Craft Horizons

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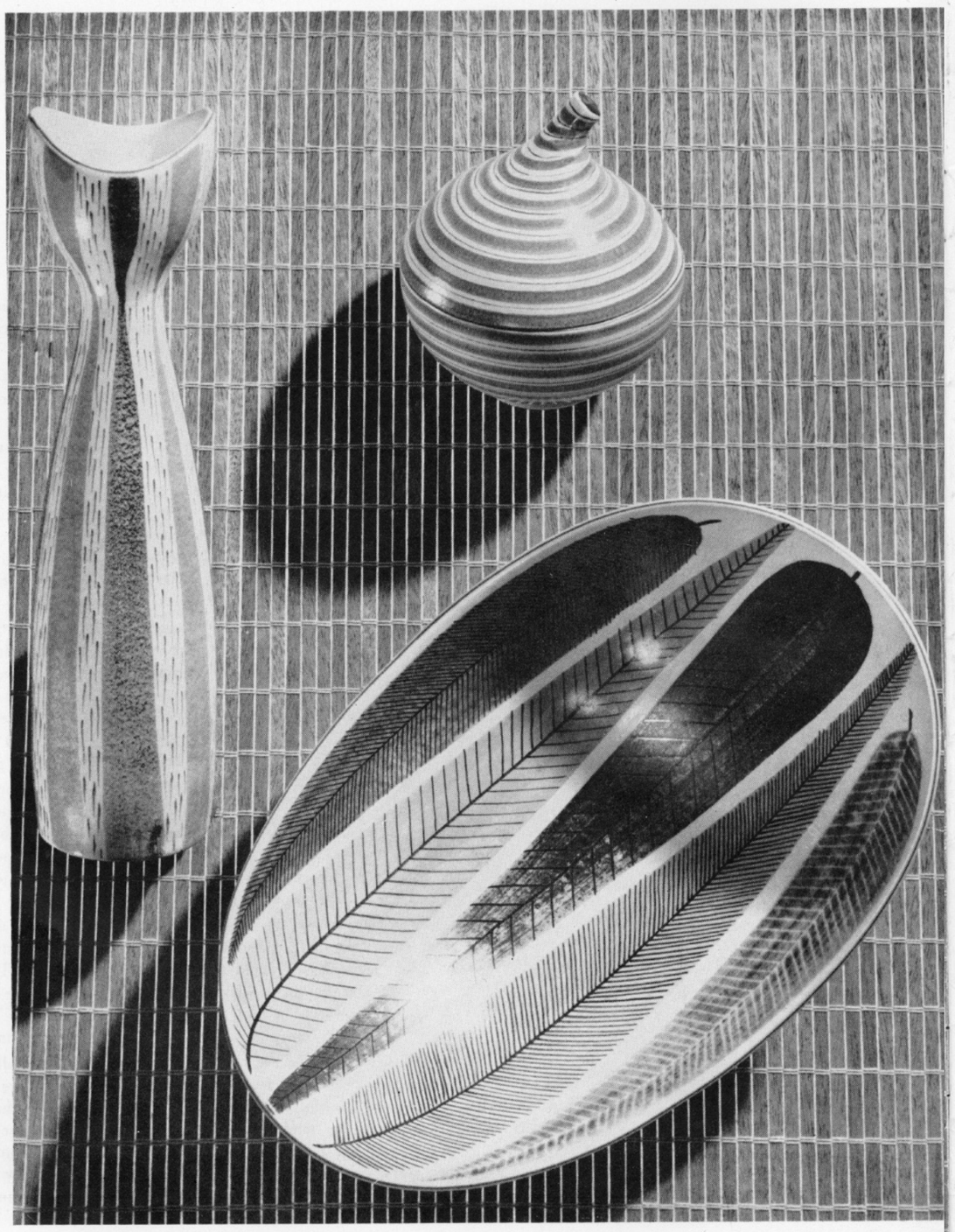
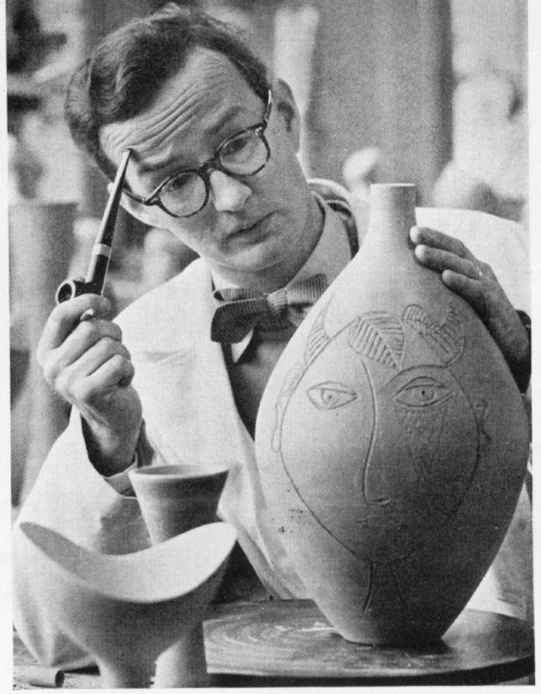
Below: polychrome decorated faïence pieces by Stig Lindberg. Opposite, the potter in his studio eyes finished piece; below, original stoneware shapes.



BY ARTHUR HALD

Stig Lindberg artist in clay

A brilliant, dynamic potter creates ceramic sculpture, stoneware, tableware, decorates faïence

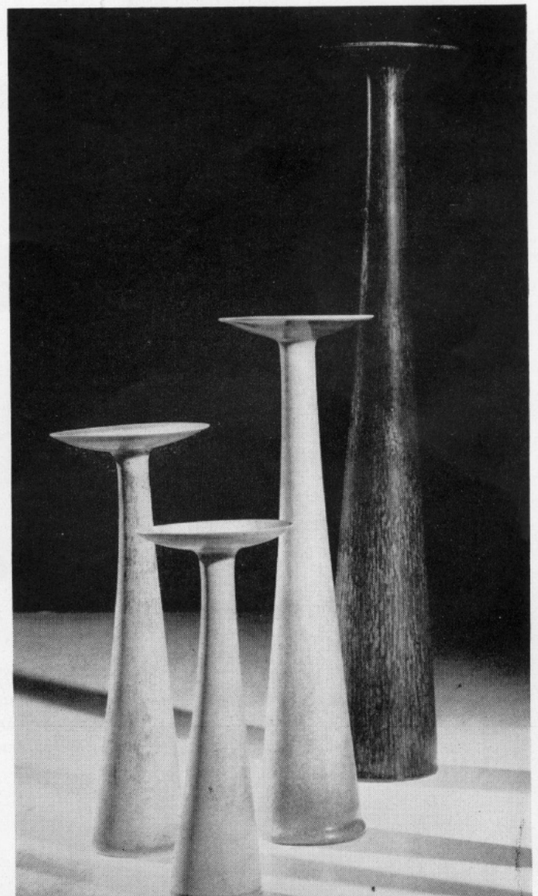


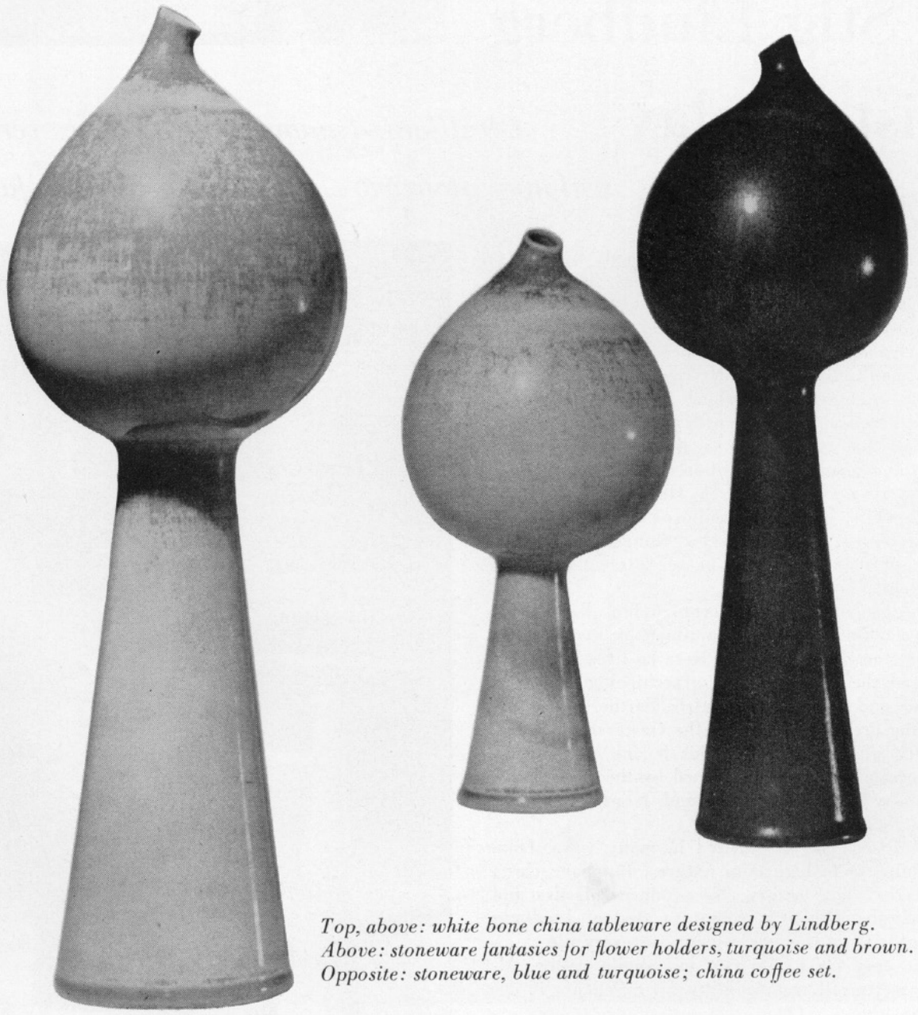
STIG LINDBERG has great talent. That of course is a minimum requirement for a ceramist who is art director of a large, modern porcelain factory. But he is gifted also outside his own special field. With a passion for *his* material—clay—he combines an appetite and a knack for many other things. He can even write a good article—but preferably not about himself. He tackles people and practical problems with quick frontal assault. He hates all that is safe and mediocre, the established taste and the conventional tradition. He is dynamic, protesting, and always on the march. He seems to be playing all the while, but in his studio or in the factory he turns perfectionist. He loves useless things, personal expressions, but at the same time he has a talent for creating useful ones.

His house is an eighteenth century inn. Besides his studio, it contains sculpture, paintings, printed textiles and a collection of graphic art. Here he lives, overlooking a bay of the inner Stockholm archipelago, with his wife Gunnel and their two little girls. Farther out on the island in the archipelago stands the Gustavsberg Porcelain Factory where he works. This is one of Sweden's three big ceramic enterprises, owned by the Cooperative Society. It is a large organization and, from the point of view of design, a progressive one.

In this factory clay is utilized in many ways, from ceramic sculpture to bathroom fixtures. But bone china is its specialty. The factory also produces plastics and enamel bathtubs. When it comes to design, Lindberg has a finger—if not the whole hand—in every pie.

He is at once chief designer and studio potter. Although he carries all responsibility for excellence in de-





Top, above: white bone china tableware designed by Lindberg.
Above: stoneware fantasies for flower holders, turquoise and brown.
Opposite: stoneware, blue and turquoise; china coffee set.

sign in the assembly line household wares, there is always clay sticking to his fingers. He is no armchair ceramist. In this respect he follows an established tradition of modern design in Sweden, with its constant juxtaposition of utility ware and one-of-a-kind treasures. This stimulates the mass production end, gives it freshness, keeps the designer from locking himself up in his ivory tower.

Lindberg's talent is, turn and turn about, directed into different channels. The possibilities and limitations of industrial production are a challenge to his inventiveness. But he can turn his back in the twink of an eye on industrial production for a rapid turn at sketching decorative faiënce; or do a rightabout-face at stubborn and patient experiment with stoneware glaze or sophisticated textural effects. Form and decoration flow naturally from him. Stig Lindberg does not seem to know the meaning of comformity, compromise or of kowtowing to tradition. He concentrates on his work as one possessed; this is what makes it possible for him to capture a design idea the moment it is born.

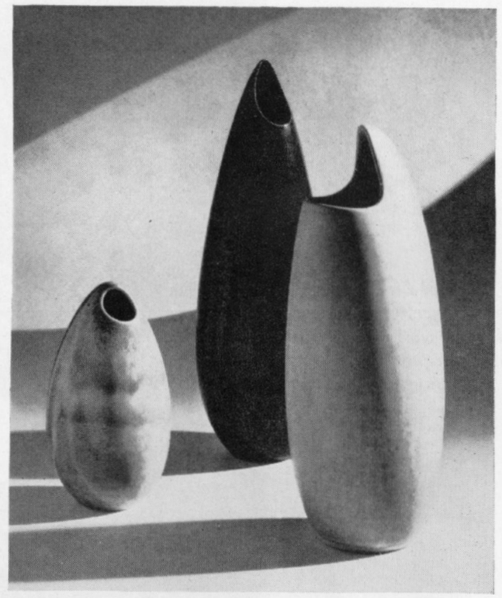
Lindberg has invented original ceramic shapes. His name has become a magnet for many colleagues the world over. This year, professional potters from six different nations have come to him to study. This autumn he has started a school where the best students from the four most important schools of design in Scandinavia will be allowed to work. He does not guard his ideas jealously, nor is he ashamed of feeling pride in his successes. Among the various honors bestowed upon him, I think he values most a *Grand Prix* at the 9th Triennale, the only international exchange for crafts and industrial design. He has been represented at all the Good Design Exhibitions sponsored by the Museum of Modern Art, and there is room for his work also at that citadel of tradition, the Victoria and Albert Museum in London. The most trying result of all this recognition lies probably in the fact that he is constantly being plagiarized. If this sounds like bragging, it may be discounted by Lindberg's constant dissatisfaction, the curse he is under of never being able to leave well enough alone, always having to round the next corner to explore the next possibility.

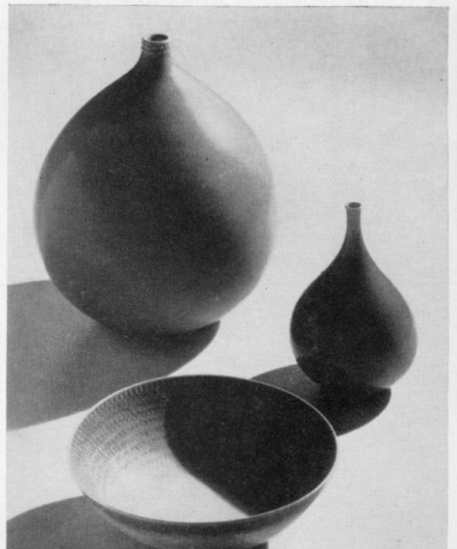
There are few Scandinavian designers who are in contemporary vein as consistently as Stig Lindberg. His work is still too new—and himself too young, at thirty-eight—to permit of mature evaluation of his work, the sort of judgment which requires the perspective of time. But he should be very happy right now that the things he creates have such flair and distinction that they have been accepted by his own generation as one of the most convincing examples of design in our times.

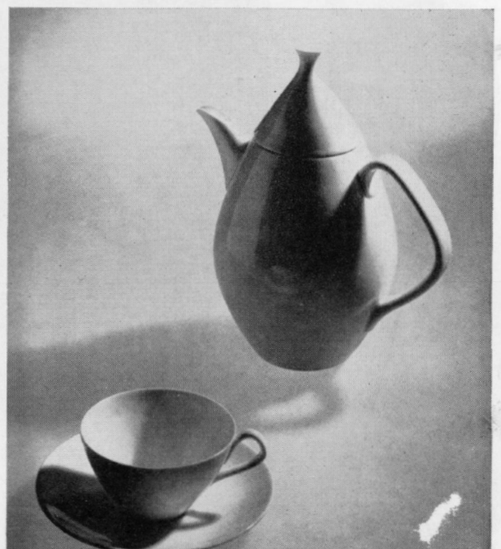
Stig Lindberg has impressive backing: A modern factory, with excellent laboratories and engineers; a progressive management—esthetically and labor-wise; and a tradition of quality established by his predecessor, Wilhelm Kage. Behind him—or with him—there is also a large but fastidious public following, individuals who are capable of appreciating, for example, as special a thing as stoneware. Lindberg in this way has a soundingboard, a gauge to guide expansion which, with every success, increases the demand for his things.

Lindberg once intended to be a pianist, but injured one of his thumbs. Now he sings spirituals and has fascinating ways with jazz on his piano. He also considered becoming a painter. His paintings have remained in his studio and his cupboards. It is *clay* that is his material.

As a ceramist he is an anti-classicist, although there is







More of Lindberg's light-hearted faïence. Opposite page, tall stoneware vases combine blue, turquoise and brown; suggest plant forms.

as much clay on his hands as on those of the most venerable potter on Kerameikos. He makes love to his material, is naturally a good technician, knows how to pick from the technician's store of knowledge the specific method that will best serve his esthetic purpose.

Gaily decorated faïence was his first big success. Ceramic sculpture and stoneware are, roughly speaking, secondary for him. The cultivation of dynamic form, of surface texture, understanding of graphic effect are plainly visible in everything he does. His third interest is tableware. Ten years ago, of course, he demonstrated that it is quite possible to make a triangular plate on a potter's wheel, even though up till then only round ones had been made. But as he grew older, and under the pressure of mass production requirements of a factory—plus the demands of consumer opinion in Sweden—Lindberg has become more and more absorbed with everyday things. He has developed new designs in tableware, improved its technical quality, and expanded the scope of ovenware. This means that he reaches the majority of his public, not as a personality, but as a designer of good things for everyday use. In the long run, he could not endure making these things alone, but is perhaps more fascinated by them than he is quite ready to admit. A witty and characteristic textile print, illustrations for a child's book, an exquisite stoneware vase, a nymph-like figurine—creating these are a source of rejuvenation for him, new paths into worlds of design to be explored. The beauty of functional objects, and of the non-functional, are in the final analysis all a part of the same cargo.

Arthur Hald, editor of "Form" magazine, also edits "Kontur" which is published by the Swedish Society of Arts and Crafts in Stockholm. Mr. Hald has recently made a survey of crafts in the United States. His father, Edward Hald, artist and designer, is director of Orrefors Glass.