

# New Ceramic Design



Edmund de Waal

# **New Ceramic Design**

EDMUND DE WAAL

**GUILD  
PUBLISHING**

Madison, Wisconsin, U.S.A.

Distributed by North Light Books  
Cincinnati, Ohio, U.S.A.



# GLOSSARY OF POTTERY TERMS

**Anagama kiln** *A single-chambered, wood-fired Japanese kiln.*

**Burnishing** *Rubbing a hard, smooth object, such as a spoon or pebble, across a leather-hard pot in order to polish it.*

**Celadon** *A green to blue-grey stoneware or porcelain glaze, originally from China. The colour is derived from the use of iron in reduction firing.*

**Creamware** *Cream coloured earthenware, first used in the eighteenth century.*

**Earthenware** *Low-fired pottery, often with a greater degree of porosity than stoneware.*

**Grog** *Ground up fired clay, added to give texture or to help in the forming of the pot.*

**On-glaze** *Ceramic colours placed on top of a fired glaze surface and then given an additional firing.*

**Pinching** *Forming a pot between fingers and thumb.*

**Plasticity** *The ability of a clay body to be solid and yet hold water.*

**Porcelain** *A clay body, high in kaolin, that fires white and can be translucent.*

**Press-moulding** *A way of making pots by pressing slabs of clay onto plaster moulds.*

**Raku** *A low-fired Japanese technique that centres on taking red hot pots from the kiln and cooling them in various substances.*

**Reduction firing** *Reduced oxygen firing.*

**Saggar** *A way of protecting pots from direct contact with flames by placing them in refractory boxes.*

**Sgraffito** *Decoration formed by scratching through one slip or glaze to reveal another.*

**Slip-casting** *Liquid clay or slip is poured in moulds to form pots.*

**Stoneware** *Pottery usually fired above 1200°C (2192°F).*

**T material** *A very refractory white stoneware clay containing a coarse molochite. Good for hand-building.*

**Terra sigillata** *An extremely fine ball clay, partially sintered, fired to a semi-sheen.*

**Terracotta** *From the Italian for "fired earth", it simply signifies red earthenware.*

**Under-glaze** *Ceramic colours usually applied to a biscuit fired pot, covered with a transparent glaze and refired.*

**Whieldonware** *An eighteenth century kind of marbled or tortoiseshell decorated earthenware.*

## Dimensions

*Where one measurement is given, the relevant dimension is indicated in the text. Two measurements are listed in the order height x width; three measurements are given as height x width x depth.*

## Acknowledgements

The author and the publisher would like to thank all the artists and in particular the following individuals and institutions for their kind assistance in the loan of transparencies and of ceramic work photographed for this book:

Bridgeman Art Library; Bonhams, London; Garth Clark Gallery; The Hart Gallery; Egg; Galerie Besson; Contemporary Ceramics; Jill Fanshawe Kato; Sara Radstone; Andrew Redman; Terra Keramiek and Claire Thorn.

The Long Sashimi Plates on pages 74 and 100 (bottom) are from the collection of Jill Fanshawe Kato.

We have made every effort to acknowledge everyone and apologise if, in error, anyone has been omitted.

## Photography credits

Noel Allum/Garth Clark Gallery 45; John Andow 118; Ian Auld 70 tr; James Austin 87; Russel Baader 121; Bob Barrett 73; David Beard 43; Jenny Beavan 64; Galerie Besson 10, 61, 102, 107, 119; David Binns 34; Terence Bogue 30, 31, 44, 114, 115; Thomas Bohle 36 m, 36 b, 37 b; Bonhams, London, UK 24, 40, 41; Stephen Brayne 8, 16, 96; Alison Brown 72; Marc Burden 116, 117; G. Carr 22; Mogens Carrebye 1, 14; Jenni Carter 21; Chris Chapman 66; Courtesy of Garth Clark Gallery 25, 45, 93, 94, 95, 99, 105; Joanna Constantinidis 18; David Cripps 43, 54, 55, 78, 79,

88, 98, 110; M. di Bartolomeo 65; Ken Eastman 42, 43; Joel Fildes 50; Michael Flynn 4, 47, 53; Victor France 72; Geoffrey Fuller 52; Hubert Gentry/Anton Gallery Washington, DC 11, 32, 33; Sebastian N. Gordon 124 b; Peter Greenhalf 48; Nicolette Hallett 87; Jane Hamlyn 109; Brian Hand 20; Jerry Hardman-Jones 80; The Hart Gallery 111; Michael Harvey 2, 14, 15, 17, 51, 68, 69, 90, 91, 106, 122, 123; Michael Harvey/Galerie Besson 68; Matthew Hollow 96, 97; J. P. Lefevre 82, 83; Will Levi Marshall 108; Jean-Jacques Morer 67; Sarah Morris 5, 89; Zui Mukhida 56, 57; Graham Murrell

86, 70, 71; Abbas Nazari 75, 84, 85; Grayson Perry 46, 58, 59; Mike Pocklington Inc. 120; Giles Revell 124 t; William Robertson 9, 28, 29; John Rogers 49; Duncan Ross 92; Lily Marie Rua 36 t, 37 t; John Russell 118; Phil Sayer 76, 77; Richard Slee 56, 57; Martin Smith 40; Petrus Spronk 81; Dewi Tannatt Lloyd 38; John Tchalenko 110; Luke Tchalenko 110; Gallery Ueda 67; Simon Upton 19; Irene Vonck 65; John White/Garth Clark Gallery 94; Takeshi Yasuda 12, 13.

First published in 1999 by  
New Holland Publishers (UK) Ltd  
London • Cape Town • Sydney • Auckland

Published in the U.S.A. by GUILD Publishing,  
a division of GUILD.com  
931 East Main Street  
Madison, WI 53703  
TEL 800-930-1856  
TEL 608-227-4147

Distributed in North America by North Light Books,  
an imprint of F+W Publications  
1507 Dana Avenue  
Cincinnati, OH 45207  
TEL 800-289-0963  
TEL 513-531-2222

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ISBN 1 880140-44-6

**Editorial Assistant:** Anke Ueberberg  
**Designer:** Grahame Dudley  
**Special Photography:** Michael Harvey  
**Project Editor:** Rosemary Wilkinson

**Editorial Direction:** Yvonne McFarlane

Reproduction by Modern Age Repro House,  
Hong Kong  
Printed and bound in Singapore by  
Tien Wah Press (Pte) Ltd

04 03 02 01 00 5 4 3 2 1

For Ben, a picture book.

## Author's Acknowledgements

I am most gratefully indebted to all the artists who  
contributed to the making of this book. Gretchen  
Adkins of the Garth Clark Gallery, New York, Jenny  
Macdiarmot and Emi Trowbridge of Galerie Besson,  
Juliana Barrett and Andrew Redman were patient  
and generous beyond any call of duty or friendship.  
To Julian Stair, ceramic interlocutor, I am happily  
indebted, and to my partner and clearest reader,  
Susan Chandler, I owe most of all.

## IMPORTANT

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# INTRODUCTION

CERAMICS ARE UNLIKE THE OTHER ARTS. We feel we know ceramics, we handle them everyday, we welcome them into our domestic lives and place them at the centre of our

rituals. They are often an unremarked constant in the background of our days. But they are a Trojan Horse,

planting a reminder of a profound transformative process in the midst of the continuity. This

process, the changing of common clay into something strange and other, is at the heart of our

myths of making. Adam, after all, was made from clay. Fired clay, malleable earth made

hard through its interaction with fire, is all around us, geologically, historically,

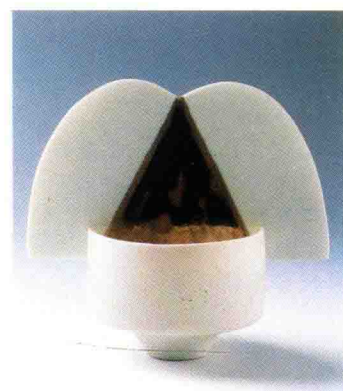
architecturally and, increasingly, technologically. The art of ceramics, however deeply it is

buried, still retains the pulse of this change, a memory of this bridging of two

states of being. This means that everything from porcelain coffee cup to figurative

sculpture shares a basic metaphorical language. Some of the richness of this

language is unfolded in this book.



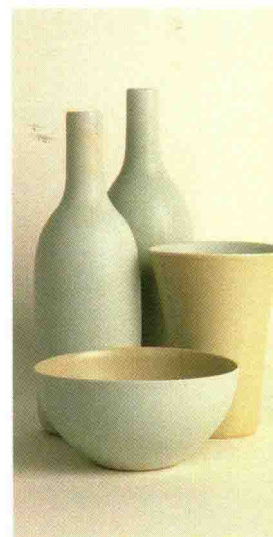




The twentieth century revival of interest in hand-made and decorated pottery is described as the studio ceramics movement. There are many divergent figures within this

movement but there is a shared interest in the qualities and ideas that can be found in pottery.

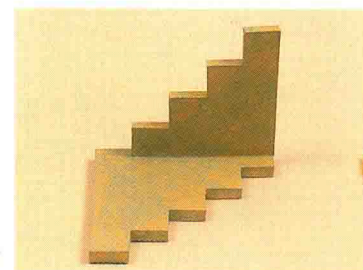
This is a book for makers and students, for collectors and users of studio ceramics – a sourcebook of ideas and images. It has been divided into chapters, not of competing schools of artists but of general approaches to ideas. It cannot hope to be comprehensive: it is a very personal selection of work that I find beautiful, intriguing, moving or even funny. Much of it is very different from the kind of ceramics that I make. But one of the real joys of ceramics is just that exhilarating breath of difference, the sense of ambiguous and continuous reinvention that is a marker for art.



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# CLEAR CONSTRUCTION



**M**ANY POTTERS ARE INTRIGUED by simple forms and clear construction, finding that there is great

subtlety to be explored within these parameters. One of the pleasures of these ceramics is that they seem to tell you how they were made. When you have them in your hands, the story of their making unfolds: whether quick or laborious, unstudied or complex, the process of their creation and the process of handling them come together. In this way, less is very often more.



 **Cargo Dishes (detail). Edmund de Waal.**  
Porcelain, celadon glazes. Max. Ø 38 cm  
(15 in). 1997

*These dishes have strong profiles that are distorted through gentle warping. The edges of the dishes are left unglazed to accentuate them and to contrast with the celadon.*

 **Cut-outs (detail). Ken Eastman.**  
White stoneware clay, coloured slips and oxides. Slab built and painted, fired several times at 1800°C. 16 x 16 x 16 cm  
(6¼ x 6¼ x 6¼ in). 1998

*Eastman explores shadows and angles in his constructed pieces.*

 **Dish. Julian Stair.** Stoneware. Thrown and constructed. Ø 62 cm (24½ in). 1998

*Constructed from thrown elements, this large dish is a striking example of balance and tension between contrasting shapes. The spiral in the middle of the dish, made during the throwing, contrasts with the almost architectural precision of the rim.*







# THE NEW AUSTERITY

There have always been simple pots. Sometimes their simplicity reflected a particular ceremonial use, as in the white glazed pots used on Chinese altars. Sometimes, as with the fiercely plain ceramics of Henry Cole in Victorian England or the pottery of the



Bauhaus, they displayed a strongly negative attitude towards ornamentation. Sometimes it was just the speed of the making of a pot that necessitated simplicity. But more often austerity is a reflection of a belief that the form of a pot is primary and that glazes, surfaces and decoration

should not overwhelm it. This is not an aridly conceptual view of form, rather it is a rich, and sometimes seductive, way of exploring form. It is an approach that is regaining momentum: it is a new austerity that finds a counterpart in contemporary minimalist architecture and sculpture. These pots show that it is possible to make work that resonates with the past, yet is truly challenging.

● **Still Life, Two Bottles, Goblet and Beaker. Gwyn Hanssen Pigott.** Porcelain.  
Max. height 27.5 cm (10¾ in). 1992

*The way in which the shadows intersect between the pots in this group has been given particular attention.*

● **Vase. Rob Barnard.** Stoneware, naturally occurring ash glaze. Anagama-fired.  
22 x 14 cm (8¾ x 5½ in). 1997

*Fired using wood in a Japanese-style kiln, the beauty of this pot depends on the tension between the random markings from the flame and the deliberate clarity of line of the thrown form.*







► **Platter with Handles. Takeshi Yasuda.** Creamware/hi-temp earthenware.

Ø 32 cm (26 1/4 in). 1998

*Yasuda exploits the plasticity of the clay with great dexterity. The two handles distort the roundness of the platter, creating a vortex of spiralling movement.*



► **Milk Jug and Sauce Boat. Takeshi Yasuda.**

Creamware/hi-temp earthenware.

Jug: 17 x 8 x 11 cm  
(6 3/4 x 3 1/4 x 4 1/4 in).

Sauce boat: 13 x 12 x 18 cm  
(5 1/4 x 4 3/4 x 7 in). 1997

*These pots seem thrown almost to the point of collapse – lips seem impossibly thin and forms impossibly stretched. The handles are playful and challenge the user to handle the pot in unexpected ways.*



► **Plateau with Handles. Takeshi Yasuda.**

Creamware/hi-temp earthenware. Ø 34 cm  
(13 1/2 in). 1998

*This is a pot for the display of food that also manages to echo archaic Chinese bronze ritual vessels, through its applied handles. One of Yasuda's strengths is that his pots are historically resonant in this subtle way.*

► **Bowl with a Handle. Takeshi Yasuda.**

Creamware/hi-temp earthenware. Large bowl:  
Ø 40 cm (16 in). Small bowls: Ø 24 cm  
(9 1/2 in). 1998

*These domestic pots work well when handled, used and stacked; the vestigial handles giving a sense of security. All these pots have a soft cream glaze that looks both to eighteenth-century English creamwares and to Chinese stoneware glazes, yet is distinctly contemporary in its austerity.*

