



Part 1

A MODERN  
APPROACH TO  
TRADITION

# 1 Introduction

## Handmade tableware

In the 19th century, at the end of the Industrial Revolution, John Ruskin and William Morris criticised industrially produced wares and inspired the Arts and Crafts movement. They proposed a return to hand-crafted decorative arts, which should be both beautiful and useful. The concept of the handmade object being made available to all was raised again in the 20th century by potter Bernard Leach, who established the studio pottery movement. His vision of the individual artist making pots in a studio or workshop inspired many to become potters in the 1960s and '70s. Craft has again become popular in the 21st century as people tire of manufactured wares and crave the qualities of handmade work, realising that beautifully designed and made tableware can enhance everyday life.

Nowadays there are designer-makers who not only make things themselves, but whose understanding of the materials and making processes enables them to design pieces for industrial manufacture. These potters produce thrown or hand-built prototypes for industrial production, bringing a handmade feel to mass-produced wares. Making by hand can become a fulfilling way of life, although it is hard work to earn a living from a craft. For this reason, many studio potters tire of tableware production and make higher-priced individual pieces instead, encouraged by craft organisations trying to raise the profile of craft to that

of art. The resulting pots are often too expensive to use and end up sitting on a shelf, while the humble handmade mug or bowl continues to be used every day. This book aims to showcase the work of those potters who are committed to making tableware.

## Changing habits

Naturally, changing attitudes and habits in food preparation and service and the rituals of mealtimes have also led to changes in the way tableware is used and produced. The way we eat now is less formal than during the previous century and a traditional matching dinner service might only be used on special occasions. This gives rise to new categories of tableware and new roles for familiar pieces. Besides formal dinnerware, there is a new category of 'casual tableware' for everyday use. We use mismatched pieces, combining mass-produced plates and bowls alongside handmade pottery, bringing art into a domestic setting. Using handmade pots can bring a similar feeling of warmth and human contact to eating a home-cooked meal, and this current appreciation of the handmade is very encouraging for makers of tableware.

## Design sources

Today's makers and designers draw on a rich history of pottery and industrial design for ideas, and there is greater awareness today of the different design traditions. One of the aims of this book is to bring together a number of different strands which have influenced contemporary tableware design.

During the Sung dynasty (AD 960–1279), the Chinese were the first to make durable, mass-produced porcelain tableware and by the 16th century were exporting it around the world. The Japanese adapted pottery-making techniques from China and Korea and added their own unique character from the 16th century onwards. Meanwhile in post-medieval Europe, a rustic style of country pottery was evolving, which ended with the Industrial Revolution. At the beginning of the 20th century, the many strands that were to influence contemporary tableware came together. The studio pottery movement was established by Bernard Leach in England, while modernism took hold across Europe. Then the Second World War forced many talented artists and designers to flee to England and America, where they were able to exert a subsequent influence on design. In Scandinavia, folk art and textile design influenced the decoration of mass-produced tableware, with artists and studio potters collaborating with industry.



Linda Bloomfield, plate, bowl, cup and saucer, and dimpled jug, 2011. Thrown porcelain, plate width: 21 cm (8¼ in.).  
Photo: David Fawcett, Seek and Adore.



Sarah Spackman, *After they'd gone*, 2010.  
Oil painting, 60 x 101 cm (23½ x 40 in.).  
Photo: by the artist.



Adam Frew, tea set, celadon and stained porcelain, 2011; Sam Sweet, cut-crystal milk bottles, hand-blown lead crystal, 2011; Emma Clegg, cake stand, thrown and modelled porcelain, 2011. Diameter: 25 cm (10 in.); Miriam Hanid, silver bowl and spoon, 2011.  
Photo: courtesy of Lisa Harrison, Miratis.

# 2 China

## Porcelain

The porcelain industry at Jingdezhen in southern China started over a thousand years ago during the Sung dynasty. There were specialists for each part of the production process: clay preparation, throwing, decoration and firing. The kilns could be as long as 50 m (164 ft) and could hold up to 20,000 pots. The highest-quality pots – fine white porcelain and celadon – were reserved for the imperial court. The Chinese potters reached a high standard of technical skill, making fine, thin-walled porcelain with perfectly applied glazes.

During the Ming dynasty (AD 1368–1644), a pure form of cobalt ore was imported from Persia to make a blue underglaze and by the 17th century large quantities of this blue and white porcelain were being exported to Europe. The porcelain shapes and decoration were tailored to meet European demand for dinner and tea sets. Chinese porcelain was greatly admired in Europe and enormous efforts were made to discover the secrets of producing it. At the same time, fine monochrome yellow porcelain was being made for the imperial court. This ware was bisque-fired to a high temperature, then glazed with a low-temperature lead glaze containing iron oxide.

## Chinese influence on Europe

Chinese pots have influenced the shapes of pots being made in the West from the time they were first exported to Europe. In imperial China, shapes were usually symmetrical. Jars often had a high shoulder and a narrow base. Bowls were hemispherical, with a wide foot-ring and a fine, out-turned rim. Saucers were first imported to the West from China in the 17th century, together with small, handleless cups that originated in the formal tea ceremony of the Chinese court, where tea bowls were placed on decorative stands.

Teapots were first exported to Europe when tea drinking became popular there around 1650. Teapots had been made in China since the Ming dynasty in forms very similar to those used today. The red earthenware teapots made in Yixing were popular with Chinese intellectuals.

They were small, holding only enough tea for one person, hand-moulded in natural forms and burnished. When they were exported to Europe, silver mounts were often added to the spout and handle, for connecting the lid by a chain. This style was imitated by the Elers brothers, two Dutch potters working in Staffordshire in 1690.

Teapots were also made in Dehua in China around 1650–1700 from a type of white porcelain called blanc de Chine. Dehua teapots were copied by porcelain factories across Europe and some look surprisingly modern today.



Dehua teapot, incised with poem, blanc de Chine porcelain, 1650–1700, height: 11 cm (4 in.).  
Photo: Victoria and Albert Museum, London.



Blue and white porcelain bowls in Jingdezhen, China, 2003. Photo: Fay de Winter.



Yixing teapot, red earthenware, 2003.  
Height: 10 cm (4 in.). Photo: Fay de Winter.



Blue and white porcelain bowl with hand-painted fish design, exported from China, 1990, diameter: 23 cm (9 in.).  
Photo: Henry Bloomfield.

# 3 Japan

## Japanese tableware

In Japan, tableware has traditionally played an important part in enhancing the serving of food. Japanese meals often comprise small courses, each served on a separate dish. There is usually a small dish of pickled vegetables, a bowl of rice and a small, lidded lacquerware bowl of soup. Fish is often served on a flat dish and hot stews are cooked at the table in larger lidded bowls. Seasonal variations in food are reflected in the shape and decoration of the serving dishes; bowls decorated with plum blossom or maple leaves are used in the appropriate season. The bowls are often deeper in the winter to hold the heat, and shallower in summer when cold dishes are served. There can be several different

cooking methods used in one meal, involving grilled, fried, boiled, steamed and raw food, each type served in its own bowl or dish.

There are many styles of pottery – some rustic, such as the unglazed, wood-fired Bizen ware, some highly decorated, such as Oribe, which has areas of copper-green glaze and iron-oxide brushwork. Each type of pottery comes from a different region and has its own special character. Great attention is paid to the presentation of food in Japan and handmade pottery is highly appreciated.

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Tomoko Okuda, Oribe stoneware with red slip and green glaze, 2011.  
Photo: Henry Bloomfield.



Japanese potter Masahiro Kumagae throwing a bowl on the wheel at Art in Action 2011.  
Photo: Henry Bloomfield.



Interior of shop selling tableware to the restaurant trade in Kappabashi, Tokyo, 2011.  
Photo: Henry Bloomfield.

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Japanese place setting with (clockwise from top left) rice bowl, fish plate, lidded soup bowl, side dish, chopstick rest and pickle dish. Soup is drunk from the bowl.  
Photo: Henry Bloomfield.



### The tea ceremony

Tea was first brought to Japan from China in the 9th century by the Buddhist monk Eichu. The tea ceremony or 'way of tea' was developed in the 16th century by a Zen Buddhist, Sen Rikyu, who introduced the concept of *wabi sabi*, 'wabi' meaning austere simplicity and 'sabi' meaning weathered.

Beauty through use is an important concept in the Japanese tea ceremony, during which tea bowls and water jars are used. Tea bowls or *chawan* are often rustic in appearance, deep-sided in winter and shallower in summer. An aged, worn quality is valued, and sometimes old tea bowls can be purposely broken and repaired with gold lacquer to achieve that effect. Asymmetry of the form and imperfections in the glaze, such as pinholes, are

Hollis Engley, wood-fired thumb-hole tea bowls, Hatchville Pottery, Cape Cod, USA, 2011. Height: 10 cm (4 in.). Photo: Hollis Engley.



appreciated as qualities of the handmade, although many potters in the West would view them as faults. The tea used is *matcha*, powdered green tea, which is whisked with hot water to make a thick, foaming, bright green tea. Tea bowls are very expensive in Japan and are elevated to the status of art, as is the tea ceremony itself.

For everyday use, many Japanese people drink thin green tea from small cylindrical cups called *yunomi*. These have no handle and are held at the rim, with the other hand supporting the base. They are smaller than Western teacups or mugs and are filled frequently from a small teapot. In Japanese shops and department stores they are often sold in 'married couple' pairs, with a large size for men and a smaller one for women.

Cups and teapot, Shonzui pattern with kaki glaze on the rims, Japan, 1990. Shonzui was a potter who visited China during the Ming dynasty and returned to set up a pottery in Arita. The surface of the teapot is divided into separate areas, each with different geometric patterns. The *yunomi* have a textured surface and look handmade although they are in fact factory-made. Photo: Henry Bloomfield.



### Japanese artists and designers

Kitaaji Rosanjin (1883–1959) was a famous Japanese potter, calligrapher and restaurateur who was interested in the harmony between food and vessel. He thought that tableware could enhance the presentation of Japanese cuisine and famously said ‘the vessel is clothing for food’. He believed serving dishes and presentation could make food taste better; in his Tokyo restaurant, opened two years after the great Kanto earthquake of 1923, he served food on his own handmade tableware, often highly decorated and based on old Mino or Seto ware.

Rosanjin believed in surrounding himself with antique objects in order to learn about elegance and beauty. He made work in a wide range of styles and disciplines and was thought by many of his contemporaries to be eccentric and arrogant. He was not a supporter of Soetsu Yanagi’s folk-craft movement, which was more concerned with beauty found in the humble wares of Japan’s traditional artisans, as described in Yanagi’s book *The Unknown Craftsman*. Instead, he preferred exquisite works of art. Japanese-American artist Isamu Noguchi (1904–88) lived

on Rosanjin’s estate during the early 1950s. Noguchi was a sculptor and designer inspired by ancient Japanese tomb figures. In 1952, he designed a cup with a pointed horn-like handle, modelled on an ancient earthenware cup he owned. His cup and two versions of a saucer were not put into production until 50 years later, when they attracted the attention of the Swiss design company Vitra.

Karin Eriksson, charcoal devil cup, 2000.  
Inspired by Japanese pottery, height:  
6 cm (2¼ in.). Photo: Karin Eriksson.



Sori Yanagi (1915–2011), son of Soetsu Yanagi, was also inspired by Japanese folk craft, but applied to modern materials and production methods. He designed several tableware ranges, including softly rounded square dishes, teapots and kettles. He also designed cutlery and furniture and was most famous for his 1956 Butterfly Stool, made from two curved pieces of moulded plywood. He often modelled his design prototypes in clay, and was able to combine the beauty of the handmade with the advantages of industrial production.

Pottery shop in Chawan-zaka, near  
Kiyomizu temple, Kyoto, 2011.  
Photo: Henry Bloomfield.





### The Japanese influence

Studio potters around the world are influenced by Japanese pottery, stemming from the legacy of Bernard Leach, Shōji Hamada and the studio pottery movement (see pp. 40–7). Industrially produced tableware in the West is also beginning to show a Japanese influence, with noodle bowls, soya sauce dishes and square plates increasingly being included in modern tableware collections.

Yo Thom, soya sauce pourer, 2006.  
Thrown stoneware, height: 7 cm (2¾ in.).  
Photo: Jonathan Thompson.

Adrienne Baba, vegetable dishes on platter, 2010. Thrown and slabbed stoneware with matt glaze, fired to 1260°C (2300°F) in an electric kiln, 18 x 40 cm (7 x 15¾ in.). Adrienne makes tableware for several Japanese restaurants in London.  
Photo: Keiko Oikawa.



Kaori Tatebayashi, hump-moulded stoneware kurocha plate, kuro mini bowl, kohiki cup, 2008.  
Photo: courtesy of the artist.



Yo Thom, rectangular plate with sushi, 2008.  
Wood-fired stoneware, 8 x 16 cm (3 x 6 in.).  
Photo: courtesy of the artist.

