme Court, it would have to first be okayed by the Congress. That's the way the law works. See, that's why the civil rights things have to go through Congress first.

Ross: So at first, you were upset enough that you considered that?

Heath: Yes.

Ross: And then with the years--

Heath: Because I thought it would be a good timely thing for someone like Barbara Boxer to--just the publicity itself would be worth it. But [laughs] no attorney would go along with me on it.

Ross: Well, it must have been a personal hurt to you.

Heath: I know as people kept saying, "Well, you can do other things, Edith, you don't have to--it's not going to be the end of Heath Ceramics." And in a way, that's true too.

Ross: From the vantage point now, it feels to me like your energy would have been taken up by that instead of in some of the creative things you were--

Heath: Well, there aren't enough hours in a day to worry about that. Go on to the next thing. It was like a farm being foreclosed, you know. Another one of those setbacks.

#### Designs for Sixty-eight Restaurants

Ross: Are you doing any restaurant business now?

Heath: Oh, yes.

Ross: Which restaurants are you supplying now?

Heath: Well, the number of restaurants we supply keeps growing--from twenty-eight restaurants in 1989, to sixty-eight in 1992. For instance, we make dinnerware for the California Cafe restaurants, the Cantina restaurants--including one in Aspen, the Campadres restaurants in Hawaii and on the West Coast, and for Chez Panisse in Berkeley. We also do the dinnerware for two restaurants at Blackhawk in Danville. They use the black and red glazes.

Ross: Now, when a restaurateur decides they want to have your dishes, they come to you with a design, or with a--

Heath: Well, they know what kind of menu--

Ross: How does that proceed?

Heath: See, they plan their dishes around the menu. Most restaurants today do things that are not just a round plate, a dinner plate and a salad plate and a cup and saucer. They combine square shapes with round shapes, and it's built around the type of food that they're serving, the kind of dishes they need, whether they want

oval platters or square or round. And mostly it's the color of the glaze, to a large extent.

The cups and saucers or the mugs usually used in restaurants, are the same shape, design, but since we now have three--we have the coupe shape and the rim shape and the Sausalito shape, and what we call the sushi line, which is Japanese-oriented. We started that for a Japanese restaurant in Sausalito, and that's now spreading around to other restaurants.

#### How Restaurants Choose Their Designs

Ross: Do you have that for sale in your retail shop, the square ones?

Heath: Yes. Waiters in the Victoria Stations have also started their own restaurants. There's one in Aspen, Colorado, for instance. So we get these phone calls from different parts of the country calling up and--

Ross: Asking for help. Well, do you have a role in the color choices? Who do you work with? The owner--?

Heath: The chef, usually, who wants the glaze to go with his menu, that looks good with his menu. So the owner of the business will come, but always with the chef.

Ross: They must also take into consideration the decor of the place, don't they?

Heath: Well, yes. For instance, the San Diego restaurant glaze color matched the color scheme of the draperies and the fabric used on the chairs. Coordinated color helps create the "ambiance" pleasure in dining.

Ross: And then are you the one that starts working with them on the colors?

Heath: Yes, usually.

Ross: Do you like doing that?

Heath: Oh, yes. Because it's interesting to see what chefs choose for a menu, because I too think the food should be the embellishment--

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- Heath: See, the chef and owner will talk about their menu, for instance, and in many cases--I don't know what the food looks like, but if it's a fish dish of some kind, what kind of a shape or color do they visualize?
- Ross: Do most menus repeat and repeat? Don't they ever change them, so--
- Heath: Oh, if they do, then they ask us for, do we have a shape that we could do for so-and-so.
- Ross: Okay, shape I understand. What about the colors, though? Tell me, for instance, give me a for instance on a color that--
- Heath: Well, California Cafe is using a pink--we call it "Heath Rose"--with antique white. The center of the plate is antique white, and the rim is a rose color. The San Diego restaurant has--well, it's sort of a pumpkin color with a glaze we call San Diego. We have so many different names for glazes! [laughing] Because it's the tile glazes, you see, that are all different too. We spend more time creating hundreds of glaze formulas, color combinations. In fact, it's getting to the point where I am just saying, "Look, we can't do any more!"
- Ross: Do you have them on computer?
- Heath: No.
- Ross: You don't! How do you--on files, or--?
- Heath: Yes, they're on card files. But mixing, the poor glaze maker goes out of his mind! Make it a little greener, or a little bluer, slightly paler, or more luster--frequently, it has to do with the texture as well as the color.
- Ross: How good are the restaurateurs to work with? Like if you sent out a batch of dishes, do you get complaints and such or do you--
- Heath: Oh, we can use more, what we call run-of-the-kiln, because if there's a slight blemish on the back of the plate, or the color is slightly off, it's not that important.
- Ross: They're not going to complain?
- Heath: No, it's much easier, because no one privately owns that plate. It was one of the things--probably the thing--that made restaurant ware much more preferable for us; it's less complicated and a more profitable thing to do. Making dinnerware for retail trade is a losing battle. Oh, it is. The merchandising and the problem of things having to go on sale--or will we take a discount, or make a

small reorder--and so finally this year we said we were just not going to encourage retail. We just can't afford to do it.

Ross: To do what?

Heath: To put things on sale, to let the stores buy it for less money.

Ross: Is that how it works? The stores say--

Heath: They ask for a discount. In other words, they want to make their same profit, but the manufacturer has to share that loss, or that cost.

Ross: Share it, but not, say, if there's a 10 percent discount, you take 5 and they take 5.

#### Manufacturing Costs vs. Sales

Heath: Well, if they put something on sale at like 50 percent off, they would be wiping out their whole profit, so they can't do that. So therefore the manufacturer then has to give a lower price, and it means that we end up really just being frustrated with retail sales. Fortunately our restaurant sales are growing, retail sales remain constant, and our own factory store (where we sell the seconds and limited editions) provide three sources of our income. Architectural tile provides our fourth source of income.

The tile matches the other three--in other words, the revenues from tile are the same as our store, restaurant, and retail trade together. So the tile is a very important aspect of our business. Which was one reason back in the sixties, as we became aware of how costly it is to make dinnerware, that we would have to make something less diverse that didn't require all these different shapes. See, we have about ninety shapes in dinnerware. That includes lids, of course. So with ninety shapes in nearly fifty glazes is just too much. You see, if you start a dinnerware, one of the things you have to be able to do is to promise the customer if they break something, they get replacements.

Ross: I remember you were talking about that.

Heath: So trying to--we try to change colors for retail rarely. We do it for restaurants because when restaurants buy, you see, they buy depending upon if they have seating for let's say 100 people, they buy for three seatings, so that some dishes are on the table, some are in the dishwasher, and some are being filled. So if you serve

100 people, you buy 300 plates of three sizes, let's say, 300 cups, only in one glaze. Whereas a store may buy only six place settings in ten different colors, plus all the serving pieces.

Few restaurants use serving pieces, like salad bowls and bakers and casseroles. Yes, they do use some casseroles, but it will only be an individual size for individual servings. We have five sizes of casseroles with five lids. We have five sizes of bakers.

Ross: What's a baker?

Heath: A baker is a shallow (deep pie-shape) ovenware without a cover--open baker.

So our retail store, (our own seconds shop,) is our major source of income, next are restaurants, and last our retail stores. And when we started, it was only retail stores. So over the years, these other sources of income have replaced the retail stores.

Ross: Considering that, do you sometimes think about not--

Heath: Having any retails? Well, we're thinking of narrowing it down to let's say one or two in each major city across the country, something like that.

Ross: Because how many cities are you in?

Heath: Well, we had at one time 400 retail stores across the country. We're down to about--I think at last count it was around 150. We've chosen twenty-seven out of that 150 that we feel buy enough in depth and in sufficient quantity that economically it's viable. The others buy too fragmented--and you can tell that mostly they're fill-ins for people who are breaking dishes, or replacement--

Ross: Would that be shops like Macy's?

Heath: Well, Macy's dropped us when imports undersold us.

Ross: How about Gump's?

Heath: No, Gump's is one of our main stores.

Ross: Because, for instance, mail order has become such a--

Heath: Now, this year, for the first time, we're in a mail order catalog. Sundance. Do you know Sundance? Have you heard of it?



Ross: Well, I think I have. In fact, I'm trying to remember if I don't get that catalog, but often I get catalogs and I don't even look at them, because once you buy from one, you are in everybody's mailing list.

Heath: Yes. I know they have about--I've forgotten--two or three million subscriptions.

Ross: Really? And is that going fairly well?

Heath: We just this year started; we made the first shipment in late January.

#### Production Slowdown During Current Recession

Ross: You just ship that to Sundance?

Heath: To Sundance, yes. But you see, it came just at the time when the war in the Middle East broke out. I think that people just are not buying. The retail stores are suffering terribly with people just not buying. In fact, we're only working three days a week at the shop.

Ross: You mean the production?

Heath: Yes.

Ross: Really? Well, it's almost like a depression. The unemployment is so high.

Heath: Yes. Instead of laying off people, what we decided--you know, if you work out with the unemployment compensation, they'd rather have you work people on for three days, so they just have to pay unemployment comp for two days of the week, instead of laying people off completely.

Ross: Yes, and I imagine your employees--

Heath: Oh, of course, excepting that they can't continue being on unemployment and make a living on three days a week. So that many of them are looking around to get other jobs if they can, but I don't think it will be very easy for them to get other jobs.

Ross: It comes close to home, doesn't it?

Heath: Yes.

Ross: I recently read the figures on unemployment--I have such a hard time with numbers--but I thought it was eight and a half million nationwide or something like that. We're talking real tough times, so if people aren't buying pottery, it's probably in keeping with the cautiousness of the economy.

### Supporting Local Potters

Heath: We had an interesting experience yesterday. We went over to Berkeley and had lunch there. There were three of us: my sister and Brian and I. One of the cups had a crack in it--teacup. It was a Japanese-style restaurant. My sister said, "We can get you some dishes that won't crack," [laughing] and the waitress said, "We like to help our local--the cups are made by local potters, and we like to give them business, so we don't object when the cups break."

Ross: Oh, for goodness sake. Is that that Japanese restaurant [O Chamé]--

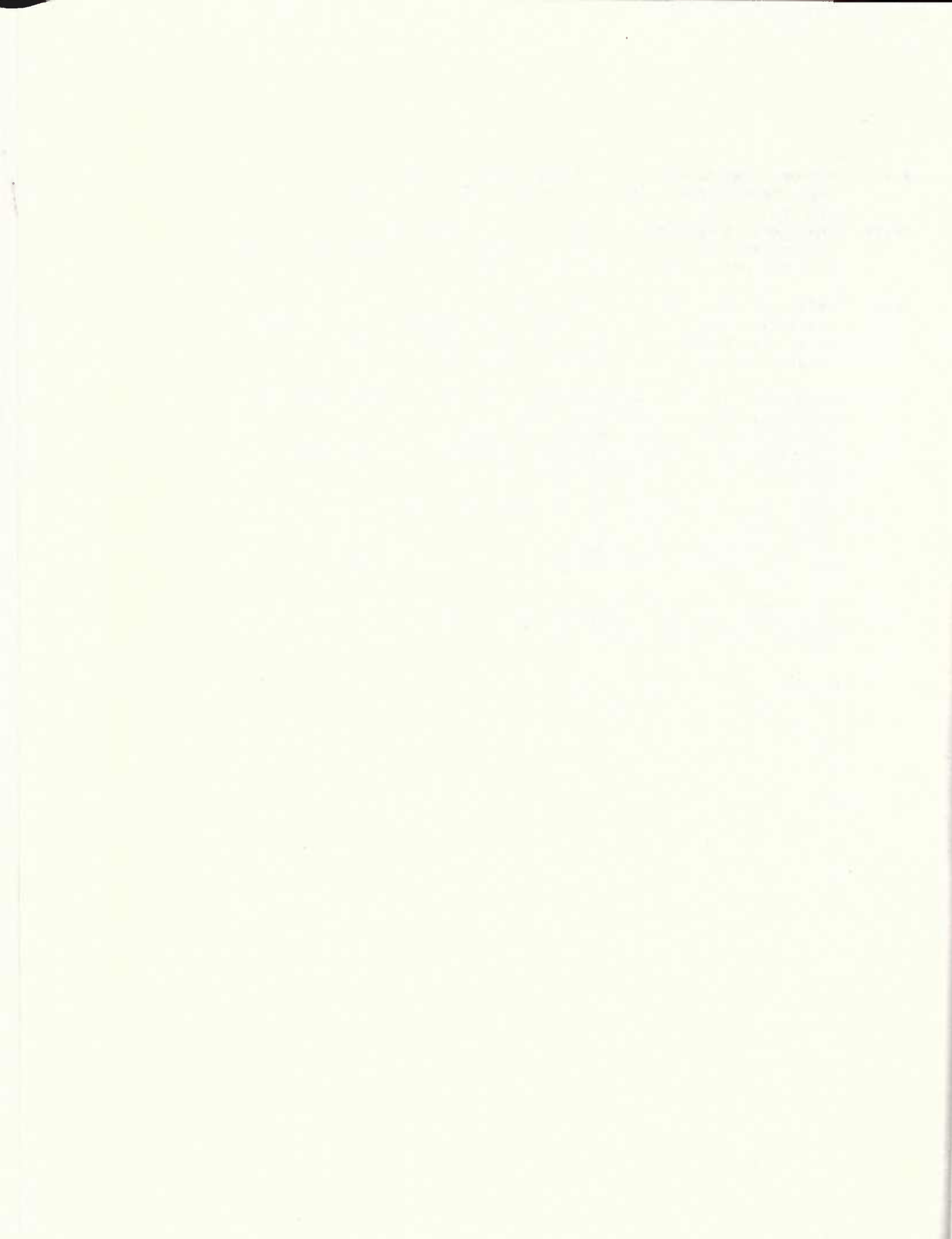
Heath: Next to The Gardener, yes. It's a wonderful feeling there, you know, with their being so concerned about the welfare of the local crafts people.

They know the local potters. And some of the dishes they buy come from China--all their cover bowls and the tureens they were using there. They're imported from China. Because that style of dishes is what the local potters can make and have the look that fits what the restaurant is wanting.

Ross: Also, I'm sure that what they get from China is probably a lot less expensive than anything--

Heath: Than buying from local potters, but even so, I think that that's the way life should be, really. And I know to a large extent that the reason our retail store does as well as it does is because we are located in a place where people do buy from us. Most of the--we have people coming from all over the country who started buying in New York and Philadelphia and so on who--there are no longer any shops there who handle our ware. So when they make a trip to San Francisco, they come to Sausalito to buy. So we now, through our factory store, in effect, service the whole country. That's why it represents 50 percent of our dinnerware business. In other words, our revenue from all the restaurants and retail shops we have is matched by our local store.

- Ross: But you started saying something--maybe I didn't understand it--you said, "That's how I think it should be." Do you mean--?
- Heath: That local people should support local industries. Instead of buying from China, or Portugal, or--of course, there can be imports too, but we're small enough that we don't need that--
- Ross: Well, how about the restaurant you were in, it's a Japanese restaurant, and they bought from China. I guess I would understand it if they bought from Japan, because that's a style, if there was no Japanese dinnerware available here. Would you agree with that?
- Heath: Yes, yes. In other words, if you're doing a cuisine that requires a certain ambiance or kinship to the food you're serving, then--especially with people who have traveled a great deal, that if you want Moroccan food, it's kind of nice to have it served in the kind of vessels that are used in Morocco.
- Ross: Yes. And it does carry out an ethnic and cultural expansion of our experience, even if we don't travel. But it would be interesting for instance if that Japanese restaurant would say to the local artists, "These are the styles. Do you want to make them?"
- Heath: Well, the potter who's making it is making a ware--I didn't know that it was made by a local potter, because it has a crackle glaze and the kind of glaze that one associates with the Orient.



Original Stoneware Glazes

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White Stoneware Glazes



Original Stoneware Glazes

"RIM"

White Stoneware Glazes



"SAUSALITO"

White Stoneware Glazes



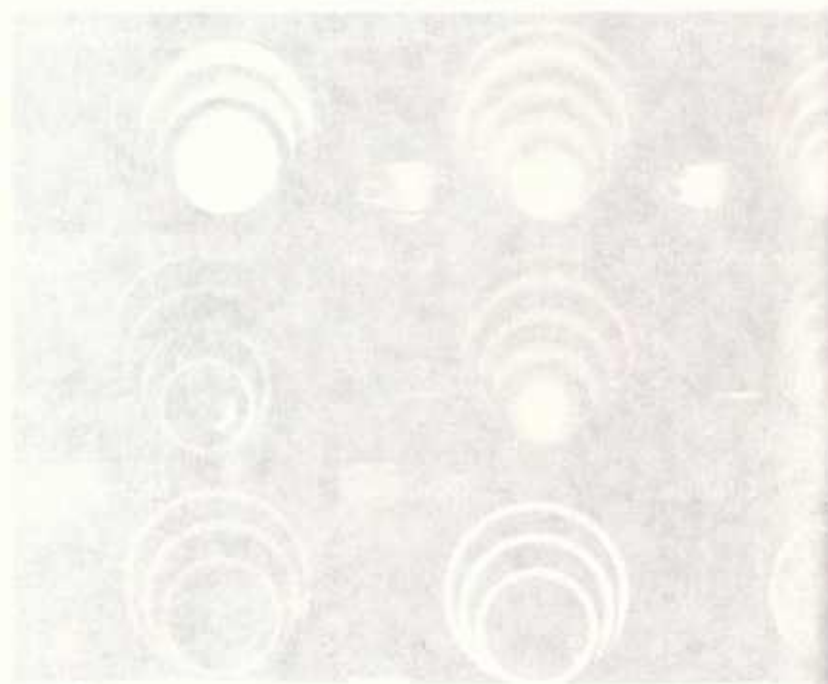
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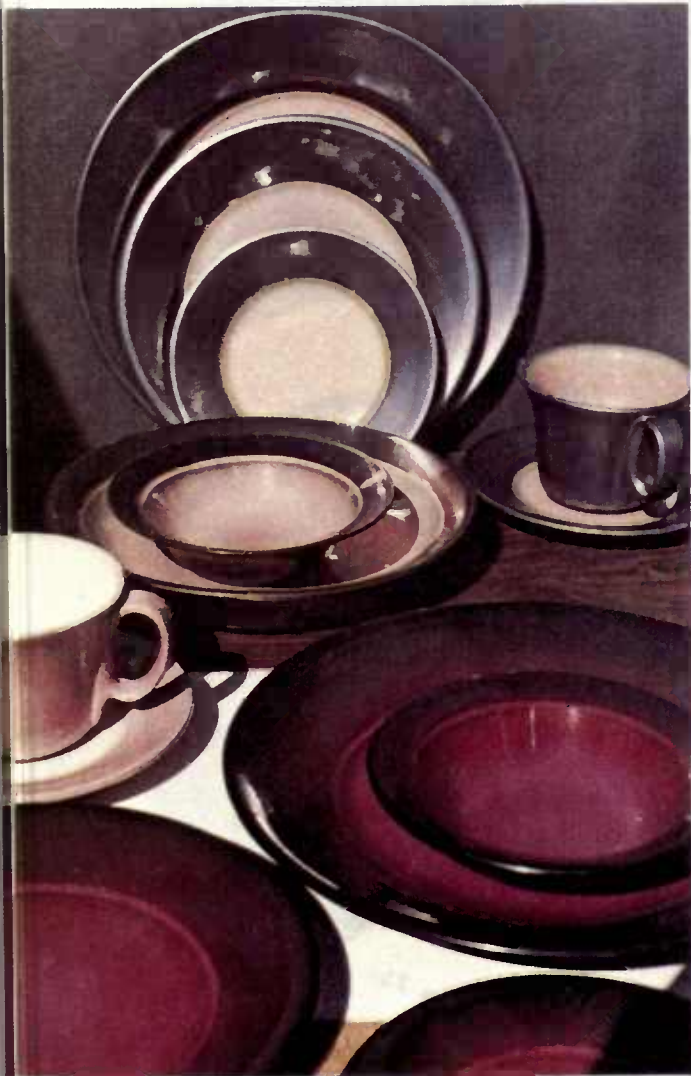


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## Glaze Index

9 original stoneware glazes continue in Coupe and Rim. 7 new glazes added on white stoneware body for "Coupe," "Rim," and "Sausalito."

*16 Glazes — Two Clay Bodies*



- |                        |                        |                       |                 |
|------------------------|------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------|
| 1*<br>Antique<br>White | 2<br>Opaque<br>White   | 3<br>Brown &<br>White | 4<br>Onyx       |
| 5*<br>Heath Rose       | 6<br>Blue Granite      | 7<br>Sandalwood       | 8<br>Birch      |
| 9*<br>French Blue      | 10<br>Opal Blue        | 11<br>Moonstone       | 12<br>Mojave    |
| 13*<br>Cypress         | 14*<br>Rose<br>Peacock | 15*<br>Raspberry      | 16*<br>Primrose |

\*white stoneware body

cover photo: "Sausalito — 5pc place setting — Primrose  
4 pc Raspberry plates  
c/s Heath Rose

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20TH CENTURY DESIGN USA







CHIP RESISTANCE TEST OCTOBER 1989

NUMBERS REFER TO THE NUMBER OF BLOWS HIT WITH A STEEL CYLINDER SWING FROM A PENDULUM READING FROM 1 TO 11.

RETURNED FROM CALIFORNIA CAFE - SAN DIEGO. NOTE HIT SCORE ALONG SIDE CAFE CHIP



FREEZING REVEALS WATER PATTERN IN DOUBLE PUGGED CLAY



These ARE from the tile clay the day that Edith + Russell tried to make the "oriental" dishes with the press mold. The clay was extremely soft.

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

Department of Geology

10

1935

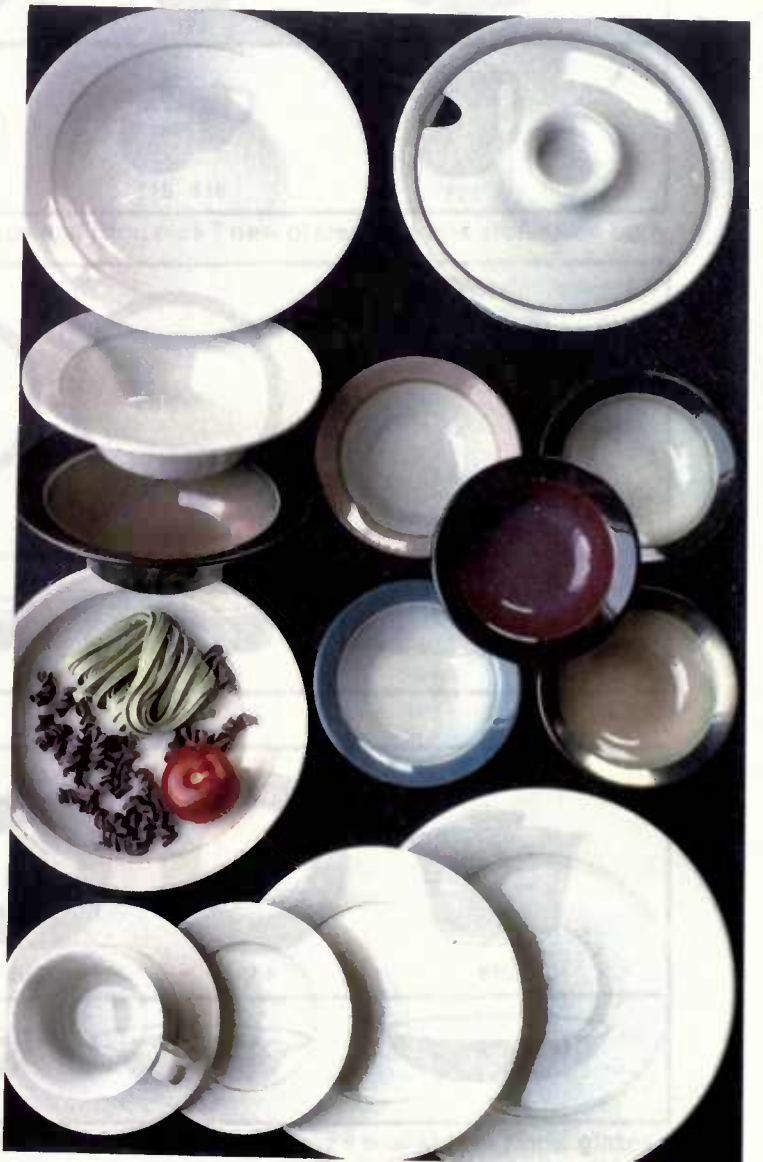
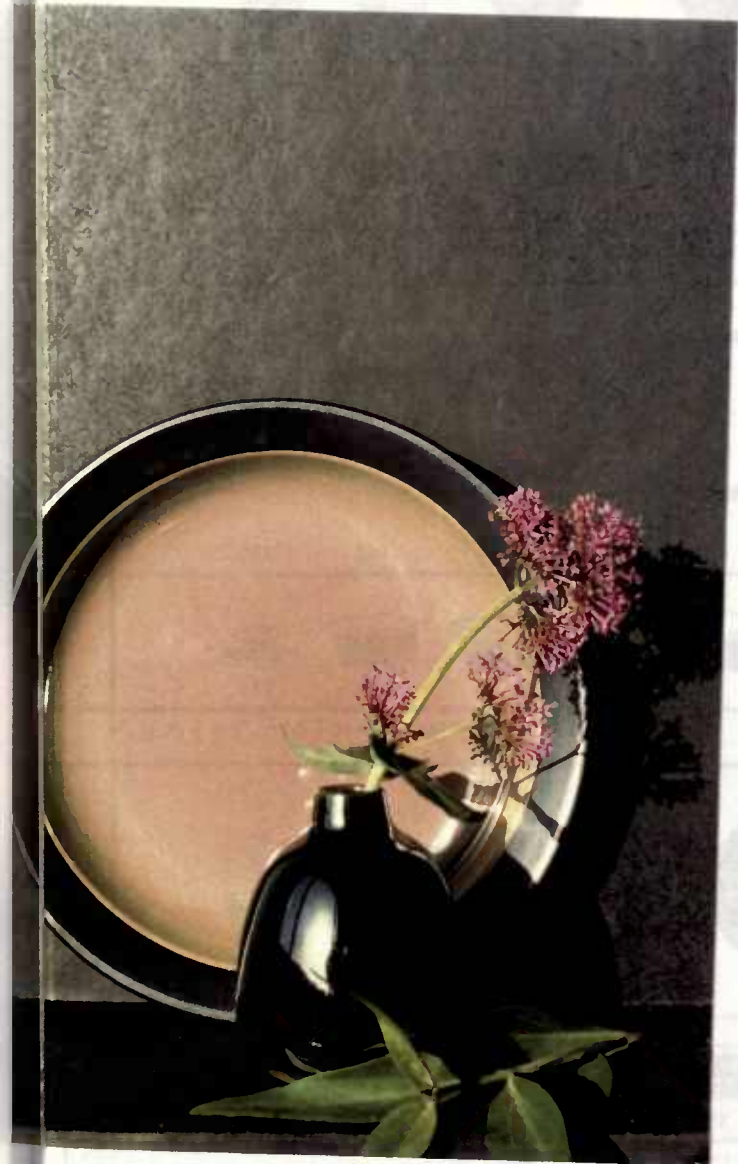


PREPARING REVERSALS  
WITH PATTERN IN  
PURE REDD CLAY



These are from the same  
the clay that makes the  
best to make the  
glass with the pure  
clay

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METAPHORS FOR  
KITCHEN  
MADE IN





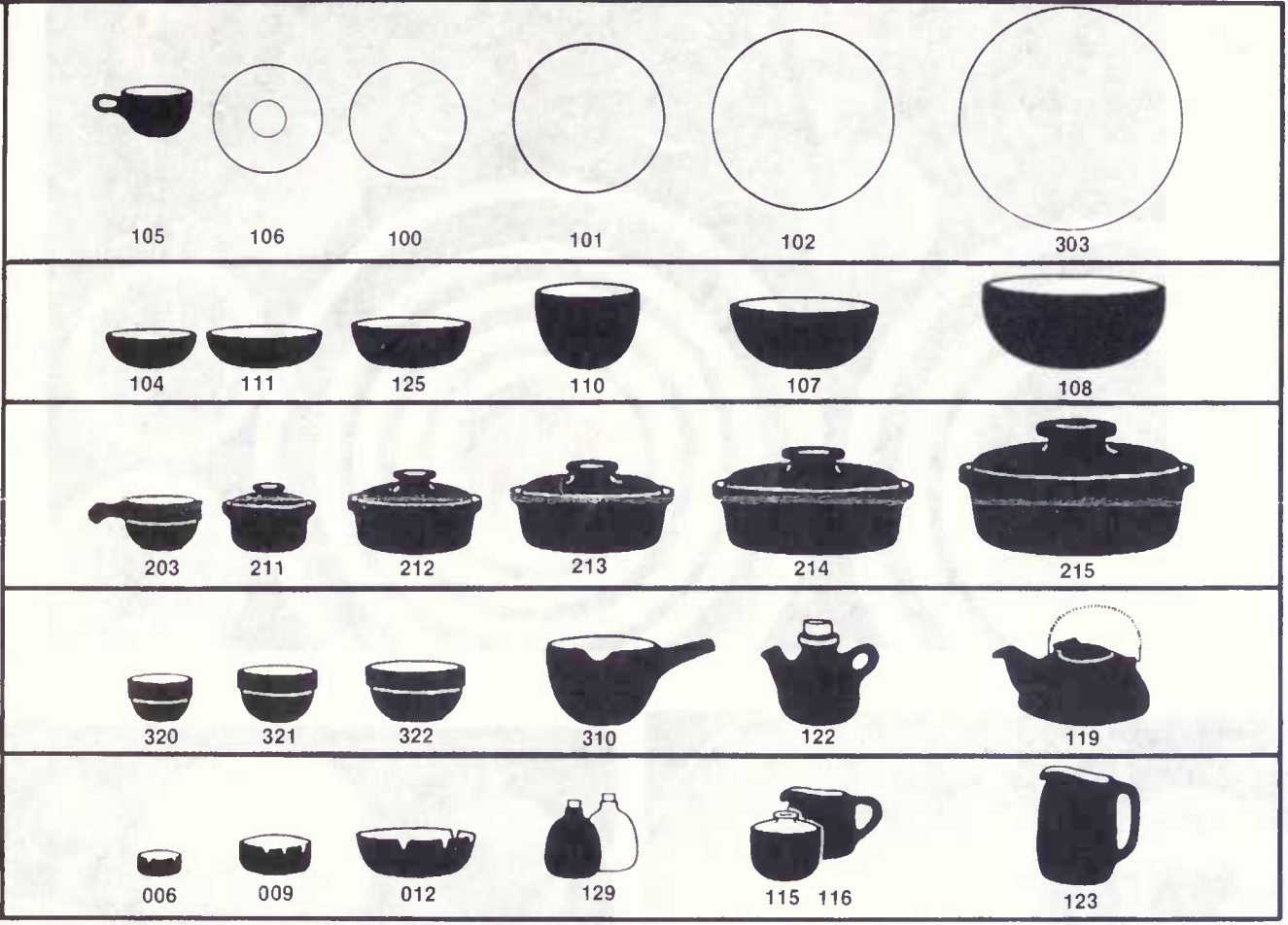
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"COUPE" stoneware, is now being made in a porcelain-type body with bright glazes.

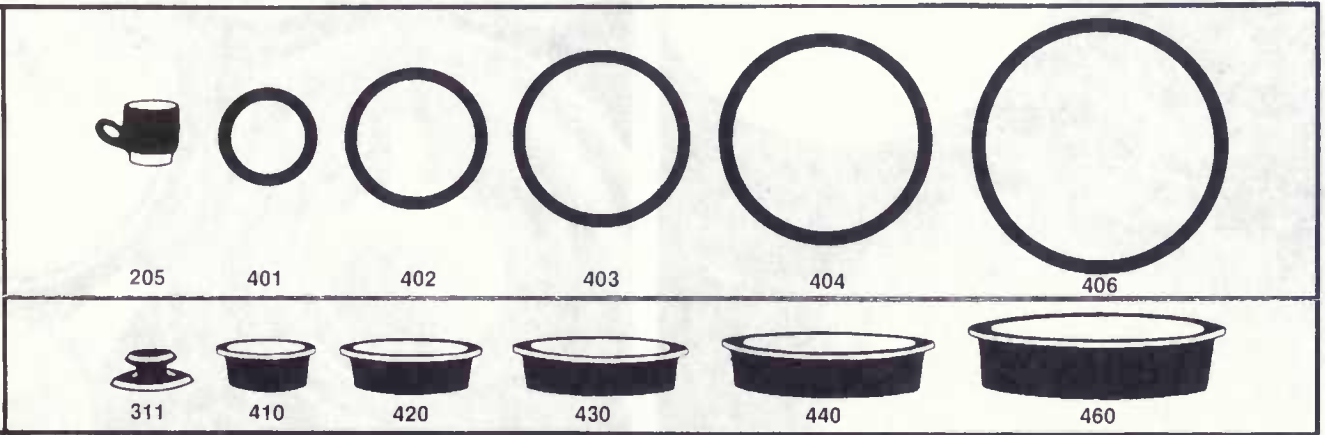
**"COUPE"**



*Oven-To-Table*

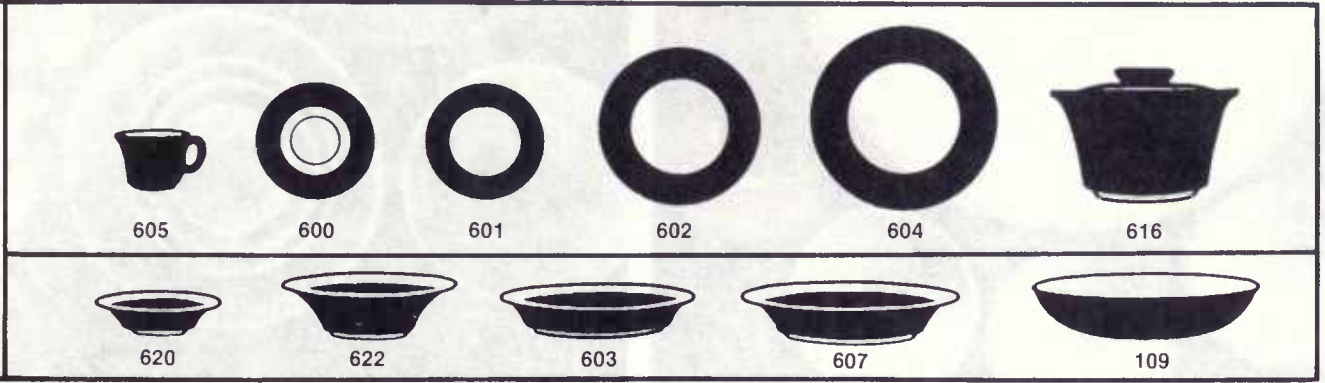
9 stoneware glazes in Coupe and Rim, plus 7 new glazes on white stoneware body

**"RIM"**



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In 1984 Heath designed "Sausalito" in white stoneware available in 7 new glazes.











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## XIII SPECIAL ORDERS

Saudi Arabian Plate

Ross: That brings us then to what you did with the Arabian plate. Tell us about that, because that was a set of dinnerware that you made last year.

Heath: Well, it wasn't a set of dinnerware; it was only a commemorative plate, actually, that was used at the opening of the Saudi Arabian exhibition called "Saudi Arabia, Yesterday and Today." They had a traveling exhibition of the arts of Saudi Arabia, or the Middle East, yesterday and today--historical exhibits. And for the opening in Washington, D.C., they wanted to have a gift for everyone, the VIPs who were attending, the senators and the foreign ambassadors. For the opening dinner they wanted a gift. So they sent us--

Ross: Who's the "they," and how did it all begin? How did you get that particular order?

Heath: Well, it has kind of an interesting history. I had a phone call one day from a potter in Berkeley who explained to me that she had been asked by the Saudi Arabian government, because she made plates with the look of the Saudi Arabian, because her husband teaches Arabic languages. They had lived in Cairo for a number of years while he was learning the Arabic languages.

Ross: He's not Arabic himself.

Heath: No, no, they're Americans. So she, being a potter, began using the language, the script, the Arabian script on her things when she worked as a potter in Cairo. When they came back to the United States, they were in Washington, she wanted to meet the man who was considered the greatest calligrapher living today, and so she looked him up. He said he had never worked on ceramics. He made

designs for the publicity of the Saudi Arabian government, but he always designed for printing process.

So he said to her that if she ever wanted to use some of his script, he would design something for her. Well, when this exhibition came up, the Saudis asked this calligrapher in Washington who could make this special plate for them. So he called Sylvia in Berkeley and told her about it, and he said, "We need 300 plates for this dinner, can you make them?" She said [laughing] she spent thirty days in making just one plate. For her to make 300 plates would take her 9000 days!

Ross: It took thirty days to make one plate?

Heath: Yes.

Ross: Now, what is her name?

Heath: Sylvia Godlas.

Ross: Now, let me get this clear: when she came back from Cairo, she had wanted just to meet this calligrapher, so she went to visit him, talked to him. Then when the United Arab Republic or whoever it was, Saudi Arabians, came to him, he remembered her in Berkeley, and then she said, "No, I can't do that."

Heath: No, she said, "I can't do it myself; I'll see if I can find some of the other potters in the Bay Area to help me." Because she shares a studio with three other potters. So when she hung up, she said to them, "Do you think between the four of us that we could make these plates?" And they said, "Oh, Sylvia, you must be kidding." But she said one of them told her, "I know who could do it, and that's Heath in Sausalito." So she called--that's how I got the phone call. And when she explained this to me on the phone, I said, "Well, we have a perfect fit, because we have three people from Pakistan who work here, who are potters, who know the script, and so it's very logical that we should be able to do it."

Ross: Wait a second. Is Pakistan--United Arab--do they have the same--?

Heath: Yes. Because that plate right up there, before we ever got the calligrapher from Washington--because he faxed--he did the script and faxed it to us, which we then carved into the plaster.

Ross: The man in Washington actually did the calligraphy.

Heath: Yes. And Sylvia masterminded the whole project. She got--because it wasn't enough just to have the people in our shop, that to make the 300 plates in two months, that's the time we had to do it, but

she had to get other people from Berkeley to work on the plates, even though it was carved in the plaster. It was first painted with the black underglaze, and then glazed and fired with--I developed a formula, I combined two formulas--well, first of all, green is a Saudi color, so we had to go through all of our glaze formulas to find the particular kind of green that they wanted--

Ross: Because this green is not at all like any of the greens that you have that I've seen in the shop at all.

Heath: No. So we spent about a month just working on different kinds of greens and the combination. Then we submitted twenty pieces for them to choose one of them.

#### Prince Bandar and the Exhibition

Ross: The people in Washington?

Heath: Yes.

Ross: Was it the embassy, or--?

Heath: Yes, it was Prince Bandar, who's the son of--well, he's in the news all the time. In fact, he's the one--he learned to fly airplanes here, and he went to school in the United States. He was the one who chose the plate.

Ross: What's his role in Washington?

Heath: Well, he's in Saudi Arabia now. No, he lives--he doesn't have any particular--he's the prince of Saudi Arabia. I mean, there are forty princes, but he's number one.

Ross: But he was in Washington--

Heath: Prince Bandar.

Ross: Yes, and working on this project.

Heath: Oh, yes, he was working putting this exhibition together, yes. That's true. But he went to school somewhere in the east, I'm not sure which one it was now. He's building a house in Aspen, Colorado, forty-million-dollar house, something like that.

Ross: Incredible.

Hiring Foreign Students to Do Calligraphy

Heath: So to make a long story short, we hired piece workers to do the gold work on these plates, because after the black underglaze, the turquoise-green glaze was applied and fired, then the black was outlined with gold, so the most that anyone could do in a day would be two plates. It took a half a day to just do the gold script.

Ross: Where did you find people who could do that?

Heath: Well, Sylvia found them on the campus. Some of them were students of her husband. And they were all Arabian or Moroccan or--in other words, they were foreign students studying at Berkeley, who were not potters necessarily.

##

Ross: So she was able to find students to do the gold painting. And the most they could do would be two plates a day?

Heath: Yes. Some of them couldn't even do two. The best were two who happened to be Russian. And that was just a fluke. They--man and wife, both artists, both potters from Russia, young people--had just come to the United States, and they were--I don't know how they happened to find us in Sausalito, but they were there the day that Sylvia came over to talk to me about this job.

Ross: Just happened to be; so Sylvia didn't find them, they--

Heath: No, no, they just happened to come to the shop. They were looking for some connection with ceramics in San Francisco or the Bay Area, and so they had come looking for a job, or a place to work. I was in the middle of talking with Sylvia when they appeared on the scene, and so they became involved in the conversation too. So it turns out that they had worked with gold and platinum in Russia.

Ross: That sounds too lucky.

Heath: Yes. That's the way life is sometimes.

Ross: Isn't it wonderful? How long from beginning to end did the project take?

Heath: I think she called me in March, and we had--the exhibition opened in the middle of July, or the first of August, something like that.

Ross: So it was four months, in all?

Heath: Well, the first months or almost first six weeks were spent in just getting the approved sample made. At that time, it was just Sylvia working with me, and with Abdul, one of the Pakistanis who was in our shop. The three of us worked on preparing all the samples. Then once we got the approval of what to do, and they chose the most expensive and the most elaborate one, the most time-consuming --I don't know whether that was because they just liked it better, or because it was the most elaborate of the designs.

At any rate, in the meanwhile she used that time to scout around in Berkeley to find out through her husband who were possible prospects to work on the job once we got the approval. So that was now in the middle of--because I calculated that we had x number of days, and the number of pieces that would have to be made each day in order to meet the deadline, and so we had to find six--besides the two Russians and Abdul--we needed eight people, so she got five more with those three, with each one making--because it was the underglaze black that also needed to be done first, so it wasn't just applying the gold. It was the total process.

And some of them couldn't come every day, you see, because they had classes to attend. So we had to--at any rate, there were eight people who worked on it.

Ross: And how many pieces did you eventually--?

Heath: Well, we shipped 300, but we had about a hundred that weren't shippable.

Ross: That something happened or--

Heath: Well, the color wasn't quite right, or it got smudged--for one thing or another, they weren't usable. I would have passed some of them, but Sylvia was very--she said, "They have to be perfect, because the calligraphy is so dependent upon the tiniest flourish," so if a brush--and once you put the gold on, you can't clean it off. You've had it. So that's why it's so time-consuming, because people would have to look at what they were copying and be sure the flourish--so every stroke--oh, I couldn't have done it myself. It's not the sort of thing that I could ever do. You'd have to know what the letter was, what the meaning of the word was, because it was so easy to--the line curved this way instead of this way or stopped too soon or whatever, that it's a different letter.

Ross: What did it say on the plate?

Heath: It was written in Arabic, and translated it said, "O Guest, were you to visit us indeed, you would find us to be the guests and you, the Lord of the manor." In other words, my house is your house.

Cost Analysis

Ross: And did they pay you handsomely for this?

Heath: Well, it was \$185 a plate.

Ross: Did that cover it?

Heath: We didn't make--we covered all our expenses, and I think we made maybe a profit of, oh, \$3,000 or \$4,000. And I paid Sylvia 10 percent. So the total shipment was around \$60,000, and Sylvia was paid \$6,000.

Ross: Amazing. Did you do it on sort of a cost as you went, or--

Heath: Well, she made a time study. She would do a plate, and time herself as to how long it would take to do each part of it. On the basis of that, she chose the people who were able to--some people could do the black underlining that couldn't do the gold. So she timed every step and how long it would take, and then people were paid by the piece.

Ross: Were they penalized when they made an error?

Heath: No. They could keep the plate or whatever, or it was one that wasn't used.

Ross: No, I meant if you get paid by the piece, you're the artist--

Heath: They were paid for every piece, whether there was an error on it or not. I mean, you could work let's say a half a day, and then just suddenly do something--

Ross: Oh, I understand, but on the other hand, that's a tricky question, because if you tried to go fast because you got paid by the piece, you'd get very sloppy.

Heath: Well, we paid \$48. We figured four hours is what it would take, and at \$12 an hour was \$48 per plate.

Ross: Well, it's interesting because that is an experience that most people, it seems to me, would really give great pause before they took it on. The idea that you said, "Yes, we could do this," and then actually were able to trust Sylvia to cost analysis--

Heath: Well, we discussed all these things in the beginning. I said, "Look, this is not something that can be a hurried job, and it will need people who know the language," and she said, "Well, that's no



problem. There are a lot of foreign students in Berkeley, and Arabic students--"

Ross: She had good connections.

Heath: Yes.

### Gift to Dinner Guests

Ross: Did you get feedback from--oh, first question, the plate was a gift to each person who attended the dinner?

Heath: Well, there was a problem in that through the local--for the American senators or congresspeople, they cannot accept a gift in excess of one hundred dollars. So for a while it was sort of nip-and-tuck as to whether we would make two sizes--two kinds of plates, one that was a hundred dollars that would be given to the U.S. senators, [laughter] but then there were so many other Americans who weren't senators who would be getting things, that they found that wasn't possible. So I don't know where they got-- maybe it's one of the things that--I guess \$185--well, \$85 in excess of what any gift you should receive might be overlooked by the powers that be.

Ross: So they decided to give everybody--

Heath: So everybody got the same plate.

Ross: Now we have insider information, don't we? [laughter]

Heath: But it was only up until the very last minute that they finally agreed to that, because I said to Sylvia, "Look, if we've got to make these two different sizes, that's just going to complicate the thing so much. Well, for one thing, with the House of Representatives--there are more than that many people, if every member of Congress got one, and it would not only be the senators but there were some of the people from the White House.

Ross: But certainly they didn't invite everybody, did they?

Heath: Well, I don't know, that was the thing. Well, maybe they had other gifts--

Ross: Did anybody go to this dinner from here so that--?

- Heath: No, not that I know of, and I've never had a word of feedback from it excepting Sylvia saying that they loved the plates.
- Ross: And how did she know that?
- Heath: Oh, because the woman who negotiated the thing from Washington--see, Sylvia didn't talk with Prince Bandar directly. In other words, there's a firm in Washington--that's their job to act as vendors, or whatever you want to call them, for special projects of this kind.
- Ross: That was really quite an interesting thing. Were you getting nervous about the deadline?
- Heath: Well, there were times. So we worked Saturdays and Sundays, and Sylvia really did many of the plates herself. If one would be goofed up, she would try to correct it in some way and put it back through the kiln again. And she looked--every single piece was examined minutely to be sure that there wasn't an error anywhere.
- Ross: That's kind of interesting, because if most of them were to go to American congresspeople--
- Heath: They would never know. No, but it was the ones that would be--and since they were now going to be all the same, she had no way of knowing who would be--. Well, they finally did not put them on the table, because they were boxed, because they had a plate stand that went with them. So they finally decided that they would just hand the gifts to the people.
- Ross: So this was not a dinner plate in the sense that eating off of it--
- Heath: I think actually that because we had to get boxes that were shippable for fifty of them, so they may have shipped some out of the country, or elsewhere--
- Ross: Were you responsible for boxing each individual one?
- Heath: Yes.
- Ross: What an incredible--see, to me, this looks like just an enormous job, like it would just be--
- Heath: Well, see, the other cost--the plate was \$185, but the total cost for the cost of the box and the plate stand and the shipping costs brought it up to \$200 or a little bit more.

Cost of Fancy Goods

- Ross: And for which you could charge. Well, when you figure out what they spent on everything else, that was probably not the largest expense at that dinner. I suppose our notion of an expensive gift is a little parochial, or whatever.
- Heath: No, there's a whole area of life that I know very little--did you see those dresses and clothing that was in last Sunday's Image [of the *San Francisco Chronicle*] section? Dresses at \$3,600.
- Ross: Oh, yes. Bill got the Saks Fifth Avenue catalogue, and he handed it to me and said, "I limit you to three of these." On the front was quite a reasonable beautiful thing, and I thought, Oh, nice. I don't buy clothes like that anyway, but--so I started looking at it. They were very far out, enormously colorful. Every one was a mini, and every model was thin and gorgeous and every one of them was over \$1,000. Most of them--there was one cocktail dress that was over \$7,000. All we could figure out was, who was going to buy these? Because the people who look like that are usually not the people with the money. It is an interesting--
- Heath: And how were you on the mailing list!
- Ross: Well, Saks Fifth Avenue, we occasionally buy things at Saks. It doesn't take much to be on a Saks Fifth Avenue mailing list. If you buy anything from them and write a check for it, you are on their mailing list. And much of Saks' stuff, of course, doesn't have that price tag.
- But when you see clothing and style like that, then you think about what you charge for pottery. Where is the value?
- Heath: It's just unbelievable, the difference.
- Ross: Do you think the same people who buy those expensive gowns--and evidently there's quite a group in San Francisco that has this sort of a wardrobe--would bicker at all at the price, say, if they were to decide to buy a set of Heath dinnerware--for instance, the beautiful ones with the gold trim?
- Heath: Well, we do sell a number of them, and even in our own shop, not necessarily through Gump's. It's not that unusual for people to order more--well, between \$1,000 and \$2,000--
- Ross: Worth of dinnerware?
- Heath: Yes. It doesn't happen that often, but it does happen.

Ross: But say \$2,000 of dinnerware, what would it buy in the gold stuff? Could you get ten plates?

Heath: Yes, it's always the things--well, a retail place setting is, I think it's around \$190, something like that, so if you buy--call it \$200--

Ross: That's not the gold, though, is it?

Heath: Yes. So if you buy twelve place settings at \$200 a place setting, that's \$2,400.

Ross: Yes. It's like buying sterling silver.

### Replacing Tiles in the State Capitol

[Session 12: March 15, 1991] ##

Ross: I thought we'd start today talking about the request for you to replace the tiles in the California State Capitol, the floor tiles. It would be interesting to know the history of that. That was a time when they were redoing the total building, I think.

Heath: Yes, and the tiles that had been used on the floor were particularly worn, the ones at the entrance. There are three entrances to the capitol building, and the tile design that was used there was the Minerva, or the state seal. The tile had been made about ninety years ago.

Ross: What does Minerva--is that a--?

Heath: The state seal. It's a woman riding a bear, the California bear, surrounded by a border. It was eight feet-by-eight feet square, and made of six-by-six tile. The technique that had been used in manufacturing it ninety years ago was lost, nobody knew how it had been done. So the state architects worked with a ceramic engineer to find out who could make tile like that, and how did they get-- because it was a patented design.

So to make a long story short, the way we replicated it was--

Ross: How did the engineers come to you? The state engineers? At what point did you get into the production?

Heath: I think they just must have inquired around the state to find out what tile plant was capable of doing this sort of thing. I don't know how they found us, but they looked us up to see whether-- because it's not the kind of job that, let's say, a large tile producer would do, because it was too time-consuming. The technique used to make the tile, we spent I think the better part of two years making the tile, because we could only make about six or seven pieces a day.

Ross: But to begin with, they had lost the formula, you might say, so they came to you?

Heath: Yes, the method. And no one still has determined exactly how it was done at the time. The state architect came up with a steel mesh of the design, made out of stainless steel--which we know was not used ninety years ago. It was 1980 when this state capitol was rebuilt, or refurbished. So that's now eleven years ago.

At any rate, the thing that was unique about the tile was that the pattern, the texture, was as if it were a needlepoint. It was like a needlepoint design, made on a burlap--

Ross: Like small cross stitches?

Heath: Yes, a rough woven material like a burlap, I think may have been the thing that was used at the time. But how they got enough of an opening, or whether they rolled it into the wet clay, the burlap, with the opening into the wet clay to get this three-dimensional effect, must have been a fabric that we don't know anything about. It couldn't have been burlap, because when it was replicated in stainless steel, each opening is an eighth of an inch opening.

We sprayed--there were twelve colored clays that were used in the whole thing, and each color had to have its own screen so that in one six-by-six color, let's say, that had twelve colors--they didn't all have twelve colors. That was the densest one, the center of the mural. It would take--we would spray the colored clay through this screen dry enough so that it would build up and become an eighth of an inch deep. And each color then had to fit right in between each other, so it was an extremely mechanically-devised screening operation. There was a master screen onto which all the others fell into place, so that if you made just the steel replication of the design, you would have twelve screens resting one on top of the other.

A One-Man Job

Heath: At any rate, it was the sort of thing that would take a small plant, because only one man worked on it.

Ross: You mean only one man in your plant?

Heath: Yes.

Ross: Who was that?

Heath: Bud Nordstad. He wanted to be a cartoonist, but he was one of our glazers. This thing appealed to him, and he had the kind of attitude toward graphic design that was necessary to not mess it up. In other words, you had to be extremely careful that the screens were always clean, because you could only work so long, because it was wet clay that was being sprayed, so you had to wait for one color to dry carefully before you put the screen down to do the next color.

So the way he worked was pretty much--he would do let's say if it were an ocher color, every one of the six-by-six that had a little scrap of ocher on it, he would go from one to the other and apply the ocher. By the time he'd covered all of those, then he would go back to do a blue-green or a green or a brown or some other. But you can see how it would really be a very time-consuming project.

We made four sets--three for the capitol, and one for ourselves that we have now, which we'll probably donate to the Sausalito Historical Museum.

Ross: Does Bud Nordstad still work for you?

Heath: No.

Ross: Oh, so he did just that job?

Heath: He worked for us for many years, at least twelve years, and then he was so concerned about his ever becoming a cartoonist that he felt that he just had to stop work. He felt that he had to stop outside work and just concentrate on his cartooning if he were ever to make a name for himself as a cartoonist--

Ross: And has he?

Heath: I've lost track of him. I think he went back to--I think he was from Minnesota.

Devising the Clay Formulas

Ross: In designing or deciding to do the job, did the state engineer or architect say, "It's your task to find out how to do this," and then you designed these screens?

Heath: No, when they came to us, they asked us how we thought it could have been done. We didn't know, so they went to the Patent Office and researched it there. They found that there was a patent, but there was not a description of the method by which it was done.

Ross: Oh, that's interesting. How could a patent exist without a description of what was being patented?

Heath: And the drawing. The drawing was there, but it didn't say how they got the three-dimensional effect.

Ross: So you designed the screens?

Heath: No, no, the whole thing, the state architect's office did all the preliminary work and worked out the details and paid the cost of the screens, because I think each screen was--I don't know, several hundred dollars per screen, and there were many, many of them. What we worked on were the clay formulas.

Ross: Yes. Now, with the clay formulas--you said something about that it was different? Did you have to make--?

Heath: Well, the ceramic engineer had to figure out what chemicals had to go into the formula to replicate the colors, and that's why the ceramic engineer--I don't know that we could really actually have matched all the colors had he not been working. He worked very closely with us. So he would say, "Well, why don't you try such-and-such a thing, and this kind of a percentage, and see what color we get." You have to know something about the chemicals used to produce the colors in clays and glazes. That was so detailed and so gradual in its change of color from one color to another that to differentiate the two, you had to be very careful in that the color tones were so close, not to mix them up.

So that working on the chemistry and the firing, running the proofs, I think we spent about a half a year doing that before we had the materials worked out, because they had to be--it had to be a durable surface, because it's right at the entrance to the building, so it's where it gets the most traffic. The designs that had been down there, much of the relief had been worn right down so there was no relief left anymore. So this meant that this tile had

to withstand--well, at that time, that had been about ninety years, you see, of traffic.

So to do a surface that would last at least--

Ross: --another ninety years?

Heath: Well, we don't know whether it will last ninety years, because there's no way of--see, that's one of the things about tile that's quite fascinating. When we first started to make tile, I talked with Mr. Craft down at Craft at Niles about how he went about testing a glaze to see how durable it was? He said well, there's no way that you can really replicate, let's say, a thousand footfalls on a piece of tile. So that it's at best--it's a comparison testing. You test one against the others. It's like, for instance, one rock that will scratch another rock determines its hardness. Do you know about Mohs hardness scale?

Ross: No.

Heath: It rates all the minerals of the earth according to which is the hardest, and diamond is the hardest, carbon. And then I think it's silica, and then alumina. So what we did was to make the materials out of the hardest minerals that you use in ceramics, to get the necessary color as well as the hardness.

So when I talked to Chuck Craft about how they assess it, he said, "Well, let me tell you stories. We made the tile, the pavers, for the aquarium in Golden Gate Park. We made them out of---the clay was one inch thick, pavers. And at the end of twenty years, those pavers around where people stood and looked at the fish had worn through, and all of them had to be replaced."

Ross: In twenty years.

Heath: Yes. But that was a much softer--those are those red pavers that you buy that are similar to the Mexican pavers. They have a porosity maybe of 9 percent or something like that. They are a tough clay, but nothing compared to what we used on this.

Ross: Well, I think it sounds quite amazing to go back ninety years and realize that the clay and the tile that they made then did last that long.

Heath: Yes. But, for instance, our clay is being used in the East Bay in a firm who grinds the lenses for the telescopes. They use our clay body as a grinding block, and they've been using them for, oh, thirty, forty years.



The Minerva Pattern at the Capitol

Ross: Let me ask you, though, about the tile in the state capitol, did you replace all of that tile?

Heath: We made only the Minervas. The tile--see, the Minerva covers the eight square feet just as you come through the door, and then beyond that, it's a field tile that is not in relief.

Ross: But it does blend, the colors--

Heath: Yes, the colors, but it's a much more simple production type of tile.

Ross: Well, were those replaced when the Minerva was replaced?

Heath: Well, I wasn't there when they tore up the floor, so I don't know how many of--certainly the tiles that were next to the walls, for instance, where people rarely ever get that close to the edge of the wall, they were just reused. They were all taken out, but wherever they could, they reused the original tile.

Ross: Oh, I see. It does say something about the material, doesn't it? What else, like drapes or carpets or anything else, that would be fading, the fact that after ninety years you can still reuse and combine with the new tiles as long as the color is duplicated.

Heath: But that's the thing about clay, you know. It lasts for hundreds and thousands of years.

Ross: Yes. Did you get some recognition at the time for that?

Heath: Well, there was a good deal of publicity. We were just part of--there were many, many artisans of all kinds, plaster makers, and--see, all the embellishment in the dome of the capitol, much of it was made by Italian stone masons at the turn of the century. So local craftspeople were used where they could, and they had to learn all of the old craftsmen's techniques in doing them.

Ross: That's quite a good feeling that the state of California was willing to be as loyal to the initial, the original designs.

Heath: Well, there are now more and more things that are being preserved and added to. We did a hospital addition in Houston last year where the tiles were made and laid in 1915. At the time it was a residence and this area was an outdoor garden space. When the family died off, the house was donated to the hospitals in Houston. They enlarged upon that space, and they wanted to continue the same

tile pattern as existed in the original, both on the floor and on the walls; on the walls it came up about four and a half, five feet.

So we replicated that; we did that on our own. We worked to match the colors as closely as possible. We didn't do the floors, because they wanted the handmade look that was used then, with the clay rolled out with a rolling pin and cut up irregularly, and glazed in a very informal kind of way. They had to have that look to continue the paving. So we didn't do the floor, but we did the side walls.

### Preview of Capitol Renovation for Artisans

Ross: After I had been in your plant, and saw the Minerva pattern there, we went to Sacramento to the state capitol, to see the renovation, and mostly to look at the tile. At first we couldn't find them, because they're in the side entrances; they're not where the big stair comes up. So we looked and looked, and had asked a couple of people where these tiles--and I hadn't remembered that it was called Minerva. Anyway, I finally went to somebody at a desk, and they said, "Oh, you mean the Heath tiles!" I was really quite pleased. So in a sense, you certainly got recognition for the work.

Heath: Oh, yes. Well, every year at the anniversary of the redoing of the capitol, they have a special open house and Winnie, my niece, goes up to demonstrate with the steel sheets how we made the tile. She spends a Sunday afternoon. It's open to the public, and people come by, and she's there demonstrating how it was done.

Ross: What time of the year is that?

Heath: I think it's in--oh, I don't remember. I know the opening was the year we had the terrible rains here and the slides and the floods, because the night of the opening--it was a Monday night where they had the big ceremony with all the artisans being present, it was a preview opening, and we were supposed to attend. We had been away over the Christmas holidays and came back, it was the day after New Year's, I think. It was raining and raining and raining, and the next morning Brian went on into the shop, and I stayed behind. By the time I was ready to leave, there was a slide across both openings to Paradise Drive. Well, that was the winter we spent with you, remember! Because we couldn't get in and out of our houseboat.

Ross: That's right.

Heath: We didn't go up there for the opening, because--I called my neighbor, I couldn't even get a telephone call through to Brian to find out if we were going to Sacramento. And the telephone operator told my neighbors, "You tell Mrs. Heath she isn't going to go anywhere today!" [laughter]

Ross: Is that right? Well, I remember that Brian called, and I think the next morning he and I slogged through the rain and the storm and went down to rescue you, but you were quite comfortable. [laughter] You were, I think, quite happy to have--

Heath: Had a fire going in the fireplace.

Ross: That's right, you were quite--

Heath: Marooned.

Ross: Marooned, and we were quite concerned. Oh, that is funny. But that, then, is the story about the replacement of the tiles.

Heath: So when they have the celebration each year--

Ross: It must be January, then.

Heath: I'm not sure that it's January, though. I have a feeling that it's late summer. But then it's not important as to when it is.

Ross: Well, it seems to me that you have had--I was going to say attention, but I don't think that's the term. You have been given valuable recognition for the kinds of work that you're willing to do, and that's certainly one of them.

Heath: Well, I'm not sure how many people really know.

Ross: No, but I would say that in the area of engineering and--

Heath: And ceramics, of course.

Ross: --and ceramics, and the people who know you and when jobs need to be done, you have been sought out as somebody who will take the time, for one thing, the recognition that you got there, and from awards and such, has to do with how you are chosen to do things like the Frank Lloyd Wright--

Heath: I don't know whether we discussed getting the gold medal from the AIA in 1971? That was because of the tile we made on what was then the Pasadena Museum.

Ross: Yes, I do remember that we talked about that.

Heath: And the tile we did in the Ford Foundation in New York.

Ross: No, I don't think we talked about that. Tell about that one.

#### Tile for Museums and Other Buildings

Heath: Well, that was one of the very first--well, the first big tile job we did was in the Los Angeles County Museum, the floor, the new building that was designed and opened in the sixties. I think it was in the early sixties, I think about 1963 or '64.

Ross: Is that the museum, the big one on Wilshire Boulevard, by the La Brea Tar Pits?

Heath: Yes, in that area. So that was the first one, and then--

Ross: You did the floors there?

Heath: Yes, the tile for the floors.

Ross: Throughout the museum?

Heath: On the main floor, yes. Where they have all the big pieces of sculpture and the heavy stuff. And then I think it was the Ford Foundation in New York came after that, probably around '65 or '66, and then the Pasadena Museum, the exterior.

Ross: What were some of the others that you did?

Heath: Well, there have been--for instance, a shop in downtown St. Louis in the rehabilitation of the downtown area, this complex was built that had bridges across the streets to adjacent buildings across the street. In other words, these overhead walkways connecting the central block to the--and we did the tile for that building. The tile went throughout the whole complex. We did the tile that were the accent tiles, forming the borders and the medallions, wherever they wanted a particular emphasis up and down the stairways.

#### Tile for Hospital in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia

Heath: We also did the tile for the hospital in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia.

##

Ross: How did you get that job?

Heath: Well, through Skidmore Owings and Merrill, the architectural firm in San Francisco. They have offices in Chicago and San Francisco and New York, and we had a tile distributor in New York by the name of Kurt Neu. He was the one, I think, responsible for--although I think we had done work for Skidmore before the Riyadh thing. Oh, yes, we did the exterior--a redo of a bank building on Montgomery.

Ross: In San Francisco?

Heath: Yes. It was a U-shaped tile, it had one and a half-inch return on the tile, on two sides, so when it was installed on the building, this return was revealed--so it had a deep grout that was one inch deep, and so it gave a fluted look, faceted look to the surface of the building. That's a nice building.

Ross: And where is that?

Heath: On the corner of Montgomery and Sacramento.

Ross: And it's still there?

Heath: Still a bank, yes.

Ross: I wonder what bank it is.

Heath: Well, it was Union Bank at the time we made the tile. It's now the Century Bank. And Skidmore Owings and Merrill was the architectural firm we did that for. I think that was the beginning of our association, because after that we did many jobs for them. They knew what we were capable of doing.

### No Tile for Teheran

Heath: And they were given a commission following the Riyadh job, they were asked--well, there were fifty architects from the firm that went to the Middle East to build an opera house and redo the civic center of the capital [of Iran]. What's the name of it? Teheran--the city of Teheran. They were redesigning the central area of Teheran when the shah was evicted.

We had been asked to come to Teheran to look over the situation to see what tiles should be made there. When we were

asked to do it, I said, "Look, people in the Middle East have been making tile for centuries." In fact, that's where tile manufacturing began. I said, "I think you should use the local tile." They said they've lost their technology, and they do not know now or cannot with their equipment make tile that are durable enough to use.

I said, "Well, I'd like to go to Teheran and visit some of the tile makers and see what might be possible." They said, well, that would be a good idea. In fact, the shah's wife was an architect, and she was very much interested in promoting the crafts and bringing them--helping with the livelihood of the people there.

So we went, we started for there in June or July, I guess it was, of the year the shah was deposed. When we were in Istanbul, we got word, "Don't come." They let you know--this is not a good time to be going there. So we went from Istanbul, we then took time, went back to Greece, and we went over to Israel, and fooled around a bit for a month, to wait to get the go-ahead. We were told then that it would not be safe, and that we could not and should not come.

So when we came back home, we learned that the shah had been deposed and Skidmore Owings and Merrill had sent fifty of their architects back to the United States, the whole project ended.

Ross: You came close to being there and being stuck there for a while, too, I suppose.

Heath: I'm sorry that we didn't, because I've been wanting to go to see those mosques through the Middle East, to Damascus and--you know, where tile was born, was invented, was that part of the world. I don't know how much will be left after all the war that's been going on there recently.

Ross: So they didn't ever finish their work, the architectural firm?

Heath: No. I don't know what's ever happened to that project.

Ross: Well, when you did the hospital in Riyadh, it's like many of the other projects you've done; do you necessarily have to go--

Heath: No, in fact, we weren't permitted--I wasn't permitted as a woman to go there, even if I had wanted to, I couldn't.

Ross: To Saudi Arabia? You were not?

Heath: No. And it's still true--well, I don't know, I'm reading this book right now written by a woman and her husband who was a doctor, who

were asked to come to Saudi Arabia. I think it was in '75 or '76, and the book is about their fantastic experiences. Women were not permitted to drive cars or--

Ross: No, but even as the professional from out of the country, you were not permitted?

Heath: No. She was a writer. She wrote articles and illegally got them out of the country, under a male name.

Ross: So even if you wanted to, you couldn't go. So who made the decisions, or--?

Heath: Well, the architects specified, they chose the glaze and the colors.

Ross: They came to you and you produced it.

Heath: Yes. It was a Skidmore job.

Ross: Did you ever see pictures of it?

Heath: No.

Ross: That must be sort of--

Heath: Oh, many of the jobs we do, we ask for pictures, but the architects are--they get inundated I guess with enough work that--sometimes we'll say, "If you get a picture, send us one!"

Ross: I guess I think of it as such an artistic accomplishment that it would be important to have--

Heath: Well, I keep hoping someday we can get to that part of the world, but every time we've been in Europe we've been told not to go to Lebanon, not to go to--we finally did go to Egypt.

Ross: But you don't have any tiles in Egypt.

Heath: No. And no tiles in Israel. We did some tile for the shah's house, palace or whatever. I guess that's also in Riyadh. And then we did the plates last year, remember, for--

Ross: Yes. But how did you happen to do the tiles for the shah's house?

Heath: Because many of the architects are American architects.

Ross: So they just order them from you.

Heath: Yes.

Ross: And that was for the shah's house?

Heath: Yes. Bathrooms, and I don't know what other parts of the house. But again, no pictures.

Frank Lloyd Wright's Commemorative Plate

Ross: Well, all of this that you have done and that we've talked about in terms of where your tiles appear, did that have to do with how you got to do the commemorative plates for Frank Lloyd Wright?

Heath: Yes.

Ross: Tell me about that. It was no surprise to me that you were going to do them, because it seems that someone who has been as much of a follower of Frank Lloyd Wright would certainly be in touch with a commemoration to him. It was here in Marin County that the exhibit was--you should have been included, but how did that come about?

Heath: Well, D. J. Puffert is the man who--I don't know whether you'd call him a distributor, but he's a collector of artifacts of the turn of the century. Handcrafts of that period in Chicago, when Frank Lloyd Wright was living there and was very active with all the craftspeople doing the stained glass windows and ceramics, and everything that went into his house, he collaborated with local woodworkers and glassmakers and muralists and so on.

Ross: That was Frank Lloyd Wright?

Heath: Yes. So Puffert is the man who has in the last ten years or so been responsible for finding things of that era, and then for clients who are looking for such pieces. He's in Sausalito, and has been for a number of years, so he knew about Heath Ceramics. He would come periodically to get tile that he would specify for various residences or homes or places where they needed tile when they were remodeling something.

So he came and asked if we would make some things for the bookstore and the gift store for the two-months period that the exhibition of Wright was on at the Civic Center. So we made the centennial plate; it was one of the pieces, but we also made a number of other--just tiles that had an architectural kinship, let's say, to the kind of embellishment that Wright used on his



buildings. We were given the permit to use his logo--do you know the appearance of his logo?

Ross: No.

Heath: So we have--that's patented design, and we were given the right to use it on making tiles for sale at the bookstore.

Ross: Yes, I saw them there. Well, was Mr. Puffert instrumental in getting the permission--

Heath: Well, he was the one who helped set up the show in Marin at the Civic Center, and found the space and designed the space. You know, they rebuilt the--they did the model house on the grounds, but alongside that, there were all the photographs from the Wright buildings, and the historical things.

Ross: It was a fabulous exhibit.

Heath: Yes. And there are some eighty or ninety books that have been written about Wright and his contributions by different authors, of his impact on the--he's the architect who designed more than 800 buildings. No architect has that record.

And in many of them, he worked closely with the people so that they could build--he would do designs that they could build themselves. The model house that was used at the Civic Center was the model house that he invented as a prefabricated house that people could put up by themselves, for low income housing.

Ross: Was it ever put into very widespread use?

Heath: Oh, yes.

Ross: Did many people use that plan?

Heath: I've not gone over to see it, but there's a woman in San Anselmo, she and her husband did that in the last twenty years or so. It took them twenty years to build it! She was at the exhibit, I met her in San Rafael.

Ross: I can't imagine building your home for twenty years! That sounds sort of crazy.

Heath: I hope I haven't exaggerated it, but it seems to me that's what she said. But I don't think that's unusual. I spent--I still haven't finished building on the tennis house, and it's what, how many years?

Ross: Well, yes, but it's hard to imagine them living in the house and building it at the same time--for twenty years.

## XIV CLAY FOR HOUSE BUILDING

People Build Their Own Homes

Heath: The San Anselmo couple lived in during construction. You could live in the house while you were building it. You lived in one section until the other was finished. I've known many people who built their own houses, and remodeled and lived in them.

Ross: Yes, I had friends in Berkeley during the sixties--well, fifties, really, who just out of economic necessity wanted to build their own houses, and I always thought it was just--I think I would rather have gone to work in the cannery or something and earn some money and pay somebody else to do it.

Heath: Oh, I love to do that sort of thing.

Ross: Well, now I think I would, but when I think back on that period of time, when you had--because it was when our children were young--that's forty years ago--children were young, and you were working very hard to just make ends meet. I don't know that people do that anymore.

Heath: Well, we have a man who works in our shop now who's head of the tile department. He and five other people built their own homes. What did they call that? The government under HUD. A group of people go together--in this case there were six families, over near Point Reyes Station who built six houses. They help each other, so that when they're laying the foundation, all six foundations are laid one after the other. And then the next step is the same procedure. If they're putting up the walls, all walls are put up one after the other; putting in the bathrooms, same process, and each house progresses at the same rate of speed, and they end up with each family finally painting, I think their own choice of color.

Ross: So there are six different houses all being built at the same time?

Heath: Yes, and in an area where they got the loan together. They started on that about a year and a half ago, and now he's planting his garden.

Ross: Is this for himself, then?

Heath: And his family; he has four children. And they moved into their house while it was still under construction.

Ross: That's great. Well, I guess some people still can do that. That would certainly help, wouldn't it, to have six projects going at a time, so you do get sort of technical help and physical help.

#### Heath's Interest in Low Income Housing

Heath: In fact, that's the thing that interests me now more than almost anything else, insofar as looking to the future, what needs to be done, let's say, in ceramics. I'd just as soon stop making dishes and make houses.

Ross: That would be terrific!

Heath: Low income housing that people could build themselves--in other words, make an altered version of a brick. Make a hollow brick that's extruded, where you run the utilities through the extrusion, not like heavy cement blocks currently being made, or heavy brick, let's say, that's used. And adobe houses now are becoming quite the thing for wealthy people to build in Santa Fe and Los Angeles.

So I have been working on this idea of extruding clay in--I'm not sure how you really have to design the house before you can know what kind of extrusions to make, so I don't know where to begin. We've started with the extrusions, but our equipment limits the size to four inches by four inches, and the length determined again by our equipment up to four feet. As the clay comes out of the pug mill, it's like extruding a hollow square sausage, segmented--call it a brick substitute that is four inches by four inches by four feet long, which weighs one-third as much as a solid clay.

New Clay Found in Sacramento Area

Heath: Did I talk to you about the man who came to see me who owns 1,000 acres of clay over east of Sacramento?

Ross: You mentioned him, but I don't think we know much about it, so go ahead.

Heath: Well, he brought five samples of clay that he had been showing to various tile and brick-makers.

Ross: Wait a second, let me ask you: he owns--?

Heath: I think it's 1,000 acres of land that is covered with clay.

Ross: This is a natural phenomenon?

Heath: Yes. You see, central California was at one time a lake bed. Clay is the grandchild of granite. So in the evolution in time, minerals from the mountains were washed down into the valleys of central California where clay deposits now exist. That's where we get the clay that we've been using for almost fifty years, mined in Lincoln, California, northeast of Sacramento. Now, this is southeast of Lincoln. It's this acreage that has not yet been mined.

Ross: Can anything grow in that soil?

Heath: Sure! Grasses grow, trees grow. It's hard to tell when you look across the field to know that that's really a clay deposit. Clay is a very good medium for growing, as long as it--

Ross: Well, when I had a house in El Cerrito, we'd go to garden, we'd hit what people said, "Oh, that's clay," and it was just like sort of hard, slippery rock almost. Things did grow in it, but it was very difficult to work in.

Heath: Yes. And once it gets--it's hard to get water into it once it begins to get hard. Water just sort of runs off of it.

Ross: But now this man has 1,000 acres?

Heath: Yes. And there's a coal deposit at the bottom of it. You see, coal is formed from forests that were covered by the Ice Age. The trees that were buried without oxygen turned into coal. And as the ice melted and the rains came, they brought down the minerals, you see, and covered the trees. The first thing that is washed out by

frost and rain are the salts, like sodium and potassium. These salts run off, and make the ocean salty.

Then the next thing that's washed out of the granite is the sand, which is why you have sandy beaches. What's finally left becomes clay. And the clay then ends up in the bottom of lakes. Underneath is the coal, so to mine the coal, the overburden--it's called an overburden--the clay has to be removed. And there is a firm who built a coal generation plant near San Diego for generating electricity. They want to build a similar plant in central California, but they can't get at the coal unless the clay is removed.

A geologist has been working there for about six years or more identifying the coal deposits and other mineral deposits of one kind or another, and now they have his approval for a coal plant to be built there. The county has been set aside for its mineral deposits. The land has to be used to recover the minerals that are there, which means the--

Ross: Is that determined by the government?

Heath: Yes. You can't use it for farmland, let's say.

Ross: Or build houses on it.

Heath: I'm not sure.

He brought samples of the clay. I guess it was when he was at Craft Tile that they said, "Well, go see Heath; she'll tell you what you can do with the clay." [laughter] Or maybe she can. And of course, they were absolutely right, because I loved it, having all these different clays. I couldn't believe, for one thing, that they would all be so close to one another in the same region. I can't imagine geologically how it happens that you can have a red clay and a white clay and a very sandy clay and a black clay, all next to each other. So it means that as the ice melted and the water flowed, that for one reason or another, that in certain areas--there was a limited amount of iron, let's say, that got deposited there, less concentrated than in another area. And more sand that stayed behind that didn't get taken into the ocean or down to the beach.

Edith Recommends Building a Plant for Clay Supply

Heath: I immediately made small bricks of each clay sample before we went over to see the location. My recommendation was that it would be such a natural to set up a clay-making plant there to supply the schools and all the studio potters but best of all to make new building materials.

The deposit at Lincoln, California, where we get our clay, will gradually be used up so that eventually we would have to go to another clay deposit if Heath Ceramics is to continue. None of the Ione deposits are as plastic as the Lincoln, but should make good architectural products if not dishes.

Ross: How soon?

Heath: I don't know; ten years, maybe. At the time we started using it, and the geologists' projection of the lifetime--at the rate of consumption, that there was maybe a fifty-year supply. Well, the fifty years are up, but there is still more clay, so their projection was not that accurate. But nevertheless, clay deposits do become exhausted.

We've had two clay deposits that have been exhausted in the years we've been making things, and we've had to switch to using something else as a result. It's always a very upsetting experience that you can no longer get Albany clay, or you can't get such-and-such a clay. It's all used up. Because clay deposits are limited in size, just as the copper pit mines in different parts of the world and different parts of the country, eventually are exhausted.

So that was my proposal, that they get the machinery to extrude the clay to prepare the clay, and then they put a clay building around it. In other words, start in the spring and the summer when there isn't any rain in California, bring in the equipment, dig the clay, process it to--pull it out, and make extrusions, and then build the building out of the extrusions.

Ross: That sounds very practical.

Heath: Well, of course, and logical. And anyone can do it, because it's just like making an oversized brick that's hollow.

##

Ross: So what did they think of that idea?

Heath: Well, first of all, they said it's a great idea, but how do you go about letting people know about it? Who's going to put up the money? I said, well, people who want to buy the--who want to put up the electrification plant, they ought to be interested in putting up some. They said, well, of course they are required legally--they have to devote 5 percent of their investment to jobs for local people. So that there is money, a requirement designating that they spend 5 percent for local employment.

Ross: Let me understand something: why do they come under those regulations? Did they get government loans to buy--

Heath: The man who owns the 1,000 acres? I think that goes back to the early days of California, that it's land that his family had or something like that. And the man who owns it is a building contractor who is now retired, who built many of the Holiday Inns in California.

Ross: But what I was thinking of is what agency can go in and say that these are the regulations?

Heath: Well, you wouldn't--you have to get a permit to build an electrification plant from the state. They'll tell you no, you can't do it because it pollutes the atmosphere. In other words, there are certain requirements. And they got the permit a year ago, and that's why the owner of the land was out looking for some way of getting this clay removed. Who wanted it? Who wants this clay? What can we do with it? Who should we go and see?

So my recommendation was that they make usable clay body formulas right there on the site, that they could then sell--you could sell it as a clay body that all you had to do was add water to it. You could do it either way. You could make a certain amount of it as wet clay, ready to use, in plastic bags. That's the way clay is now bought for schools; they buy from brickyards or--

Ross: Clay that's already mixed?

Heath: That someone's already--for instance, the schools in Sausalito, they recently wanted to know if we would make clay. The teacher wanted the children to make some tile for a new school that's being built, and for the children to make the tile to go into one of the walls of the school. So I know that there would be a market.

But who's going to do it? In other words, somebody has to get behind it and promote it and find out, and do a research project as to how many people would be interested in buying the clay before they could have, let's say, venture capital to do it. But it could



be a very--the most expensive part of the project is, it requires machinery with very high power to push wet clay through it, depending upon the size. Now for making clay for a pottery of our size, it doesn't require that heavy equipment as it does to extrude something that is hollow. Because you're pushing the clay through smaller openings.

Ross: What do you envision--you say now your tiles are two-inch? No, your extrusion is--

Heath: It's four inches by four inches. But you can cut it into any length.

Ross: Yes. But if you were to, say, start constructing houses out of it, then you'd want more than four inches to--

Heath: Oh, yes.

#### Making House Bricks From Clay

Ross: What do you envision as a practical size?

Heath: Well, first of all, for serious construction, I think it should be--

Ross: Serious meaning a house.

Heath: We could do a model with the size we have now, a model room or space or something. But what it should be ideally, it should be at least a six-inch-thick wall. In other words, the blocks should be at least six by six, and preferably maybe a six-by-twelve inch extrusion. See, the cement blocks that are on the market are eight inches by eight inches by sixteen, that's the largest. In other words, it's eight inches tall, sixteen inches wide, and eight inches wide and high.

Ross: Now, the ones that you have been--that I've seen that you've made, the small miniature ones or whatever you call them, they're joined by groove--sort of tongue and groove, you might call it. In terms of a practical application, how would you fit that into housing? Would you have to use a grout in addition to the grooving?

Heath: Well, that's of course a problem. If you lay them up as ordinary brick, you'd use mortar just like you do for laying up any kind of a brick. Horizontally, with mortar in between, and instead of having a brick that's eight inches or twelve inches long, you could

have a piece that's four feet long. So it's a brick four feet long, four inches wide, and that's where I think that I'd like something bigger than four by four inches. Although a brick is only two and a half by four by twelve.

Ross: That's right. And since you can have them any length--

Heath: Yes. And the brick is solid, so it's heavy. The idea is in extruding it, you'd have a membrane maybe that was a quarter of an inch thick, and it has to have internal support. You can't extrude a tube of clay an eighth-inch thick without it collapsing on itself. Because the clay is soft enough to where it will sag down. So it has to be held apart and held up, so on the four-by-four that I have, I have a cross in the center. When the clay is forced through, it's a quarter of an inch thick all around, and it weighs --what did I come up with?--four by four by twelve inches, I can't remember now. But it's about half the weight of a post that's four by four feet. If you buy a four-foot hardwood post, the weight of that post--in fact, it's very hard for me to carry a four-foot post by myself. Have you ever tried to pick up a piece of four-foot lumber?

Ross: Yes. Heavy.

Heath: It's heavy. Well, I can pick these clay extrusions up without any problem. And it's made out of that same clay that they use for grinding mirrors for telescopes, so it's a hard, dense material. And being that--see, most brick is coarse, has coarse sand in it, and is open-structured. You can't shove that kind of clay through a one-eighth or quarter-inch extrusion, because it's too coarse, too open, too crumbly.

So the reason that I am fascinated by the problem is that the clay that we use for making dinnerware is not an extremely fine clay as is used, let's say, in the porcelain industry or in the dinnerware industry usually. Being a stoneware, it is sort of coarse, so that's why it lends itself to becoming a brick--a very fine grade brick. So it would have to be more expensive, let's say, than a solid, heavy chunk of clay with a lot of sand and openings in it.

So the thing that is unique about it is that it's a dense material that--weatherproofing would be practically zero.

Ross: So you actually could have that as the outside and inside?

Heath: Yes, you'd have an outside and inside wall.

Ross: And you can glaze it, so you could have pink houses, green houses, yellow houses--

Heath: Yes. The other thing is that you'd put the color right in the clay; you don't have to glaze it if you want different colors of clay.

Ross: And it would last forever.

Heath: Yes.

### Italians Use Extruded Clay for Houses

Ross: Has anyone ever done anything like this?

Heath: Well, in Italy, in fact, that's where the idea--I found out that it was even remotely possible. I always thought of clay as being such a heavy material that--and that bricks had to be that way, until the Pasadena museum was built, that's what started me thinking. That was built out of cement, the eight-inch cement block that I talked about, and then after the whole building was constructed, it was gunited--that is, you know what guniting is?

Ross: Yes, it's sort of sprayed--

Heath: Sprayed on the outside of the building to make the curve. In other words, the sharp angles and the curves, and the mortar joints became a flush wall. And then the tile was pasted on the surface of that, and I thought, my word, that's such an expensive way of putting up a building. Why can't clay be used, you wouldn't have to do all this. And the tile, instead of just being a facing, the whole thing would be clay.

So I said to Brian, "Let's go to some countries where clay is used for buildings, and let's find out if anyone is doing any research on bigger sized bricks, or something unique in the use of clay." Because I knew that the year we were at Wedgwood, as we left London, we went by an area that was designated as a brick research center, or something like that. So I knew that it existed.

We went to them to talk about, what are the latest developments in the use of clay in construction? They said, "If you want to know, go to Italy. They have reached the nth degree of what you can do with clay. And that's where you should see what

they're doing, because they're building schools and hospitals and prefabricated housing for people all over the country."

And sure enough, we went. In '69 we went to Piacenza in Italy, and saw how clay was being laced together with steel cables and concrete to make roofs that were--the elements were four feet wide and 160 feet or more in length. It was like stringing beads, is what they did with this very thin-walled material. For each building, there was an architect or an architectural firm as part of the brick plant, or the tile-making plant.

It was part of the Italian government's project that prefabricated buildings be built as a program throughout Italy. There would be a clay-making plant every fifty miles, so the longest you would haul things from the fabricating site to the place would be twenty-five miles, trucking it. So you'd truck whole houses from the factory to the building site, and they put these things up like you do a prefabricated building.

And the architects were--because there would have to be different sized blocks and extrusions, let's say, for walls that had windows in them or not, and--

Ross: It's sort of on the module order, then?

Heath: Yes. But the thing that they did was instead of putting each brick up by itself, they laced them together, so it was a whole wall that arrived on the site. The way they'd lace them together out in the field outside the plant: they had a railroad track that was four feet apart that a car rode on for cement mixing, and in between they laid the bricks--I'll call them extrusions--because they don't feel like a brick at all. And there was provision made for steel cable to be stretched between each one of--three extrusions wide made four feet, so they'd lay down three--in this case, the day we were there, that's what they were doing. Three side by side, 160 feet long, with two steel cables stretched in the spaces in between, and then with the cement truck, drove along and poured cement down into that space. The whole thing was covered with wet gunny sacks and allowed to cure for a month.

Then the tension was taken off the steel cable, and you had a beam that was that big. They would saw it up to whatever size or if they wanted to use it that length, they could. If they wanted to use it, let's say for a wall, an eight-foot high wall, or a sixteen, they could cut those lengths and saw it out.

Problems of U.S. Production of "Clay Houses"

Heath: Piacenza is the site where we visited. That's now twenty-two years ago, so you see I've had a long time to think about the way they were using--. As they said at that time, this would not be something that would be able to be done by, let's say, a factory, because it involves civic buildings being designed with U.S. government money. The architectural firm--in other words, it's a whole system, it's a whole scheme. It's not just a factory that makes these things. So that it wouldn't be possible to do it because you have to have the cooperation. First of all, the government has to want it, put up the money--

Ross: You mean no industry--like Bechtel couldn't put--

Heath: Well, Bechtel could do it, let's say, if they got the--well, for instance, in a country that's destroyed like Kuwait now, they have to rebuild; then they could probably set up, but they'd have to get a clay factory to make the thing, and they'd have to have the architects working there. So to get that kind of condition, you have to have a country that's been bombed out, let's say, or has no housing, and the government has to step in and do something about it. And then we get the thing rolling, and that's what's going to have to be required I think eventually in the United States, as the forests are--you can't build wooden houses.

Ross: No. But why couldn't a large enough building company go to your 1,000-acre clay site, produce the bricks or the extrusions, and then--

Heath: Sell them.

Ross: Well, or the company would sell them, and somebody puts them together just like you would a clay house, or a brick house.

Heath: But before you do that, you have to have the organization set up first, get architects involved in wanting to design with it. In other words, how much of a market will there be?

Ross: Oh, okay. So that would be--it's a new, innovative idea, so you have to sell it to the architects.

Heath: You have to discuss it with them and find out how many architects would be willing to work with you to design the kind of block that would be necessary--

Ross: I see, because the initial outlay would be too great to produce--

Heath: Well, it isn't the sort of thing that you can--now, it's true if it were as miniature, let's say, as a brick, then you don't have to have that kind of a plan, but an architect still has to make a floor plan and so on for--and where the windows are going to go in the brick wall. But economically, making a house of single bricks, one on top of another, as it's been done in the past, is just too expensive. That's why the concrete has supplanted clay, as that's the way most big buildings today are made, out of poured concrete.

Ross: Say that you've dreamt on and that you decided to do a model, a real house, a model house, and you produced enough of the extrusions, and you put it together, you made a house. Is it possible?

Heath: Sure!

Ross: Then if you made that house, then--

Heath: But it would be a fairly simple thing, because the questions you raise, like an hour ago, how are you going to hook the thing together? How are you going to connect which--are you going to use these horizontally, vertically? What's going to happen in an earthquake--in other words, what is the--now, you could drill holes through the wet clay to make provisions for steel reinforcing rods to go through them. But that would be part of the design.

How large are we going to make, let's say, something that replicates a piece of plywood that's four by eight feet. You make enough clay blocks and fasten them together. A good deal of that has been going on, of prefabricating brick walls that are brought to the site. But again, unless you--

Ross: I think they use that here; I think I've seen it in downtown San Francisco where they put up whole brick facades.

Heath: But they have to plan where the plumbing is going to go, where will the electrical go through the wall? Does it go inside? In other words, what provisions for the utilities through the building?

Ross: It's funny, because when you were first talking about this, for some reason it looked to me like you could do it very easily. You just make a plan, and your wiring goes through, your plumbing, everything goes through these openings, and it's like cement block with the reinforced rods--

Heath: Excepting I don't--is there some way of keying it together without laying it down in a field to do it? Because if you--well, for the people who are building a little shelter for themselves, it's one thing, but it depends upon whether it's a cubicle for somebody

sleeping on the streets as compared to a school building or a hospital or a condominium.

Ross: Well, you know, when you think about what the housing needs in this country have become and will become, you think something drastic has to happen.

Heath: I'm going to try to get some more information about what kind of equipment is available to do some larger extrusions than the ones we're working on.

Ross: It sounds like a project that will take a lot of your time.

Heath: Well, the thing would be to get a school of architecture interested in it, so that we could get some input from those.

Ross: I think that would be fantastic.

Heath: I know we can do it with adobe.

Ross: What do you mean, "we?" You mean your plant?

Heath: Well, the clay that's in Ione could be used in making adobe houses, because there you cast the clay right--you don't have to refine it or anything, it has all the rocks and junk in it, doesn't matter. You add more straw to it anyway to make an adobe brick.

Ross: Yes. Well, considering the way that adobe is viewed today in sort of an aesthetic or as you say--

Heath: In fact, I just had a good idea. Maybe that's the way we should start, is making an adobe--

Ross: Extrusion?

Heath: No, you can't; it would wreck the machinery. No, but housing the space, because as I walked around over there, I kept visualizing where in this terrain would you put up a factory, and what should it look like? And then I said, well, we should just make it out of the same material that's here so you wouldn't even know that it was here. That's why I thought well, we'll just--such a nutty idea, isn't it? And just get the machine to spit out the clay, and then you cover the machine with it.

Ross: [laughs] I love the idea. We were hearing President [George] Bush speak about his big crime bill that he proposes which some think is not very good, because to build more prisons is only to fill them with more of society's problems. But the other evening we were talking with some friends and somebody brought up the fact that the

work farms that used to--you know, a work farm, a working farm where instead of putting prisoners in close quarters and having them be unproductive, have a work farm in which people actually become productive. And what you're talking about almost fits into the concept of, you've got the clay right there, you can get the manpower, personpower, and it could be a self-contained operation.

Heath: Yes. In fact, the Preston School for Boys is not very far from there.

Ross: Yes, youth labor camp, or whatever they call it. School for boys?

Heath: Or the Preston Home for Boys. It's where delinquent boys are sent. I think it's up in that area. There is certainly something that can be done. It could probably not be on the scale of what's being done in Italy. In fact, that to a large extent, I think, accounts for the wonderful look that you have as you drive through Italy now. Our first trip to Italy, it was so sad, it was after the war and there were still so many areas that were bombed out and just rubble. And then this last trip, which was about three years ago, when we went to a tile exhibition, all the buildings in the towns, they were so well designed and well built--

Ross: With this material?

Heath: Well, I think to a large extent. It's hard to tell when you look at the building once it's finished. But the general feeling of the countryside--how recently have you been in Italy?

Ross: The last time was in '85, I think, and I just went to Venice at that time.

Heath: Did you drive through the countryside and see any of the factories?

Ross: No. We were in Venice and then we took the train back to Paris.

Heath: You know, most factory towns, as they were known here in the United States, at any rate, they're always so grungy.

Ross: But that was not the case in Italy?

Heath: The tile plants that we visited and the ceramic plants where they now make tile, umpteen thousand feet a day, with maybe four people working there. The clay is mixed at one end of the building and it goes through the machine that forms them, the tile, they travel along a belt into the--through a drier, under a glaze belt, into the kiln which is a traveling belt, and out the other end, and you have no people around. When the tile comes out of the kiln, there's a person sitting there who looks quickly at the tile to see



if anything's wrong with it, whether something is chipped or broken, or a spot on it or something that makes it a second, and touches it. And it falls off the belt and into a box on its edge all lined up, so the next one falls in along side it. The good ones travel along, and then they drop off the end leaf by leaf by leaf. The box moves off, the flaps are sealed, onto a dolly and out onto the truck, ready for shipment. No human hands touch it.

Ross: Really?

Heath: Until the box is opened and it's installed on the site. It's unbelievable. And that's what we compete with. Tile itself for, what, a dollar a square foot or two dollars a square foot.

Ross: Where, in Italy?

Heath: Yes, imported to the United States.

Ross: And what does your tile sell for?

Heath: Well, if it's less than a hundred feet, we have a scale that breaks down. The cheapest is five dollars a square foot, but it starts at eight.

Ross: I see the difference.



## XV HEATH CERAMICS IN THE NINETIES

Heath Tile Used at Tinsley Labs for Grindstones

Ross: Edith, I want to go back to something you said about Heath doing some work for a company that makes telescopes and microscopes. You were saying that your clay is used for optical--

Heath: Yes, for grinding mirrors.

Ross: What's the company? Is it in Berkeley?

Heath: It's Tinsley Labs in Richmond.

Ross: And how was it that they came to use your clay?

Heath: Well, it's so many years ago that I don't know. I suppose that they went looking for somebody to make grindstones for them. I think that they got some samples, they're two-inch squares that are pillow-shaped on the upper side, so that the pillow side is put down so that as you grind, you don't have a sharp corner on the glass. So it's a little cushion shaped--but flat on the upper side. They're glued onto a large sheet, I don't know what the material is that it's or secured to--they use a black, gooey substance anyway to adhere it to a sheet, and then they have to grind it so that it's level.

Ross: They install the grinders?

Heath: The grinders, they have to be very carefully leveled so that every one is the same level, so they don't grind more in one spot than another. This black gooey stuff cushions them, so each one is on a plane with the other. Then when they begin to grind, it's a circular motion, a big round circle, probably four- or five-foot circle. And it constantly--and it's monitored all the time to be

sure that it doesn't tip or move in any way, and then sort of a motion like this--

Ross: Sweeping back and forth.

Heath: And they grind them for weeks and weeks at a time.

Ross: Now, Heath produces the grinding stone?

Heath: The stone, yes.

Ross: And it's out of the clay that you're--

Heath: That we use for our dishes, yes. And that clay, when it grinds down, it's just glossy and shiny. It's unbelievable the texture and quality of it.

Ross: The texture of the clay?

Heath: Yes.

Ross: Oh, so the grinder itself becomes glasslike.

Heath: It's glossy. It is glasslike. And it's because of the high silica--see, silica's a very hard material, so it's the alumina and silica that's in the clay, and there's manganese which acts as a cement sort of. It melts at the temperature that we fire to, so it kind of glues the alumina and silica and things together. And it makes really a remarkable--I was so impressed, I could hardly believe it when we were at Tinsley Lab. I walked in and I saw all of these little squares of Heath tile going around and around and around, and looking at them I said, "Don't any of them ever break? Don't they have any blemishes in them?"

They said, "Yes, once in a while we'll have one that breaks, has a crack, and then we have to tear it out and throw it away. We can't put another one in there." So it's like a missing tooth, but since it's this constant grinding--and then it reaches a point where now so many have disappeared, have been pulled out, that they have to really start all over again. But they say they last for-- in fact, we have such small orders because they don't wear out.

Ross: So how often--or how many did you produce initially? Do you remember? Ten, or a hundred, or--?

Heath: Oh, no. Thousands of them. Because on one of these sheets--but then they last indefinitely. And then they said, "One time we got a batch from you that were full of a lot of holes or breaks in them. We telephoned you about that." And see, we have no way when

we look at those blocks--they're about half an inch thick--to know what's on the inside of them, or if they're going to crack.

Ross: So what happened when he telephoned?

Heath: Well, we made good on it. That we only charged--I think we started at forty cents apiece or something, which is ridiculous. I think we now get sixty cents apiece, but it's such a--and then they last so long. But nevertheless--

Ross: So it's not profit-making. [laughing]

Heath: But they are so pleased with them and so appreciative, they just--with open arms welcomed us in to show us what they were doing. I was so impressed how good the clay was, and I saw the pieces they pointed out, there was one that was missing there. So our quality control in that case was much better than--I think in the last year that the drought has really affected our condition, or maybe we have more pollution in the atmosphere than we think. The trouble we've had in having our clay hang together is just unbelievable. So I don't know when we make the next batch for them whether it will be as good as the last.

Ross: Do you make these for any other optical companies?

Heath: No.

Ross: Why not?

Heath: I don't know why we don't! We're just stupid, I guess.

Ross: I mean, would it not be profitable for you, or is it a--?

Heath: Well, I don't know how many places there are that build telescopes. I don't think there are very many. They're building the one in Hawaii, and they're also involved--they did the research on what went wrong with one of the things they shot into outer space.

Ross: Yes, the Hubble Space Telescope.

Heath: Somebody had to try to make a guess as to what was the problem, and they worked on it, and made the deduction of what had to be done to correct for it.

Ross: So they make telescopes and what else?

Heath: Well, I don't know on these things they shoot into outer space. They certainly are solar-powered, so that it has to do with mirrors. I've never seen one of them, have you? I haven't the

vaguest notion what they look like. But isn't a mirrored surface, isn't that what powers them, the sun? Aren't they sun-powered?

Ross: Oh, the ones that circle the earth--

Heath: You read what the outside of Mars looks like from the mirrors.

Ross: Oh, I see. They're satellites.

Heath: Satellites, yes.

Ross: You mean some of your things may be up on the satellites?

Heath: Yes. Well, I don't know. Not the clay itself, no, but the product that was made from using the tiles.

Ross: That's quite an exciting thing to think about, how much you've contributed to the science of the world.

Heath: Yes. So that's why I think that devising something out of clay for housing is not that far-fetched.

### Finding Qualified Workers

[Interview 13: May 11, 1991] ##

Ross: Last time you were talking about the mirrors that the optical company, Tinsley Labs, makes. But today we have a couple of things to finish up because we're nearing the end of our interviews.

One of the things that I remember was a problem that you had some years ago with being able to hire good help here in Sausalito. I think at one point there were a lot of problems with just getting people who would do the heavy kind of work, and such. You had some undocumented workers, and at one point that became a problem with the officials coming in and picking up your workers and taking them away. I thought we'd start and talk a little bit about that, because it's happened before, and it's happened in many companies. Your experience would be interesting.

Heath: Well, where do you want to approach the--?

Ross: Well, I think one of the things would be the nature of the kinds of jobs that you have, and getting people who would do that kind of

work. You had Mexicans working for you who would lift the heavy stuff.

Heath: You see, it's interesting. I've been reviewing recently how different each decade has been really, since the time we started in the forties. Each decade represents a particular evolution or a change of problems.

In the beginning, most of the people who came to work for us were people who were art-related. They wanted to be potters. In other words, they had a pottery background. Living in Sausalito then was very inexpensive. For instance, we paid \$300 a month rent for the top floor of the Village Fair Building. That building now probably--I don't know what it rents for, but probably like \$30,000 instead of \$300, the same space.

So that the people who originally worked for us were artists, because Sausalito was somewhat of an artists' colony. And then as the years went by, as real estate and things changed, the artists moved out to outlying regions, so the commuting became a real problem. We had a reverse situation occur where the Mexican help, let's say, or Latin American help, who lived in San Francisco, then began immigrating or going to Marin County or to outlying counties to find work. One of our managers in production was Mexican, and he had worked in Stockton since he was fourteen practically, in potteries.

Ross: What was his name?

Heath: Nash Reese. And interestingly enough, he was sent to Sausalito to establish a pottery workers union.

Ross: From Stockton?

Heath: From Stockton. Because they had the pottery workers union over there. And I didn't know this until many years later, but that's how he happened to come. And that was his mission, to gain employment at Heath Ceramics so that over a period of time, he could organize the union.

But as he said many years later, he said he found that what we were paying people and the workload and so on, and the way things were, "there weren't any benefits that I could bring to them."

So because of his experience and background and having worked in potteries all of his life, he very soon became the manager of the forming department, which he was up until this last year. So I think he came around 1960, so from 1960 to 1989, '90--well, thirty years, he was our production foreman. And being Mexican, he spoke

--and he could talk, translate, so we didn't have to have English-speaking people necessarily working in the shop.

Ross: Was he a citizen?

Heath: Yes. He was born in the United States; he was born in Texas. So he was a citizen by birth. His father was one of the people in Juarez' army. At any rate, his father wanted his son to be born in the United States, so they took him across the border into the United States when his mother was about to give birth. So that's how he happened to be born in the United States.

At any rate, when he retired last year, it has just been a very difficult situation in the shop because of the number of non-English-speaking people, because when there was a new opening in the shop, naturally one person would speak to his cousin or his brother or some relative, over the years starting in the sixties. Up until the sixties, the plant had consisted primarily of college graduates or art school graduates, and people living in Sausalito and the waterfront artisans. And then when they had to move out, they started their own businesses really then, became potters on their own. Then the Mexican and Central American population came in. And then after the Vietnam War, so many Vietnamese came that now we have Filipino and Vietnamese and Pakistani, and there are hardly any native-born--excepting for the original group of 'people who worked in the shop who have been there like thirty years now, some of the glazers and some of the formers.

#### Undocumented Workers

Ross: So when Nash was there, some of the workers that came then were not citizens?

Heath: That's right. And so they were picked up, I'm not sure the number of times. They were on the alert always, and they passed the word, "Oh, the police are coming to raid the place."

Ross: These were the immigration--?

Heath: The immigration police. And it happened maybe three or four times, that people would be picked up who didn't have work permits and so on. And they were taken across the border, but within a few days they were back again. They'd be taken across the border and then they'd wait, and cross--and so within a week, they were back. And then they'd be picked up again.



Ross: Really quite an amazing thing. I remember the one time when Brian called me. The immigration people had raided once more. He asked if I knew of--because I knew the Vietnamese people. And of course, they were here legally, but they were also people who needed work.

Heath: Yes, you did bring in the Vietnamese.

Ross: But I remember also that my friend, the Vietnamese woman who brought her friends or relatives over to go to work, said that a couple of the men, because they're of smaller build, would not have been able to lift the heavy sacks and do the heavy work that was required to do the job, so that it didn't work out. But I think you do have a couple of people from that--

Heath: Yes, but it's true that they cannot lift the boxes of tile, for instance, as readily. It becomes really quite a severe handicap because they're so willing and want so desperately to work, but they just simply do not have the energy. See, a box of tile weighs about fifty pounds. It's four pounds a square foot. We have twelve and a half square feet in a box.

Ross: Can some of the Hispanics and other workers lift those?

Heath: Oh, yes. For the most part, the Mexican and Central American people are muscular. I think it's because--well, I'm not sure. I think just physically--

Ross: There is a difference.

Heath: They're bigger-boned, and just stronger. So that Antonio, for instance, who--he's absolutely amazing how he can run that press and catch those tile coming down, and the weight of them, and the agility with which he does it. There's no one that can keep up with it, but he's a very husky Mexican who has the power to do it. And he enjoys doing it.

Ross: And he's been with you for a while.

Heath: Oh, I suppose it's twelve, fifteen years. Time goes so fast, it's unbelievable. I turn around and I think someone's been here like three or four years, and then it turns out they've been here ten years.

Ross: With the departure of Nash, who then could take over the role?

Heath: Well, interestingly enough, Brian's nephew--Brian's sister's son and daughter, when they graduated from college, both had studied ceramics. In high school, their father taught art in the Mountain View schools.

Brian's Nephew Takes Over Key Role

Ross: Isn't that a coincidence!

Heath: Yes. So when they graduated from college, they came to work.

Ross: I say isn't that a coincidence because that's not your side of the family, that's Brian's.

Heath: Yes.

Ross: And his sister Isobel married--?

Heath: Jim Crittenden, who taught art in Mountain View.

Ross: And it was their children, Winnie and Russell.

Heath: Yes. And Isobel majored in home economics, so the home arts became sort of part of the background.

Well, Winnie Crittenden is the older one. She has a very nice, deft way of handling the glazes and the materials, so she's the person that I worked with in the beginning, to teach her techniques that would otherwise be difficult to teach people unless they had--well, she is very Zen-oriented, so her feeling toward flowers and nature and where you draw inspiration and the arts, it's just part of her way of working and thinking.

So she's played the role of what little embellishment we do, let's say, on dinnerware, because I feel that dishes--the food should be the decor, so that normally we don't embellish dinnerware. We started out doing it more with tile. Then gradually what was done on tile got transferred onto dinnerware, so that now we do more embellishment on dinnerware than we did originally.

And then Russell Crittenden, who is the second child, was into drugs in the beginning. So he was a very uncertain--

Ross: That was while he was working for you?

Heath: Yes. He came out of that period of the sixties and seventies, with people experimenting with drugs.

Ross: There was a lot of it.

Heath: Yes. But Nash insisted that since he was Brian's nephew, that he was the heir apparent--or had to be the heir apparent. He insisted that Russell learn as many jobs as he possibly could. I suppose if Nash hadn't taken that parental role of insisting upon it, that he would not have--because he sort of resisted learning, in a way--

Ross: Continued to resist establishment, or more--?

Heath: I think it's a kind of feeling, lack of discipline. I don't know how to evaluate it. A sort of feeling that the work--he was never paid enough for what he did, in other words. However, when Nash left it was Russell who stepped into his shoes, and so this past year has really been quite, quite traumatic for everybody.

Ross: Yes. Well, let me ask you: during the time that Russell was there and sort of resenting or resisting the work, I guess, and not being paid enough, why did he stay?

Heath: I don't know, because many times [laughs] he threatened to leave, or we threatened--"Okay, Russell, go ahead. Maybe you should go." In other words, when a problem came up and his reaction to it and so on, we said, "Well, okay, I guess this isn't the life for you." But in the meanwhile, he married and has four children. He is really a very good father and takes a great deal of interest in the children. Now he is completely off of drugs so that's no longer a problem. I feel fairly pleased with his change in the last two or three months, his attitude towards the job.

Ross: Oh, just in the last two or three months?

Heath: Yes. Because we have had a great deal of friction. We had a mold-maker, Chris, for I think three or four years who had graduated from Alfred University, which is a ceramic school in New York. When we were helping Lorelei Young get started making the restaurant ware in Los Angeles, Chris made molds up here that we sent down to Los Angeles to use in the production of the dinnerware for the restaurants, for Victoria Station.

Then when we had the lawsuit with Lorelei, and we lost the case, she hired Chris to become her mold-maker, and he left our employment and started up a separate business of his own.

Ross: Not even with Lorelei?

Heath: Making molds for Lorelei. So he was very well acquainted with working on making dyes for the press, for instance. So Brian had sent Russell up to Napa where Chris has his business to learn how

to make molds for the press. In so doing, he got--I don't know where he got the notion, but somehow Chris knew more about mold-making than I did. So whenever I would ask him to do something, he'd say, "Well, that isn't the way Chris would do it."

Ross: Now, this is when you asked Russell to do it?

Heath: Yes. He'd say, "Well, that isn't the way that Chris would do it." I'd say, "I don't know what Chris's method is. I just know that this is the way that I am familiar with, and it will do what I want it to do, and so this is the way I want to do it."

And after this went on for some time, one day I said to him, "Russell, I don't understand you. Is this because you think I'm an old lady that's past my prime? [laughter] That the young people know more than I do? I just don't understand your attitude at all." Well, I don't know whether that had any effect upon him, but from that time on, things have been better between us.

#### Changes at Heath Ceramics Reflect World Changes

Heath: We're at a very serious place, and it's not just because of the change of administration. I think politically and economically and geographically, that Sausalito is now such a different place than what it was when we started. I have great doubts as to whether we can continue on there, because having to have people commute from thirty or forty miles away in order to get to work and our wages are not, I suppose--well, I don't know how they compare with the electronics industry, but our wage scale now is like \$10 to \$12 an hour, with a medical plan that has just grown unbelievably expensive.

And the outside pressure of having to modify the way we've done things in the past when we could just haul things off to the dump. Now we have to recycle. The drought that we had this year that played havoc with the pH of the water, and changed our clay preparation. There just have been so many things that have drained the energy of everybody. Although I think we've come through most of it, it's a real question in doing the kind of product we're doing. It requires such skill and scientific knowledge that our help just does not have. The man who fires the kiln fires it by rote, not because he understands what's happening inside that kiln. Because he's Vietnamese, he doesn't understand the language well enough. I tried to teach him, but I don't know how much of it he understands.

Ross: Who would have tended the kiln before he did? Would that have been Nash's--?

Heath: Nash would have supervised it.

Ross: And now you have nobody to supervise that knows as much as you do?

Heath: No, the man who was firing kilns is now in the--he has more experience with what the ware looks like when it comes out of the kiln, so he is replacing the woman who is now reaching the age of retirement in establishing what is shippable and what isn't. In other words, the seconds control, and sorting what comes out of the kiln and codifying the seconds. Are they due to the way the kiln functions, or was there a mistake in the glaze, or was it carelessness in stacking the kiln that the shelves weren't clean? So he, having been the kiln fireman for so many years, is the person who knows more about what can go wrong, so in making a judgment as to whether it's a first or a second, you have to have someone who has extensive experience with what the ware should look like.

We're getting to the point now that so many of our people are reaching--they're up in their late fifties and sixties, so almost all of the older people who have been there twenty-five, thirty years will be retiring anyway in another couple or three years. So it sort of feels like it's the end of a period.

Ross: And not the interest by your younger people to learn, or is it the language thing?

Heath: Well, so many of the Latin Americans plan to go back to Latin America if that part of the world ever gets to the point where they can--they've left in order to make a living, but they all want to return there. They do go back quite frequently to visit.

Ross: Are these mostly from Mexico, or are they from El Salvador?

Heath: All the countries. Guatemala. I think every Central American country we have represented.

Ross: When the immigration people come, do they fine them, does the company have to pay anything--?

Heath: No, we make sure that everybody has their working papers. So we don't hire anyone unless they have their papers. And it's true not only of Mexicans, but of every national, whether you come from Pakistan or wherever, you have to have your work permit.

Ross: Of course, the Pakistanis and the Asians can't get into the country without papers, but the Mexicans can come over the border.

Heath: That's true, although there are a couple I know who came into the country by marrying, temporarily, American women to get citizenship.

Ross: And then finding people who live, say, in Marin County. Is that sort of a class of people too rich or too whatever so that they don't do the kind of work that you require?

Heath: Yes. They don't want to break their backs lifting sacks of clay and mixing clay.

Ross: They're more affluent and move on to other professions.

Heath: Into the electronics area.

#### Huge Cost Increases to Run Business

Ross: At one point, I remember you talked of selling the plant. You had sort of wanted to do that, and I think you didn't want to do it. Then whether or not there were buyers and things. Is that still on the horizon?

Heath: Well, we still talk about it, but I feel that--well, in the first place, many of them, after investigating, have decided that it isn't [laughs] profitable enough.

Ross: Financially feasible, or--?

Heath: Well, for instance, since we own the land and the building, we don't charge anything for rent. So we in effect are subsidizing. And the medical plan which a few years ago was \$3000 a month is now \$12,000 a month.

Ross: From three to twelve? That's an enormous difference.

Heath: It's just unbelievable. It is our one most costly thing in the shop, the medical plan. And this month, it's going to go up another 14 percent.

Ross: That's incredible.

Heath: So we were talking with the union this week about the possibility of the employees paying that additional 14 percent. But of course, they really can't afford it either.

Ross: If you give them a salary, and then they have to commute--and I've heard that the bridge tolls are going to go up to three dollars very soon.

Heath: They were talking about five dollars for a while.

Ross: So that makes Marin County almost impossible.

Heath: Yes.

Ross: Well, what would the alternative be?

Heath: Well, what I've been doing recently is looking at rentals in west Berkeley, because there's a whole section in west Berkeley that's becoming a builder's haven.

##

Ross: West Berkeley is a builder's haven?

Heath: It's becoming that. A number of people have been instrumental in promoting it as such, because the architects and builders like to have things close where you can do cement work, you can get tile. You need everything for lighting, for furniture, for steel, for structure--it's all available within three or four or five square blocks of one another. So for us to be in that location with tile manufacturing would be very logical.

Ross: But wouldn't that be an enormous switch?

Heath: But the rents, the land values over there are not nearly what they are in Sausalito.

Ross: You mean you would consider selling your building here and moving the whole plant?

Heath: Well, I'm not sure that it would necessarily need to be sold, if in the move we should change what we do with the tile. Instead of pressing it as a stiff mud, in a stiff mud press process, the tile should be extruded. In other words, if we were to change our method of making the tile, we could make--with the same number of people--probably four or five times as much tile as we can with the press. But it means all new equipment, everything has to change. The method in making the clay, because it's a continuous feeding of the clay through the pug mill, and extrusion, and automatically

through the trimming and drying process, it would be a continuous belt. In other words, it would be getting into really semi-automatic production.

Ross: Well, is there a demand for that increase?

Heath: Well, not necessarily for tile, but for the possibility of extruding clay as a building material.

Ross: We talked about that in the last session, and you and I had what I thought was a fascinating discussion of material such as that being used for home building, low-income homes, and then the possibility of the university being involved with it from the school of architecture. The question I have of you is, I happen to know that you're going to be age eighty in a short time--

Heath: Two weeks from today!

Ross: Two weeks from today, and the energy and the investment must just be overwhelming to do that.

Heath: On the other hand, it's so invigorating when you're on a new trail, on a new search, that the energy--I have the energy. When I wake up in the mornings, I think about--

Ross: Get excited about it.

#### Recycling Produces Mosaics and Bird Baths

Heath: Yes. What's going to happen today? And also, all of these things --for instance, what happened when so much of our ware was breaking and cracking, and my not wanting to haul it off to the dump but getting into doing mosaics. And using all the--doing the things that Gaudi did in Barcelona, for instance, in the use of broken tile and--

Ross: Yes, I want to talk about that after a while, but right now we want to stick to the--

Heath: Because it's so fascinating that--we've just piled up all the broken casseroles and chop plates and platters and tile and so on into a big heap, and break it up for mosaics. Now I'm looking for a rock crusher to break it down into smaller parts. All the glaze waste from the glaze booths which have dried out now into a powder form. This week I hope to use an acetylene torch and see if we can--with adding some Borax to it, turn it into glass pellets.



So it just opens up all sorts--when you think about having to recycle--that you can't throw it away. If you can't throw it away, what can you do with it? And that is a very big challenge, and very exciting. For instance, this week a new restaurant in San Antonio ordered our square sushi plates. We've never sold a restaurant the square plates before.

Ross: Is it a Japanese restaurant?

Heath: No, I think it's--it's on the river in San Antonio. Have you been in San Antonio?

Ross: Yes, and that river area is--

Heath: It's very picturesque.

Ross: Very picturesque and very upbeat.

Heath: Well, anyway, that's where it's going. But lo and behold, the big plate, the big square plates, the first day they came out of the kiln, we lost about 50 percent of them. The next day it was down to 30, and then yesterday it was down to 10 percent. So we're sort of getting a handle on it, finding out what it was that we were doing wrong.

But I have like sixty or seventy of those plates that have little cracks along the side, and I just can't bear to throw them away. So yesterday I said, "Uh-huh, I'm going to make bird baths." Or something for the garden--these shallow square plates, you see. We'll pour concrete on the back of them, and make the mosaic background, and then create a pedestal, so that it becomes a very decorative thing in the garden, shallow, that you can fill with water, or with bird feed or whatever. Or float a blossom in it, or whatever.

Ross: And then you sell it to The Nature Company and you're off and going.

Heath: That's right. So that that's what I was doing this afternoon when I came in late today to have this interview. I just finished doing the back of our first bird bath, for want of a better word. And it's really very, very nice.

Ross: I can hardly wait to see it, because this would all be from those square plates?

Heath: Yes. Of which we have like sixty or seventy of them. The wholesale price, what the restaurant is paying, is \$10 apiece, so I figure, well, here's \$600 if there's sixty plates. Now, if we do

make them into a bird bath and add a little something else to them, instead of them being \$10, they'll be \$20 dollars.

Ross: But how much work is it to do that?

Heath: Well, I had a form made to pour it, so we can turn them upside down inside, and then pour the cement over it, and then embellish it with the mosaic. So it probably took me--oh, at most--I had Hassan mix the cement for me, so--we worked less than an hour, the two of us, to do it.

Ross: And you get faster all the time. But what you're talking about is that you are kept alive and excited and happy by all of these challenges, every day practically, and that the nature of this company is that you could keep busy as long as you wanted.

Heath: Forever. That's right.

#### New Ideas Every Day

Ross: But then why go into such an ambitious thing as you're talking about?

Heath: Well, that was interesting too. The man who has the arts and crafts shop in Sausalito is a man who is a Frank Lloyd Wright collector and seller of furniture and furnishings of Wright's period. He works with people who are collectors of Wright memorabilia, mostly in Los Angeles. He was in a couple of weeks ago, and saw the extrusions.

He came back today with another man--I don't know whether he's an architect--but they were looking at the extrusions with the idea of using them in the gardens, not as a dwelling, but as walls or benches. If you cut them in two-inch short stubby little things, and they're segmented and filled with gravel or concrete, and then they could use them let's say as a paver.

I said I would like to be working on a larger module than the four-inch square. I said six-by-six or eight-by-eight, and they said oh, no, this is a good dimension, because it isn't too heavy, so that you can have a two-foot long piece, and it doesn't weigh--

Ross: Right. Well, you already knew that, and you were talking about comparing the weight of a piece of wood with that same weight, and how you can lift one and not the other.

Heath: Whereas a concrete block, for instance, that is one-inch thick, and heavier or thicker than that.

Ross: Dreadfully heavy.

Heath: They're very heavy. So a square foot of tile--a paver, let's say a Mexican paver is usually ten to twelve pounds a square foot. And our tiles are four pounds. And these extrusions have that same weight. In other words, if you lay out a square foot of these, let's say two inches high, it takes nine of them to make a square foot. And that's four pounds.

Ross: But the Frank Lloyd Wright collector wanted--

Heath: He felt this was a good dimension. He said to me, "When could you start making things for us if we wanted them? At this dimension, just the way they are now." I said, "We could do it any day. The reason we haven't done very much with it is because I've been thinking in terms of waiting until we get equipment to make the larger ones." He said, "You don't need to wait."

Ross: It seems to me that if you get involved with a huge project like the production of building materials using extrusions, you won't have time to do the little things you enjoy doing, like the bird baths.

Heath: Oh, I know.

Ross: The energy it would take from--it's not just that you're going to be eighty; that has little to do with it. It has to do with how many things can any human being do. You can't do extrusions for Frank Lloyd Wright, you can't do these bird baths, and you can't do those fun--what I would call fun projects because your energy and time would be so spent--

Heath: Unless there's someone who comes along, and I think there may be, who will take it on as a separate project. For instance, the other thing we've been making this week are patio tables. I've designed a new way of putting tables together. It's so neat.

And what I was proposing today was that we could buy these circles already cut, and with the holes drilled, and the doweling cut to length. People could put the whole thing together themselves. We would cut the top, and so it's a pre-fab unit.

Ross: Would people be able to choose the color of their tile, then, or would that be--

- Heath: Well, right now, since we have a mess of redwood glaze tile we would concentrate on that. In other words, trying to use up our overruns, because we do so many jobs for special colors, less than a hundred square feet, so you will have maybe ten square feet of something left over in a color, and what can you do with it? So you have to find something to use up these odd bits and pieces. Otherwise, they just sit around forever.
- Ross: Well, it sounds wonderful. It sounds like you--would it be marketable, do you think?
- Heath: Oh, yes. The people--I rolled the table into the store. "Now, how much are you going to sell that for?" And they liked it very much, and when the man was here from the arts and crafts shop on the extrusions, he said, "That's great for a patio. We can use those."
- Ross: That's terrific.
- Heath: So if you're sort of in tune with what's going on in the world, it's not hard to dream up things to do.
- Ross: Yes, and with your creative mind, there's always something new and exciting.

#### Reduced Market for Dinnerware

- Heath: Well, as I say, there's enough dinnerware on the market that we don't need really to make dinnerware. Plenty of other things that we could make, because the dinnerware market is really so down.
- Ross: Is that right? Is that because of too many other kinds of dinnerware being available, and you're just not competitive--?
- Heath: All over the world. You see, after all, when we started in the forties, right after the war, there weren't any imports. Every European country was so decimated as a result of the war. It took ten to twenty years before they could rebuild--and then beginning in the sixties is when the imports really began coming in, and by the seventies, it became worse, and by the eighties, we were so impacted by imports that--and there are good things that are being made. So we'll go on making our dinnerware, because we have enough restaurant accounts that will be reordering, and new ones coming in. We'll just find our way into other areas. So instead of making tile for floors and walls and exteriors, we'll make patio tables.

Taking Care of Employees

- Ross: And with the staff that you have now, do you think that the retiring people, you can replace with--?
- Heath: Well, I think the idea--ideally what should happen is someone should take on the making of patio tables, period.
- Ross: Oh, it's somebody on your staff.
- Heath: Yes. One of the guys, like Hassan, for instance, would be a logical person to do it, and would like to do it.
- Ross: That's Hassan?
- Heath: Hassan, from Yugoslavia.
- Ross: Oh, he's back?
- Heath: Yes. He gave up his bar business; he said that he is not a--he doesn't drink, he doesn't smoke. Running a bar he decided was not his cup of tea. So he went to Yugoslavia and took his three children, was there for six months. He said things in Yugoslavia today are really very bad, because they're all wanting to split out into their own--the Albanians and the Montenegrans, and let's see--there are six Slavic groups in Yugoslavia, and they're all at odds with one another. He said when he was there that there were four policemen on every corner, and it was--it's almost as tense as it was in the Middle East.
- Ross: Really. Had he gone back for a holiday, or for--?
- Heath: No, his wife--she went off and left him, so he thought he would take the children back to Yugoslavia to his brother or sister or some family member--
- Ross: Oh, to leave them there?
- Heath: To leave the children there. So he went over and stayed for a couple of months, and then came back here, and then returned again. And meanwhile his wife decided that she really didn't want to split up. So about a month ago, he came in, he had flown in just the day before with the three children from Yugoslavia. She had stayed here; she didn't go to Yugoslavia. So he brought the children back from Yugoslavia, and came to the shop, and said, "I need a place to live." So he's over at 3310 Paradise Drive now, with the wife.

Ross: Oh, so you allowed him to go over there and live. Was there space over there?

Heath: Well, Anna Jane's been living there by herself in the big barge.

Ross: Oh, I thought others were living there too.

Heath: No, Susan has the front part that we used to have, but the other part--see, that's a two apartment houseboat. So the second apartment and a big--well, the guys who had been living there, there were two men who were getting their doctorates at the fisheries down the road, and they both moved out last August, at the end of the summer session. So from then on, Anna Jane has been staying there. I also had one of the other guys who was having trouble with his wife, and baby, and was being evicted from his house. The baby was born--she was pregnant--so in a way, what--we have street people.

Ross: Yes, you have the people who need things, yes. So, Hassan then is back, and he's going to stay?

Heath: And he's been working with me on reorganizing the tile department, and working on these projects, like the tables and so on. So that's what we were doing today, sort of outlining what kind of equipment--we could do two things. We could have the prefabricated assemblies that people could do for themselves, and that would be at one price, and then have finished tables. And I think for Marin County, that--well, it will be interesting to see how many people will put their own things together, because it's so easy to do.

#### Heath Ashtrays Become Collector's Item

Ross: Well, maybe I'll buy one, and I'll be the tester to see if I can put it together. It's interesting, because I looked at the Heath ashtray out on your table here, and I said to Brian, "What am I going to do with all of my Heath ashtrays?" And he said, "Well, they're going to be collector's items very soon."

Heath: Well, they are already.

Ross: Are there certain markings on the back that would indicate how old they are?

Heath: I was really quite fascinated, a couple of years ago a man came in from Los Angeles who's a collector of Heath ashtrays. He was saying, "There's one ashtray that's missing from your collection."

I said, "What do you mean?" He said, "I know the markings on the back of your ashtrays for every decade about." It's true that when we first started making ashtrays, we had one--we were using a metal stamp to stamp in the wet clay. Then we carved the lettering into the mold, and the carving we did then was of a different design. So there are about six changes that took place on the signature on the ashtrays. And he had five of them.

I said, "Well, how do you know what dates they were?" He said, "Because I'm a collector, and I make it a point of knowing." He apparently started buying them when we first started making ashtrays, and he would buy--when he detected that there had been a change in the signature in some way, or something about it, or a different color, although they weren't changed very much. We reduced the number of notches at one point, so at one point they had gone from six, now there are room for four.

Ross: Are you still making them?

Heath: No. We have a number of them left over, and once in a while there will be an order coming from a business, an offer. But it's really very, very seldom. When I think that at one time we were actually spending 25 percent of what we did--

Ross: How will the changes in production--for instance, no more ashtrays, but bird baths and tea carts--change your employee needs?

Heath: Well, I don't know what's going to happen on that. We keep debating whether to go--Brian would like to go down to about half the number of people we have and sort of start over again.

Ross: And start over again with hiring new people?

Heath: Yes. We don't have really qualified people in very critical jobs, so to maintain the kind of quality control that we need for restaurant work, for instance, we just don't have it. And we don't have anyone who's a replacement for me if something goes wrong.

Ross: Or if you wanted to travel, take some time off. You don't have anybody there who can--was it Nash who would have done that in the past?

Heath: Well, at least partially. Now, I suppose in time Russell will--

Ross: But you really haven't had anybody in the shop in the past--

Heath: No. Winnie would be capable of doing that, but she really isn't that interested. She's doing the embellishment on the tiles, what we call special projects.

Ross: But to find somebody and train them, that takes a long time.

Heath: Well, that's the problem.



## XVI MINERAL CONTENT PROBLEMS

[Interview 14: August 20, 1992] ##

Breakage from Lower pH in Water

Ross: Edith, it's now August 20, 1992, and the last time we taped an interview was May 11, 1991.

Heath: Oh, that's terrible.

Ross: Well, there were many things going on, and you just didn't have the time or your head wasn't in the right place to spend time on the history. Maybe we should talk about what some of those things were.

Heath: Okay. That's almost a year and a half ago.

Ross: Yes. I think one of the things that was really a problem at the time was the breakage, and that had to do--

Heath: Had we solved that problem?

Ross: I think we had talked about it, but we didn't come to the solving part of it.

Heath: Because the Marin County Water Department finally rescued us, after my going up there--I don't know, half a dozen times, asking if they had done something to the water that made it different.

Ross: You had asked them this before and repeatedly?

Heath: Eventually we learned that they had lowered the pH in the water from 9 to 7.8. For clay to hang together, you have to have a balance between the alkalis and the acids, that clay is acid, and

it won't stick together unless there are enough alkalis present. It just falls apart.

So what the water department suggested we do was add lye to the clay mix. There were two things that we could do: we could either use boiling water, which of course is impossible--to mix clay with boiling water--or we could mix lye with the clay. What was happening was carbon dioxide was forming in the clay, because-- I don't understand the chemistry at all to explain why, but by adding the lye, it meant that the carbon dioxide could escape. See, we needed to get rid of that carbon dioxide. In the past, there had never been any problem, because the water was a pH of 9 which meant that it was sufficiently alkaline, that it balanced the requirement that the clay needed. But when the water department lowered the pH, they didn't know that we would be affected adversely.

Ross: Did they do that for some reason?

Heath: Yes, because as the drought continued, the water level in the lake lowered, so that the particulates in the water--rotting leaves and vegetation--increased. So in order to make the water drinkable, they lowered the pH. Why that should make it more drinkable I don't know.

Ross: But they were in control of it.

Heath: Yes. So when I brought them the sample of clay that was falling apart, they recognized immediately that carbon dioxide was forming in the clay, and that we had to get rid of it. The carbon dioxide in escaping was making the clay fall apart. So they gave me little tablets of Borax--lye--little pellets, and said, "You raise your pH over 8, 8.2, and see how many it takes, you know what it takes--a dozen of these little beads or what, and then you can control the amount that you put in. But as long as you're over 8, you shouldn't have any problems, because that will drive the carbon dioxide out."

So that's what we've been doing, and it did decrease the extraordinary amount of cracking, but we still periodically--we lose more ware from cracking than we ever did in our forty-odd years earlier.

Ross: So you still aren't absolutely certain what causes the cracking?

Heath: Well, perhaps not enough time is allowed to get rid of all the carbon dioxide.

Ross: But it's enough better that you don't spend time--

Heath: Oh, yes, because we would have whole kiln loads of ware that would crack.

Ross: In the past you had some of those problems, but you didn't know what it was, so now you really learned a lot.

Heath: Well, I assumed previously that when it did crack that there had been an error in the clay mix. Now, at least we have learned that clay must have a pH of over 8 in order for it to stick together. So that was one problem that was solved.

Ross: But you had said something about that you had learned more this year than--

Heath: I learned more in this past year about ceramic chemistry than my whole life, I guess.

### Glaze Waste

Ross: Yes, and you had another situation that took much of your attention--glaze waste.

Heath: Yes, it all happened so quickly. What to do with our glaze waste? We had called to have our septic tank emptied and the septic tank people said they couldn't take it to the dump, couldn't take it to the landfill any more, because it is toxic. So I panicked, but I knew that it had to melt because it was glaze waste (over-spray from glaze booths) that was all dumped together. I didn't know how the mixture would fuse, or what the surface would look like--glossy or matte, crazed or fluid. So I took a dipperful out of this septic tank and screened it, poured it across a plate and fired it. It came out the most beautiful blue satin finish glaze you could imagine--no crazing, no blistering--unbelievable! What a gold mine, I thought.

So we'd been throwing away this perfectly good material all these years, but now the question was, how much would it vary from time to time, depending upon which color glazes we were glazing? Would it always be blue, or would it sometimes be red or gray or--? So we bought fourteen garbage cans and pumped out the septic tank into them. We mixed and screened each batch or can full, and ran tests through the kilns, firing them at our regular temperatures. The colors and the character of the material was remarkably the same. So that it looked as if we could use the waste as any nature-made compound--a raw matter to be tinted or used just as it is, to be opacified or dulled down.

We could add materials to that base, and turn the glaze into a black glaze or a redwood color, and we could bleach the color by adding tin or more clay. By adding a white clay we could decrease the intensity of the hue--changing it to a very pale grey. But in so doing, the glaze would become more matte by the addition of clay or alumina.

Ross: More matte?

Heath: Yes, not as shiny, not as glassy. Because, as it is, it is very beautiful--not too shiny, but at least glossy, so there is room to add more clay in order to change the tint and be able to create other colors. We can handle it as a raw material, just as I've done for forty years, made glazes out of nature's "wastes."

So the testing has been time-consuming, taking several months really to become confident that we could even suggest to people that they could buy a dinnerware made from "waste" glaze.

Ross: Well, let me ask you: in the past, you'd been throwing this out. Now, when you screened it, was there anything that was--?

Heath: Hazardous? No, it was lumpy-scrap clay particles and because there was grass, weeds, and paper that blew into the open tank--

Ross: So there was no longer anything that was toxic--you could throw the screened material away.

Heath: Yes, because it was organic--there wasn't that much of it in the first place.

#### Toxicity of Minerals

Ross: Well, let me ask you: what was the material--the glaze they no longer would haul away, what was the basis for not doing that? Was it toxic?

Heath: Almost any mineral, if it is a fine-ground dust, is bad for breathing. An increased amount is toxic, but it was primarily lead and cadmium that were the critical materials. But there's also barium, for instance--you know, barium is a poison, but they were all materials that one uses medicinally, and are in our bodies all the time. But if you get an extra amount of barium, then that's hazardous, or an extra amount of almost anything. It's like eating too many prunes [laughs].

So when we're making glazes with various percentages of sodium, potassium, barium, calcium, aluminum, silicon, copper, cobalt, manganese, zinc, magnesium, lead, cadmium, selenium, gold, platinum, to name the most common--toxicity is a reality to the worker, and when used as land fill, it will be carried into the ground water. Minerals must be fused into glass or stone to be non-toxic. The potter puts back together the minerals that nature took apart and makes "stoneware."

Ross: It strikes me that you were throwing away valuable materials all these years!

Heath: Well, it almost seems that way.

### Separating Out the Minerals

Heath: In fact, I was just reading a report of a firm in Stockton, a ceramic industry, that is separating out their minerals and selling them as single elements.

Ross: You mean separating them from--?

Heath: From each other. When you mine minerals, they are always mixed-- you never mine a mineral that's a pure anything. And so, all materials are processed after they're dug out of the earth. We are too small to glean or separate all the elements from our waste glaze. We could have them separated out, but it would be too costly for us.

Ross: Oh, and you say the company in Stockton is doing just that.

Heath: And marketing it. Apparently, they're reclaiming more than \$500,000 a year out of their glaze waste.

Ross: Wow, that's a--

Heath: I still haven't taken time to figure, because now we have sitting in our yard--we must have at least thirty or forty huge drums of this material, because we don't use it up fast enough. We use 1 and 1/2 percent in our dark clay body as a glass former, but 1 and 1/2 percent is fifteen pounds to a thousand-pound batch. We put in fifteen pounds of the glaze waste as a glass former. But we can't eat enough of it. We accumulate more than that every day.

Ross: What you need is some inventor to come along to--

Heath: Well, what I've found is that I can use as much as 40 percent of it in a clay body mix, but it would have a new look, be a new product. When you make a clay body, you're not just using plain clay out of the ground, because it would shrink too much. You usually have to add sand back into it, some silica. A clay formula consists of 50 parts of clay (roughly) and 25 parts of sand, and 25 parts of glass formers.

So when I say we can use 40 percent of waste glaze to 60 percent clay for a clay body, you can understand the significance of our making use of this waste. For a year or more, we could lower our material costs by at least 40 percent. But it would mean the discontinuation of what we have been making all these years. Therein lies the frustration.

Ross: Tell me, what role does that waste have to do with, say, the extrusions? Can you use it for that--?

Heath: Oh, that's what I plan to do with the extrusions, because we could make intricate color clay bodies that would be self-glazing by the amount of glaze slurry that we put back into the body. So why don't we do it? Because we don't have enough equipment--we'd have to clean out the equipment every time we changed body formulas. For instance, in a bakery business, if you make chocolate cakes and white cakes and orange cakes and so on, you have to clean all the utensils or the equipment if you're using a single large vat. Every formula needs its own batching equipment--for that we need more space--or another factory elsewhere.

And so the cleaning up of equipment is out of the picture. When we were at Wedgwood, they had about twenty different clay bodies, and they had a separate system for each one of them. They didn't have to clean out the equipment. So when they were making the black basalt body, for instance, they were not burdened by contamination or time loss in fabrication of black ware.

### Reclaiming Waste Materials

Heath: The most discouraging experience in recycling is the stress that enters the work place--uncertainty about the future. People in the shop have been unsympathetic with this idea of reclaiming waste materials. They said, "For heaven's sakes, why don't we find a place where we can just ship it out of here and get rid of it, instead of trying to set up a system whereby we can use it." I said, "Well, why should we? That's valuable material, that means we don't have to buy all these single materials now, it's all mixed

together ready to use." So it's sort of like a ready-mix cake that you can modify.

Ross: How long did it take them to recognize the value of what you were trying to do?

Heath: They still think that I'm nuts.

Ross: They do?

Heath: Oh, yes. "That's Edith, you know, playing. Trying to do the impossible. She will destroy Heath Ceramics. People like what Heath makes! Why endanger our jobs?"

Ross: But actually, from an ecological standpoint, it makes a huge amount of sense.

Heath: I agree with you, and I think it's very exciting to do it.

Ross: Do you know if other plants are doing this?

Heath: Oh, yes.

Ross: Have they been doing it for a while? Were you a latecomer to this, or were you--?

Heath: I don't know. I don't keep enough in touch with what people are doing. But they can't haul their things off to the dump, either.

Ross: No, but that's all been sort of new, like this just came up.

Heath: Oh, yes. It's part of the whole ecological program.

Ross: Yes, right. But other plants have been doing it because they knew they could save money by using their--

Heath: No. As I said, the firm in Stockton or Fresno--one of those-- they're separating out the minerals and just selling them. I don't know why they are, but--

Ross: So it must be profitable for them, or they wouldn't do it.

Heath: Well, because the larger the plant is, the more waste there is, so they really couldn't probably reuse it fast enough.

Ross: So with their volume, they have more possibility of large quantities to sell the various minerals.

Heath: Well, I should get--become informed about what people are doing about it.

### The Lead Problem

Ross: Well, then there was something else that came up, which I think was really one of the things that you found very frustrating and difficult to take care of, and that was the lead problem that became such an issue here in California. Wasn't that the Food and Drug Administration?

Heath: Yes. California made the permissible limits much more stringent than the national level. There was no standard established for the amount of lead or cadmium that one could use in a glaze until 1972, I think, or in the 1970s. So at that time, I began making lead-free glazes in order to be in compliance. So fortunately, two of the glazes that became very popular are lead-free in our dinnerware. And the others are not leachable because stoneware and porcelain are like glass where the glaze and the clay body mature simultaneously, fired to zero porosity. In other words, as the glaze melts, the clay reaches zero porosity (or near zero porosity) at the same time. Thus a molecular chain is fused, locking up the lead, integrating the clay body and the glazes as they boil together. Heath, as you know, is a stoneware, or technically, is probably more accurately a porcelainized stoneware.

In the china industry, china is fired first without glaze. Then the glaze is applied in a second firing at a lower temperature; therefore if lead is used it may not form a molecular chain with the alumina and silica in the clay body, as it does in stoneware, porcelain, and glass. Therefore, china is more likely to be leachable. Earthenware which fires at lowest temperatures, needs a higher percentage of lead to melt, is most probably leachable.

So when the glaze melts, it really is lead-free. When the woman examiner from the Food and Drug Administration came to the plant, she pasted little porous bits of paper that were impregnated with acetic acid on every glaze that we had visible in the shop.

Ross: Did she take the samples from the seconds shop, or did she come to the back?

Heath: She tested samples in the showroom, and some of them were just odds and ends.



Ross: So just arbitrarily throughout the shop.

Heath: They were things that really weren't on the market, but just happened to be around as part of the exploration in glazes. And the ones that we had--one glaze, our gunmetal glaze, which we used to spray on the edges, three different combinations--we used it with the sand and the apricot and with the pink--well, in each case, the lead content in the gunmetal was higher than that ratio of one to three. In other words, I hadn't put enough silica into the gunmetal to prevent it from leaching.

So those were the three glazes that were in question, and that we had to--we were supposed to tell all of our retail stores and write to our customers and tell them to return anything that was made with the gunmetal on the edge.

Ross: This was the FDA [Food and Drug Administration] direction to you?

Heath: Or told us that the customers should break the pieces.

Ross: Oh!

Heath: I said, "I'm not going to tell anybody to break the pieces, because I know how to get--if there's any lead there, all we have to do is fill a dish with vinegar for twenty-four hours, and what little is there--" because it can't be very much, because when they ran the test, they asked me, "Why do your pieces--" see, here's the schedule. Seven parts per million is the maximum required--you can't be more than seven parts per million.

Ross: You're saying seven parts lead per million?

Heath: Per million parts. So seven parts out of a million, if you can even measure it, you can imagine how little it is. So that was the national standard up until 1990. Then the national standard changed, so the plates could stay at seven parts per million, but the serving bowls that were larger than a quart were five parts per million, and the casseroles and something that was over a quart was three parts per million.

Ross: So it sounds like anything where food would be stored in it.

Heath: That's right.

Ross: Like a cup or a glass or something--

Heath: Yes. So, California says that you had to have--plates could be three parts per million, and--well, the three variations there. And the cups and pitchers had to be a half a part per million.

Ross: Oh, my goodness!

Heath: So the other thing is that if you'd ever fired a glaze in the kiln that had lead present that was being released, it would be embedded in the walls of the kiln, and each time the kiln would heat up, that would fume, and a little bit of it would maybe deposit on the top of--even if you had a lead-free glaze, there would be a little bit deposited on the ware. So that half a part per million was, I suppose, a way to get rid of what might be fuming in the kiln. So many of the industries completely rebuilt their kilns, relined them--

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Heath: --if they weren't making stoneware and/or porcelain. And most of what's sold in the industry is either earthenware or china, and china is fired hard on the first firing, and then the glaze is applied at lower temperatures on the second or third. For instance, china in decoration, in order to retain some of the colors that change with the temperature rise, a plate with embellishment on it may go back through the kiln two or three or four times, each for a different color. And they are the ones that are most susceptible for lead release, because lead gives you bright colors. If you mix iron with lead and tin, you'll get a red.

So the pieces that the public should be aware of are the low-fired things, for instance, that might be imported from Mexico or Spain or Portugal, they haven't been hot-fired high enough to form a glass. But even there, I still think that--well, the way you test for lead release is to put vinegar in the cup or bowl for twenty-four hours and send it out to the laboratory, and they'll tell you how much is being released.

#### Checking Kilns for Lead

Heath: So when I got the results back from our laboratory, I didn't understand why one might have one part per million going up to six parts per million out of the same glaze on a piece. The only conclusion I came to was that there's enough variation within our kiln conditions that in some cases the glass wasn't--the silica and lead didn't all really melt. So that meant that we had to fire higher.

So then, fortunately, we hired a young man who was looking for a job and had gotten his master's in ceramics. During his

schooling he had fired a lot of kilns. So we hired him specifically to get our kilns much more constant and predictable every day, by using a CO<sub>2</sub> meter in checking--what you do is pump part of the atmosphere into--well, it's sort of like pumping a woman's breast in breast-feeding, you pump out some of the oxygen that's in the kiln and you can measure what the CO<sub>2</sub> reading is, the carbon dioxide. And that influences the firing of the kiln, or the temperature.

We had always had people firing kilns who I felt fired it more just on the basis of how the cones melted. But the cone doesn't tell you what the atmosphere is. So now, we've had Greg working for almost a year, and it's a dream to see how things are coming out of the kiln, and it's so predictable, it's unbelievable.

Ross: So all these years, you've lacked a real scientist at the kiln. That's a great relief, isn't it?

Heath: Well, one of the things that's happened with ecological pressures is that you do have to be more scientific. You have to have better control.

Ross: And did the FDA give you clearance then, did they get off your back or--?

Heath: Well, they still--I suggested that if anyone--because when we sent things to the lab, it might come back with instead of a half a part per million, it might be nine-tenths of a part per million. In other words, it was so close to it. I said, "Well, now that you've taken out the nine-tenths parts per million, there must be nothing left there, must be all gone." And they said, "Yes, of course." So I said, "Well, if that's the case, why can't we just tell people to put vinegar in their cups? If you're going to leave tea in it for twenty-four hours, and--" Yes, in other words, get rid of it right now. And the FDA said well, they didn't like that recommendation, because most people probably wouldn't bother to do it.

Ross: But in actuality, how much lead is dangerous? Does anybody know that? Because through this whole thing of what you kind of call a hoo-haw, you wonder how much of it is sort of busy-work for the FDA, because you find that there's lead all through our atmosphere.

Heath: That's right.

Ross: It's dropping off the Golden Gate Bridge.

Lead Content in Blood

Heath: I had a lead count taken after this began. I'd had one several years ago, and I had seventeen parts per million in my blood.

Ross: In your own blood?

Heath: Yes. Because I stick my arm into the glaze barrel and stir it up and so on. And so in the last year, I went and had another test, and it was twenty-three. So I said to my doctor, "That's getting pretty high, isn't it?" Because the people who spray glazes are supposed to wear a mask, and periodically they're supposed to go in and have a lead check-up. And if it gets up to twenty-seven, then they can't glaze until they've lowered their lead content.

Ross: So it's not a permanent thing, then. Being away from it will pass it out of your blood.

Heath: Eat beans or something, to absorb it. At any rate, when I said to the doctor, "That's pretty dangerous," she said, "No, that's very typical. Don't worry."

Ross: Is that right?

Heath: So when you talk about a half a part per--but apparently for young children, I remember when we were living in Chicago, there was a street corner in Gary, Indiana, where the steelmills were, where the children waited on a corner in the morning, there was a stoplight. And the exhaust from the fumes of the cars was so great that so many of these children were sick with lead poisoning. And they found out it was because they were standing on that street corner waiting for the lights to change, and all those cars sitting there pumping the exhaust out of their cars, and the lead content in the gasoline--

Ross: So that was before we had unleaded gasoline?

Heath: That's right.

Ross: But then I remember when I worked for the Medical Committee for Human Rights in Chicago, and we had a very active group who were studying the lead content particularly in black ghetto neighborhoods, where the children were found to have high, very high levels of lead. It was claimed to have been from paint. Children chew on things--

Heath: Peeling paint off the walls.

Ross: Yes.

Heath: Yes, the paint industry several years ago had to stop using lead. We've always bought our paint for the shop, when we repaint the building and the trim. So for years, I had a formula that they would mix for the particular colors I wanted, until that year they said, "Well, we can't do that any more. We can't use that. We have to now use a water-based glaze, can't use an oil-based glaze any more." And that's when all the water-based glaze came on the market.

Ross: Oh, yes. So that has been quite a horrendous happening. I remember when you first spoke of the FDA coming in, and that there was a lot of feeling that they didn't have as much information as they needed to really answer questions, and that they were pretty-- maybe the word would be bureaucratic, they had a certain routine that they were supposed to work out, and it had very little practical--

Heath: Well, the thing that I found distressing was first of all, the fact that California lowered the standards--and no one really knows whether that was a political move on the part of--it was part of the environmental movement to make people correct their waste disposal.

#### Lowering Lead Content with Vinegar

Heath: I don't know whether it's really necessary for the lead content to be that low, but at any rate what happened was that when I learned that in sending the tests in, and it had a rating of 1.1 or 1.6 or whatever it was, that was what was in there, and it was gone. I said, "Okay, run the test again. I want to see if it comes out zero." And it did. So every one of those three formulas now--it took five months to get to the point where I got smart enough to know that. There was one bowl that I made, a big bowl for Joy Micon, that had seven parts per million. It was a large bread-making--she uses it for making bread. And it had seven parts per million.

So I said, "Well, run it again. Let's see; is there any lead left there?" So they ran it again--

Ross: What do you mean--what had you done? Had you soaked it or something?

Heath: I had put vinegar in it. I took a gallon and a half of vinegar to fill the bowl. So I said, "Okay, that came out with seven parts per million. I want to know if there's any more lead left in there, if that's all of it." So the lab repeated--they got fresh vats of vinegar and did it again. This time it came out, it removed four parts per million. I said, "Do it again." And that time it came down to two parts per million, which is what that size bowl should be. I said, "Okay." So to remove from that big a bowl, it takes more than twenty-four hours. It takes--three times twenty-four--twenty-four hours, and you fill the bowl three times--seventy-two hours. So that's how long it took to get seven parts per million out. You can imagine how many times you would have to mix salad in there, it would take a hundred years!

Ross: Yes, it's quite ridiculous. Well, now, let me ask you: was this a special lab that the FDA was using, or was this a lab that you were using?

Heath: No, it's a lab up in Petaluma.

Ross: Oh, that's government--

Heath: --Scott Laboratories. No, they're private.

Ross: Oh, they're private. So you were doing this on your own.

Heath: They do most of the testing on the wine--for the wineries. When I walked in there, it looked like a winery, all the bottles that were there.

Ross: Well, that's an interesting thing, because the FDA is very powerful and can really--I remember when I was the director of the Planned Parenthood in Contra Costa, we had gone through that Dalkon Shield problem. Remember, we were told that the Dalkon Shield was such a terrific IUD?

Heath: Yes.

Ross: And we had installed an awful lot of them, and then came the bad news that it was quite unsafe. And the FDA yanked it off the market. Not only did they give us directions not to use it, one day an agent of the FDA came and I had to go with him down into the clinic, take out all the packaged IUDs and stand there while he cut them up. He cut them in half. And that was how determined they were to get it off the market. Well, in a sense, that speaks well for them.

Compliance with California Ordinance

Heath: So the date for the abiding by the rules was July 1.

Ross: I see, so they gave you a deadline--

Heath: No, that was the deadline for the California ordinance.

Ross: Well, again you learned something.

Heath: Yes. I still don't know what the--oh, that was an interesting thing that I found out. The FDA held a meeting, and invited store buyers and manufacturers to the meeting to discuss how to cope with the lead problem. One of the people that was invited as a speaker --I don't know whether I should mention this or not--was Williams Sonoma, the woman from Williams Sonoma, was one of the speakers.

Ross: Was she a buyer?

Heath: Yes, she was a buyer. And she said that Williams Sonoma had bought \$300,000 worth of imported ware that had a high percentage of lead. So--

Ross: Unbeknownst to them?

Heath: That was before this whole thing broke. There wasn't any question about testing for lead. So they had to recall back all of these pieces that they had shipped out. She asked the manufacturer if they couldn't change the glaze formula so that they could continue manufacturing--because it was a popular casserole shape that they were importing. And they said yes, they could change the glaze, so they changed the glaze formula, but the glaze was so crazed it leaked. Because it was an earthenware, see. It was low-fired, and that's why the lead content was as high as it was.

But the trade-off is, if you don't use lead, it will craze, and then the pot won't hold water.





## XVII CREATIVITY AND USEFULNESS IN CHANGING TIMES

[Interview 15: February 15, 1994] ##

Health Problems and a Slowdown

Heath: How long is it since we last talked?

Ross: I think at least a year. And we've had dates that either you or I have had to change. And then, you went through some real severe health problems.

Heath: Yes, in August I had surgery for colon cancer. And I had the cancer removed. So, I was in the hospital for a month--a very painful experience. And the doctor said it would take probably four months before I would be back to normal again. So, that's about four months ago now. But I'm not back to normal really.

Ross: In your health?

Heath: Well, mostly it's, well, hearing loss has become more severe. I learned in the hospital that when you have surgery, the anesthetic slows everything down in your body. So, your blood rate, heartbeat and everything is altered. And the longer you're in the hospital the more time it takes to recover, to get back to the normal speed that you had before. That was interesting because I had anesthetic twice. The first time they did the surgery, they were supposed to be just taking a few little short cuts instead of a large opening. But it didn't work. So, after three weeks, the doctor had to go back again and make a large cut because apparently there was a leak somewhere in the system of the small cuts. He had to find where the leak was in order to get rid of the painful gas pressure. And that was the big problem, extreme gas pressure.

At any rate, that altered my work habits quite a lot these last several months. And I'm not sure how long this will be a problem.

Ross: When you say this will be a problem, because it seems to be--

Heath: My physical condition. I don't have much energy. So, whether this is a time for retirement at a time when more energy is needed--in coping with the changes that are taking place in society as a whole. We've been very critically affected by the economy, to the point where we really should have a skeleton crew of probably ten or twelve people instead of the thirty-two that we've had for the past two years. We can't seem to get far enough ahead to get a good cash flow. So we are using up all of our savings.

Ross: Let me go back, though, to your own personal health. It seems to me that you had the operation in August and you were back in the shop very soon afterwards. In fact, I remember visiting you in the hospital and it looked like a miniature Heath plant. You had all of your tiles and your extrusions in your hospital room and you were still involved in the operation. You were still in command of what was happening at the shop and wanted to know all that was going on. So, your energy was there and it seems to me that you went from your hospital bed to home for just a short time and then you were back in the shop.

Heath: Yes. But the fact was, not so much with what I wanted to do, but the people in the shop were saying, "Why is she coming back? We don't need her anymore." So the rejection that took place--. It seemed like a happy occasion to get rid of Edith.

Ross: That's interesting because I didn't hear that myself and I go to the shop quite often. And that wasn't what I heard. I mean, there was a lot of relief that you were well.

Heath: Oh, I feel that. But that was separate from what I should be doing around the shop.

Ross: Do you think some of that, you know, sometimes when there is heavy anesthetic and such, even your own attitude gets changed. You might have built up some sort of what you might call paranoia about how people were. Would that have been a possibility?

Heath: I wasn't feeling paranoia.

#### Could Heath Become a Foundation?

Ross: Do you feel better about it now?

Heath: No, I don't. I don't because it's obvious that with the economic downturn and because of age, people are worried that Heath Ceramics won't survive. So, we've spent the last--I've spent and already started on it before the operation--to see if we could set up a foundation of some kind, that would provide for what was going to happen in the future.

We went to the University of California to see if it would be possible, whether they would be interested in using the facilities in Sausalito to work for the College of Environmental Design, to work with finding new ways of using clay in architecture, which the university was very much interested in doing.

Ross: Yes, I remember the meetings that you had with them.

Heath: Yes, you were there.

Ross: I was there at one of the meetings and the provost and the head of the financial department. It was quite an impressive group that gathered to talk with you about it.

Heath: You see, the thing that happened is that the university has become more and more strapped for funds and cutting back. They felt that that property in Sausalito should be sold and the money go to the university and that the research center be located in Berkeley rather than Sausalito. But to move our equipment to another facility, I wasn't going to commute to Berkeley from Tiburon. So, that idea has now come to an end.

So then, the other possibility would be to set up a foundation of our own. But because we have really used up our surplus capital that we've accumulated slowly over the years, now there's no money to set up a foundation.

Ross: But certainly your estate encompasses Paradise Drive property, this condominium, and the plant. That is, even though it may not be cash, it's certainly a sizeable amount of estate, isn't it?

Heath: Yes. We had a meeting last Friday with a man whose business is to help set up foundations. And he said that it was a mistake to try. If you weren't sure that you had enough money to really make it work, that you could go through a million dollars very quickly with nothing to show for it.

Ross: With just fees for lawyers and fees for the investigation of the possibility?

Heath: Well, not only that but for a foundation, the kind of people that need to be--. There are two groups. There's the outside board of

directors who should be unbiased. And their mission is one of seeing that the foundation really does what's stipulated in the trust. Then there are the people that work within the trust. They need to be insightful, genuine--geologists, explorative scientists, creative, imaginative, "hands-on"--wanting to know more--exploring the work, et cetera.

Ross: Well, that may be a complication that we don't need to get into at this point.

Heath: So to do the research, we have to have this machinery, this equipment. We need a kiln. We need the digging of the clay so that just the sheer cost of the research is--

Ross: That sounds like two different things, because if you have a business that is going and a plant that is going, and you want to set it up as a foundation, that determines what's going to happen. It seems to me that the foundation formation would be just an acceptance of what is in the factory. I don't know that, so I shouldn't get involved with it. But what was your decision about that?

Heath: What it means, for instance, if we were to no longer be a profit institution--

Ross: So you'd be a nonprofit.

Heath: We'd be a nonprofit organization. Any money coming in is fed into supporting the foundation. But if you don't have enough money to run the factory parallel to the research center to support it--

Ross: Oh, I see. You have a whole other dimension now with the foundation. You're talking about a research center which is in addition to the Heath Plant as it now exists.

Heath: It would use the Heath Plant to design and manufacture any new ideas and market them nonprofitably. But to do it, we need a much more sophisticated work force. In other words, the people aren't sufficiently qualified to really become a part of the research center.

Ross: So, that's a whole new dimension to the program.

Heath: Yes, so that we need the geologists. We need--

Ross: Yes, you need all the expertise that goes with research.

Heath: That's right.

Developing Uses for Clay in Ione

Ross: So, does that seem like it's not going to be a possibility?

Heath: Well, I don't know. The people up at Ione where the clays are mined are very much interested in having a facility there for developing uses of clay. And Claude Stoller, the architect, went with us a couple of weeks ago to look at the setup. He was very excited about the whole prospect and what a wonderful thing it would be for architectural students to see the actual evolution of this clay coming out of the ground, then being changed into a useful, structural element. Because, you see, the way we've been using clay and making tile, the clay has only been a facing. It's a skin. But the potential of clay is much greater than just as a surface material. It should be used structurally so it doesn't need anything pasted onto it.

Ross: It goes back to your concern about the resources and not using wood but to start using what we have in the ground, the clay, to make our houses and our buildings.

Heath: The other interesting thing that's happened with the Ione situation is that the geologist is on a committee, for the county, to build a civic center that would use and feature all the minerals mined and the products made in the county. And they are very much interested in using the Heath extrusions in the design and development of the civic center.

Ross: What's the timetable on that? Are they in the planning stage?

Heath: Yes, the talking stage. And it's necessary to showcase what is done in order to get--. Because after gold mining ceased, then forestry was the industry in the county. Now forestry is no longer permitted. So, now they need to find something to be manufactured out of local materials that are there. Use of clay is the answer. The extrusion idea may be the answer.

Ross: Clay, and they have this great resource.

Clay Extrusions

Heath: I can understand why architects would not design from brick because the small brick is tedious, expensive hands-on business. That was the whole intent with my trying to develop a larger modular, hollow

clay extrusion; a keyed brick, lighter for the do-it-yourself project. It could be dense and work in all kinds of climates.

Ross: So, in your way of thinking, it's a new, whole new--

Heath: It's the cutting edge.

Ross: Yes, and if it's the cutting edge, what would you predict the time for acceptance would be? Would it take us to lose our whole forest before the architects turn to it or would it take some very well-known architect to consider it?

Heath: Khalili, an Iranian architect in southern California, has been working for eighteen years on using clay architecturally. But he said until I came along there wasn't anyone in the U.S. who saw any real potential in clay. Brian and I had driven to Los Angeles to meet him. We had in the trunk of the car some of the extrusion pieces. When we opened the trunk and took out a piece that was eighteen inches long and four-by-four inches square and handed it to him, I said, "That's our brick." He looked at it, felt the weight, and laughed as he said, "This is better than a brick." And he was so delighted, you can't imagine, that finally somebody had done something. As he then said, it is the potters in the U.S. who were interested in what he was doing.

Ross: Had he never done extrusion? It was just a theory? He wrote the book.

Heath: Yes, but he didn't think of extruding clay. He thought still of using it as solids, you know, like making large, thick pancakes or large slugs or squares or blocks. Because if you're doing it yourself, if you're building a house in any part of the world where people are impoverished and they're going to build it themselves, they'll use the local clay, the mud that's there. And it will be fashioned as it has been fashioned over the ages as blocks or cubes.

### Mixing Clay and Cement

Heath: An interesting thing I read yesterday--I had asked Khalili, "Where in the world is the most, the cutting edge of using clay in architecture?" And he said it's in France. He said, "There's a firm there who are really innovative." What they're doing is mixing a high percentage of clay with cement and they can extrude the mixture. They can extrude it instead of casting it. See, the cement block is cast in a form. Hundreds of molds would be needed

for casting. When you extrude something, it comes out very fast. It's like squeezing toothpaste out of a tube. So, technically if clay with cement could be extruded and could be used without firing it, that would be another gambit.

Ross: So, if you have clay and cement, you wouldn't have to fire it?

Heath: That's right, because there's enough cement for it to--

Ross: But could you extrude it?

Heath: Yes, see you can't extrude cement now, if it's just cement and sand. But if you put enough clay to make it stiff, it would hold all the particles together, then you could extrude it and cut it into lengths. So, I'm interested--today I'm going to try this--to mix some cement with clay and see how much clay it takes, because in this article I was reading, it didn't give any formula for the percentages.

Ross: What would the impact on your machinery be?

Heath: You'd use, I think, the same machine.

Ross: You think? [laughter]

Heath: Well, if you can extrude it, it would be easier to extrude all clay by itself.

Ross: Yes, but I was thinking in terms of cement as more granule would run the risk of being--

Heath: Well, you'd have to have enough fine grain material to surround every particle of cement, sand.

Ross: I see, yes. Now, let me ask you, cement is a limited resource, isn't it?

Heath: Well, it's another one of the materials out of the earth. I'm not sure just how cement is made. It's like plaster, it's related to plaster. And this is where my lack of knowledge of chemistry and material--. In fact, what I think I will find out is I will make some, I'll put some clay and cement in the kiln and see what happens to it, if the sand breaks and ends up by being sand and plaster because it is a talcum product. But I don't know anything else. I don't know anything about cement. Well, Portland cement is something that was developed apparently hundreds of years ago. It has to do with calcining the mineral.

Ross: What's calcining?

Heath: There are many minerals that are calcined. I think what it does is remove the water from the mineral. You break down the rock by removing the water. And then to use it as a product, you mix water with it and then it reverts. It makes a chemical change. I suppose it's a little bit like turning water into ice or water into steam. There are three conditions of H<sub>2</sub>O.

Ross: I think you know a lot about chemistry. I don't think you'll have trouble finding out what cement is all about and how it's going to mix with clay.

Heath: Well, I know that materials get changed when you heat them or pull them.

#### New Uses for Clay

Ross: So, what you're saying is that yesterday you read something about a material being used in France.

Heath: Yes, they're already doing it.

Ross: And what is their use in France?

Heath: For housing. For inexpensive housing.

Ross: Do you know where?

Heath: I don't recognize the name of the town or the area of France.

Ross: It'd be interesting to find that out, and locate somebody who is using it, because that could speed up your process.

Heath: See, what does happen at the shop is that people read articles. This came to me through the man who currently repairs our equipment. Well, he read this article, gave it to Winnie, my niece, and she gave it to me yesterday. So, I've just learned about it. Last night I was saying, "Well now, how am I going to find out how much clay it takes?" And I think, well, that's simple. You just take 100 percent clay here and 100 percent cement and then you make a batch and at some point, the mixture will become firm and plastic. It's like you could throw it on a potter's wheel. That's what I will try, is to take a mixture of clay and cement and throw it. And if it holds together and I can shape it on a potter's wheel, then we could extrude it.



- Ross: Well, it sounds exciting. I mean, it's like new beginnings for you. Every day seems to bring some new discovery.
- Heath: See, there's also the idea of blowing up a balloon and spraying that with cement.
- Ross: Right. But that's been done by others.
- Heath: Yes. But it's also on the cutting edge.
- Ross: Oh yes, yes. I think what has always caused me to be interested in the way you operate is that there seems never to be a dull moment in your creative process. Here I'm coming today and think that we're going to talk about the extrusions that you've been so excited about. And all of the sudden you've become open to a whole new idea, and that's just very exciting and enriching.
- Heath: Well, I think this, in a way, will become a very important period historically because, well capitalism is dying. Socialism is dying. What's the form of organization we're going to end up with as capitalism ceases to be?
- Ross: Well, I think if you knew the answer to that, our lives would be quite a bit happier. But I think, again, the fact that you're seeing a larger picture of the political world and the social world as tiles and different materials fit into it, is what makes a very important contribution. Whether you see, whether in the time that you have to live, you can develop this to the point of usage, it certainly has a possibility of adding to the literature.
- Heath: Well, it's one of the processes that is inevitable. The history of the world is written in clay.
- Ross: I remember you said that, yes.
- Heath: On the clay tablets.
- Ross: Right. Your art history class has been the basis for your thoughts in clay, all through these interviews. You've referred back to what you know of the history of the clay.
- Heath: Well, architecture is, that's what it is, the story of how human beings have changed their environment through the kind of dwellings they made or the kind of buildings they created, whatever the materials were, starting with the cave. And then the cave was there. That's what housing is about.
- Ross: You also mentioned, when last I visited with you, that there was somebody from a heritage--?

Heath: Heritage foundation. He's the one who recommended the man whose business is to set up foundations. But his response, when we had the meeting with him last week, his parting words were, "Edith, give up. Let go."

Ross: Let go of what?

Heath: Forget about a foundation. He said, "You don't have the money. You can't, with what I know of what exists."

Ross: So, that's no longer a consideration.

Heath: No, and I was so discouraged after this whole weekend at the prospect that I can't seem to get connected with something that has any financial backing. It's such a frustrating experience to try to do something without any money. I told Brian yesterday I wanted to employ an architect or an engineer at the shop who could work with me on these things.

#### Theoretical versus Hands-on Approach

Ross: Have you thought of perhaps getting a graduate student to work with you, as a project?

Heath: If the graduate student was used to working with materials. Not theoretical but hands-on approach.

Ross: Yes, that may be the hardest kind to find these days.

Heath: That's the trouble, you see, in our culture. That was a big contribution that the Bauhaus tried to make in Germany in architecture, was to require anyone--and it's true in Europe, that you can't design without hands-on schooling. You learn to make it yourself. The American system in architecture doesn't do that.

Ross: Is that true of all the schools in this country? I know Berkeley's known for being very theoretical. But do all architectural schools follow that same theory?

Heath: No.

Ross: That's interesting. Because it seems to me that it would be a good Ph.D. project or a class project for some graduate students who see this from the beginning and to maybe, you know, carry it on into--

Heath: I see it not so much for beginning students to be working on this.

Ross: No, I didn't mean that. I meant graduate students ready to go out, hopefully, with some experience. Is that something that would interest you?

Heath: To get a graduate student? Well, of course.

Ross: Instead of hiring an in-house architect, which would be pretty costly, if you could find somebody who could really work with you. Because when I talk to you about the extrusions, I don't get the sense of beyond the bricks sitting there, how they go, where they go from there. You know, you and I have talked about the excitement of building a demonstration house. And I think until somehow that happens, you won't get the attention to it.

Heath: Well, the form that we've had sitting in front of the shop in the last two months or so, we've changed that in order to find out what size elements work best together. Because that's been an important part of the development of what the size should be of these elements that you're extruding that are handy, easy, and not so heavy that even a child could build with it.

#### Extrusion Model at Heath

Ross: Right. Maybe we should back up again for just this purpose. Is the piece you're talking about outside the entryway of the Heath plant? It was a dome, half a dome.

Heath: Well, not a dome. It was a vault, half of a vault. A vault is a half cylinder.

Ross: Okay. And did you ever get it to the full cylinder?

Heath: No, I haven't made a full cylinder yet because I haven't come up with a satisfactory size that I want to cement together. I've cemented together small sections.

Ross: But do you see the extrusions being used in that shape or would it be a traditional square?

Heath: You can extrude any kind of shapes.

Ross: If somebody said today that they really wanted, the wine seller, for instance, needs square housing for his wine, could you do that?

Heath: You mean extrude a square?

- Ross: Extrude enough of the blocks, the bricks, whatever, the extrusions, to create a square room.
- Heath: Well, it would take probably a week to do it if we devoted the kiln space.
- Ross: Yes. But see, that's what I'm thinking, that if you could get something like that and put it in the front of Heath Ceramic Plant and then--
- Heath: Well, what we had out there has been amazing. The number of people who stop and look and wonder what it is.
- Ross: That's right. But my point is, because it's cylinder shaped, would the application become evident to someone who hadn't read Khalili's book? For instance, the gentleman who wants to do it for a wine cellar or a wine room. I mean, he's read the book so he knows the possibilities.
- Heath: He is also a builder.
- Ross: He's also a builder. But say some yuppie guy comes along and he's in here to buy some dishes and he sees a demonstration room and he says, "Hey, that's going to be great for my wine." I think it has to have some real applications in terms of people's use.
- Heath: Well, I suppose that's part of the problem. And anything as elemental as this is, then what are the limitations? You know, it's open-ended. So, it's limited by how long it takes to make a new die.
- Ross: But you have two dies now. One is the rounded and one is the square. So you can do either.
- Heath: But the next step I'm wondering about is, instead of being four by four inches, whether it shouldn't be a five-by-five so there's more air space, better for insulation and also for just ease of construction? Or whether it should be a rectangle, a four-by-six? So, you'd have a wall that's six inches thick, or four inches thick.
- Ross: Do you plan to do this house?
- Heath: Well, that's the problem. Each one of these things becomes dependent on the die. Once you have the die, then one could begin extruding and find what the difficulties are in drying, what the particular amount of coarse material is needed to prevent cracking.

Khalili's Model

Ross: Has Khalili used the tiles you've delivered to him?

Heath: I haven't delivered them. That's my problem.

Ross: Oh, I thought you had.

Heath: No, because I didn't want to deliver them until I was sure that if someone takes--. There's an answer to the very question you asked, you know, how are you going to build with it. So, he's building a model.

Ross: A model with what?

Heath: With extrusions. The lower part of the model is already finished, waiting for the extrusions. But as he started working with the four-foot lengths, he said they were not good, that they were too awkward and too heavy for a single person to stretch out their arms in placing.

Ross: So, you have delivered some for him to work with?

Heath: Oh, yes. He has the four-foot lengths. He has very few short lengths. So, you haven't been to the shop, have you, to see all the different--?

Ross: Yes, I have. And it was a huge amount of material and then all these little examples of, it looked like a little city. It was really beautiful to view.

Heath: So, I've set up now a, well, it's not really a model. I've put a row of four-by-fours, the four-by-sixes, four-by-eights, four-by-twelves, four-by-sixteens up to two-foot lengths to see whether all of these would be good to make, because then it opens up the avenues that you're not committed to just one floor. And I'm beginning to think that having more small elements is important, because they are easy to pick up and play with--explore randomly with varying sizes rather than all long. The long ones are like trying to build something out of four-by-four posts--too clumsy.

Ross: So you have to cut them?

Heath: You have to cut them and do something with them unless you're just using them as posts. So, in working with these smaller elements, that's what the man saw yesterday. He said, "Now I have to go home and I'll decide which sizes I want."

Ross: The one who wants it for his wine shop.

Heath: And that is the important thing. You could put together short, small pieces.

Ross: Have you figured out the corners? You know, as they come together.

Heath: We've done a little bit of work on them but not very much.

Ross: Because when we were planning my flower box, we came to the corners and--

Heath: I find that the easiest way to handle that is to have them upended and then they just turn right angle.

Ross: Right, and vertical, up and down, is really the look.

#### Edith's Work Style

Ross: Now, what is the situation? You're still working almost full time. You have no intention of changing that, I take it. Or what is your plan?

Heath: Once I wake up, my thinker doesn't stop.

Ross: So you're totally involved with the shop.

Heath: Always.

Ross: And it's important. I've read where a very--I don't know what his name was, he was an artist or an architect and he was ninety-five. Somebody asked him about his life and how he kept going. He said, "Every day, you need a challenge." And that's how I see you. Every day, a challenge comes to you. And you just go--

Heath: And it grows out of what you were doing. It doesn't come full blown. You feel your way through it.

#### Heath Properties ##

Ross: Okay, now. So we know where you are on your development of your extrusions and your hopes for that. Now, what about what's going

on with your house here and your barge and all of that? Has everything sort of fallen in order here and there?

Heath: I've been so busy on other things that it's sort of floundering.

Ross: You mean, the gardens and the house?

Heath: Well, the barge needs a lot of work on it. In the lower section of the barge, it looks like there's been some settlement. We pulled up the carpeting yesterday and looked to see what was happening because the sand now has filled in completely underneath. And so the bottom of the hold is wet all the time because of the sand touching.

Ross: When you originally put it there, it was essentially just touching--

Heath: It was air space all around it. In some places it was six feet high because in order to float in there, you had to have enough water to float into the shore. So we had bulldozed a basement to move into, knowing that eventually the sand would return to its regular level. But we had bulldozed out at least four to five feet of sand out of the way to float the hull in position. Now that it's gotten all encased in sand, the question is, will that make the bottom deteriorate.

Ross: It hasn't deteriorated yet?

Heath: Well, Hassan, one of our employees, is pulling up the floor, the top flooring down below so we can check and see what's happening to the lumber underneath. See, that's three-inch Port Orford cedar that it's built out of. Port Orford cedar is a little bit like redwood. It doesn't rot.

Ross: And then you've got this cozy place [the Tiburon condominium] and you have no regrets about moving here, do you?

Heath: Oh, no.

Ross: This is really a wonderful house--compact.

Heath: Well, it's at least circumscribed. It doesn't stretch from here to eternity. Whereas out at 3310 Paradise Drive there's no boundary.

Ross: Do you consider selling that land?

Heath: Well, every now and then I toy with the idea, but I think with the changing economic system that where the property is, on one acre

residential, the time will probably come when that no longer would be zoned.

Ross: Yes, but why would that affect whether you sell it or not?

Heath: Well, because I think of these potential housing things. It's a good place to do some models, some extruded clay models.

Ross: Yes. Can you keep part of the property? Could you subdivide it?

Heath: I wouldn't subdivide. I'd just put up the models.

Also when we talk about selling, there's always this debate about should the barge be removed. Who wants to live like that?

Ross: Well, whoever buys the property, if you sold the property--

Heath: That kind of facility, I think, can only be enjoyed by the bohemian or the nonconformist.

Ross: I see that.

Heath: When you drive from here to Sausalito, from Tiburon, the housing has gone crazy. Did you notice it today when you came along? Did you pay any attention to the housing on that far hillside?

Ross: You mean up Gilcrest Drive?

Heath: Yes.

Ross: Those are mansions.

Heath: I know. And the lumber that's going into it.

Ross: Oh! I understand what you're talking about. Many of them are for sale.

Heath: Oh, they're huge because people without money can't, don't have the money to buy small houses. So, they're designed especially for the wealthy.

Ross: Well, in my opinion, most of them don't meet any design that I would want to live in.

Heath: I wouldn't either.

Ross: Although there are a couple that I think are stunning. There's one that has some copper on it that I think is really--



Heath: Yes, but that's a small one.

Ross: Yes, but it's a small gem amongst all those others.

Heath: It's kind of a little jewel. See, that's the way I think about the clay houses, as being little jewels, places that you love.

### Fifty-sixth Wedding Anniversary

[Interview 16: August 5, 1994] ##

Ross: Okay, it's August fifth. I think February fifteenth was our last interview.

Heath: Next Saturday, the thirteenth, will be my fifty-sixth wedding anniversary.

Ross: You're kidding.

Heath: The thirteenth of August, 1938. I've been debating whether we should celebrate or whether just to forget about it. When Brian and I were married, he was at the University of Chicago getting his master's.

Ross: I remember the story of how you happened to get married. The reason seemed to be a little faint at the time. But you've certainly held up. Oh, that's interesting.

Heath: Well, what's happened in the last year is that since Brian has been wanting to retire for many years, it becomes more and more difficult to know where we're going to end up, because I don't want to retire. I've got too many things going on in my head of things that I want to do. And I don't know what the resolution is going to be.

Ross: Well, it's interesting. I'm glad you mentioned the fact that you were going to have been married for fifty-six years because, in a sense, you have worked together almost fifty-six years. That's somewhat of a record in itself. And perhaps the fact that some people would say, well, why doesn't Brian retire and you continue to work? You have that sort of a situation where it could happen. But it's a habit to work together. And maybe also deep down you might really need each other on the job each day.

Heath: It might what?

- Ross: Deep down, you know, you may have your differences, but deep down you really may need each other's support.
- Heath: Well, the thing that's most distressing is Brian keeps saying, "I'm losing my mind." He says, "I don't remember." And it's true that he, for instance, he's always done the shopping for--
- Ross: The household.
- Heath: In order to be able to eat, because even the day we were married, I had a job and he didn't. So, he bought the pots and pans and set up housekeeping and bought the groceries. And in effect, he's almost been the preparing--
- Ross: What we call a housemate or a houseperson or whatever.
- Heath: Yes. And when he shops today, he doesn't pay any attention to what we have in the refrigerator or what we've already bought. And we have so much in the refrigerator there isn't room for anything anymore.
- Ross: So, he thinks he's losing his memory and you're losing your hearing and the two of you are quite a team.
- Heath: And he thinks when I don't hear him that I'm just faking it.
- Ross: Well, the hearing, I think, is one of the big things for people to adjust to.
- Heath: I find it very difficult to accept. It's fine when I'm working on my, you know, whatever it is that I'm doing and I don't have to be listening to people because that's my salvation, really, is to get into actually doing things instead of supervising. I hate supervising other people. I'd rather make things to find out what's possible in this technique.

### Recycling at the Plant

- Heath: For instance, we have to recycle, now, all of our waste materials, which I talked about some time ago. And recycling has become so demanding that things accumulate that you can't throw away. I spent this week going through what I call our iron collection in the yard, of all the piping and things that are left over from when they built the plant and equipment that we discontinued using. It just gets put off into that corner of the backyard.

So, I've just said that it's been completely grown over with ivy. We couldn't tell what was in the heap anyway. So, I had the people who are on part-time days now at the shop, three guys from the tile department, helping to unbury, uncover this heap of iron in the corner of the lot because we just need more space. But also because it has to be disposed of.

Ross: And how can you dispose of it? Can you sell it or can you have somebody--?

Heath: Well, you can sell them as you sell metal by the pound. So, I had Julie in the office call to find out where to, who will come and pick up the stuff and how.

Ross: So, this is just one example of all of the things that take you from your creative work.

Heath: But even that becomes a kind of creative thing because in uncovering things I say, "What in the heck was that used for? What is this thing?" I asked Brian, finally when we got everything uncovered and I estimated that oh, we must have like fifty tons. Well, it isn't fifty tons, but they're massive pieces of iron. When we bought the property an engineering firm had owned the property, and they left in the building great amounts of equipment and pieces that we have scavenged. Brian has used some of it over the years to build things until we got down to the things that we just right now don't have any use for, or Brian isn't interested in rebuilding any broken-down old equipment anymore.

Ross: Yes, well, you could probably write a history from what's in that pile. And it does remind you of many things.

Heath: Because when we were in England, Brian saw this old used equipment out in the back field of Wedgwood. And he looked at that and said, "Oh, we can use that. I can rebuild that. I can make this." So, when we left England, he had a whole bunch of stuff sent here that he then made into--

Ross: I remember that. Yes. I mean, I remember your telling about it.

Heath: He made roller jiggers, roller jigger wheels. So that's one little thing I've been spending my time on. Then the other thing, we have all the worn-out kiln shelves that have gotten encrusted with the wear and tear of putting things in and out of the kiln, and glaze getting on the kiln shelves and so on. And eventually the shelves are just too corroded to be useful. But they're still whole so we have palettes of kiln shelves.

Ross: What are the kiln shelves made of?

Heath: Clay.

Ross: Oh, they themselves are clay.

Historic House to Use Recycled Kiln Shelves

Heath: Yes. They're the shelves that you use in the kiln. It's called kiln furniture. There are posts and shelves. So, what to do? I think we have five huge palettes of kiln shelves. And lo and behold, the other day, a woman came in who bought a house in England that was built ten years before Columbus discovered America.

Ross: Fourteen eighty-two?

Heath: Yes, this house was going to be demolished. She's an archeologist and anthropologist and she had gone to school at Cambridge in England and had been there for about nine years. And she saw this house that was having to be torn down. And she says, "Oh, no. I want to buy that house." And so she bought it for \$48,000, shipped it to Napa, California.

Ross: Are you kidding?

Heath: No, I'm not. And it's a beautiful house. You should see it.

Ross: Did it get dismantled before it was shipped?

Heath: It was dismantled. The people who were tearing it down put it into two crates to ship to California. And it's being rebuilt. She had the man who tore it down come and spend two weeks to rebuild it, which he did. She brought in photographs yesterday of the house and it's that period of architecture that's my favorite period in England, heavy, timbered, dark color structure, also built in many parts of Europe, in France and Germany, France particularly. All the structure is revealed and wattle is used in between--which is light colored.

The houses were built out of the same water-proofed timbers that were used in building boats. Do you know the horizontal pointed shapes that form the hull of a boat?

Ross: Yes.

Heath: They were upended, spaced as pairs, six or eight feet apart with diagonal bracing between, forming an X. The braces were also made

of big timbers that were used in building ships. When we were in England, we stayed in a house like that.

Ross: That was an actual style in a period of England?

Heath: I think it's referred to as Elizabethan. It's a black and white style. To make a long story short, she now wants to make the tile that is appropriate to go into this house, which needs fourteenth century old clay floors. Our used kiln shelves can now be recycled beautifully. They're fourteen inches by twenty-eight inches, and can be cut into smaller size tiles. We will glaze them, she will cut appropriate designs through the glaze, and then we will fire them. They will be cut to size at the time of installation. And she says, "Oh, I'm so excited." She says, "That's just what I need."

Ross: You are kidding!

Heath: No.

Ross: So what is junk to you is her treasure.

Heath: Not junk! Anything that can be recycled is "money in the bank," I say. All those palettes that have been piled up for years in our yard are now being turned into money. And you know, I'm just blessed. I swear that these things happen.

Ross: But how did you happen to even show them to her?

Heath: Oh, she is a client of a friend of ours, and she was telling her about this house and that she needed these tiles. She says, "Do you have any idea where I could get tile to do this?" And she says, "Go to Heath's in Sausalito."

Ross: I understand how she got to Heath. But I don't understand how you happened to show her those old--

Heath: Because she had a sample of the thickness of the tile that she wanted and it's thicker than we can make because our clay body is too fine textured.

Ross: So, the tiles she needed were thick and you remembered that the old shelves could be adapted.

Heath: We walked out into the yard to see what might be there that would or could be of use to her. And as we walked by, I said, "By the way, look at the thickness of these kiln shelves. Do you think you could use these?" Because the sample she had with her was a tile, not glazed, made in Mexico. It was very low fired, very porous,

and she had used some pigment, put wax on it as some kind of a solution thinking that she might be able to use that.

She said, "But I don't want to use this if it's going to break, if it's too weak." And I said, "Yes. I wouldn't recommend that you use that." So, the kiln shelves are about that same thickness, just a little bit thinner. She said, "Oh, those are perfect." I said the shelves could be cut up into the same size pieces as her sample. And she was paying forty-five cents for them, a piece. So, fifteen out of the shelf meant that it would be like \$6.75 a shelf. So, if we have enough to make a thousand of them, which now, today, I'm going to take a count. We have to move them out from where they're all covered up and stashed in the yard.

Ross: Well, it's a story that exhibits the sort of creative thinking and the idea that you could make her satisfied. She's happy, you're happy.

Heath: When she saw them, she said, "Oh you don't know how excited I am. It's just perfect." It's one of those crazy things in life, you know, that happen and no one can explain.

Ross: Well, this goes back to why I wanted do this oral history in the first place. Because to me, that's the way your mind works. And it's a stimulating thing to have that happen. It's an exciting thing to watch.

Heath: And especially since she wants to do the design herself. All we need to do is cut up the shelves. And she can sit there on her periods between clients coming to the shop and do her--

Ross: What will she do with those? Will she put color into them or will she--?

Heath: Well, that's what we're doing right now is run a series. They're going into the kiln today, things she made yesterday. When they come out it'll give us a clue as to whether it's the right kind of color. At that period in England, the sort of tiles used were usually made out of a red clay of a kind similar to what the kiln shelves are. The kiln shelves are a buff-colored fire clay, rather than a red adobe clay. But we could use our volcanic ash that's mined up near Reno that, when you spray it onto the kiln shelf, it will look very similar to a red adobe clay.

The only thing that concerns me is how long lasting will the skin be on top of the kiln shelves. But even if it wears through, she says, "I want it to look like an old house." The only thing she doesn't want is for them to break. She wants to be able to clean them.

Ross: So she is using them only for flooring.

Heath: Yes, and probably the counter tops and things like that.

Ross: And you have enough to satisfy her.

Heath: Well, I don't think there will be enough. But she's going to use many of them without gluing anything to them because they--. It's sort of an interesting thing, they just look like a worn old antique tile when you cut them up.

Ross: That's fabulous. Yes.

Heath: So that will help empty out our yard full of things that have accumulated. Because we can't haul things to the dump anymore, as you know.

Ross: And so that saves you a whole lot. Will it be very pricey for her in the end?

Heath: Well, when she bought the house, she paid \$48,000 for it and \$8,000 to have it shipped to Napa. And so it will be a pricey house.

Ross: No, I meant the tile that you're providing. Is that going to be a pricey thing for her, what she expected to pay?

Heath: No, no. She knows what the price will be. The only problem will be when we run out of kiln shelves. If there aren't enough, we may have to get her some new ones or some that aren't as badly used if we close down the tile department. We have accumulated thousands of square feet of tile of every size, color, and texture in overruns over the years.

#### Sunset Magazine Story

Heath: There is an excellent article in Sunset magazine this month about the tile used in our house and garden--how tile left over from many jobs can be used creatively, moving from outdoors to indoors.

Ross: Oh, yes, I saw that article.

Heath: Those tiles are all left over from different jobs that we have done--from the mosaics in the King County Jail to the back walls of the fish departments in Safeway Stores.

Ross: And you used leftover tile in the tennis house, didn't you?

Heath: Yes.

Ross: You didn't do a special run for that?

Heath: No. I've always used just what we had on hand. And we're doing some tile for the Transamerica building in San Francisco now--mosaics to be used in the bathrooms.

### Outlet Stores versus Retail

Ross: What about Heath sales in retail stores?

Heath: Retail stores. But the retail stores--

Ross: Have been slow for a long time, haven't they?

Heath: Yes. We went up to the wine country a couple of weeks ago--because apparently there are these outlet stores everywhere.

Ross: Oh, yes. Everywhere.

Heath: And we went into the one that has the Dansk ware. And I was so distressed when I looked at that, because every piece said "closeout," less 50 percent or 48 percent or whatever.

Ross: At the Dansk Store?

Heath: Dansk was one of them. The other one was Gorham China. And they occupied a large space. And that saying that it's a closeout is a sales gimmick that makes people think they're really getting a sale. Those are not closeouts. They're going to continue repeating those. I think this is doing a great disservice because the ware is no longer made. Originally Dansk was made, I think, first manufactured in Germany by the Dansk designer. And now it's made in the Philippines, in Japan, in--

Ross: So you think the quality isn't the same?

Heath: The quality is not the same. No, it's much heavier and clunkier. But the thing that is distressing is that because these things are being made in these foreign countries--. I remember years ago seeing things that were coming in from the Philippines that were Philippine design ware on bark and berries.



Ross: They were the craft.

Heath: They were the crafts of the Philippines. And so with international firms like this coming out, they are killing off local design all the time.

Ross: Oh, I think there's no question about it. But it's that whole economy of going elsewhere to get cheap labor, to do your work and then sell it at home. And it's been accepted here for ages. With these discount stores, one wonders why anyone buys regular prices.

Heath: Yes, because that's true.

Ross: But I'm not sure I understand why you say that when they label it "closeout" that that's what that implies.

Heath: It implies this is the last of this.

Ross: And you're saying it is not.

Heath: I don't think so.

Ross: Yes, okay.

Heath: Because, you see, in order to keep the prices down, or the manufacturing costs down, they couldn't be redesigning all the time and just sell a limited quantity of something and then bring out something else because--

Ross: Well, would the only reason for them doing that be to assure, or to tell the customer, that they should not plan on getting replacements for this?

Heath: It's a sales gimmick.

Ross: Yes, there's no question about it.

#### Designer-Made or Copies?

Heath: And also, another thing that distresses me, and Dansk must have sold this trademark, the name, Dansk II in international--

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Heath: Hanging on the walls of this shop were portraits of designers who had designed these products.

Ross: Portraits?

Heath: These portraits were hung at the end of the room. And they were from Finland, from Sweden, from Denmark, from America. There were five or six designers from different countries which implies to the customer, I would think, that you're buying designs made by the finest ceramic designers in the world.

Ross: Well, sure. But I think we're now talking to a public, or we're selling to a public that doesn't care that much.

Heath: I dislike--. I think it gets into the area, and I talked to Brian about it, that I feel like writing an article or doing something about truth in advertising.

Ross: Oh, absolutely, and you are not the first one to think about this because everyone who likes quality, who respects the designs of another country, who wants to know that what they're buying is--

Heath: Is the ultimate.

Ross: Right, but I was just looking at a Nippon suit. Albert Nippon is a famous designer. I saw it down here in a shop in Tiburon. And on the label it says, "Made in Taiwan."

Heath: Yes.

Ross: Well, Nippon is an Italian. So, it's still called a Nippon. But it's not made in Italy. It's all money that has been paid to sort of diminish, diminish, diminish the--

Heath: See, I didn't realize this was happening. It was several years ago that we'd been in Carmel. There's an outlet like that also for the imports, the good design imports of Europe and it included Dansk and the German pottery--right now the name escapes me--who do the very thin porcelain thing. And when I was in there, I kept wondering, "Well, where are these products being made? What part of Denmark are these coming from? What part of the world?" And then someone said to me, "These things are made in six, seven different countries. They come from South America, from Portugal, from the Philippines." And the thing is, I don't know whether it's any connection between when the United Nations was established first in San Francisco. I was then much more active in other organizations like the Industrial Design. I was a member of Industrial Designers in San Francisco. And the United Nations passed a resolution that unfair competition, that no country would copy the designs from another country without compensation or without authorization. And it would be considered a no-no. So

that the writers are protected. The composers are protected. But the designers are not protected.

So that was another thought that I had, that I should find out, what is the attitude of the United Nations? Is there any provision that--? Well, it can't exist because all these products are being made in these countries.

Ross: Well, I think that in terms of time for our interview, we may have to go back to when you were fifty to have the kind of energy to do that political work and to write and discover. But you're the logical person to do it because of your long-term knowledge and history. It's too bad that, I mean, heaven forbid you should ever not be able to do creative work with your hands. But if you were not, you could always sit at a typewriter and put out the information and ask questions and kick up the trouble of what this is about. You know, maybe nobody pays attention to it anymore. I mean, if the designers don't take it upon themselves to do it, it's probably a lost cause in a way.

Heath: Well, for instance, when we made the ware for Victoria Station restaurants, we couldn't keep up with the production.

Ross: Yes, and the woman who started making this for you then started making a copy and put her own logo on. And you lost that case in court.

Heath: And we lost it in the court because the judge said that Heath Ceramics had been on the market for more than twenty years and we couldn't continue exclusivity forever. That it was for the general good of the public, and he quoted the Supreme Court decision on the Stiffel lamp.

Ross: Yes, we know that story and it's a sad one. But I guess we can't go over that.

#### Heath Buttons Wanted by a Collector

Heath: Let me tell you an interesting story. The woman who runs the gallery in Fort Mason introduced me to a man who she said is the greatest collector of ceramics in the country. He was with her one day when she came to the shop and he saw the buttons upstairs. We went upstairs to look at this exhibit I was putting together and he saw the buttons and beads hanging on the wall. He became very interested.

He came back two days ago. Ann called me and she said, "Are you willing to sell the buttons that we have up there? This man wants to buy them for his collection." And she said, "If you want to sell them, what price will they be?" I said, "Well, look what the prices are," because we had buttons mounted with the name of each store who bought buttons. They each had their own selection. We had a duplicate copy so that when someone ordered buttons from Santa Rosa or wherever it was, New York, we had a copy of the buttons that they had.

So he looked at these. It has the name of the people who bought the buttons, the prices, and the little copy that says handmade buttons, designed and so on and so on. So, he bought a whole batch. We doubled the price. He walked out the other day with a whole batch to go into his collection. So the buttons that sold at a dollar apiece were now two dollars apiece. So, he got them for peanuts.

Ross: Yes, absolutely.

Heath: Because for a collector's item they probably should be ten dollars apiece.

Ross: Yes, right, exactly.

Heath: Because I know that eventually those buttons are going to become very pricey. Well, the day I die the price will go up. So also, we made the knobs, the doorknobs, and the doorpulls--all based on the same techniques as we worked out for the buttons. So, now he wants the doorknobs.

Ross: Well, this time maybe you should up the price.

Heath: Then he saw a panel that I had made years ago. I can't even tell when I look at it how I did it. It is that complex. And he wants to buy that. I said, "Well, I can't let you have it until I've at least figured out what in the heck, how I did it." I remember doing it; it was an outgrowth to what we were doing with the buttons. It was in the seventies.

And going back through the archives, which I've had to do recently because we get requests now for tile installed twenty-thirty-fourty years ago. And the people are adding to the house or they need more tile to go with what was done then. So, in order to

match as reasonably as we can something that was done then, I go through the archives upstairs where I have each glaze that's been worked on, the whole history and the summation. But many times I can't even figure it out.

Ross: I remember. Yes, we talked about how conscientious you've been about that. You've talked about how it took so much effort and so much time to redo that. I wonder if you charge according to your time.

Heath: We have on our brochure, the sales brochure, that we do a four-color chain of a variation for the glaze for a hundred dollars. Then if someone wants something that's a little green or a little blue or whatever, more matte, not so shiny and so on, we do the four tests to see how difficult it is to accomplish.

Many times people send in a paint chip that they got at a paint store and expect us to match that. And that gets just---. They don't understand that glaze is not paint.

Ross: Right. Well, now, to move on. We've talked about the financial situation and we were talking about cutting back on staffing and on production and such. Where do you stand today on that?

Heath: Well, it is cut back considerably.

Ross: How many staff people do you have today part time?

Heath: We're on three-day weeks. Because of the union it's difficult because there's a seniority clause in the union contract. So, it's a very awkward situation. What we tried to do is to match the people that get the unemployment compensation for the days that they're not working. It's so sporadic that some people are off maybe two days a week. And I never know who's on duty any more, who's jiggering today, who's making clay, who's doing what.

Ross: So, do you carry the same thirty-plus staff members but they work at different times?

Heath: Yes. And it can't go on.

Status of Extrusion Production

Ross: Well, what's the status of your extrusions, the new product?

Heath: Oh, that's interesting. We now have enough extrusions made to send to Khalili to do at least a partial model. But again, there aren't the funds to ship it. We've been taking little truckloads down here and there. But it's a very silly way of doing it.

Ross: Well, and Khalili doesn't have funds to pay for the shipment because he's on a--

Heath: Because he's in the same sort of bind that we're in. He does have a method of when people come, they pay a tuition or a fee.

Ross: Student work.

Heath: Yes. But it's never enough. He, I think, had hoped that we would have the financial capacity to make enough extrusions to build a model. And we should have enough financial help to be able. Because you can't sell something without a model.

Ross: No. That's what we've talked about.

Heath: And we finally have built a little model. It's only four feet square and six feet high. And we're now in the process of--. It's like we made a plywood mold that we lay the tile on. It has wheels on it. So, we'd pull the mold out from underneath and there it is. We've started gluing it together or cementing it together. That should be finished within a week or so. It's aroused a good deal of interest.

The thing is that it can be a long time from the time when you make an actual model and people become interested, until someone really goes ahead and designs something.

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Ross: We've gone over the extrusions and we know that you still have hopes that that is going to work and that you're still working really hard to get that.

Thinking About the Future

Ross: Now, as we come to the end of this long interview, Heath Ceramics still exists and even though it exists in what you say is part time and that people aren't buying dinnerware and there are lots of frustrations, you also are having quite a few successes. *Sunset* magazine [August 1994] came and did that really quite good piece that has had a lot of attention. And so in terms of the future for Heath Ceramics, things are happening. It may seem dark sometimes to you but on the other hand, you're still being creative within the company and you still have a staff and a plant that exists. And there are many thoughts about what you want to do with it. How do you see the next ten years at Heath Ceramics, as it affects, first your own personal self, you and Brian?

Heath: Well, I think we are in the middle of a chaotic condition, not only within our own shop but in the world. And in chaos, there's no way of predicting what's going to come out of it. I can't predict what's going to happen to Heath Ceramics. I only hope that the solving of the waste problem, recycling glaze, for instance, will lead to the new look of Heath that will appeal to the buying habits of people. You can't sell anything to someone who doesn't need it, who doesn't want it, and can't afford it, no matter how good it is. So, we have come to a kind of stalemate in making any projections for the future.

I see it only as becoming more troublesome, more chaotic than it is now. I think that as people around the world begin to have a glimmering of a hope of their lives becoming better, that people, all people are going to become more demanding. And if the condition now prevails where entrepreneurs, let's say from the United States, manufacturers go out of the country to have things made, there will come a day when it will cost just as much to have it made in the Philippines as it does in the United States. This situation exists now, this being able to get cheap labor for the growth of the economy. It's going to come to an end because people have to have a better life wherever it is. And that better life costs money.

So the capitalist system, as it has been, is going to die out because you can't have, as a goal, to get rich quick. It's been possible. It's what has been happening in the United States, that you can get rich quick by becoming a jazz musician of some kind.

Ross: Or a baseball player.

Heath: Look at what baseball players are paid. And it's a cockeyed world where baseball players make far, far more income than really--well,

like myself, for instance. The idea of having the income of one or two million dollars a year, I think, is vulgar.

Ross: It's outrageous.

Heath: I do, I really want to wash my hands of it. I don't want that as a goal. The goal should be one of people becoming resourceful, that it's not going to be easy to get rich. But this idea of taking advantage of people's need to have enough money to eat has been the driving force for taking industry out of the United States, for instance. I've been asked any number of times, "Why don't you go to Mexico to have Heath made? Why don't you go to China? Why don't you go someplace else?" I say, "I don't want to go there. I want to do it here. I want it to be made in Sausalito. I don't even want to go over to Berkeley to make it."

Ross: [Laughter] That's right.

Heath: I mean, this idea of always hunting for that nebulous something that's out there, and I don't know how I can go on expecting that Heath Ceramics is going to be in the future what it was in the past because it isn't going to be. We're going to be fragmented, just as I have illustrated today, the kind of jobs we're getting, where a woman imports a house from England and makes her own tile. And when people begin seeing that house up in Napa, believe me, it's going to be an influence. And it'll be a good influence because it is so clear as to how it was built. You could look at that house and say, "Oh, yes. I could make a house like that."

Ross: And then you contrast that with the Transamerica building and their purchase of tile.

Heath: We've been throwing up these grand buildings. I remember thirty or forty years ago, an architect who was working overseas was saying that wherever you went, whether it was to Cairo or wherever you were sent with the parent firm, that the people there said, "We want a building that looks like the one that was built in the United States." And for the tourist industry, what they wanted to do was to build housing for people--hotels, let's say--that were regional styles that were out of regional materials. But no, the people who lived there said, "No, we don't want that. We want a three-story building." Or, "We want a skyscraper." So they were building skyscrapers in Hawaii.

Before that, the idea was, when you traveled, to live in something that was native to the region, that was regional. Why do I want to stay in a Holiday Inn in another country?



Ross: Tell me this: Do you think that to have this attitude about how we make things, what we want, how many people can have it, to return to something more basic--do you think this country is going to have to go through some very poor times, more of a struggle? Our children all seem to never have had any wants. Now we have a whole group of poor people. But how many more people have to get poor before they will return to the values that you grew up with, for instance, where everybody had to pull his weight?

Heath: Well, for instance, the number of communities that have been destroyed by floods or natural disasters. You know, nature has destroyed what people have been trying to build. I mean, trying to build a house that's easily tipped over in a windstorm is not a solution to a housing problem, because that house is going to be blown over and destroyed in a cyclone. So, then builders have to begin to be much more aware of the forces of nature so that you don't build to get rich quick, you build to build something safe, that's long lasting, that can't be burned and destroyed in the fire. It can't be like the Berkeley hills.

Heath Preserves Shards from the Berkeley Fire, 1991

Heath: In fact, I have a very interesting note here that I was going to have you read or put into this documentary. Let's see, where is it?

Ross: So this is a letter from a woman who came to you after the Berkeley fire.

Heath: She came with broken shards that she had gathered from the ashes of the house. She'd had Heath's tiles and dishes before the house burned so some of the fragments were leftover Heath parts. But there were also fragments from her grandmother's dishes and other artifacts that she had. She'd gone through the ashes and picked up those things which had not been destroyed completely. And she says, "Can you use these, make these into a mosaic? We have lots of steps. At the top of each step, I'd like a bar of mosaic sunk into the concrete so that as we walk down the steps, we can see fragments of what once was, and for my being able to tell my children, 'See, that was a piece that we saved from the fire.'"

I said, "Of course we could use the shards." I was very much interested in doing it because it gave a whole new meaning to the idea of doing a mosaic. In other words, why does one do mosaics in the first place? I think, to a large extent, it comes out of a person's desire to save something from the past. And since you

can't save everything, even if you save just one little something, it is something tangible that was. And that's very important for people to have a connection with the past. That if we throw away everything there is, we've thrown away our history. And that was her feeling. She says:

Enclosed you'll find a map to our home. If you are ever in the neighborhood and would like to see the work in progress, please let me know, as we'd love to show you. Access from the street down to the house should be better after Saturday when they pour concrete for them. You need to be a billy goat down. Again, thank you. As I use the steps where the Heath bars are already installed and see the fragments of our old pottery, it makes me happy that something of beauty was produced from a pile of ash-laden rubble.

Sincerely,  
Sandy Turnbull

And then she gives her phone number and address.

Ross: That's a lovely, lovely tribute.

Heath: Isn't it nice?

Ross: Yes.

Heath: She says, "You don't know how the anguish was sublimated. There's nothing more devastating than to have your house burned out from under you and reduced to rubble--the shock." Because nothing was saved except these things that wouldn't burn. And that's why I think clay is the most marvelous material in the world.

Ross: And with that, I think we have finished our oral history. It's a wonderful tribute. And it's been fun. And I loved doing it and I hope you have.

Heath: All right, my dear.

Ross: Oh, that's terrific. That is terrific.

### Watts Towers

Heath: You know the Watts Towers in Los Angeles, don't you?

Ross: Yes, but I don't know that I've ever seen them.

[tape interruption]

Heath: There is a lot in Los Angeles that occupies three tall forms, spiral forms that go up into the sky.

Ross: I've seen pictures of them.

Heath: I think the tallest one is about forty feet high.

Ross: Oh, that high?

Heath: Yes. It was built by a tile setter, Italian, who came to the United States. He worked on it for about thirty years of his life, bringing home from the jobs that he worked on, the broken bits of tile. And he would pick up pebbles and seashells and so on. He began constructing, starting with the ground and using steel. He covered the steel which he could bend into a spiral. And then he would walk up the spiral. He used it as a stairway. So, as he went, he would add more steel to what he was constructing and then walk up and add more encrustation. And he worked on it, well, thirty or thirty-five years. They're called the Watts Towers.

He was invited to speak in San Francisco about what he had done and asked why he did it. And he said, "Because I didn't have anything better to do. In other words, I like the--." Well, I don't know whether I am quoting him exactly. And why should someone do that, you ask. He said, "I came to the United States a very poor young man. I was able to make a living here. I want to do something to show my appreciation for the United States. If I can show you what I can do and you accept it," or whatever, "that's why I did it. People can see that I made something." When he was doing installations for different people, who knew who the man was or who did it. He says, "I made this."

Ross: And now it's a memorial.

Heath: When he died, there was no will, you know, what to do with it. He just sort of walked out. Then the city of Los Angeles wanted to tear it down because they felt it wasn't safe, and there was a protest of the artists in Los Angeles and the architects, that it should not be torn down. So, they had bulldozers come and tie cable to the thing to see if they could pull it over. They couldn't budge it. It was so well done. And these rods that were, you know, they twist wire around them and encrust them so that they wouldn't break. It doesn't fall off.

Ross: My goodness.

Edith's Pleasure from Her Work and Location

Heath: Now, nobody taught him how to do it. Why did he do it? Because he was grateful. I say that to Brian. I said, "You know, we should be so grateful that we live in this part of the world. It's one of the most beautiful areas and we are so lucky." I said, "I'd just as soon give the land back to the Indians. I've had my pleasure out of it." And that's the way I feel about what's going to be the future of Heath Ceramics, that it's brought me a great deal of pleasure. And I've lived in a beautiful part of the world and I've been able to do what I wanted to do.

Ross: That's true. You've had a rich, rich life.

Heath: And people can see some of the things that we've made.

Ross: Yes. When you become frustrated with what you can't do for the future or what the world won't be, remember that many, many people will remember you for all you have created.

9-21-'90

CLAY, YIELDING TO TOUCH AND FIRE  
REVEALS THE UNTAMEABLE IN NATURE.  
IT FRUSTRATES THE WILL "TO MASTER",  
TO FIND PERFECTION . . . .  
SO, WHERE IS BEAUTY?

IT IS IN THE MIND AND GUT,  
WHEN THE ACCEPTANCE OF THE  
NATURE OF THINGS  
IS FELT!

---

Edith Keizer Heath



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