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Sidebar: Barbara Willis

Barbara Willis, along with Edith Heath, has been credited with “unprecedented introduction of studio pottery techniques and aesthetic standards into commercial pottery production.”¹ In 1941, Willis was 23 and her husband was away in the Air Corps when she began home pottery production. She used molds, although her ware looked like handworked slabs. Essentially she adapted to commercial work several characteristics of the pre-wheel work of her former teacher, Laura Andreson, including intense colors and crackle glazes. She created pinholes by putting grog in the clay and scraping the still-damp surface with a knife, or she used wire brushes to make scratch marks. She soon had 15 employees. She closed her business in 1958 and lived in obscurity until, decades later, she happened to recognize her own work at a flea market and discovered that it had become a collectible. She was suddenly a cult celebrity in her 80s.