

Happy glaze

After 60 years of dreaming, California's Heath Ceramics has finally opened its first LA shop



It has taken Heath Ceramics – a company known for its particularly Californian way of doing things, that is, sometimes very slowly – 60 years to open a second retail outlet. Actually, given that the store at its Sausalito production facility is essentially a low-key sort of factory outlet, you could call this the company's first adventure in retailing proper. The opening signals both a new partnership with hip Los Angeles's favourite potter, Adam Silverman, and a new commitment to producing unique pieces and bringing in other ceramic artists to work with the brand.

Founded in 1948 by Edith and Brian Heath with the aim of providing 'simple, good things for good people', Heath Ceramics has always been about good design and responsible and waste-averse production, pushing these ideas long before they were fashionable. In 2003, industrial designer Catherine Bailey and her husband Robin Petravic, a mechanical engineer, bought the company from an ailing Edith Heath (who died in 2005), intent on re-energising the brand without selling out those founding ideals.

Last year, Bailey, Heath Ceramics's creative director, asked Silverman to join the company in a new role as studio director. Silverman,

a Connecticut native who studied architecture, art and design at Rhode Island School of Design, had only taken up pottery full-time in 2003. He had come to LA to work as an architect but ended up forming the X-Large clothing label with Mike D of the Beastie Boys. As a potter, Silverman built up a reputation for innovative glazes. His connections among LA's artistic elite have helped pushed the profile of ceramic art in the city.

Bailey wanted Silverman to become Heath's chief (and emblematic) artist, producing one-off, specially commissioned work but also running a studio, co-ordinating a visiting artist programme as well as running a gallery to showcase local design talent. They needed somewhere to do all this and decided that they might as well add a store. Oh, and maybe a place to stay for Bailey and Petravic, while they were in town.

All agreed on the importance of working with an independent design firm that would not only understand the Heath aesthetic but could also bring something new to the mix. It wasn't long

ALL FIRED UP

Adam Silverman produces small-run works for his new studio within the Heath Ceramics store in West Hollywood

before Commune Design, a Los Angeles collective highly regarded for its retail, residential and hospitality projects, was signed up.

As active participants in LA's lively art scene, Silverman and Commune's partners – Roman Alonso, Steven Johanknecht, and sister and brother Pamela and Ramin Shamshiri – knew each other socially. Silverman ate at Ammo, a hip Hollywood restaurant they designed. They asked him to design ceramic light fixtures for their Palm Springs Ace Hotel project. And Silverman, knowing instinctively it would be the right fit, asked Commune to pitch a proposal to Bailey and Petravic for the new Heath LA facility's design.

As Silverman recalls, Commune's proposal was a 'spot-on interpretation of Cathy and Robin's adaptation and reinvention of Heath's original 1950 factory store in Sausalito'. Commune's design sensibility, perhaps best described as an earthy yet highly sophisticated spin on the handcrafted and the homespun, was the perfect match for Heath, a company which places such a strong emphasis on the craft of manufacturing.

The Heath team envisioned an innovative hybrid studio/retail programme for the space they settled on – in a mid-1920s art deco »



FEELING THE HEATH

Left, Commune creative director Roman Alonso and Heath Ceramics's co-owner Catherine Bailey with three of Silverman's 'Atwater' pots in the new LA store. Below, the building's exterior is painted a warm grey, the colour of Heath's trademark stoneware clay.

Southern California; mid-century modern meets Sausalito craft; and Scandinavian artisan meets Terence Conran's Habitat.' Indeed the inspiration of such early 1960s retail visionaries as Conran, Crate and Barrel, and, of course, Design Research, is evident in the open-stock display.

Commune's rustic knotty pine millwork and fixtures – inspired by furniture designed by artist Donald Judd – are the perfect foil for Heath's colourful ceramics. Built-in shelving runs below the windows at the front of the store while tall open bookshelves hold cups, plates, bowls, vases, and stemware. Also on display is one of the company's newer lines, a tableware range devised for the famous Chez Panisse restaurant. Tucked away in a corner, an intimate seating area is stocked with design and cookery books.

Alonso has also made smart use of special ceramic elements to tie together the interior: tiles with sample glazes frame an inspiration board that gives a pictorial history of the company; kiln spacers support glass shelves; and recycled kiln shelves top refectory tables and custom crates that can be used as storage elements. On view behind the cash counter is a display of both vintage Heath and pieces from the company's ongoing series of collaborations with artists such as Roy McMakin and Dosa's Christina Kim.

While the opening of Heath Los Angeles coincided with reports of a global recession, there is a lot to suggest the company is in tune with the current mood of frugality and restraint. After all, Edith Heath bought much of her experience of the 1930s to bear when she established Heath, using local materials and always selling pottery seconds rather than just destroying them.

And even today, the company is determined on producing pieces that can last a lifetime. If not recession-proof, then recession-ready. ★

www.heathceramics.com; www.communedesign.com

building with a prime corner spot on Beverly Boulevard, in the centre of Los Angeles's burgeoning design district. Simple hand-painted signage, a datum of opal blue tiles and crisp orange canvas awnings recall the aesthetic foundations laid by Edith Heath and give the building a strong, instantly recognisable identity.

Wanting to keep the interior of the high-ceilinged L-shaped space open and airy, Commune's Alonso inserted very few structural additions. The shop occupies the most visible part of the space, its large windows luring in passers-by with glimpses of the wares on offer. A studio, where Silverman will continue to produce his signature pieces, is at the rear. Both spaces are linked by a loft-like mezzanine with an office on one side and a small living space on the other. An orange powder-coated metal rolling library stair provides access to the mezzanine and an industrial metal bridge connects the two spaces, which overlook the selling floor. Ingenious eight-foot sliding barn doors of pine and glass separate the shop from the private areas while offering a window onto the process behind the product.

Alonso describes his inspiration for the interior design as, 'Northern California meets

