

AS SEEN IN

# PERIOD LIVING

TRADITIONAL HOMES, INTERIORS, GARDENS, ANTIQUES & RENOVATION

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](http://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

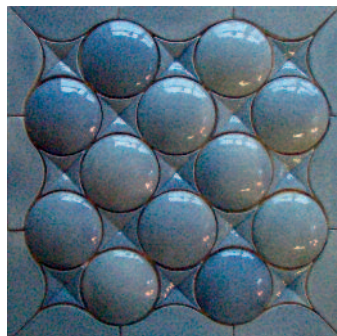
glazes with mother-of-pearl

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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