



# TURNING OF THE TIDE

From wonderfully tactile stoneware inspired by coastal textures, to rustic terracotta bread pots, Vicky Ware's pottery has gradually grown from a hobby into a business

Words Rachel Crow | Photographs Jeremy Phillips



*Opposite:* Vicky hand-builds her range of stoneware from textural cream and black sculpting clay, which once formed and biscuit fired is immersed in various coastal colour-inspired glazes

*This page:* The potter at her wheel, with Scarlett, her pottery dog, keeping an eye on progress. Vicky's husband Tim converted the stables behind their hillside home into her studio space, which is warmed by a log-burning stove





**G** rains of sand caught in the crevices of rocks worn smooth by the relentless caress of waves; lichen creeping out of inky blue rock pools; sea foam settling on barnacle-encrusted driftwood; the richly veined granite coastal cliffs of North West Scotland. These are the some of the textures that have inspired Vicky Ware's rustic tableware. Yet such elemental seascapes are a far cry from the idyllic, undulating countryside that surrounds her secluded hill-top studio in Powys. Enjoying stunning panoramic views over the Trannon Valley in the Cambrian mountains, her studio space, a converted stable nestled in the trees behind her home, is in a wholly contrasting, yet equally inspiring inland location.

The surrounding woodland is starting to pull on its autumnal technicolour cloak of russet, bronze and gold as the low autumn sunshine floods in to her workspace through its wide windows. The earthenware bread pots and mugs drying on slatted wooden shelves mimic the fiery hues of the leafy canopy outside. The style of Vicky's varied pieces is the culmination of 25 years of 'trial and error', starting in an evening class when her children were tiny, as a hobby, and then slotted in, when time permitted, around her full-time job in accounts. 'For years my studio was in the garage or kitchen of our various homes, but it has only been in the

last five years that I have been able to focus on the pottery full-time. The only way to progress is by experimentation, and I've produced the most inspired work in the last five years since I've had more time to devote to it,' Vicky explains.

Self-taught, learning on the go and picking up tips and skills from other potters along the way, she loves 'grabbing a piece of clay that has come from the earth, and making something useful from it. From the beginning it's been all about the texture and tactile nature of it for me. The items I make are not perfect but have a function. It is the imperfections that enhances them,' she explains.

Employing completely different processes and techniques for her two types of work, Vicky throws her earthenware at the wheel, while her stoneware pieces are made from heavily grogged black and cream sculpting clay, which she kneads, slabs, coils, manipulates and builds into shape by hand. 'I was brave enough eventually to realise I didn't want to throw these, because you feel like you have to, somehow. But as a potter it is nice to do a variety of different things, otherwise you start to feel like you are on a production line.'

The light bounces off the deep indigo, moss green or soft cream glazes cloaking her textural stoneware. To recreate the colours and textures of her coastal inspirations, Vicky experimented with the interaction of various glazes and slips with different clay bodies. 'It involved a lot of testing to find out what worked. You wouldn't normally glaze the black clay, so it took some time to discover what was compatible. Glazes react differently ➤



*Clockwise from top left:* The breathtaking view from Vicky's home over the Trannon Valley, caught in autumn; the pottery sits nestled among the trees; Vicky takes time out from turning and sculpting to relax with Scarlett; her sculptural stoneware pieces, which mimic the colours and textures of

the coast on the North West of Scotland, are priced from £10 for a small dipping dish, £25 for a bowl, to £150 for a large platter; how a mug feels and fits when it is held the hand is very important for Vicky; the wash of glazes on this platter were inspired by the myriad hues found in rock pools







*Clockwise from left:* The process for creating her earthenware range differs greatly from the stoneware – turned at the wheel, before the handles are formed and attached by hand, her earthenware mugs are then fired before she applies hand-mixed coloured slip; with folk music playing softly in the background, Vicky sits at the wheel absorbed in throwing and teasing clay into the embryonic form of a bread pot; fired to a rich toasted terracotta, the pots can be used for baking all types of bread

each time under firing, too, and when you put it on it doesn't look anything like the colour that comes out of the kiln. By happy accident some things may come out differently to what you expected, but that is half the fun of it.' By contrast, her popular earthenware bread pots are left unadulterated by slip or glaze, 'because I love the earthy feel of the terracotta clay.'

The ideas for pieces – from dinky dipping bowls and tactile mugs, to expansive platters awash with pools of colours – tumble out of her head, feeding, sometimes subconsciously, off things she has seen. 'I don't sketch ideas for my designs,' she explains, 'I just create.' But she will capture shapes in terracotta moulds – be this manmade or organic forms – a plate, a log or a stone; 'anything lying around if it has a nice shape. I like making moulds from natural forms, in particular,' Vicky explains.

Her tableware can now also be found gracing the tables of restaurants dotted around Britain, among them the Michelin-starred Bulrush in Bristol. 'It is a challenge working with chefs because they will send me a sketch of what they want and then I have to conjure up something that will be practical, too; but it is fun because as an artist you are creating something for another artist.'

Just as her pieces need a function, so the goal-driven Vicky always needed the pottery to serve a purpose. It has taken nearly a quarter of a century, but her hobby has blossomed into a "career". 'It is really exciting,' she admits, 'and it still doesn't feel like it is a job – it has just evolved.'

To find out more visit [vickywareceramics.co.uk](http://vickywareceramics.co.uk)

