

# POT LOVE

Many of us have Clementina cups and crockery brightening up our kitchens — now there's a coffee-table book too

One of South Africa's foremost ceramic artists and potters, Clementina van der Walt, pictured below, has released a new coffee-table book of her work over the years, *A Ceramic Journey*. As well as adorning the homes of her clients, Van der Walt's work is in the art collections of Iziko Museums, parliament, and the universities of Cape Town and Johannesburg, among others. We spoke to her about her journey in ceramics.

**How would you describe your work?**

I make mainly utilitarian ceramic pieces, but also some sculptural figurines and masks, as well as architectural panels. I use a variety of clay hand-building techniques – slab building, wheel work, press moulding, casting, modelling.

Every piece is unique and truly carries the mark of individual handmade. My palette too is varied – sometimes bright colours, sometimes earthy with a combination of shiny glazed and matte textured surfaces.

**How has your work transformed over the years?**

I started making ceramics in the '70s. Initially in the '80s my work expressed a busy, bold and brightly patterned aesthetic. In the book this is described as "The Fiery Years". Gradually, this gave way to "The Quieter Path" – the earlier frenetic approach slowly toned down to a softer, more contemplative mood.

**How has your inspiration changed over time?**

In my early work I was inspired by the political and social turbulence and energy in the zeitgeist. A youthful search for identity and life meaning manifested in angular cubist type forms and brightly coloured surfaces. I was inspired visually by the urban landscape, by West African textiles, the Highveld light (I lived in Joburg) and township jazz. I moved to the Cape in the '90s and here a different landscape, a milder climate and softer light led to a more meditative sense, and subsequently quieter monotones, more gentle forms. I think this has also been a path of young adulthood then growing older, more reflective.

**Do you have favourite works?**

I am never completely satisfied with what I do. I'm always aiming for the "perfectly resolved" piece. However, whenever I make something new I get terribly excited and can't wait to open the kiln, at the risk of burning my fingers at times because everything is still too hot.

And then often a piece will be "a favourite" for a few days or weeks until I become very critical and try to take the concept further.



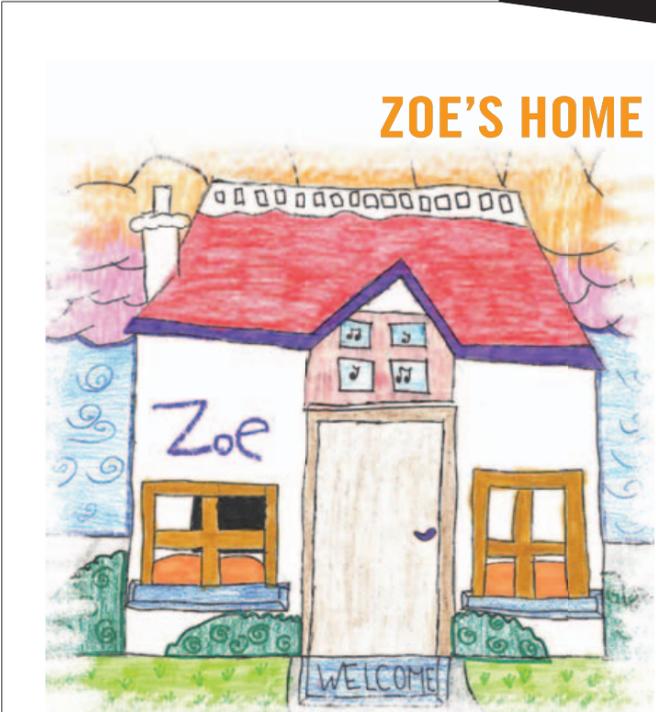
Currently I'm inspired by the Japanese world view *wabisabi*. This is a way of being which sees the world as imperfect, irregular, transient. I am attempting to interpret this view in a South African context into my work.

**Do you aim for your work to be functional or to be beautiful *objets*?**  
To quote William Morris: "Have nothing in your homes that you do not know to be useful or believe to be beautiful." So both, really. However, I do love that people use



my pieces on a daily basis and that they are enriched by that experience – holding a cup, raising it to one's lips. A bowl containing soup or salad or rice, nourishing the body, the bowl itself nourishing the soul and pleasing visual and tactile senses. ☺

*A Ceramic Journey*: on sale at selected bookshops and galleries or [www.clementina.co.za](http://www.clementina.co.za).



## Craft

WORDS  
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PICTURES  
**Courtesy of the artist**



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