

perspective

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INSPIRING ARCHITECTURE & DESIGN

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MULTICOLOURED RECIPE FOR SUCCESS

By layering the three primary colours – red, yellow and blue – Beijing-based People's Architecture Office cooks up a vibrant office for gourmet sweets franchise 21 Cake

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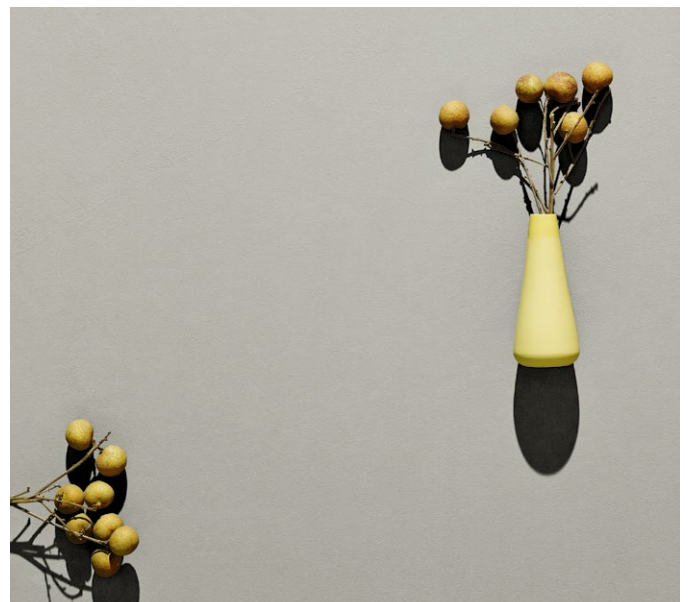
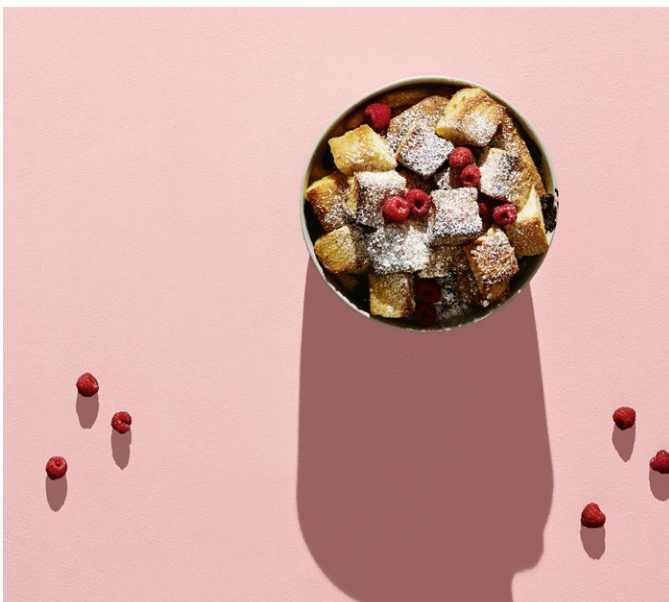


HK\$48
US\$18
€15

Firing it up

Hand-crafted from a factory in Sydney, Australia, mud australia creates unique ceramic ware in a wonderful spectrum of colours and shapes

TEXT:
Sophie Cullen
PHOTOGRAPHY:
Courtesy mud australia



From soft neutrals through to vivid bolds, mud australia's palette consists of 18 colours



Each handmade product is lovingly crafted by the team at the Sydney-based factory

The story of mud australia is one of those inspirational tales of someone finding their passion and then turning it into an international success. Shelley Simpson, the founder of mud australia, had no formal training in ceramics but was curious to know how to throw a pot on a kick-wheel. She soon discovered she had a natural flair for the craft and became hooked on making handmade pots, so she set aside her career in theatre and the arts to concentrate on developing her skills.

Initially, she sold her products at local markets before moving into supplying restaurants and retailers, and, in 1994, mud australia was officially born. Originally using earthenware clay, the firm soon shifted to producing its products from high-quality French Limoges porcelain clay. This shift enabled the brand to experiment with colour, glazes and finishes to arrive at the distinctive style for which it is known today.

Located in Connaught Village, the London store showcases pieces from the ever-growing collection in a range of colours



Walk into one of the mud australia retail stores in Sydney, New York or London, and you'll be transfixed by the gorgeous array of colours that surround you. "Our palette is made up of 18 colours ranging from soft neutrals through to mid-strength tones, and then a few bold colours as well. In our blues, greys, reds and greens, we have three versions of each colour. We then have secondary colours such as plum, bottle and steel, that act as bridges between the main colour groups," notes Simpson.

This staggering selection of hues – from the most delicate pastel pink to the boldest fire-engine red – coupled with a minimalist design aesthetic is what has made the brand so popular; after all, you know you are doing something right when gourmet goddess Nigella Lawson uses your ceramic products to showcase her delights in print and on her television series.

Simpson says of the unique palette, "Most ceramic has colour. Our range is slightly different in that our biscuit porcelain means the colour reads visually as matte, which absorbs light differently and makes the items more sculptural."

With over 70 shapes available in the collection, and additions being made seasonally, mud australia crafts dishes, pots, platters and plates, and the technique that goes into each piece is intensive. The porcelain is tinted before it is poured, then fettled and finished, bisque-fired, sanded and hand-glazed and finally fired again to vitrify the finish. Clear glaze is then hand-brushed onto the interior of each piece which, after firing, leaves the exterior with a vitrified, stone-like surface that becomes smooth with handling.

The designer likes to think of the firm as a family, and it truly is, as her husband, James Kirton, gave up his job in eCommerce to become the company's business director. mud australia now maintains a dedicated studio staff of 35, which includes 25 people working solely on the Sydney-based factory floor. Including both professional ceramicists and amateur potters who have been trained on the job, each piece is touched and worked by hand at every stage of the process.

Keeping a very 'hands on' role in the mud australia studio, Simpson spends much of her time on the factory floor, troubleshooting production



processes, keeping a firm eye on the finishes and ensuring that the edge of each piece is perfect. "I love seeing the kilns opening and spending time glazing," she says.

The designer is fiercely proud of the handmade products that mud australia creates, as she believes they are truly a unique addition to the marketplace. "People definitely connect to the emotional content of a hand-made ceramic item more so than something mass produced or perfect. The colours also allow them to create a mood that reflects their lifestyles and aspirations," she concludes. ●

Shelley Simpson is the founder and creative director of the firm, while her husband, James Kirton, acts as the business director