



**OTTO AND GERTRUDE NATZLER
Self-Taught Ceramists
Began as Hobbyists**

By FRAN MAIER

Self taught ceramists, Gertrude and Otto Natzler, were in Birmingham recently to open a show displaying a collection of their hand-thrown pottery of extremely thin shell. They concentrate on beauty and simplicity in form.

Their work began as a hobby almost 20 years ago in Vienna, Austria. They used to meet with friends each day in a Viennese coffee shop . . . and with their cups of coffee totaling 60 shillings a month, they decided they could rent a studio, have more time together and concentrate on ceramics.

They started in their little studio in 1934 at which time Otto became interested in the chemistry of glazes and started mixing his own. Glaze compositions invented by Otto are designed to create effects during the firing process which can only be achieved in the ceramic medium. All forms are thrown by Gertrude.

To view the tranquil beauty of form and seemingly inexhaustible variations of glazes in Natzler ceramics is to sense that nature herself had a hand in the creation. The Natzlers are self taught, their development having been guided by individual research, critical discipline and devotion of superior craftsmanship. They work as a team. Each piece is hand thrown on the potter's wheel by Gertrude.

Her sure, yet so sensitive touch makes the clay yield under her fingers, giving willingly what seems nearly impossible to achieve; ce-

ramics of superb form and rhythmic flow of line, with that incredible thinness of shell which is so typically "Natzler."

The glazing and firing is done by Otto who, over a period of years, has perfected hundreds of glazes. Each glaze is the end result of a long series of tests. The amazing colors and textures in Natzler ceramics are therefore not happy accidents, but the result of his innate artistry coupled with tireless experimentation and sound knowledge of chemistry.

THE PHILOSOPHY behind the Natzler creation is "let the work perform and develop strictly within the scope of the ceramic medium while exploring this medium to the fullest." The form is felt while it is created from the clay. No superficial surface decoration is employed. The glaze is part of the form, not just a coating to hide the clay body, but always an indivisible part of it. The color and texture of the glaze is the result of the fire through which it went, leaving its mark as part of the story of its creation.

The Natzlers were honored at an open house by Peggy deSalle who is currently showing their works nearby impossible to achieve; ce-



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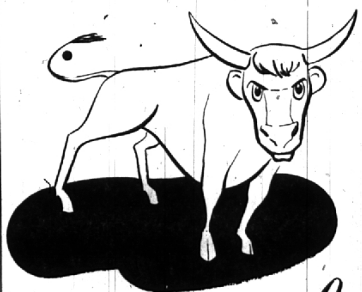
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