

Earthy delights

Discover clay's delicate, tactile beauty with Bridget Bodenham's ceramics, handcrafted in her sun-drenched Daylesford studio

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CLASSICAL MUSIC SWIRLS

around ceramicist Bridget Bodenham as she moulds soft clay, her hands moving gracefully with the soaring melody. The material grows in form until the curves of a bowl start to appear. "Clay fascinates me," she says. "It has this incredible ability to change completely. It starts off as this malleable dough-like material that, if you add too much water, will disintegrate completely, but mould and fire it, and you're guaranteed beauty that lasts forever – unless you smash it, of course!"

The Queensland-born artisan grew up surrounded by art. "My mother is an art restorer and my father explored several materials and processes: bronze casting, etching and painting," she explains. "I spent my early years wandering between their two studios, either playing with paint or clay." With no doubt in her mind that working with clay was what she wanted to do, she enrolled in an advanced diploma of ceramics at the University of Ballarat, and from there, launched her own collection in 2008. >



Bridget's rustic stoneware range includes platters, bowls and small plates, starting from \$25 each.

Practical everyday pieces can be beautiful, as seen with this gorgeous collection of pestle and mortars, garlic crushers, tea strainers and vessels. "From the get go, I knew exactly what kind of style I wanted to create," says Bridget. "First and foremost, I wanted to make functional pieces that people will use in their homes day in and day out."





Bridget (above) begins each day by dropping clay from a height on pavers to soften it. "I cut it into equal parts with fishing line and roll it into balls." Bold, textured patterns are hallmarks of her range (below right). For colour, "I paint the exterior with a porcelain slip [wet clay]. After the slip has dried, I draw into the surface with needle tools, carving images of birds, worms and rain clouds."

< Much of Bridget's inspiration stems from her surroundings – the dense Daylesford bushland, vivid flora that changes with each new season and the towering gum trees that frame her home. It's an idyllic view that originates from the most unlikely of places – her studio and home is made up of a series of shipping containers. "My mum designed the house with 12 40-foot shipping containers, stacked on top of each other to create two levels," explains Bridget. "Two are positioned parallel with a sloping roof in between; one is a large communal living space and the other is my mum's art restoration studio."

In between the two buildings is a central courtyard with veggies and fruit trees which, says Bridget, is a lovely spot to soak up the winter sun. "My studio is located under my self-contained living space," she says. "We run power from solar panels and hope to be completely off the grid soon. We're trying to be less dependent on external sources for energy."

Given the location of Bridget's studio, it's hardly surprising that her ceramics bear such an uncanny resemblance to nature's bounty. "I do a lot of sketching before I get stuck into the clay, but so much of what I make is inspired by what I see around me," she says. The clay starts as a deep red in colour and, as the kiln fires up to 1300 degrees, grows lighter. "I use a mix of porcelain and stoneware clay bodies, which I mix together to get different tones and textures," she explains. To produce her pastel-hued pieces, she mixes in a synthetic stain before firing. "The extreme heat changes the colour and size of every piece so that you never know what's going to come out!" she says.

This process calls for experimentation and a learned appreciation for imperfections. "I think the most beautiful ceramics are those that show the marks of the maker's hands," says Bridget. "When something is handmade – when it goes through the hands of just one single person – you can really feel the love and care that's been poured into it."



When in Daylesford...

Best coffee in town? "Koukla at Frangos and Frangos – it's a great space where you can see half the street."

Must-visit homewares haunt? "The local op-shops and the Daylesford Sunday market; you never know what you might find."

Favourite spot to get back to nature? "I live in the country! But for visitors, you can't beat the Daylesford Botanic Gardens. In all seasons, they're amazing"

For more details and to shop online, visit bridgetbodenham.com.au. 