

# Picking up the pieces

The artist Angie Lewin seeks ceramics of all kinds, which are often the starting point for her artworks. Among those has been her *Honesty Blue*, commissioned by the V&A, in response to their ceramic collection. *Sue Herdman* finds out more about her collecting

**I've been amassing ceramics for years.** Friends will look out for pieces for me. I was given a beautiful cup and saucer designed by Graham Sutherland, which has featured in several watercolours and drawings. The carefully observed flower, which is printed onto the inside base of the bowl, works so well in layered compositions with feathers, seaweeds and grasses. I also collect Staffordshire figures. I often select a ceramic piece because I can see that it would be perfect for a still life artwork. I use such pieces to store the seed heads and grasses that I collect; these then create 'accidental' still lives on my studio shelves. Along with pieces with Eric Ravilious and Edward Bawden designs – and examples of Rye Pottery that find their way into my prints and paintings – I also collect tea bowls and lustreware jugs. I can see the patterns flowing beyond the surface of the mug or plate and mingling with the plants and grasses that are displayed in and around it.

**I always been drawn to pottery.** On a daily level I've long enjoyed eating and drinking from a tactile and visually pleasing plate or cup – drinking from a special mug is a positive start to the day. We have several of Colin Saunders' striped mugs (my favourites). I've been attracted to pattern and stylisation from an early age, so ceramics, along with textiles, have had an influence on my prints and paintings, as well as, later in my career, the designs I produce for St Jude's Prints. Ceramics also remind me of locations. In my lithograph *Cromarty Bowl*, for instance, a Scottish spongeware piece, which I discovered in an antique shop, is filled with lichen, feathers and berries collected on a walk on the same day, on the Black Isle.



**My first piece came when I was four or five years old.**

An elderly relative gave me a tiny chipped Royal Doulton coffee cup, hand-painted with an image of a shepherd in a Cotswold landscape. I still have it.

**Two artists associated with ceramics have been especially important to me.**

Eric Ravilious' pieces or Wedgwood have been a huge source of inspiration. The transfer print process used to decorate the china has retained all the subtlety to be found in his drawings and lithographs. He and Edward Bawden were both great artist/designers who could design specifically for a product, whilst never compromising on their personal style. I have a number of pieces by both. Among the contemporary makers I admire are Tanya Gomez, Terry Shone, Clive Bowen, Philip Eglin, Paul Young, Sian Paterson, Ben Arnup, Lisa Hammond and Andrew Crouch.

**When I had my own gallery** we displayed St Jude's fabrics alongside the prints and paintings of the artist/designers, to give it a domestic feeling. It seemed natural to include furniture and, of course, ceramics too. We stocked vintage pieces – Rye and Hornsea Pottery and Susie Cooper – alongside fresh work by Antje Ernestus and Daniel Reynolds. Our choices were instinctive. I love Rye Pottery for the hand-painted quality with the scratches, brush marks and simple, pleasing shapes. Hornsea is also evocative of a certain period (two *Heirloom* herb jars appear in my *Two Green Jars*). Many of the pieces we featured were not by known names, but if we liked the shape, or the way they co-ordinated with the palette of a certain fabric, then they would be included.

**I like less than perfect pieces.** On a practical level, if a piece is chipped or cracked they are affordable and can be used as storage and in compositions without fear of damage. I am cautious about my Ravilious ceramics – they are fragile. I have lots of damaged pieces. I like their sense of having been well used, the chips and staples adding further interest. I recently found a huge lustreware bowl in Spitalfields. It had been smashed into pieces and then reassembled in an amateur way. Although it would be beautiful if perfect, the cracks cutting through the decoration have a fascination for me. Shards of pottery are a wonderful record of place. I scour places for fragments. If a cup or plate is accidentally broken, I love to include a piece in a print or painting.

**We're lucky to own one of Norman Makinson's Wedgwood mugs.** It was designed for the *Festival of Britain* in 1951 and I featured it in *Festival Mug*. I'm also seeking examples of Scottie Wilson's later work for Royal Worcester. And I am keen to add some of Susan and Richard Parkinson's work to our collection – I love the spontaneous decoration and stylised shapes.

**When I was at school I visited Kettle's Yard in Cambridge.** There I saw, for the first time, that artwork,



ceramics, books and natural objects such as pebbles, seedpods and feathers can be displayed together in a domestic setting. In my own home I like to intersperse ceramics on bookshelves. We also have a large Georgian plate rack, which displays platters and cups of all types, from chipped tea bowls to contemporary pieces, but also postcards and photographs. I particularly like to see feathers displayed in mugs and vases, or scattered on a plate with berries and the pale, chalky greens of lichens.

**We have a Paul Young 'pew group' piece at home.**

It was commissioned from Paul and inspired by 18th-century pieces produced in Staffordshire. It features myself, with flowers, and my husband Simon with his saxophone, along with our two terriers. It's beautifully observed, humorous and decorative.

**The V&A has always been an important resource for me,** dating back to my time at Central School of Art in the 1980s. I've visited the ceramics gallery many times. I love the layering and stacking and the way you can look through seemingly endless glass cabinets at countless pieces. It is a good place to sketch. I don't have detailed knowledge of ceramics, but I find it a liberating space – and each time I find a new favourite. They asked me to create a new print edition (pictured on page 40), which was inspired by the blue and white ceramics in the collection.

**When I'm hunting pottery pieces** I visit The Scottish Gallery in Edinburgh, Richard Scott Antiques in Holt in Norfolk, the Craft Potters Association's Contemporary Ceramics Centre, and the Contemporary Applied Arts (both in London) ... I also can't resist junk and antique shops everywhere.

**Observing ceramics is rewarding.** Unravelling how a ceramic artist has stylised natural forms to create surface pattern is very informative. Reinterpreting this into a different medium, such as linocut, screen print or watercolour, and combining it with my depiction of platforms and natural finds brings rich rewards. 

Angie's next major display of work will be as part of St Jude's In The City at *The Bankside Gallery* ([banksidegallery.com](http://banksidegallery.com)), 23 Nov–4 Dec. Find out more about Angie's work at [angielewin.co.uk](http://angielewin.co.uk) and [stjudesprints.co.uk](http://stjudesprints.co.uk)