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Robert Winokur

In the early '90s, Robert Winokur's work began an architectural evolution. Back when he was a maker of functional pottery, he had made some large "stewpots" with supporting tables exactly to size. Now he made some ceramic tables for themselves, the tops divided into decisive geometric shapes in circumspect tonalities of deep ochers, siennas and olive greens, pebbled with the salt-glaze effects for which he was known. They were given names associated with either the Italian towns that had thrilled him (*Orvietto*) or the awesome sites of the American Southwest that he and his wife, Paula (see Ch. 10), had visited (*Chaco*). Decorative motifs included warning-sign stripes and long rectangles split diagonally into pennant shapes, but also austere incisions in dry planes, cut "ramps" in edges (recalling Earthworks), and angular raised or recessed configurations that evoke pueblos and kivas.

It was an easy step from tables to independent objects, and from these architectural allusions to the more explicit forms of houses, churches and villas, all reduced to blocky masses with only teasingly diminutive indications of an entry or an occasional window. The density was amplified by lightless, somber colors. The success of these new architectonic works was ironic, considering that Winokur had more than 30 years of functional work behind him.

Winokur (b. 1933) took his BFA from Tyler in sculpture and ceramics (under Rudolf Staffel) and an MFA from Alfred two years later. He married that summer and moved to Texas, ostensibly as a sabbatical replacement but staying on, teaching two-dimensional design. In 1964 the Winokurs moved to Massachusetts and took a stab at being production potters, but in 1966 he accepted a job at Tyler. They bought a house outside Philadelphia and built an 800-square-foot

studio that they shared for more than 20 years. His utilitarian pottery had subtle painted-by-fire surface interest and a sculptural presence that made itself felt gradually. He favored teapots and jars of simple masses allowing line drawings, which were painted with slips and ash and salt glazed.

By the early '80s he was making vase forms he called "Soft/Square" that had tiny apertures presaging those in the building sculptures to come. In 1985 he made *Parquet*, a floor piece of little boxes showing diagonal stripes and checkerboards, reminiscent of Italy. In 1987, *Geometric Wrap Table No. 1* had what he called a "tight decoration, like wrapping paper." First he did a rectangle, then a horizontal standing rectangle with a wedge at one end, and then he realized it was like architecture. By 1998 he was making the dark houses.