

Aiming High: Ann Van Hoeyâ??s Career Shift into Ceramics

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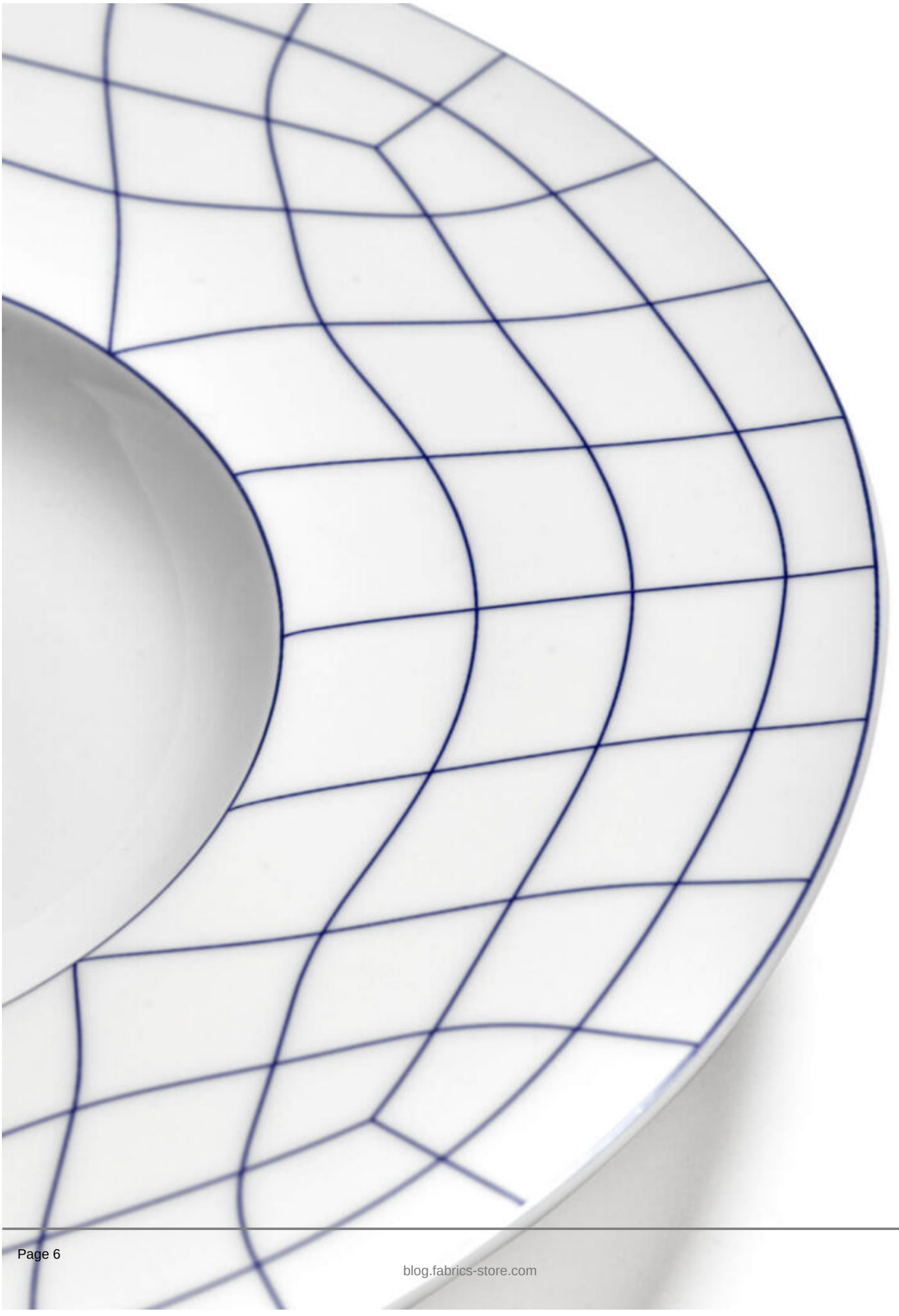
In 2006, at the age of 50, renowned Belgian designer Ann Van Hoey officially began her career as a ceramicist, trading a 20-year career stint in economics for a new creative path. Having pursued ceramics as a hobby for years before taking up a ceramics degree in her late 40s, the leap into the unknown was to be the most fulfilling period of her life so far. She explains, â??For my 50th birthday, in 2006, I decided to try to become a professional ceramicist. My plan was to apply for the big international biennials and see what would happen. It has become an amazing journey: sometimes I still canâ??t believe it myself!â?•

Early in life Van Hoeyâ??s path seemed destined for a different route. She says, â??I was a rather scientific person, interested in math and science at school. At university I studied something called economical engineering, but never used my diploma. The rest of my family were sales representatives for furniture companies, and I also started as a sales rep for furniture companies. I did that for almost 20 years, and then did some other commercial jobs.â?•



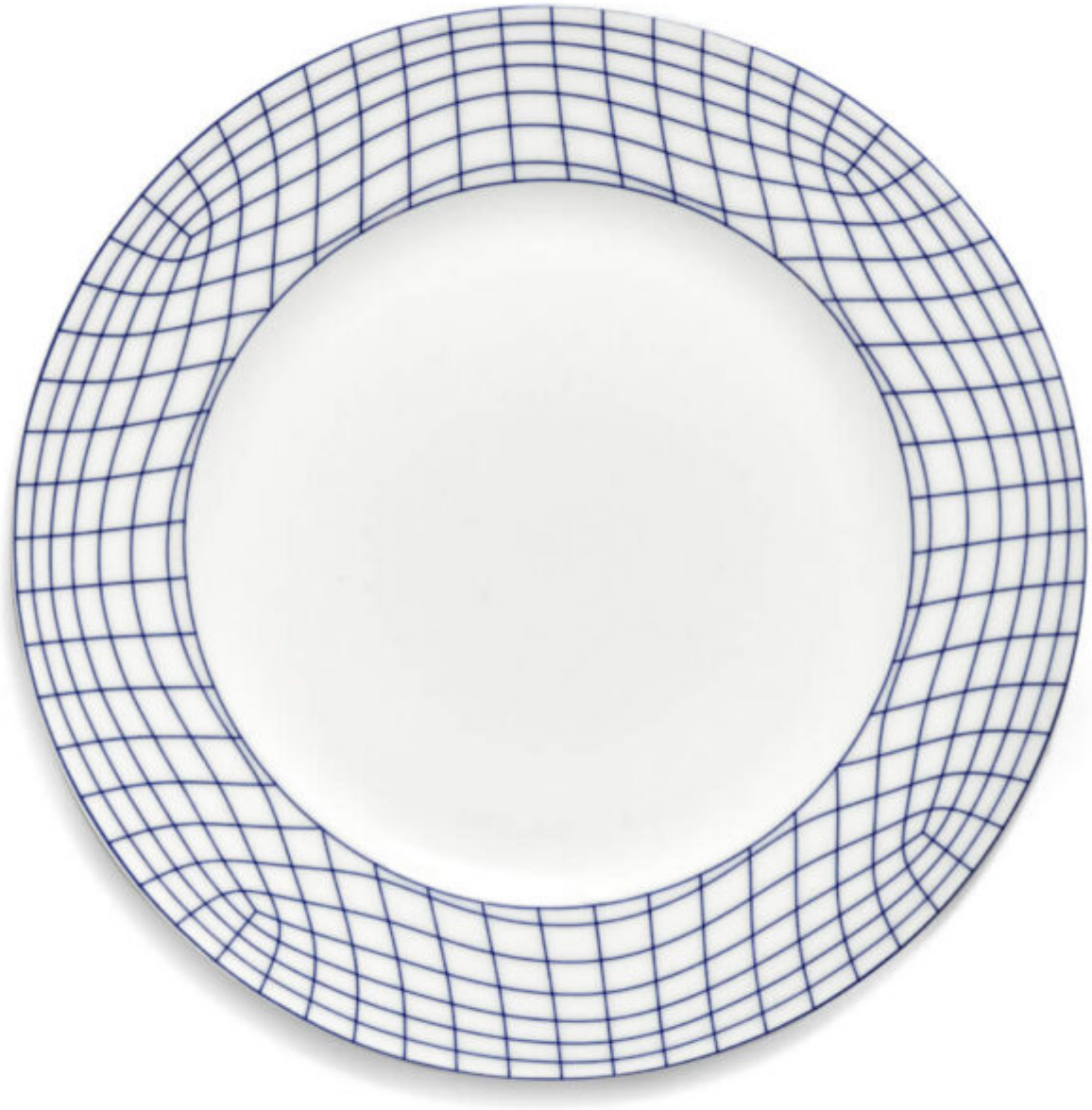
However, as she approached 50, feeling dissatisfied with her professional life, she made the decision to focus on what had been a lifelong interest in ceramics, in a more full-time capacity. Completing her diploma was an enjoyable experience, when she discovered the wonders of dark Earthenware clay from the South of France that would become a core part of her trademark style.

Nonetheless, starting out as a designer and maker was a trickier challenge than she had anticipated, a road beset with moments of isolation and doubt. She says, â??I went very enthusiastically to my studio every morning. But it was not very easy for several reasons. First, itâ??s difficult to distinguish yourself in this area. Second, I underestimated how difficult it would be to work alone all the time. And third, with my economics background I found myself thinking about the costs of materials and labor in making an individual object to make this a viable career. It was all very â??counter-creativeâ??.â?•



Her husband was her greatest cheerleader, pushing her to keep going during a particularly difficult spell of self-doubt. She remembers, â??After a few months I stopped going to the studio â?? it almost turned into a failure. Then my husband said, â??Come on, go back to the studio. Enjoy yourself making your pieces like before. Donâ??t count, and aim as high as possible.â?•â?•

She adds, â??He also told me, â??At 50, youâ??re much too old to have a little exhibition here in our town this year, and then perhaps next year in the little town next to us. You have to aim as high as possible right now because you donâ??t have time to build this up gradually.â?• Normally, Iâ??m not like that. My training is to see if I can do something on a small scale, and if that works then try the next thing, and so on. I donâ??t like to show off. But I said, â??Okay, Iâ??ll try.â?• It was really liberating.â?•



This encouragement, coupled with an inner determination pushed Van Hoey to persevere, and find a distinct artistic voice, creating elegant, minimalist vessels from clay that toy with the borders between form and function which have gone on to attract attention from galleries and arts institutions throughout the world. Since this time, she has expanded into new approaches, playing with differing textures and materials, including bronze casts. â??The moment that I began to believe in myself was a turning point,â?• Van Hoey explains, adding, â??It didnâ??t happen immediately. I still have doubts. But at a certain moment I thought, â??Gosh, I have something here. I really have somethingâ??.â?•

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