



CARL SCHULTZ




An assemblage of pots and platters in various colors and intricate patterns populates ceramist Nicholas Bernard's Scottsdale studio.

P A S S I O N *for pottery*

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NICHOLAS BERNARD

Master
ceramist
Nicholas
Bernard
shapes
a lifelong
career
in clay.



Neutral hues and sinuous swirls define a pair of 9-inch-tall porcelain tendril bottles.

STEP INSIDE CERAMIST NICHOLAS BERNARD'S STUDIO, AND YOU'RE INSTANTLY OVERWHELMED BY THE VAST ARRAY OF POTTERY

in various shapes, patterns and vivid colors that line just about every horizontal surface.

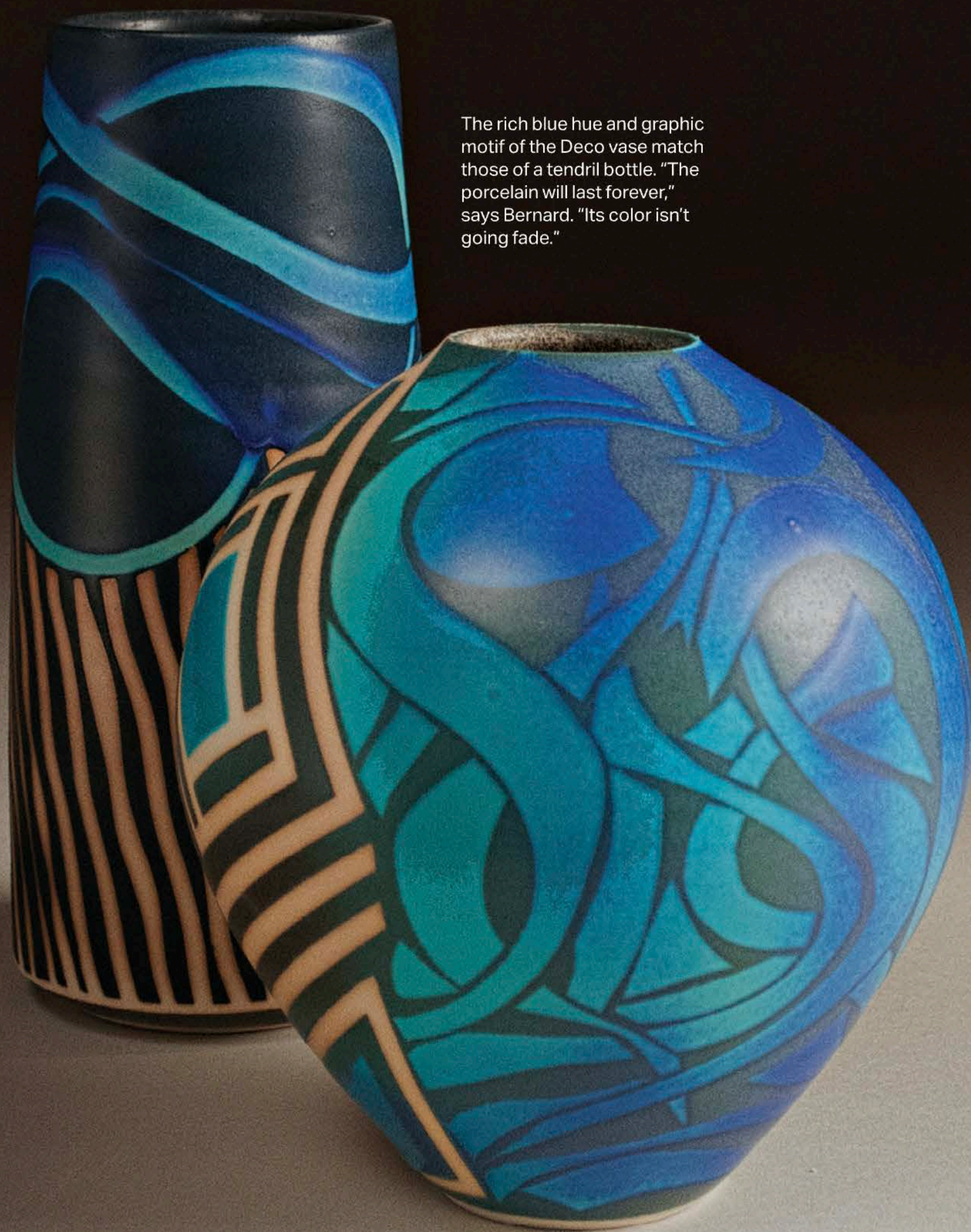
Rainbow-hued balloon-shaped vessels perch precariously next to an army of small vaselike jars decorated in patterns that recall African mudcloth, and 2-foot-tall earthenware jugs share space with delicate 5-inch-tall porcelain yunomis, or Japanese teacups. Outside, more pots fill shelves and line the walkway and fences of the property. The range—and quantity—represent 40 years' worth of creativity, dedication and hard work.

Bernard cannot remember a time when he wasn't infatuated with clay. As a child, his mother enrolled him and his brothers in art classes in an effort to harness their unruly energy. He also has memories of his parents bringing home a globular ceramic piece, the

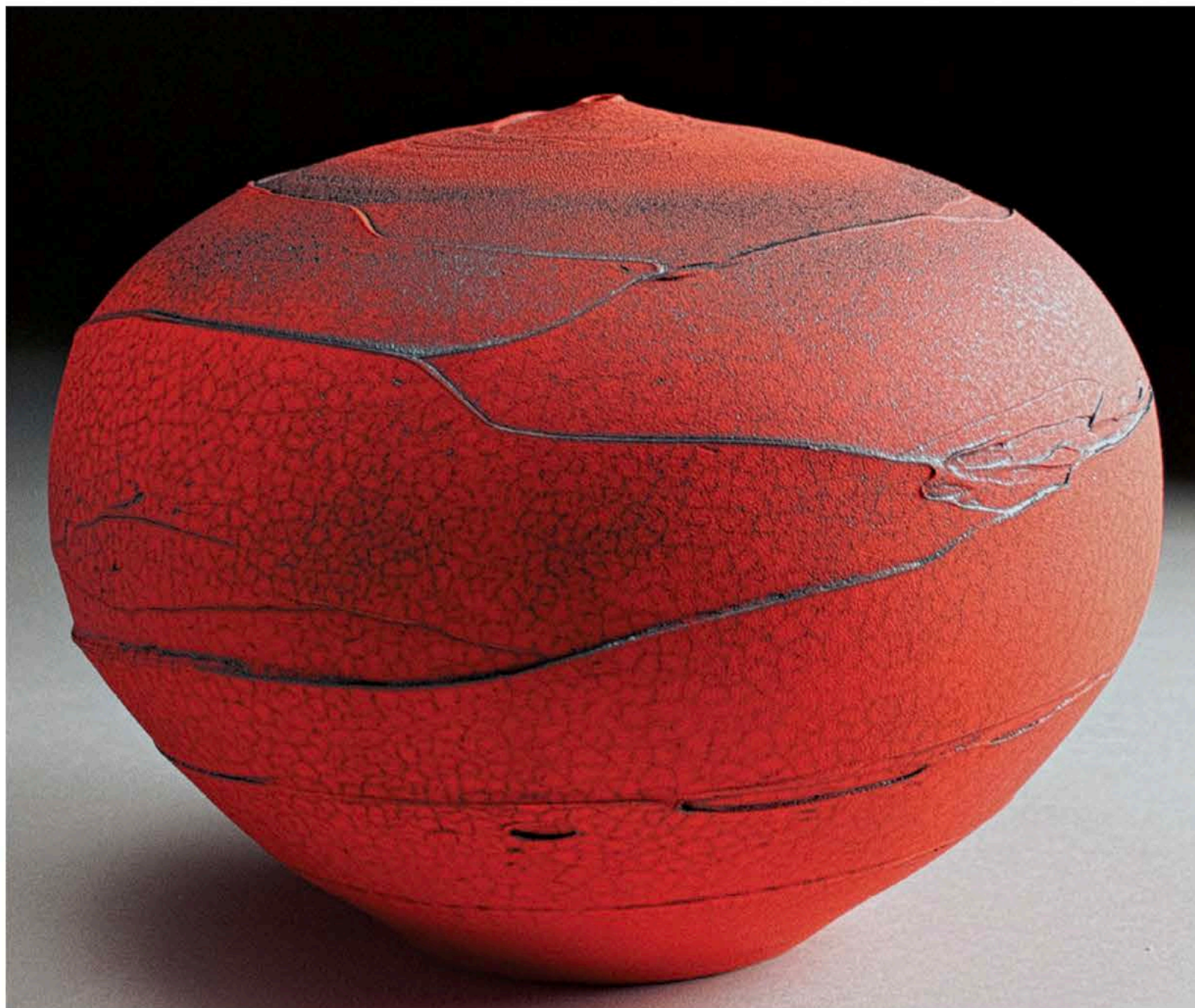
shape of which continues to influence his work today. This medium stuck with him through his teens, when the Los Angeles native moved to Connecticut and later attended school in New Hampshire for a brief period. In 1978, Bernard relocated to Phoenix to study ceramics at Arizona State University, receiving his Bachelor of Fine Arts in 1981. He's been a fixture in the Valley's art scene ever since.

Julie Sasse, chief curator of the Tucson Museum of Art, met Bernard in the early 1980s when she was working for the Elaine Horwitch Gallery in Scottsdale. Bernard, just one year out of college at the time, had managed to get his ceramics represented by the legendary gallerist. "To get your work in Elaine's galleries was a big deal, because it would put your name in public view," Sasse says. "The fact





The rich blue hue and graphic motif of the Deco vase match those of a tendril bottle. "The porcelain will last forever," says Bernard. "Its color isn't going fade."



LEFT Bernard is well-known for his brightly colored earthenware vessels, such as this one, titled "Low Red Wrap." **BELOW** In addition to pots, Bernard also makes platters that can hang on walls. This white stoneware piece from 2020 measures 24 inches in diameter.

that Nick believed in his work and knew that he could produce for her made him stand out, and he has never let anything dissuade him from his goal, which is to make beautiful art."

In 1985, the artist purchased his Scottsdale home on a dusty plot of land just down the road from the famed Cattle Track Arts Compound. Over the years, he's transformed the property into a showcase of art and Sonoran splendor. Past the house, nestled within a lush jungle of native flora, is a bright, open studio with large glass doors that look out to the gardens. Inside, Bernard works on his creations, often toiling over pieces in varying stages of completion seven days a week.

Bernard has become known for his brightly colored earthenware pots that continue to be a fixture in museum gift shops and galleries throughout the state. "His palette is extremely unique," says Peter Held, former director of the Ceramics Research Center at ASU. "The colors he achieves are indicative of the desert environment. I see the same hues in the sunrises, sunsets and desert landscape."





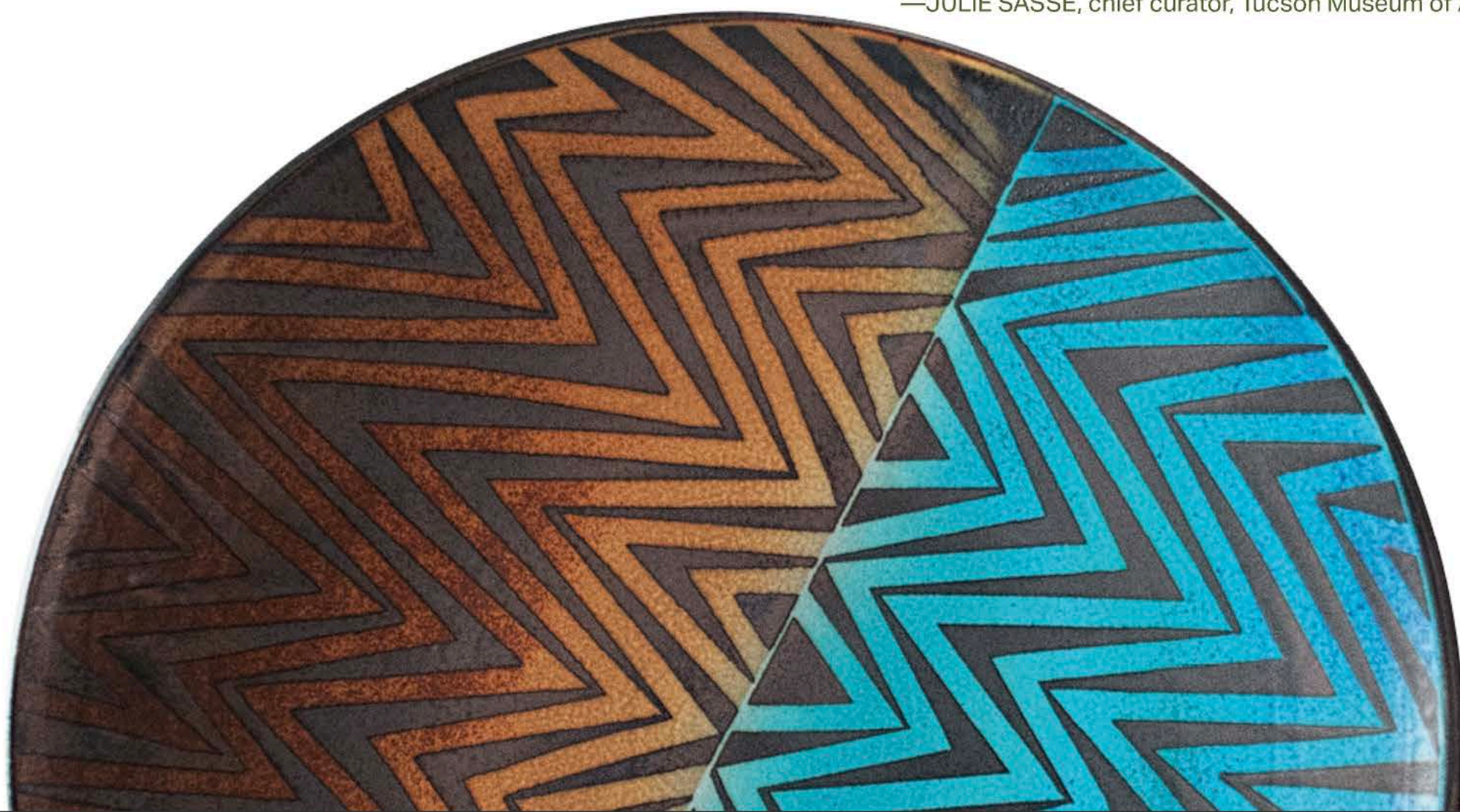
ABOVE A trio of striped porcelain bottles, measuring between 7 inches and 9.5 inches tall, makes for an eye-catching display.

BELOW This 24-inch-in-diameter zig zag wall platter showcases a stunning blend of gold and blue glazes.

“There are a lot of artists for whom their work is a means to an end.

But not for Nick. To him, it’s the beginning, the middle and the end.”

—JULIE SASSE, chief curator, Tucson Museum of Art



The 5-inch-tall "White Topography" and 9-inch-tall "Carved White Wave" feature Bernard's signature surface appearance. "The texture is a clay body that is mixed into this beautiful mud and applied to the pot. It shrinks the same as the earthenware," the artist says.





One Family, Three Artists

A VISIT TO Nicholas Bernard's studio yields more than an abundance of pottery. Located in an adjacent building behind his house, in what used to be a horse stable, are the studios of his wife, steel sculptor Linda Margaret Kilgore, and daughter, metalsmithing jewelry artisan Rosa Kilgore. "They're really the stars. I'm just the crusty old potter," Bernard says.

The colors of the earthenware "Landscape Bottle" are reminiscent of Arizona sunsets.

Vibrant yellows, deep reds, vivid oranges and verdurous greens flow effortlessly around the textured pots, blending seamlessly like the sun's rays in the evening sky. Bernard points to one of the polychromatic pieces. "This is like six layers of color. It started with orange, and then I just kept laying shades down like watercolors." Another vessel combines greens and yellows. "It turned a different tone of green after I fired it, so I don't know if I could ever do that again," the artist notes. "There are a lot of really lucky accidents here."

The fantastical silhouettes are important. Perfectly balanced spheroid forms rest almost unfathomably on miniscule bases, their large rotund bodies seemingly floating above the surface. Many sport tall, narrow necks, the circumference of which is no larger than a child's pinky finger. The contours and colors are immediately identifiable as Bernard's. "I look at shape and composition," the artist explains. "The No. 1 thing for me is to make great pots. I'm trying to create this beautiful, absolutely pristine curve, and the narrow top and bottom epitomize elegance."

Recently, Bernard has returned to his early aesthetics. He opens a copy of a 1986 New York Times Magazine that reveals a two-page image of his

black-and-white-striped raku vases, part of a feature on the changing styles of American pottery. Raku is a low-firing process that involves removing the pot from the kiln when it's red-hot and placing it into containers with combustible materials, such as newspapers. The fiery reaction affects the colors of the glaze. "After that story came out, I made my living creating those raku pots for 15 years," he says.

For the past two years, Bernard has been developing a series of porcelain vessels that showcases designs similar to his raku ware: neutral hues, bold stripes, tendrils and swirls that are at once Native American, African and even art nouveau.

"Nick's early work had these wonderful influences from ancient indigenous art forms," Sasse remarks. "But he evolves. He doesn't just do the same thing over and over again. He updates it. He's inspired by his previous pieces, but he may fuse his new creations with subtle changes in the textures and colors."

"He's very proud of the field he's in. He's proud of his medium," Sasse continues. "There are a lot of artists for whom their work is a means to an end. But not for Nick. To him, it's the beginning, the middle and the end."

For more information, see Sources.

The daughter of trailblazing Native American art dealer Margaret Kilgore, Linda fabricates bold geometric forms, such as globes, pyramids and crescent moons from sheets of steel. Finished in black powder coating, an oxidized rust or polished steel, the hard-lined modern sculptures contrast with the desert greenery that envelopes the building. "My work is elemental, not overworked," Linda explains. "We have a relationship with forms. When we're babies, the first thing they give us is round. You don't get some spikey thing. So I guess I'm drawing on some really primitive emotions."

There are also references to antiquities, archaeology and even the rock formations of Sedona in the stark designs.

A small room off the stable's main gallery houses Rosa's workspace. The artist is known for her contemporary Southwest-inspired statement necklaces, earrings and rings that combine sterling silver with antique bronze, cultured pearls and semiprecious stones. She performs the metalsmithing, while her husband, John Mettier, does the lapidary stone cutting.

"Jewelry is like little sculptures," she says. "I get to work with metal, but I can still

live in a small space and move it around easily. And I get to wear it." Rosa's Heritage collection showcases large, chunky cabochons cut by her husband. Paired with delicate pearls, they're a mix of masculine and feminine.

"Our home is a destination," notes Bernard. "People will come to see Linda and Rosa; they'll come here to see me. We do events, have kiln openings and even a couple open houses. In spring, when the cacti are in bloom and the birds are scratching about, the gardens are gorgeous. It's a different world."



Bernard has been working in porcelain for the last two years. The stylized swirls of this blue tendril bottle, 9 inches tall, give the piece an art nouveau feel.