

The MOSAIC BOOK

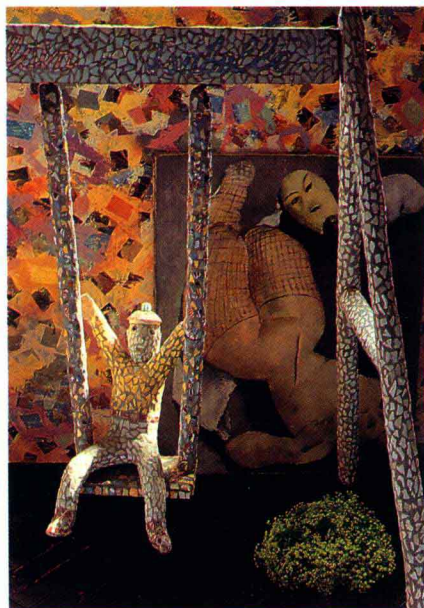
Ideas, Projects and Techniques



PEGGY VANCE and CELIA GOODRICK-CLARKE

The MOSAIC BOOK

Ideas, Projects and Techniques



PEGGY VANCE and CELIA GOODRICK-CLARKE

Special photography by
CLAY PERRY

With thanks to my husband,
Dharminder Singh Kang.
Peggy Vance

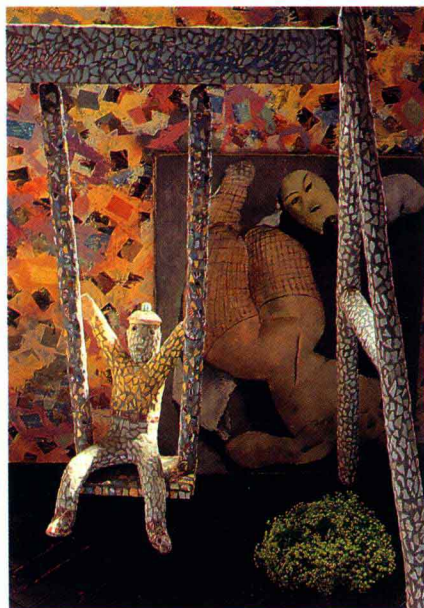
With thanks to Jane Muir, who fought a long
battle to keep mosaic alive through unfashionable years,
Stephen Windsor Clive whose enthusiasm for the art is unbounded,
and Cleo Mussi whose creativity is unlimited.
Celia Goodrick-Clarke

First published 1994 by
Conran Octopus Limited, a part of Octopus Publishing Group
2-4 Heron Quays London E14 4JB
www.conran-octopus.co.uk

Reprinted in 1995, 1996 (twice), 1999

The MOSAIC BOOK

Ideas, Projects and Techniques



PEGGY VANCE and CELIA GOODRICK-CLARKE

Special photography by
CLAY PERRY

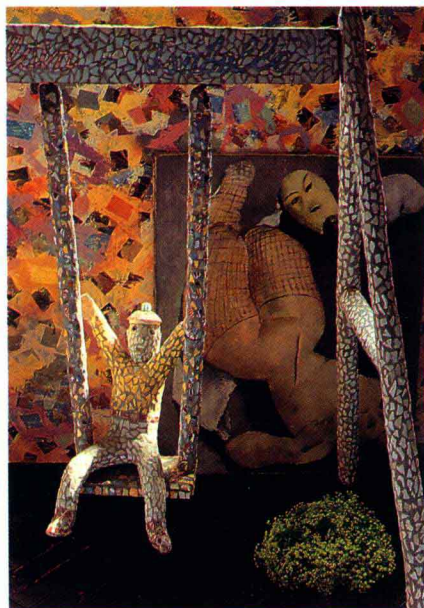
The MOSAIC BOOK





The MOSAIC BOOK

Ideas, Projects and Techniques



PEGGY VANCE and CELIA GOODRICK-CLARKE

Special photography by
CLAY PERRY

With thanks to my husband,
Dharminder Singh Kang.
Peggy Vance

With thanks to Jane Muir, who fought a long
battle to keep mosaic alive through unfashionable years,
Stephen Windsor Clive whose enthusiasm for the art is unbounded,
and Cleo Mussi whose creativity is unlimited.
Celia Goodrick-Clarke

First published 1994 by
Conran Octopus Limited, a part of Octopus Publishing Group
2-4 Heron Quays London E14 4JB
www.conran-octopus.co.uk

Reprinted in 1995, 1996 (twice), 1999

CONTENTS



Foreword 6

Introduction 8

The Glorious Legacy ❖ Tools and Materials

The Direct Method ❖ The Indirect Method ❖ Laying Mosaic Tesserae

Objects 23

Tables ❖ Frames and Mirrors ❖ Containers ❖ Jewellery

Interiors 57

Floors ❖ Walls ❖ Bathrooms ❖ Kitchens

Exteriors 83

Cobblestone Paths ❖ Grottoes and Garden Walls

Garden Containers ❖ Water Features

Motifs 112

Glossary of Terms 124 Addresses 126

Acknowledgements 127 Index 128

FOREWORD

Working as a journalist in the interior design field, I have had the good fortune during the last twelve years to visit hundreds of fascinating homes all over the world. Many of them, I came to realize, were distinguished by the use of mosaic decoration, either as decorative embellishment or as a work of art proudly displayed. Once conscious of the medium, you realize it's a familiar sight everywhere: on the bottom of swimming pools, on the sides of the Underground station, glittering behind bars at restaurants, or discreetly colouring the floors of sober banks. I have even seen Cornish villages adorned with pebbles, shells and bright chippings of tile and glass.

And yet mosaic is not a mere designer accessory that relates purely to twentieth-century style. Mosaic is the oldest, most durable and



most functional art form, with colours that never fade, and materials that withstand sun, rain, frost or even centuries of burial. Carlo Bertelli says in his famous book *Mosaics*, 'mosaic art flows through history like a great river through a porous desert, disappearing and reappearing again'. Colours in early mosaics tended to be of natural stone: soft greens, blue, ochre, white, terracotta and black, but gradually highlights of

glass were added. A dazzling kaleidoscope of colour was introduced with glass smalti by the Byzantine masters, who found that by angling smalti in the mortar they could create brilliant plays of light on the surface patterns. The ancients also believed that glancing lights and shards of mirror contained a 'flash of spirit'. Which is why outdoor mosaics look so lovely in the rain, gleaming amongst the wet foliage.

In principle, mosaic is simple to create – it can be tackled by anyone who can tile a wall or glue down a collage. In practice, it needs to





be carefully conceived, designed, planned and executed for a really professional finish. For any beginner, there is one important point to remember: the simple design is the best design. A complete novice might start with something that is regular and flat, such as a mirror surround (see pp.42–3), or that does not take long to complete, such as small-scale jewellery (see pp.52–5).



On a final note, I think it is important to stress that the projects we have chosen are really intended to be inspirational ideas to provoke a little lateral thinking and increase your understanding and appreciation of this exciting art form. Enjoy!

Celia Goodrick-Clarke

THE GLORIOUS LEGACY

At heart we are perhaps all mosaicists, for who can resist the temptation to colour in noughts, fit the last piece of a jigsaw or make patterns with loose buttons or sweets.

The ancient art of mosaic derives from just such a basic desire for order and ornamentation. Five thousand years ago the Sumerians created mural patterns by driving coloured clay cones into walls, and by the third century B.C. the Greeks were constructing representational mosaics out of variously coloured uncut pebbles. Since these early times man has used 'bits' of stone, ceramic, glass, shell, plastic and many other more unusual materials to create mosaics for public and private buildings, spaces and purposes. The variety of possible applications is tremendous, including interior and exterior schemes, furniture, jewellery and an enormous range of decorative objects.



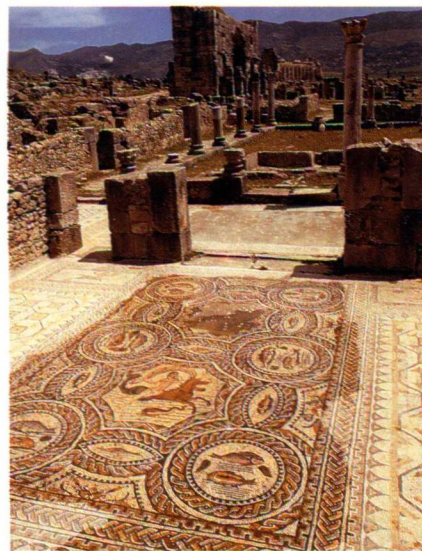
The permanence of the materials used has meant that much mosaic has survived in good condition, including many exceptional Roman works. Inspired by Hellenistic examples, the Romans exploited the functional and decorative qualities of the medium to the full, using it both for hardwearing pavimental and intricate mural

decoration. Mosaics have been found across the entire area of the Roman Empire exhibiting an enormous range of genres and styles – from conventionalized compositions depicting the gods to closely observed scenes of everyday life, simple monochrome 'silhouette' images, detailed studies of animals and an inexhaustible repertoire of abstract border and infill designs.

During the reign of Emperor Justinian (A.D. 518–27) Roman, Barbarian and Eastern influences contributed to the fruition of the

The panel depicting the Triumph of Neptune (below left), which dates from the first half of the third century A.D., demonstrates the sophistication of late Roman mosaic in the fineness of its tesserae, its close description of anatomical and other detail, and the broad, sinuous sweep of its composition.

The popularity of pavimental mosaics across the Roman Empire can be attributed both to technical advances that allowed for swifter production and to the fact that the Romans quarried enormous quantities of local marble wherever they went. The Moroccan pavement (below) accords with the convention for emblemata – more intricately worked panels – to be inserted



within a dense framework of abstract border designs.

The presbytery of San Vitale in Ravenna contains two outstanding panels depicting Emperor Justinian and Empress Theodora. In the former (opposite), glass smalti, precious and semi-precious stones are used to convey the splendour of the robed and crowned Emperor and his retinue.



Byzantine style. Christian pictorial conventions were becoming well-established, with a hierarchy of images evolving in response to the encouragements of patronage. Mosaic fast became a primary medium for the decoration of Christian churches, a natural extension of the Byzantine practice of cladding walls with a decorative marble skin.

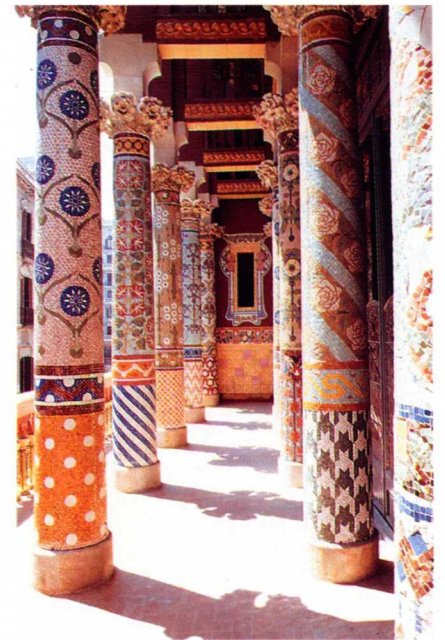
The mosaics of the church of San Vitale in Ravenna, the last Imperial capital of Italy, consummately illustrate the accomplishments of the period: the unfettered use of vibrant colour (including the introduction of gold smalti); the combining of different materials; and the creation of an undulating surface that exploits reflection.



The fashion for mosaic to imitate painting reached a peak in the eighteenth century when large mosaic panels were executed that employed similar compositions and an enormous 'palette' of painterly hues (left).

Art Nouveau, and particularly its Catalan offshoot, modernisme, resulted in many civic buildings being adorned with an exuberant agglomeration of abstract and stylized pattern (below).

Mosaic was integral to Antonio Gaudí's distinctive architecture, used as a dynamic and expressive means of colouring form (opposite).



The Byzantine style of fifth- and sixth-century Ravenna was to be sustained and developed in Venice and to reach its ultimate expression in Constantinople, the centre of Orthodox Christianity, between the thirteenth and fifteenth centuries.

Initially, the Renaissance saw a decline in the practice of mosaic, but by the mid-fifteenth century

large quantities of smalti were being produced in Murano, and new works were created influenced by contemporary developments in painting.

A fascinating dialogue ensued between painting and mosaic, each medium imitating the other and striving to create illusionistic effects. Panels were worked with tesserae so fine as to have a seemingly

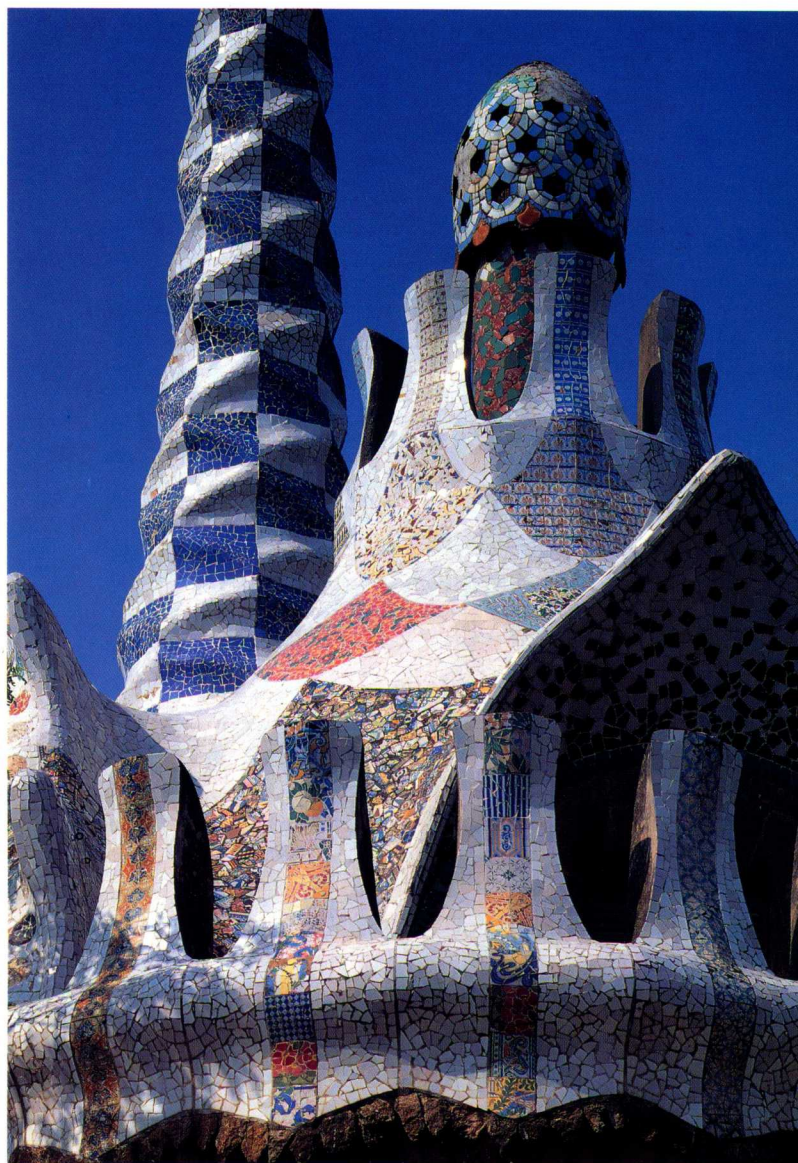
smooth texture and church interiors were frequently painted in imitation of gold mosaic.

But it was in the late sixteenth century that Renaissance mosaic reached its apogee in the enormous works for St Peter's Basilica in Rome, their compositions suffused with the painterly qualities that made Ghirlandaio (as reported by Vasari) remark that mosaic was '*La vera pittura per l'eternità*' (the true way of painting for eternity).

By the eighteenth century Rome was firmly established as a great centre for mosaic, a studio having been set up within the Vatican, the primary aim of which was to produce further monumental works for St Peter's. At the same time as these massive panels were being executed, however, there also existed in Rome a vogue for miniature mosaic using tesserae barely visible to the naked eye.

The eclectic historicism of the nineteenth century fuelled a revival of arts and crafts of all kinds, including mosaic, which became increasingly widely practised, with dedicated schools springing up to serve large public commissions (including St Paul's Cathedral in London and the Paris Opera). The famous workshop of Antonio Salviati in Murano was a particular success, producing fine reproductions of historic mosaics for worldwide export.

At the turn of the century, however, the burgeoning Art Nouveau movement began to loosen the ties that had bound mosaic to an imitative, representational language, allowing the introduction of pure pattern, abstracted and stylized forms. Relatively ordinary buildings in major cities, most notably Paris, Barcelona and Prague, developed a



'rash' of mosaic decoration, and Barcelona in particular was distinguished by the exuberant and idiosyncratic creations of the architect Antonio Gaudí. His influence was to forge a path towards complete freedom of expression in mosaic, encouraging such artists as Klimt, Chagall and Kokoschka to design for this most enduring of media.

TOOLS AND MATERIALS

Tesserae

These are the basic building blocks that form the mosaic. At the start of any mosaic project it is advisable to have planned and prepared sufficient tesserae to complete it. Listed below are the most common types, but to these may be added a host of other objects and materials, including semi-precious stones, shells, buttons, *faux* gems and pearls.

Smalti These rectangular chunks of opaque glass – generally 10 x 15 x 7 mm ($\frac{3}{8}$ x $\frac{1}{2}$ x $\frac{1}{4}$ in) are hand-made in Italy, available in an enormous range of colours, and offer an irregular, highly light-reflective surface. Sold by the half kilo, they are of a standard price regardless of their colour, although gold and silver (plain or ‘ripple’) are more expensive, having finely beaten precious metal sandwiched between a thick layer of coloured glass and a thinner veneer of plain glass. These may be used with either side uppermost, depending upon the effect desired; their standard size is 20 x 20 x 4 mm ($\frac{3}{4}$ x $\frac{3}{4}$ x $\frac{3}{16}$ in).

Vitreous glass These lozenges of opaque glass – 20 x 20 x 4 mm ($\frac{3}{4}$ x $\frac{3}{4}$ x $\frac{3}{16}$ in) – are smooth on the front and slightly corrugated on the back to provide key. Their range of colours is not quite as wide as that of smalti, but they are strong, less expensive (though the price of different colours varies), highly weather resistant and very easy to cut with nippers (*see* p.13). These tesserae may be bought loose in a mixed bag, in single colours, or stuck face down on paper, making them ideal for the indirect method (*see* pp.18–19).

Marble Although somewhat difficult to cut (*see* p.13), marble offers a fantastic natural range of colours and patterns. It may either be polished or left matt, in which case it should be sealed.

Stones and pebbles Hard stones are preferable, e.g. flints, quartz, granite and limestone. Stones and pebbles should be deeply embedded in a cement base.

Ceramic tesserae These range from plain white household tiles, which may be painted and fired, to small earthenware tiles and broken crockery. Whilst the variety is endless, and the material generally easy to cut, ceramic can be vulnerable to frost.



Tesserae-cutting tools, tesserae-fixing glues and adhesives, and health and safety equipment (above). Clockwise from top: scalpel; Stanley knife; palette knife; glass cutter; general-purpose engineer's pliers; flat-edged pliers; spring-loaded nippers; hammer; dust mask; goggles; scissors; brown paper; cement tile adhesive; gum arabic; PVA adhesive; rubber spatula.



The most traditional and most effective of tools for cutting smalti, marble and stone, the hammer and hardie (the latter sometimes called a bolster blade) may be purchased only from specialist suppliers (see p.120). In order to provide a firm and secure cutting edge, the hardie is generally embedded in the sawn-off end of a log and for added durability both the distinctive, curved hammer and the hardie may be tipped with tungsten carbide. To cut a tessera, hold the mosaic material between the thumb and finger of the left hand (or right hand for left-handers), its longest edge across the blade. Hold the hammer in the right hand (or left for left-handers), positioned so as lightly to strike the mosaic material directly above the hardie blade's edge. Practice is required to master accurate cutting.



Tesserae-cutting tools

In addition to the primary tools below, most mosaicists will find it useful to have pliers, a glass cutter and a hammer.

Nippers (mosaic cutters or tile nippers). These are ideal for fashioning vitreous glass and ceramic into fairly precise shapes (see p.17). The spring-loaded

variety is less arduous for long-term use.

Hammer and hardie A traditional tool, comprising an anvil and a hammer (see caption above), used primarily for cutting marble and smalti. Ideally, both parts should be tungsten-tipped for strength, and the hammer should be in proportion with the size of the hardie.