



# CONTENTS

## FEATURES

<b>Keith Murray: The Reluctant Designer</b> <i>by Peter Sheridan AM</i>	5
<b>Save The Horsham Town Hall? Yes We Can!</b> <i>by Simon Reeves</i>	10
<b>Toasters</b> <i>by Julie Lord &amp; Brian Scott</i>	13
<b>Canberra Walking Tour</b> <i>by Robin Grow</i>	18
<b>Exotica &amp; New Art</b> <i>by Bob King</i>	22
<b>Art Deco &amp; Albury 'Delightfully Deco', The Exhibition</b> <i>by Robin Grow</i>	25
<b>Hastings: New Zealand's Other Deco City</b> <i>by Bob King</i>	27

# SPIRIT OF PROGRESS

JOURNAL OF ART DECO AND MODERNISM SOCIETY INC.

issue  
46

WINTER 2011  
volume 12 number 3

CANBERRA KEITH MURRAY HORSHAM TOASTERS ALBURY EXOTICA HASTINGS



# KEITH MURRAY

Peter Sheridan AM

## THE RELUCTANT DESIGNER



Keith Murray (1892-1981) is today celebrated as a gifted designer of beautiful ceramics in the Art Deco style. It is ironic that the skill and talent for which he is most remembered was not his first or enduring passion.

Born in New Zealand, he served in the Royal Flying Corps in World War I, being awarded the Military Cross and Croix de Guerre Belge. Graduating as an architect in London in 1921, and with limited opportunities, he first tried his hand as an illustrator for magazines. An avid collector of glass, he visited the 1925 Exposition in Paris and also the 1931 Exhibition of Swedish Industrial Art in London. He was impressed by the sleek Scandinavian glass designs and this inspired him to consider designs for British factory production. With even less architectural prospects available due to the Great Depression, he obtained part-time work as a freelance glass designer at Stevens & Williams Glassworks of Brierley Hill in 1932. Some trial glass pieces were exhibited in London in the same year leading to the creation of the 'Keith Murray range'. Although made only in small quantities (six to twelve) he produced over 1200 designs in the period from 1932 to 1939 including vases, decanters and bathroom sets. The forms were modern with understated practicality.

In 1932 he also turned his hand to ceramics, working two months a year with the Wedgwood pottery company. He was invited by Josiah Wedgwood who had taken over the factory in 1930 after the Wall Street crash and wanted him to design some modern shapes while utilising existing manufacturing techniques. His first task was to assist in the design of the vegetable tureen as part of a range of dinner and teaware called 'Annular' which were plain with horizontal ribbing. From the outset Murray's designs were simple and clean, either plain or with broad geometric fluting reflecting his architectural approach. This was accentuated by the use of matte glazes in white 'Tombstone', green, turquoise, straw, duck-egg blue and grey which were developed by Norman Wilson. Rare examples of Murray's designs are seen in brown and black basalt. Both the simple lines and the glazes were unique and immediately popular in the English market. An exhibition at John Lewis in Oxford Street London in 1933 highlighted one hundred and twenty four of his designs, reflecting his status and popularity. By 1935, Keith Murray had achieved great critical acclaim as his pieces formed part of an important exhibition held at the Royal Academy and attracted a lot of attention. In fact the art critic for the Times newspaper wrote – "Nothing in this exhibition is more gratifying than the work as designer of Keith Murray, in ceramics, glass ware and silver".

**TOP:**  
Cup, saucer and plate

**FAR LEFT:**  
Milk jug

**CENTRE LEFT:**  
Teapot

**CENTRE RIGHT:**  
Serving plate

**FAR RIGHT:**  
Sugar bowl





**TOP LEFT:**  
Medium white vase



**RIGHT:**  
Large green vase



**LOWER LEFT:**  
Small green bowl  
with lid

Murray's style was subtle and simple in contrast to other contemporary Art Deco designers such as Clarice Cliff. His designs were less expensive to produce and could be adapted to slip casting rather than hand potting. In many ways this fulfilled Wedgwood's dictum to change direction and to find "new cheap shapes, attractive to modern eyes" which would be "the best possible for the money and reasonably attractive to that growing section of the younger public which has some taste but no money." Another English ceramics designer, Susie Cooper, also found success in this section of the consumer market.

His most famous pieces are vases, bowls, book-ends, dinnerware, pots and inkwells, although he also designed beer jugs and mugs. Some pieces in silver were created for Mappin and Webb.

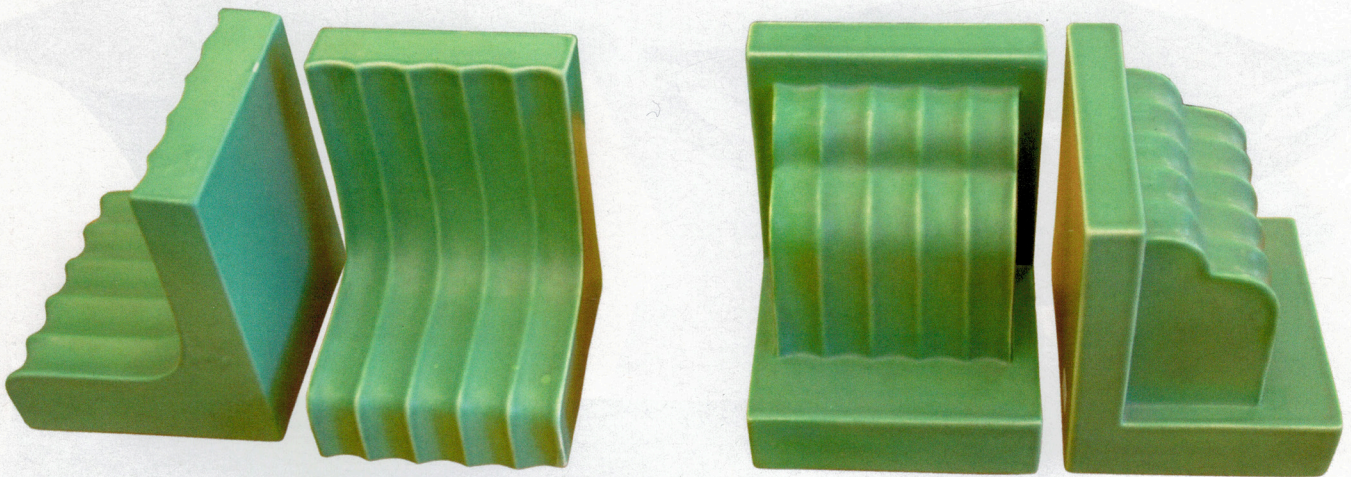
In 1936 he was rewarded as 'Royal Designer for Industry'. Yet such was his love of architecture that in

the same year he opened an architectural firm and was appointed architect in charge of designing the new Wedgwood factory at Barlaston.

Following WWII he returned to full-time architectural practice and left the field of industrial design. Although he was not involved with new work at Wedgwood after 1946, Keith Murray's designs remained in production and formed a large part of the Wedgwood catalogue of glazes, bodies and shapes until 1950. In 1978 The Victoria and Albert Museum honoured Keith Murray with an exhibition of his works.

Identifying Murray's work is generally straightforward although some of his designs were produced with the Wedgwood mark without his name. In 1932 Murray was given the rare honour of having his signature included alongside the Wedgwood name. In most cases Wedgwood pieces produced prior to 1940 have Keith





Murray's full name in the form of his signature on the base whereas subsequently this was abbreviated to the KM monogram. After 1940, when the new factory was opened, 'Wedgwood of Etruria and Barlaston' was added in a circular form. On each piece there are also impressed letters and numbers referring to the potter and date of manufacture.

Most of the shapes are designated by a descriptor (such as vase or bowl) and delineated by a model number. One of the few shapes given a name was the 'Bomb' vase (model number 3765) which came in four sizes and various colours. Vase model numbers 3801 and 3802 seem later variants of the same design and those with a similar spherical shape are now called 'football' vases as well as 'bomb' vases.

Keith Murray exemplified a modernist ethos in simplified yet classical hand-worked shapes, which highlighted their

intrinsic elements. His designs were skilfully subtle and elegant, belying the compromise required for cost-effectiveness and mass production.

Although Keith Murray worked as an industrial designer for a relatively short period (from 1930 to 1946), he must be considered one of the best of the twentieth century designers, particularly for his ceramic pieces. Today, his works are represented in many permanent museum collections as well as being highly collectable. His designs have that wonderful timeless quality which typifies the best of Art Deco.

All images by Peter Sheridan.

#### FURTHER READING

Johnson, S. (2005) *Keith Murray Designer*. Bath UK: Gemini Publications.  
 Cunningham, H.C. (1999) *Clarice Cliff and Her Contemporaries: Susie Cooper, Keith Murray, Charlotte Rhead and the Carlton Designers*. PA, USA: Schiffer Publishing.

- TOP LEFT:**  
Three green vases
- TOP RIGHT:**  
Medium white vase
- LOWER LEFT:**  
Bookends
- LOWER RIGHT:**  
Bookends





**TOP:**  
Green teaset

**CENTRE LEFT:**  
White tureen

**CENTRE RIGHT:**  
White bowl

**RIGHT:**  
Base marks

