

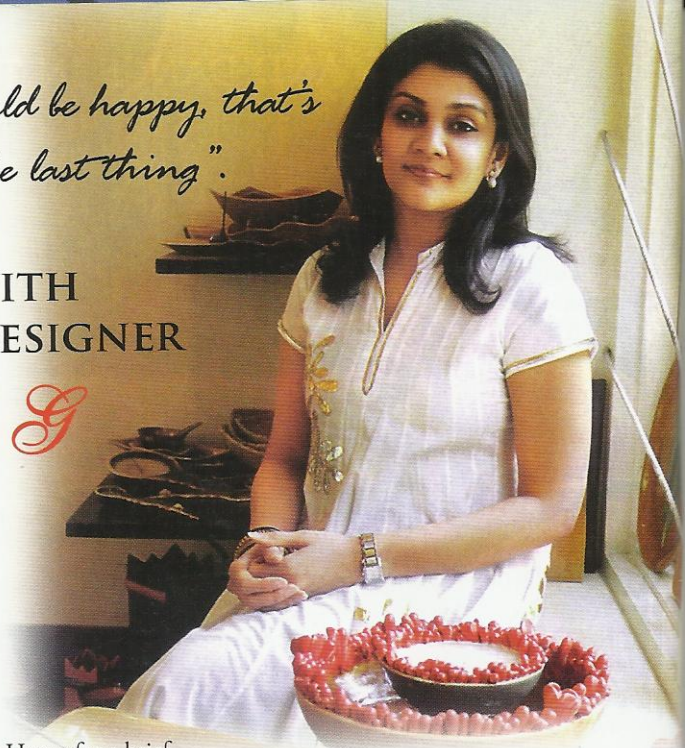
*"The client should be happy, that's the first and the last thing".*

## INTERVIEW WITH A CERAMIC DESIGNER

*Anupama G*

*Jalan*

Special Correspondents



**C**al Calling visited Jalan House for a brief tête-à-tête with the designer. Excerpts follow:

*Cal Calling: Could you tell us how you got involved with ceramics?*

*Aanupama G. Jalan:* I had it actually as a board paper in my school, Modern School Vasant Vihar, Delhi. And then, while I was in college, in Lady Shri Ram College for Women, Delhi, I was working with an artist, Lydia Mehta. So, that kind of continued and then I came to Kolkata. My sister-in-law had already started a little pottery thing here and it's been eight years now, I've been looking into it.

*CC: So, did you choose ceramics in school or was it compulsory?*

*AGJ:* Yes, I did. It was very intentional.

*CC: But, why ceramics?*

*AGJ:* I think the creativity of the clay is something very beautiful that always intrigued me. It was sculpture actually, then

it turned into tableware after I actually started the studio. I wanted to make it more like a business than just an art form and that's why I got into an art form of pottery tableware.

*CC: How did you start up the process over here?*

*AGJ:* The basic system was already set, so I just continued with that and now I have one or two artists sometimes who come and visit and I'm associated with ceramic colleges here so whenever you need guidance from them, there are professors who come and help you. And through the work, people like the labour also, get me people whenever needed. The designs are very nature-oriented so the inspiration is very natural. It just moved on, step by step.

*CC: What are the different techniques that you prefer?*

*AGJ:* I do different shapes and different designs. Otherwise, I use spray-glazing.

That's one thing I do and hand-brush painting. And of course, then there's rolling of clay, there's on the wheel, those are the different, basic ways of producing.

*CC: Could you tell us about some of your favourite creations?*

*AGJ:* My favourite are the green platters with a design on the side. I'm just developing this one with a feather, a peacock feather. It's still in the process, but I think this is also one of my favourites. And the other one is the lotus series. As you can see I use a lot of earthy colours, which are contrasted with a bit of red – not too much or too bright.

*CC: Where do you retail from?*

*AGJ:* I was supplying to the Address but since I've got my own studio in Kolkata, it's from here and I take part in exhibitions. Then, Parampara, one year. Outside Kolkata, of course, I've tried exhibitions in Bangalore, Delhi, and Bombay.

*CC: Apart from tableware, do you do anything else?*

*AGJ:* I do candles as well as ceramic containers. And I just got a lot of stuff from Vietnam. These really nice lacquer-ware plates and then I made candles and accessorised it with ceramic flowers. And I do washbasins as well, but only on order. And, you can see, there's a Buddha head, that's a sculptural, decorative element. And, there are water-basins, for feng-shui. These things are by order and the table-ware is part of the regular production.

*CC: Does it matter how big the order is or how small it is?*

*AGJ:* No, I'm very flexible. The client should be happy, that's the first and the last thing.



*CC: What are the prices generally like?*

*AGJ:* On average, a dinner plate is for Rs. 325. It varies. My prices start from Rs. 300 and something like the Buddha head would be Rs. 12,000. But, on average, for all the plates and bowls, maximum is Rs. 2000.

*CC: Could you tell us about some of the more interesting orders that have been placed?*

*AGJ:* I did a very nice order for the Olive restaurant in Delhi. Taj (Bengal) is a regular client. Park Hotel. At Diwali time, I do a special series of products using metal and interesting things like that.

*CC: How long does it take approximately for conceptualisation and execution?*

*AGJ:* It could be instant. Like, I saw a square plate and I draw just a line on it and that could be a design. Or it could even take a week.

*CC: The designs that you do choose, do you prefer abstract or natural?*

*AGJ:* Design, I don't know, (points to a particular set), it's a honeycomb, it's a concept that came to the mind and then we transformed it. It could be intricate or just a straight line. Then, I went into question





Photograph by Monita Me

marks (a large yellow question mark plate is on display), comas, exclamation marks and turned them into big plates. So, it's just random. Like, that was a boat (points to some boat-shaped bowls), I saw a canoe-like thing and then we developed it into bowls.

*CC: How do you feel Kolkattans respond to your kind of work?*

*AGJ:* Initially it was troublesome. But now people are changing, their concepts are changing, they are very open to new ideas, that's definitely there and I think people are becoming house-proud, so I don't think that's a problem any more.

*CC: Do you make single-pieces or do you make the same thing over and over again?*

*AGJ:* I do have a production system flowing, which is what we work with, and we keep getting orders so the order work continues so that's like one thing that happens and apart from that I always have stock. You may like this particular design but you may not like the colour that I have, if you want to change to any combination of your liking, I could do that. We're not bound to anything here.

*CC: Any exhibitions in mind?*

*AGJ:* I want to do IMC (Indian Merchants Chamber) in Bombay this year and maybe do Parampara in Kolkata later, and I have got a recent enquiry from people in Samsaara, they want to do a tie-up and do something in Delhi and in Kolkata.

*CC: What are your plans for the future? Are you going to expand?*

*AGJ:* Right now the way we are placed, it's very comfortable. I'd like to move towards the higher-end stores in India and to do exhibitions in different cities. So that's what we're planning to do. And hoping to get more orders.

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