

Wallpaper*

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

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FEELING THE HEATH
Left, Commune creative director Roman Alonso and Heath Ceramics co-owner Catherine Bailey with a pair of custom ceramic pots in the new LA store. Below, the building's exterior in the new, light grey, the colour of Heath's trademark stoneware clay

Southern California mid-century modern meets Sanjilto crafts and Scandinavian artism means Terence Conran's Habitat. Induced 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 woodshelves hold cups, plates, bowls, vases, and more. The store's aesthetic is a nod to the company's never-fades, 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 simple glazes frame an inspiration board that gives a pictorial history of the company; kiln spacers support glass shelves; and recycled kiln shelves top trolley tables and custom crates that can be used as storage elements. On view here is the new range of pottery, including a series of collaborations with artists such as Roy McMillan 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 fragility and restraint. After all, Edith Heath bought much of her experience of the 1950s 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 decade. If not a generation, then at least a decade. ★

www.heathceramics.com; www.commune.la; www.royaldecor.com

building with a prime corner spot on Beverly Boulevard, and its retrograde, for its retail and residential boutique. The building is a prime example of mid-century modern design. Simple hand-painted signage, a dam 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 Alonso and Bailey continue to produce its signature pieces, is tucked away in a rear wing, 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.

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hybrid studio retail programme for the space they settled on – in a mid-1950s art deco' ★

A Connecticut native who studied architecture, design at Rhode Island College of Design, had only taken a few classes in architecture before coming to LA to work as an architect but ended up forming the X-Large clothing label with Mike D of the Beatnik 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 artists. The design firm's focus was on all things mid-century modern and this led to the decision that they might as well add a store. Oh, and maybe a place to stay 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 PAGES UP
Adam Silverman produces small-run works for his new studio within the Heath Ceramics store in West Hollywood

It has taken Heath Ceramics – a company known for its particularly Californian way of doing things – that long time to get to this point. In 2005, Silverman opened a second retail outlet. Actually, given that the store at its Sanjilto 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 the home, the company has always been about good design and responsible and wise ceramic production, pushing these ideas long before they were fashionable. In 2005, industrial designer Catherine Bailey and her husband Robin Perovic, 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,