

Ian Vance Ceramics

Background

Ian Vance Ceramics was set up in 2006 to build on a lifetime interest in ceramic design by starting to make my own!

After an initial starter course in Cambridge, I attended evening classes in Harlow and then did my City and Guilds Ceramics at Cambridge Regional College.

I am an active member of Anglian Potters one of the largest associations of potters in the country.



Designs

My inspiration has come from nature and from making drawings of ideas that look like they might work in clay. It's very different from things that work in stone or metal, and sometimes very different from things that work at all!



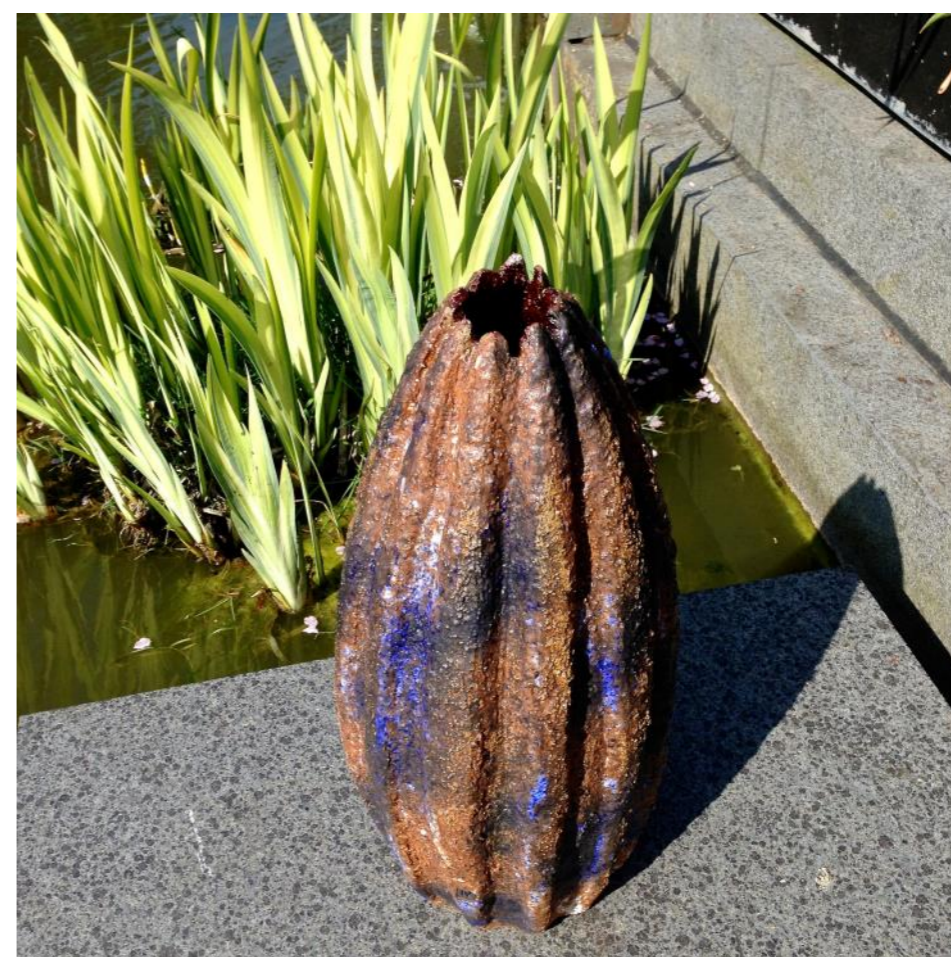
One starting point was the Karst mountainscape of Guilin in China where successive hills disappear behind each other into the mists.

I was interested in how to translate this into sculpture that was not exactly the same but used the essence of this landscape



Another interest was the Opuntia, prickly pear. I used their very characteristic shape to create a series of wall pieces made up of individual shapes wired together.

This also solves a problem of how to create large pieces within the constraints of the size of my kiln shelves which are 42cm square.



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Processing Ceramics

Pottery involves developing a lot of different skills and techniques:

The artistic ideas – moving beyond the blank sheet of paper. I draw things first to see what looks like it might work – then see how to construct it.

An understanding of clay and how it behaves – I use a very heavily grogged clay from Holland called Vingerling K133. This has 25% 3mm particles in it that give a rough effect, and if scraped when drying gives a ‘wire-cut brick’ finish. You would not want to throw this clay on a (potter’s) wheel as you would not have any fingers left!

Creating designs – this often involves trial and error, as things drawn do not end up the same in 3D. Making a maquette helps to see if it’s going to work.

Construction of pieces – this varies with type of piece, but for example the big “seed” pot illustrated was made by making a hump mould and forming half of the pot on it from a sheet of rolled out clay, and then adding strips. Two halves were then joined together onto a separate base.

Developing and making glazes – this is true magic – something of a mix between cooking and science. Glaze is made from a mixture of ground-up rocks, which includes silica that gives the glass effect, and some flux and stabilisers. I use a lithium matte glaze that is really a dull cream colour but, when applied to the red clay, the iron in the clay comes through the glaze at high temperature and colours it. So we are talking about a glaze/clay combination actually and none of it is obvious! A lot of test firings of different samples are needed to develop a glaze and very good records are clearly required. The colours come from spraying on cobalt oxide, copper carbonate and other metallic oxides, but even here the actual finished result depends on the thickness of the glaze, the exact temperature and time in the kiln etc.

Firing the kiln 2 or 3 times for each item. I biscuit fire my work at 1000°C when it comes out brick red – see picture. This takes some 6 hours in my propane fuelled kiln and then it is glazed. I usually brush on the glaze in multiple layers, but sometimes I have to spray it on thin pieces. Then I fire again to about 1150°C (another 8 hours) the actual temperature and time at the temperature is measured using ‘Pyrometric Cones’ – these are special clay cones that melt at a well-defined point, and 1150°C is about Cone 3. A third firing sometimes is used to brighten up the colours or to add other lower temperature surface effects.

Finding places to exhibit and sell the work – this is quite tricky. I belong to Anglian Potters and we have several exhibitions as a group throughout the year. The next big one coming up is at All Saints’ Church in Cambridge from mid-November to mid-December when some 70 potters will be showing their work. I also have participated in Open Studios, which is quite a social occasion and at least means I have to clear up the workshop!

For Further Details of Ian Vance Ceramics see my website:



www.ianvance.net

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