

PROFILE Cecil Sanders: "You're opening up a big can of worms!"

When Spanish tile became popular and swept the country in the 1930's, Cecil Sanders had just begun working for a small tile plant in Pomona, California, called Pomona Tile Company. Like most of the workers who made ashtrays and other trinkets on their off-duty time, Cecil made a tile table top, drawing and glazing a free hand design of Old Ironsides. He ran it through the kiln overnight and when he arrived at work the next morning, the boss and several others had congregated around the piece of art. "Did you do this?" the boss asked Cecil, who figured he was about to lose his job for using the kiln. When Cecil admitted the piece was his, the boss offered him a job as head of the decorating department!

The tile plant owner's faith in Cecil's talents was not misguided. In those days, to keep the colors of the various designs from running together, it was necessary to have a wide ugly brown line an eighth of an inch wide separating them. Cecil realized how bad this looked so he

searched for a way to make a thin line to draw the designs yet keep the colors separate. At first he mixed ball clay with honey as this was the only thing he could find to keep the clay together. "But when I left a design overnight, the mice would eat it away because of the honey." Finally he noticed one day that the jar of turpentine he had left sitting in his window had evaporated and left an oily resin. He tried mixing it with the clay, and it worked. He contacted chemists in New York and they sent him some of this oil of turpentine.

He then took an old alamite gun,

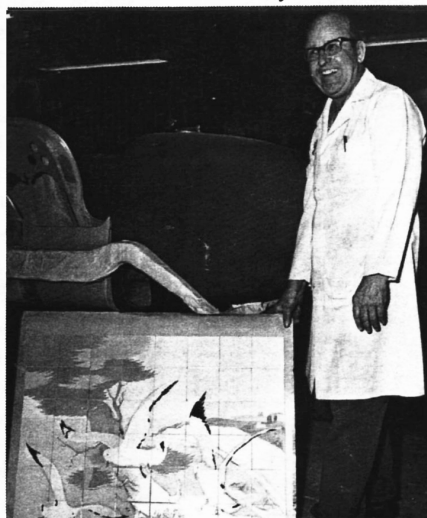
had a brass tip made with a small hole and, using this mixture of oil and ball clay, made thin lines on the tile much

like those of a cake decorator. The lines were raised which kept the colors separate, and they didn't fire out in the kiln. His method was successful and all but revolutionized the decorative process. In fact, he was sent to other tile plants to teach his new method.

Another of his discover-

ies was when the kiln master made a mistake and fired some Chinese red tile at too high a temperature. He was

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Cecil Sanders displays tile work, 1969

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about to throw it out when Cecil saved it, put it into a design and called it Morocco red. "From then on, we couldn't burn enough tile to keep up with the color demand."

Cecil made numerous tile murals for residential bathrooms and public places as well. He remembers a fountain outside the Veterans Hall in Pomona. His largest work was an 8 x 10 foot panel of a lake scene for a hotel in San Diego. The tile work was fronted by rocks with real water running over them.

The gull painting illustrating this article has a strange history. Cecil, when he did it, considered it a cull, and he sold it for \$5.00. Twenty years later, his brother-in-law, who

operated a second hand store, bought the tile from an estate. Cecil saw it, recognized it as his own, and bought it back for \$4. Now, of course, his family won't part with it. His grandson, a tile contractor in southern California, now holds the mural in safe keeping.

Born in Houston, Texas, in 1909, Cecil was a designer for Pomona Tile for five and a half years in the early 30's and never made more than \$19.80 a week. In the early years he commuted from Lawndale, a distance of some 40 miles each way, on motorcycle before purchasing a Star roadster once his job was secure. He might have spent his entire career there had his boss, Leonard Johnson, agreed to give him a raise!

After Pomona Tile, Cecil designed for Redondo Tile, a small tile

company called "Hodjo" and Vernon Potteries in Los Angeles and later held a number of jobs before being employed as a metal shaper by Harrah's Automobile Collection (now the William F. Harrah Automobile Foundation) in Reno, Nevada. At his home in Grass Valley, Cecil, now 79 years old, busies himself with the restoration of his 1904 one-cylinder Cadillac.

Reacting to this renewed interest in his long forgotten past, Cecil stared off into the distance and commented with a sigh, "You're opening up a big can of worms!"

Note: This article (in part) was first published in Harrah-scope, the monthly bulletin of Harrah's Club, Reno, Nevada, May 1970.