**Design and Manufacture of Ceramicx**

**23.05.2018**

CG; If we can start with an overview of before you started the bus

XX; Straight our of school into secretarial, worked in an art gallery in South Africa, then editing the catalogues, then Sotheby’s in Johannesburg assessing paintings. On return to England I completed History of Art at Cambridge and chose between a job in publishing at Wantage or teaching English to fund a ceramics course in Italy.

CG: So was that a risk at that point forsaking a job for a ceramics course?

XX: Yes, I mean I was very aware I had flitted between so many things, but I felt I was young (well in my 30s by that stage) and was really drawn to the opportunity. My plan was to import Italian ceramics into England and sell them as my business; I had no intention of producing my own ceramics at that point. However as I completed the course I realised that dealing with the Italians as an outsider was very tricky, there were many unwritten rules and so much bureaucracy, whilst at the same time I fell in love with making ceramics.

My father had started off life as an engineer but for the most part he was an entrepreneur with various businesses. So I decided I would set up my own workshop in the UK, I think it came from him.

CG; how did you go about setting up?

XX: I was able to use a Rural Development Commission Trust workshop in Hampshire. I was throwing pots back then; mainly pots, big bowls and mugs in earthen ware. Most of my business was done at craft fair, with the odd commission. Then we had the children and I didn’t want to spend every weekend across the country at craft fairs, so I had to re-think my products and market. So I came up with tiles; a niche business with limited handmade suppliers at the time and I love surface pattern which is what it’s all about. So I switched. Tiles are also much easier to produce, so there was less risk in production which meant if my children distracted me it was not so much of a problem.

CG; So that switch in product, was is mainly a commercial decision because you say a market demand and limited supply? Or was it more about the family’s needs?

XX: It’s quite difficult to say. When you are pot throwing you need to know you have the time to finish it off the next day, you need the consistency of knowing you can work for some hours the next day, without interruption. It’s too stressful with small children to know for sure that you will get those hours. Basically the pottery dries and then you can’t use them.

At some point I did get a bit of help with the children, but I didn’t want to put them into a nursery school.

CG; So you had someone who came into the house to help? So the children were always with you? What did those extra hours of help give you?

XX: It gave me a few hours, so I could relax and think creatively for some time.

CG: So was it more the headspace or the physical commitment that you valued most?

XX; Definitely the headspace, to think without interruption. Once you know they children are safe and happy, only then can you relax enough to clear you head to be creative.

I do remember saying to Hugo at the beginning, well it would be useful for me to have just 2-3 hours a day for me to work. He said that sounds a lot. I don’t think I took it any further.

CG: So you took all the responsibility for the children?

XX: Well yes, he would go off to work and pop back for lunch. I remember feeling such irritation and resentment. He’d say, well I’ll get back now and I was just left …… Well it just dawns on you, this is it… Well I mean he would always do the shopping on a Saturday and take the children with him, so Saturday mornings I could carve out for myself. Then occasionally he’s be off to an auction and he’d take them with him then. But those carved out moments…….. Makes me so tearful.

I didn’t realise it was still there…. It’s awful, it’s been so long.

It was so hard, after all these years …..so hard. It is survival. Is there an easier way?

Looking back I think it was the right thing to do; for the whole family. I couldn’t have put them in a nursery, it would have been heartbreaking. No win. You can’t do everything.

It takes a long time to emerge from it.

Then another thing came along, my mother. In the early years she really helped me out and she was wonderful with the children. But then she got cancer and she dies 10 years ago, leaving my father who had a stroke and so I needed to pick up his care. He did employ an army of carers, but you need be across it all. But he got depression and then gradually deteriorated physically and often in and out of hospital, I had visit every day. Then 2 years ago he died, which lifted a huge burden from me, he’s not suffering anymore. Except he left a lot of financial conundrums, as his mind went he did all sorts of strange financial arrangements which had to be unpicked.

Finally, in the last 2 years I have had time again for creative freedom.

CG; So really since you switched into ceramic tiles, what 16 year ago? It’s only been the last two years that you have been free of caring duties and can truly focus on the business?

XX: Yes absolutely has.

CG: So can you compare this last two years, compared to before?

XX: I just feel I have lived with frustration for a long time and had to keep a lid on it. Then you feel that there is so much to do. I have invested in my workshop so it’s up to date and warm and I have been focusing on my product to make sure it’s right for the market and I’ve booked onto the latest glaze course. I redid my website. You know I feel like I have been muddling along and built up expertise, but now I have more time to really look at my work and get creative again. Get the product right, that’s my priority.

That’s where my small financial cushion helps. I was very pleased to have attended a trade fair at the weekend, it was a highly prestigious fair, so great to be invited. But the footfall was so low, I didn’t sell enough, it was disappointed.

I have approached a few businesses in Winchester; I went along to Women in Business.

But you I do still feel guilt. I have been so busy focusing back on the business, I don’t have time to plan meals and cook. We have been living on “get-by” food because I am prioritising the business. Then you feel selfish and I keep on having to tell myself to stop feeling this, men would never feel this, but I’m putting so much time into the business, I feel I am putting the family out. Human relationships are your top priority, but you do also owe it to yourself to pursue that creative force that gives so much satisfaction.

CG; When you look a key milestones, setting up the business, switching products and your recent freedom, are there any others?

XX; Well, people do ask me how long have I been making tiles and I say 20 years! It’s been actually keeping it going for so long. I did move from commercial glazes to handmade ones. I have introduced new products; the coasters and the horizontal tile line. The website has been a great development and my instagram too. I feel I am on the right track, but last weekend was disappointing.

I’m pitching to Made that are based in Marylebone and I will keep going with the Handmade Craft Fairs . I need more professional photographs and a sharper personal statement. I went to Women Who Do in Winchester, but networking is something I need to practice, I don’t feel comfortable be so superficial. It’s a bit of a front really, and actually business is quite a front.

The Handmade Craft Fair was a disappointment; I feel crushed that it wasn’t successful. I need to keep developing. I feel like it’s early days which is extraordinary, but then I feel these last 2 years are a new business.

CG: It’s shows the impact of those years, when it ticked along and that is resilience.

XX: Well yes, it’s been going forward each year, but slowly. But I don’t think I would have been able to carry it forward like that if I needed the money. I haven’t made enough money yet.

I am approaching interior designers in London. I have some contacts and I have pushed some cards through them. I have contacts with handmade kitchen designers; it takes me a long time to pluck up the courage.

**Personal Details**

Age: ~~16-29 30-39 40-49~~ 50-59 ~~60+~~

Nationality: British (white)

Country of origin: UK

Mode of working: Full Time~~:~~ ~~Part time:~~

Children: (1) ~~0-2 3-4 5-11~~ 12-18

Children: (2) ~~0-2 3-4 5-11~~ 12-18

Children: (3) 0-2 3-4 5-11 12-18

Children: (4) 0-2 3-4 5-11 12-18

Highest educational qualification: A’Levels later degree

Location of business: Lasham Hampshire

Home working: Home

Last position held in employment:

Husband Occupation: Furniture maker

Husband highest educational qualification: Degree

Household income: Dual Single