Paul Soldner was an army medic during World War II before studying art at Bluffton College and the University of Colorado. In 1954, Soldner studied ceramics in a new program in Los Angeles with Peter Voulkos. He started a pottery equipment business and owned seven patents. After receiving his MFA, he started teaching at Scripps College, and later he was involved with starting the Anderson Ranch Arts Center in Colorado and the National Council on Education for the Ceramic Arts.

Voulkos and Soldner were known for founding the California School of ceramics, combining Japanese and Western elements and techniques in their pottery and moving away from functional ceramics to Abstract Expressionism pieces. Soldner introduced a technique called “American Raku”, a variation on the Japanese raku teaware, which brought out spontaneous results from the kiln. Soldner wrote a book on kilns as well as a memoir and was the subject of a documentary, Playing with Fire.

In 1991, Soldner retired from Scripps. He had studios in Aspen, Colorado and Claremont, California, and died in 2011.

For Soldner, the philosophy of his pottery was key to his work: “There can be no fear of losing what was once planned and there must be an urge to grow along with the discovery of the unknown...make no demands, expect nothing, follow no absolute plan, be secure in change, learn to accept another solution and, finally, prefer to gamble on your own intuition (1973).”