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On the Cover

David Lawson's
Prize Winning Ceramics

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Blott Works By Angie Boyer

We were delighted to select Dan Morrison's *BLOTT WORKS* for our Award at the Great Northern Contemporary Craft Fair last autumn, his extraordinary limited edition, hand engineered, functional sculptures are fascinating, intriguing and very clever indeed! *BLOTT WORKS* is like nothing we've ever seen before - and after more than 30 years in the business, we've certainly seen a wide range of different takes on creativity - so we asked Dan to tell us more about his work.

Have you had any formal training that has a bearing on your current work?

My engineering degree is probably the only thing that counts as formal and directly relevant, but my work with *BLOTT WORKS* comes from me cherry-picking a lot of the different things that I've learned and enjoyed doing over the years and attempting to pull them together into one focussed creative outlet.

As a boy growing up in Shropshire I was lucky to be able to spend time with some inspiring people who instilled lifelong passions in me. Too many to mention, but one example would be Harold Winlove, an exceptionally talented (retired) cabinet maker who lived round the corner from my Great Auntie Mary Blott, and taught me the love of wood and the importance of keeping my chisels sharp. Another early hero of mine was Bill Norton, a family friend and extraordinary entrepreneurial engineer, who taught me the versatility of metal and the magic of mechanical mechanisms. Also my Uncle Reg, who owned a hardware shop and instilled in me a love of tools, nuts, bolts and fittings, and the eternal joy of that special smell that hardware shops have!

My degree in Engineering Design and Appropriate Technology at Warwick University (1983) was the first of its kind in Europe to specialise in renewable energy

production and third world technology. This gave me a good grounding in formal engineering and a sense of it as a force for good and for social change.

A very important thread throughout my life has been the art and performance projects I have worked on with David Wheeler and the team at IOU Theatre (www.ioutheatre.org). This work has been a major influence and inspiration to me and has enabled me to develop as an artist and find my own way of creating original work.

But a lot of what I do, and have done in the past, is self-taught. This does mean that I don't always do things the optimal or quickest way, but the flip side is that the work I produce is more likely to have an original twist or two!

What's in your head when you're developing a new design/product?

I've always enjoyed working in roles that bridge the gap between the technical and the creative, between science and the arts. So for *BLOTT WORKS* I wanted to use this as my starting point and find my own way to celebrate the wonder of engineering through the artistic process, hence my self-ascribed title 'artist-engineer'.

My approach is to use very simple but carefully considered mechanisms in an attempt to capture some essence of our industrialised world and work these into things that speak to us on an emotional level, that have meaning beyond the function, and that blur the boundaries between the natural world and the world created by humans (which can be thought of as the same thing - nature in all its guises coping with its environment). And I try to do this in a way that is both serious and playful at the same time.

I decided to focus on 'functional' sculpture because I like the idea that people are actively using my pieces as part of their daily lives. I tend to start with an abstract mechanistic thought and then coax the meaning and emotion out of it through playing and experimenting with it.

I try to achieve a contemporary look so they fit in with the modern aesthetic but still have a timeless quality. I don't use any recycled parts in my pieces, everything is made from raw materials. And as with all things, it is all about balance, using industrially treated aluminium to provide strength and structure, wood to soften and add individuality, brass to add warmth, concrete to add solidity and texture and stainless steel fittings to provide sparkle and detail.





Clamshell Alchemist

Breeze vase

When I am working on something there is always an enjoyable tension between the engineer in me trying to make everything precise and repeatable, and the artist in me who revels in the unexpected, the imperfections and differences (the beautiful blemishes). It is getting the balance between these two things that can make all the difference.

What do you think most fascinates people about your work?

I think people are initially drawn in by the unusual look of the pieces, but also because they are very characterful and friendly looking. The fact that they move in the way they do adds another whole dimension and people are surprised at how satisfying it is turning the handles or spinning the discs. It's often the simple things that are the most engaging! I love the way my work seems to makes people smile (and laugh!). I think it is something to do with it having a child-like quality but constructed in such a serious adult way. Daft things taken very seriously.

Customers report back how they make regular adjustments to their lamp as part of their daily routine just for the fun of it. And describe how the lamp is almost like one of the family! I like this playful ritualistic role these pieces can have in someone's life. And it's great to think that my work is as much of a companion as it is a piece of useful sculpture - something that you can not only enjoy but also share your life with!

People who like the work often think they need a big warehouse/industrial chic apartment to fit with the style, but I have designed the aesthetic to fit into a variety of settings and the majority of my customers have placed them in their domestic home, typically the lounge, hall or office.

What are your thoughts about the future for your work?

I would like to see what I can do with other functional items and put lamps to one side for a while. My new set of fan-assisted 'Breeze' vases is a small step in this direction.

It has also always been part of the plan to draw on my experience as a sound artist to design some sound sculptures. It will be fun finding functional uses for this sort of thing, but an obvious first step could be to set them up as doorbells so that they sing out when a visitor comes calling.

I would also like to develop more truly kinetic work. I'm particularly interested in things that move in a random or chaotic motion rather than the regular repeating motion often associated with kinetic sculpture.

I'm also conscious that I need to widen my range so that I can offer both smaller and larger pieces. And perhaps, now that I am getting more of a reputation, I can move back to more high-end pieces like the 'Pebble' clock I developed in collaboration with artist Andy Plant right back at the beginning. That clock is one of a family of three, so it would be nice to finish work on the other two bigger siblings.

Dan tells you lots more about BLOTT WORKS on his website: www.blottworks.com

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