

MEET THE MAKERS **CHARLOTTE STORRS**



ARTISAN PROFILE

If Charlotte Storrs' curriculum vitae – linguist, musician, teacher, ceramicist – makes her sound like the ultimate multi-tasker, there is nothing frenetic about her simple white stoneware. Instead, its quiet lines and plain, hand-pressed decoration seem to reflect the calm of her garden studio. But her time-management skills, which have been duly acquired in the process of running three businesses and a family home, must be an asset in a process where timing is everything: throwing, turning, glazing and firing the clay, and making sure it doesn't dry out between stages: "I make sure that I write a to-do list each night so I always know what my working order will be the next morning."

Born in Holland, Charlotte came to the UK in 1971 to work as a translator and then study the violin at the Guildhall School of Music & Drama in London. We have the enlightened Dutch education system to thank for her original interest in ceramics: children in Holland traditionally have a school-free afternoon every Wednesday, and Charlotte's were spent modelling clay at a friend's house, fashioning miniature figures and nativity scenes. It was this early memory that inspired her to enroll in a ceramics evening class years later when she was living in Chichester with her own young family. But it wasn't until the last of her children had left home in 2003 that she went back to college, combining her music teaching with one morning a week at a local art school and becoming "obsessed by clay".

By this time, the family had moved to the Oxfordshire village of Culham. Her husband, harpsichord maker John Storrs, had just built himself a workshop in the garden, and with far-sighted generosity he suggested that she transform this into her studio. "Once you have your own wheel, you can make and make, and get better at it," Charlotte says. "I made pot after pot until I had too many to give away – I had to stop inflicting them on family and friends, so in 2004 I had an open day

in the garden and sold them in aid of charity." They sold out, and Charlotte ended up with orders for more – including a 12-piece tableware set. That challenge focused her on creating a range of plates, bowls, jugs and storage jars that are perfectly formed for everyday practicality and that quickly found favour with the shops she showed them to (including Daylesford, David Mellor and Liberty).

The surface decoration of short diagonal marks and slim horizontal bands is pressed into the leather-hard clay with ceramic rollers ("Before it's

dry but when it's tough enough to take the impression") and the white glaze, which is made by the same Irish company that supplies her raw clay, fuses minimalist elegance with an innate sense of domesticity. "I want to make good, functional glazes in the tradition of studio potters like Bernard Leach and Richard Batterham," she says.

A trip to Japan a few years ago inspired her to experiment with akebia vine, adding beautiful woven handles to trays and pots. She also makes lampbases and little funnel-shaped downlighters, and John

designed her a vacuum system that helps her glaze larger pieces such as counter-top washbasins. And if you want to give her stoneware as a present, she sells gift vouchers designed as ceramic discs – lovely in themselves, and supplied in a little linen bag.

Pottery itself can be a solitary occupation, but the learning curve of marketing and packaging as Charlotte set up in business was a chance to network and stay in touch with the outside world. She still takes private violin and viola pupils – and her teaching skills have transferred naturally to providing hands-on sessions at fundraising events. "The thrill for me is being at the wheel and creating things from a lump of clay. The fact that people seem to want what I make is even better."

To see Charlotte's work or arrange a studio viewing, visit charlottestorrs-stoneware.co.uk.

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WORDS BY CAROLINE ATKINS

PHOTOGRAPH BY AGNESS CLARK