

AS SEEN IN

PERIOD LIVING

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CRAFT REVIVAL

Behind the Craft

Naomi Jones talks to Alex Zdankowicz, who designs and hand-makes decorative kitchen and bathroom tiles

What urges you to create?

I can never sit still, so my energy is always channelled into creating something, anything: sounds, shapes or words.

Did you have formal art training?

I studied ceramics, sculpture, printing and product design at Chelsea College of Art and Design from 1977-1980.

Where do you find inspiration for your tile designs?

When working for a private client, I look at what surrounds them, inside the home and out. But generally inspiration can be taken from anything, even a broken twig or a sheet of crumpled paper. Often I'll draw dozens of random pencil lines until something from the shapes speaks to me.

Who have been your greatest influences?

The artists Gustav Klimt for the richly embellished pattern in his paintings and Mark Rothko for the opposite reason. I was also influenced early on in my career by the Art Deco architecture of the Odeon cinemas.

Is your craft a full-time occupation?

Yes. Tile-making is a labour intensive and lengthy process due to the slow drying of the clay – it can't be rushed. Consequently, half a dozen projects can take months.

Where is your studio?

On a farm on the Hampshire/West Sussex border; to have views of the nearby South Downs is inspiring.

How would you describe the atmosphere?

Occasionally chaotic if I'm constantly filling and emptying the kiln, and especially if I need to use the floor to lay out my work. But most of the time I would say it is serene;

I think clay has that effect: it's such a wonderful, natural material.

Have you taken on any unusual commissions?

The one I'm working on at the moment – five free-form segmented and sculpted columns for a swimming pool wall. The project is a real departure from designing for a kitchen or bathroom.

Which creation are you most proud of?

Any collaboration, such as the bathroom I created for the British Interior Design Exhibition in 1990 for Paris Ceramics when I was designing in France; this was in conjunction with friends who ran a studio in London, where I'm from. The theme was aquatic, and included relief shell tiles (which are still available at Paris Ceramics) and architectural components. I even designed starfish to house spotlights on the ceiling.

Who would you say is your biggest fan?

Johnny Grey, one of Britain's most influential kitchen designers.

What do you do to take your mind off work?

I love to cook: there are many similarities with ceramics – the preparation of raw materials, adding and weighing ingredients, and finally finishing in the oven.

Have you got any advice for budding creatives?

Relax, take a step back from your normal routine, rediscover childhood curiosity, and play with shapes and colours. Don't be afraid to make mistakes, either – I believe in serendipity.

Visit alexzdankowicz.co.uk or call 07791 725826.



TOP Alex at work in his studio

ABOVE Scale mosaic of coloured glazes and lustrous

BELOW FROM LEFT Dome

and Star design; Chequer is

a mix of cream and pewter

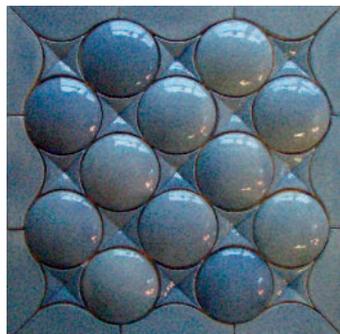
glazes with mother-of-pearl

and platinum lustres; Alex's

Dome frieze for Johnny Grey's

garden kitchen for Alitex at the

Chelsea Flower Show 2011



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