

Andy Shaw

DESIGNING FOR DURABILITY AND USE



Ceramics Monthly: What elements are central to your sets that add to their function?

Andy Shaw: Function has always been the foundation of my work. The transfer of my time and efforts into a physical object that I can share with others and that they can fit into their lives brings me great satisfaction. The *Tableware* series addresses utility within the parameters of functional dishes, components of which include the round and multiples. As a potter, I have loved using the circle as a starting place to develop other shapes but I found that those shapes confused many people about function. Since most of the dishes in my growing-up years were round, I started to think that a round bowl implied soup, cereal, or ice cream before asserting itself as an object. I liked this thinking and adopted the round form to communicate use. At the same time, I began to see the limits on the presentation of single handmade dishes and how they can sometimes suggest gift, one-of-a-kind, or something that would run interference on utility. So I started to exhibit plates and bowls stacked and cups grouped in fours as if ready for a friend to pour a round. To me, multiple dishes suggested a serving portion rather than non-use. Clients can use or not use the tableware to their liking. In making these design decisions for myself, I was simply trying through form to communicate my objectives effectively.



1 Dinner plate, 10 in. (25 cm) in diameter, wheel-thrown porcelain, water-etched pattern, celadon glaze, fired to cone 10 in reduction, 2014.
2 Tumbler, 4¼ in. (11 cm) in height, wheel-thrown porcelain, water-etched pattern, celadon glaze, fired to cone 10 in reduction, 2014.
3 Stack of dinner plates, 10 in. (25 cm) in diameter, wheel-thrown porcelain, water-etched pattern, celadon glaze, fired to cone 10 in reduction, 2014. 1–3: Courtesy of Schaller Gallery.



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CM: How have the patterns on your work evolved over time?

AS: The patterns started out as a way to fill the surface. Drawing does not come naturally to me, so I started working with lines and grids. Pretty simple. Inevitably that became dull and I needed to figure out something else, so I made slight changes to one grid square, repeated that in every square and voila, a pattern emerged. I've painted well over 100 patterns and the work has since evolved to be a study of these slight changes and the resulting patterns. Most recently, the grid as a physical part of the waxed and water-etched relief pattern has dropped away. It is now the underlying structure rather than part of the finished pattern—less obvious, but still essential.

CM: What functional considerations do you find most important to keep in mind as you create work?

AS: Design decisions often mean that to have one objective, another must be relinquished. At best, I'd like my work to be used regularly. Formally, a crisp rim would



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4 Vases, 17 in. (43 cm) in height, 2013. Photo: Kevin Duffy. 5 Espresso mug, 3 in. (8 cm) in height, 2013. 6 Dinner plate, 10 in. (25 cm) in diameter, 2014. 5–6: Courtesy of Schaller Gallery. 7 Dinner plate with shrimp, 10 in. (25 cm) in diameter, 2012. 8 Serving bowl, 4½ in. (11 cm) in diameter, 2013. Photo: Kevin Duffy. 4–8: Wheel-thrown porcelain, water-etched pattern, celadon glaze, fired to cone 10 in reduction.

define all of my pots so much better than the fatter, rounded one that I use. In the rim, I have chosen durability as a priority. Dishes can take a good clanking when used and I want my pots to be able to withstand a hearty dinner prep and cleanup. A gallery owner once called me to say that a table of my pots had been knocked over in the showroom and that my pots all bounced. They were fine. I love the thought of bouncing porcelain—not the traditional delicate application of porcelain, but I like the way it works.

CM: How do you balance the need for an interesting pattern with the desire to maintain a functional eating surface?

AS: I keep the pattern depth very light so that the glaze can fill in and level the surface. Friends shared a photo of their dinner with shrimp arranged very much in scale and regularity with my surface grid pattern. That was a tremendous surprise!

CM: What are your reasons for working in a pale celadon glaze palette for your dinnerware?

AS: As an artist, I want to make work that satisfies my creative interests, but I like to remember that with functional objects, the

client will take the pots home and incorporate them into their lives in ways I won't ever know. I think of the neutral glaze as providing a place of vacancy, an intentionally designed withholding that promotes the cook to bring completion to the work. I use vacancy as a means to communicate the activity of function. Cooks then have options every night to create color combinations and texture arrangements in their meals with the neutral background of the *Tableware*.

the author Andy Shaw is an associate professor at Louisiana State University in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. Visit shawtableware.com, to see more of his work.

Check out a video of Andy Shaw discussing the ideas central to his *Tableware* series and an archival article on his work from the October 2005 issue in the digital PDF edition available at www.ceramicsmonthly.org.

