



Model for structure of clay.

## Stan Bitters' Book--- 15 Years, 300,000 Tons In The Making

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"Environment" may be a relatively new flag for politicians to wave but it has been a long-time concern for Fresno ceramist Stan Bitters.

Bitters believes we live in a sterile, visually monotonous world because of the cold and impersonal style of much of today's urban architecture.

He believes passionately that the solution is in using clay, incorporating it into architecture both as decoration and structural element.

The artist has been making his case locally in public art—notably in baroque bronze doors for the Convention Center theater and elaborate exterior relief of Duncan Enterprises—for years.

Now he gives the concept national exposure in an unusual book, newly published by Van Nostrand Reinhold Company of New York (\$16.50, 144 pages).

Entitled "Environmental Ceramics," the book is a bible for ceramists interested in pursuing Bitters' theories about functional ceramics. Needless to say, the artist also hopes the book will find its way into the hands of architects.

Micha Langer, a local photographer, provided profuse illustrations, in color and black and white, of Bitters' installations in private homes as well as in commercial and public locations.

In effect, Bitters has spent 15 years and about 300,000 tons of clay documenting his case for the feasibility of clay as part of the permanent scene rather than as transient, isolated object.

His most winning case in point on a domestic scale involves the decoration and construction of the foothill home he shares with his artist wife Jean Ray Laury.

But he plans a much more elaborate commercial project, an entire shopping center to revitalize Prather, a crossroads community near his home.

Bitters has private financial support and the backing of the Madera County Board of Super-

visors. He envisions the project as a showcase for his belief that contemporary architecture can become a rich and visual statement through the collaboration of architect and ceramist right from the drawing board.

In this instance Bitters has complete artistic control; Together with some associates from the Bay Area, he will plan everything from basic structure to landscaping.

What he will build will be patterned more in the fashion of San Francisco's Ghiradelli Square than the conventional shopping center "with the rows of cubicles and long, flat frontal exterior."

"Art should not be separated from the rest of life," he said. "It should be part of the everyday, environmental visual experience."

"In a public setting the way to an environment people can respond to is to create sculptural forms that people can walk into and through rather than around.

"You use different levels, planes, plenty of overhangs and foliage, and take advantage of the different textures of clay and plantlife."

Bitters conceded that a major cause of the stark design and conformity of today's urban buildings is the spiraling cost of materials.

His book takes note of clay as a neglected, timeless solution to the problem of both cost and utility:

"(The solution) is one with taproots reaching far into the past, primitive and sophisticated. Adobe cliff dwellings and baroque building complexes are conceptually related because in both cases the environmental approach demanded response to the full range of creative experience.

"Non-architects are proving (in individualistic housing) that cost is not necessarily a limitation; it may be the incentive for imaginative invention."

But he also blames government regulation for discouraging individual creativity with standards that virtually assure conformity.

"As example, everybody agrees that solar research is vital in the future availability of fuel," he said. "But government codes eliminate individual research with restrictions that force you to buy from GE." But

another factor, he said, is the "pre-packaged" attitude of many architects:

"Too many people still think of clay only in terms of kitchen utensils and pretty exhibits," he said.

Bitters first became interested in art as a junior high school student. The inspiration was a teacher, Bob Beeching, an expert in the use of multi-media for education purposes.

When Bitters gave a reception last week at Duncan Enterprises to announce his new book, Beeching again assisted by contributing a slide retrospective of the ceramist's work.

Bitters took up clay, while studying in UCLA and the Los Angeles County Art Institute because it was an inexpensive solution to the high cost of metal for sculpture.

His interest in environmental art was inspired by his preoccupation with the notion that art ought to be part of the daily system of living, not just decoration.

"It's one thing to sit in a studio being creative," he said. "It's a whole new challenge to be involved with people in all the complexities of daily living."