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profiles **in the studio**



**T**hose familiar with Lesley Anton's work may have seen her organic textured Lotus lamp in a designer showroom or her lustrous porcelain Blossom cluster pendant in the pages of this magazine. Anton's shapely wood-and-ceramic lighting has been a favorite among designers for more than 10 years, evolving from a few totem-pole-like hand-thrown ceramic table and floor lamps to graceful chandeliers and accessories. But even those who know her work

CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: It took years for Lesley Anton to throw a porcelain lamp as quickly as one made of stoneware clay; the Calliope lamp is a playful departure from Anton's hand-thrown lighting; her functional pottery has a matte finish.

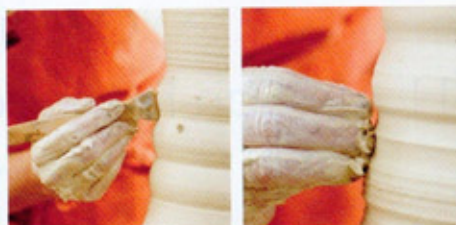
might be surprised to see some of the newest pieces on display in Anton's Los Angeles studio.

Along with the classic and colorful gourd lamps in the storefront window, there's a collection of tall decorative vessels in earth-tone glazes, accented with gold paint. Just inside, a row of silvery honey-bear sculptures stands sentry near what appears to be a matte black cinder block topped with a kraft paper shade. The organic patterns of Anton's well-known line are not gone, but machine gears now coexist alongside the imprints of eucalyptus acorns on her popular Snowball lamp. Her latest table lamp, the Calliope, features hand-sculpted, gold-glazed "seed pods" trapped inside a square wooden frame. "I've been working on the wheel for so long that I became tired of the round forms," says Anton, who cites the "boxed" artwork of Louise

reinventing the  
**WHEEL**

Ceramic lighting designer Lesley Anton is expanding her line and rendering everyday items unrecognizable in matte-glazed clay. BY SARAH LYNCH

## profiles in the studio



*"I started booking my flights around the firing schedule, and pretty soon I was addicted."*

Nevelson as one of her latest influences. "When I was done, I was going to name it Lyriope, the flower that seemed to most closely match the shape of the ceramic pieces," she says. "But in my search I came upon images of an old-fashioned calliope, a carriage that contains a steam-generated pipe organ, and it suddenly reminded me more of that than a flower."

The discovery of her artistic calling was similarly serendipitous for Anton, who enrolled in a ceramics class at New York's 92nd Street Y while working as a flight attendant for American Airlines. "I had studied graphic design and was just looking for a creative outlet, when a flyer with their class schedule came in the mail," says Anton. "I started booking my flights around the firing schedule, and pretty soon I was addicted."

A move to L.A. for her husband's acting career allowed Anton to branch out, and her hobby soon became a business she ran out of their garage. Noticing that there were no handmade ceramic lamps in designer showrooms, she filled the void with elegantly imperfect shapes in historical glazes that would complement any style from midcentury modern to cutting-edge contemporary.

Once her lighting was picked up by local purveyor Thomas Lavin and then by De Sousa Hughes' San Francisco showroom (her work is also at Ted Boerner in New York and Town in Denver), Anton's career took off. Three years ago, she moved out of her garage studio and into her own space with a storefront, "exactly when the market took a nosedive," she says. To bolster her business, Anton branched

out to functional pottery with dinnerware and vessels at a lower price point. "Times were tough and everyone was obsessed with nesting," she says. "And there's no way to make the experience of eating at home more special than with handmade dinnerware."

The functional pottery, glazed in matte finishes because Anton prefers the noise it makes against her fork, looks like a vintage set that one might find at a flea market. And at \$38 for a mug and \$125 for a serving bowl, the prices are affordable for hand-thrown ceramics in a market where cast pottery and high-volume production reign. Currently available through her website and her studio, Anton's functional pottery is in the running for this August's New York International Gift Show. If

ABOVE: Anton still touches every lamp that bears her name.  
RIGHT: A few years ago, Anton moved from a studio in her garage to a storefront on San Vicente Boulevard, with a new gas kiln just built for the backyard.



## profiles *in the studio*



*"I have always tried to find everyday shapes that, once they are repeated, are almost unrecognizable in a pattern."*



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Anton's shapes are organic and her glazes are all historic recipes so the collection feels familiar and cohesive; Anton's "mini" series offers all her pieces on a smaller scale; she paints a design on a Phyllis vessel.

Anton's work is picked up for the show, large orders could mean that this one-woman enterprise will have to expand: Though she currently has an assistant, Anton still touches every piece that bears her name.

In the meantime, Anton remains focused on expanding her line for showrooms by experimenting with new glaze-and-clay combinations as well as forms. "I have always tried to find everyday shapes that, once they are repeated, are almost unrecognizable in a pattern," says Anton, who discovered her most popular lotus root pattern while she was out for sushi. In search of inspiration, she's picked up wing nuts at the hardware store and cast them into porcelain magnets. She's also taken an old engine gear found in a junkyard and turned it into an elegant decorative accessory. And she's used a carved wooden cog as the base of a lamp, which tapers softly toward a simple linen shade.

Watching the petite Anton at the wheel, whether in the back of her studio or in a special demonstration at the Thomas Lavin showroom in the Pacific Design Center, it's clear that her skills have reached expert level, though her demeanor is still one of a shy artist. Dressed in yellow Doc Martens and an orange apron, she turns a creamy ball of porcelain into a slender vessel in minutes. Seeming to be transfixed by the spinning form, she uses slight movements to force the material to ripple and bend. When she's done, the audience is impressed and surprised. She graciously smiles and gets to work assembling a Lotus floor lamp and readying it for delivery, which will happen en route to picking up her twin 13-year-old daughters from school. These days, Anton has a full plate, but at least it's a plate of her own making. ■

Lesley Anton, 5613 San Vicente Blvd., L.A., 323-937-5769, [lesleyanton.com](http://lesleyanton.com)

ETHAN PINES