

Priscilla Carluccio has commissioned a group of Central St Martins students to design a new collection of ceramics. By Sarah Brownlee

Carluccio's way

Not all student projects prove fruitful, as Anthony Quinn, senior lecturer in ceramic design at Central Saint Martins, is happy to acknowledge. But everyone seems agreed that this particular client project has been especially rewarding – the client being boutique shopkeeper (and sister of Sir Terence Conran) Priscilla Carluccio, the five students being ceramic design second-years, Sarah Nibbs, Vicky Richards, Nam Tran, Rebecca Lundberg and Miao Zhang, collectively known as *Châm Design*. 'Priscilla really knows what she wants,' says Quinn. 'She kept sending the students away and they'd come back with more and say, "Well, actually we want to do this," and slowly but surely they worked out what this client wanted. It was a very real experience for them.'

'She knows what she wants' comes up several times as I chat with Quinn and the students, but more in admiration and respect than frustration. The fact that Carluccio was no walkover makes it all the more gratifying that she is so enamoured with the outcome – a family of five biscuit-fired vessels – that she plans to exhibit them, selling them in limited editions in her London shop *Few and Far*.

Several clients were invited to work with students on Central's ceramic design course this year. The college has had big names commit to client projects in the past, and continues to do, but there's no guarantee that they'll have the time or inclination, once on board, to be as supportive as the students hope.

But Carluccio was more than committed. 'I'm really pleased with it,' she says excitedly. This after an initial disappointment – the first designs the team came up with, were, she felt, 'more about applied pattern than the ceramics themselves': crucially, they hadn't actually made anything for her to see.

The course tutors had supplied the students with a concept to bear in mind from the start: the philosophy of the Slow Movement, which inspired their group's name (*châm* means 'slow' in Vietnamese). But beyond this, they were in Carluccio's hands: 'I feel it's very important that designers actually make their designs – that they have contact with the material they're using,' she explains. 'I asked them

A member of *Châm Design* at work



'I want people to see that the students worked painstakingly on these pieces'

to go back and produce something individually, that they felt could all live together as a family.'

'Basically we had a rule,' says Vicky Richards. 'Priscilla told us we had to start again in the workshop and make a piece that we each thought was beautiful, but we didn't want them to be too individual as we're working as a group, so we made up a 'genetic' code we had to follow [made up of a curve, a straight line and an angle]. The pieces are all different but linked to the code.'

In the end they produced five different families of biscuit-fired pots, all made of the same clay body – known as Grog Buff, which is versatile enough to be used for both high and low-fired ware. They asked Carluccio to choose the five pieces – out of all of them – that she felt would make the perfect set. She chose a bowl, a jug, two smaller pieces looking like cups, and a vessel perhaps appropriate for salad dressing. All have a cute, organic charm, and at her request, the final sets are to be glazed while maintaining the 'simplicity

and tonal values of the biscuit firing.'

They will go on show in the store in September during the London Design Festival, along with the pieces that didn't get chosen. 'I think it's really important to show the whole process, and project a story customers will understand,' says Carluccio. 'I want people to see that the students worked painstakingly on these pieces. That's something customers should connect with, and have an emotional response to.' Carluccio is also adamant that the collection be as accessible as possible. 'What worries me is that the big names in craft are currently so expensive – I think it would be really sad if craft became like the art market.' But ultimately she wants to sell the pieces for the sake of the students. 'I want people to be able to afford them, because if they can we'll be able to commission them to make some more,' she says with a determined smile. You couldn't hope for a better client than that. www.fewandfar.net
www.londondesignfestival.com