





# THE MANOR REBORN

For a new show at Waddesdon Manor, ceramicist Kate Malone has revived aspects of the estate's past. The house, gardens and a collection of Sèvres porcelain all offered inspiration, while portraits of its founder - Ferdinand de Rothschild - and his sister make a rousing appearance in her ebullient array of pots and pumpkins. Text: Grace McCloud. Photography: Tim Beddow ▷

Opposite: *Waddesdon Big Mother Pumpkin*, 60cm wide and made of crystalline-glazed stoneware, sits on a trolley in the doorway of the new oak-framed house that Kate's husband, Graham, is building a few doors down from their current studio/home. At the moment, it accommodates her glaze archive. Top: Kate, seen here on her cobbled street in London, bicycles to her nearby satellite studio every day. Mr Boo, aka Booba, sits in the basket





Left: on the dining table, *Eythrope Blackberry* pots and a pair of *Masquerade* gourds flank the *Oak Estate* urn. The oak was one of Ferdinand's favourite trees. Top: Kate's take on a tulipière. Above: passementerie-inspired tureens and a pair of *Estate* vases sit below a staircase of railway sleepers, made by Graham

**KATE MALONE** is, by her own admission, very lucky. ‘I seem to have been dead jammy,’ she says when I ask how she became a potter. It started, of course, with a ‘handsome, dusty pottery teacher under E-Block stairs’, and thence the jamminess continued. At art school in the halcyon days of higher education – no fees, no cuts – it doubtless helped that she got her hands dirty under the auspices of Mo Jupp at Bristol Polytechnic, and later David Hamilton, Eduardo Paolozzi and Janice Tchalenko at the Royal College of Art. But surely it’s more than just good fortune that has led to the inclusion of her work in the V&A’s permanent collection, or her becoming a judge on BBC Two’s much-adored *The Great Pottery Throw Down*? Kate laughs. ‘Yes! Being a workaholic helps!’

Enter Kate’s house, built with her husband, Graham Inglefield, in the 1980s, and you realise she isn’t even slightly joking. Though they’re now building a new one a few doors down, hoping to separate life and work, this two-storey mews house, nestled between Islington and Hackney, is full to bursting with the fruits and vegetables of her labour. Porcelain pumpkins squat in corners; stoneware berries, as ripe as in a Keats poem, are dotted round, and above the dining table, paper cut-outs, not far off Matisse, almost leap from pink-and-grey breeze-block walls. Carry on through the open-plan ground floor and you reach an office area. Here, an old typesetter’s chest displays objects animal, vegetable and mineral: inspirations for future pieces. Beyond is her kiln room. And everywhere pictures, postcards and sticky notes turn the rooms into giant pinboards of this potter’s whirring brain.

‘It’s the things that are in your periphery that are sometimes more exciting than the things in centre vision,’ she explains, before adding quickly: ‘but it’s not that you sit and don’t do anything... You have to be on a trajectory.’ (Somehow, I can’t imagine this seasoned cherry-picker is ever *not* hurtling along one trajectory or another.) Her latest show, *Kate Malone: Inspired by Waddesdon*, which runs in the Coach House at the Buckinghamshire manor built by Baron Ferdinand de Rothschild >



Top: Kate’s crystalline-stoneware glaze archive is the largest in Britain. Chests on wheels hold her findings, shelves above display glazes and, above them, a row of ‘face pots’ by the Sylvac and Sadler potteries looks down, ‘laughing at me because I’m such a nerd’. Above: *Young Ferdinand* sits to the right of *Sanchi Tassel*, inspired in part by an Indian temple. In front is one of Kate’s Waddesdon scrapbooks, which are also on show in the exhibition

in the late 19th century, bears testimony. Across the exhibition, there are references – oblique and less so – to the parterre beds at Eythrope, the Rothschilds’ garden; to the vermicular pattern sprawling across the portico; or to Ferdinand and Alice’s collection of gold boxes. But look closer and you’ll begin to see how the shape of a column from a Buddhist temple Kate saw in India has informed that of a huge stoneware curtain tassel (homage to Waddesdon’s exquisite passementerie). On one of her tureens, the handles – every bit as exuberant as those of the Sèvres pieces collected by Ferdinand – also bring to mind the Afro-Caribbean wigs and weaves of her local beauty shops.

Incongruous? Not as much as one might think. ‘I felt so completely within the essence of Waddesdon,’ says Kate. Such ‘gathering and borrowing’, as she terms it, is bound up in the place. Designed by Gabriel-Hippolyte Destailleur, this French chateau in the home counties is nothing if not dissonant. Deliciously so: with the main house finished in 1883, its rooms were soon crammed with Dutch old masters, Gobelins tapestries and Sèvres porcelain, becoming synonymous with ‘*le goût Rothschild*’.

‘It was like a library of things,’ Kate says of her first visit to the estate, where she was accompanied by her dealer, Adrian Sassoon, with whom the Rothschild Foundation has collaborated to create this exhibition. ‘I was just like: “Phwoar!” But now I’m annoyed I did the most obvious thing!’ Hardly. For starters, Kate has included her paper cut-outs in the exhibition – a first for her. But most surprising are her ‘portraits’ of Ferdinand and his sister, Alice, who inherited the estate on his death in 1898.

Kate has made pots with ‘assumed characters’ before, some bearing titles such as ‘naughty boy’ or ‘baby’. However, to ‘pick a character... it was a hard thing’. But, making a pot late at night, suddenly ‘I thought: Oh my god! It looks like Alice! It just had her figure. She had this high forehead and she was kind of squat and strong... She was a feisty woman!’ *Miss Alice* is similarly robust, encrusted with hundreds of tiny white porcelain daisies (a reference to Victorian high lace collars), contained within ▷



Top: a pair of clay faces, made by Jane Muir for her degree show, have been standing sentinel in the garden since the 1990s. They were meant to be sold, but they’ve never moved, so Kate is swapping them for pots. She says they look like Graham. Above: this test piece was made by Kate last autumn during her research period before the Waddesdon show. Each mark on the base of the jug references a different glaze experiment on the outside

## antennae



box hedging (she was a devoted gardener, dubbed ‘The All-Powerful One’ by Queen Victoria, having admonished the formidable monarch for stepping on her plants). When one of the curators first saw the pot, she said it was like meeting the real Alice.

But having done the mistress of the house, ‘I had to do bloody old Ferdinand, didn’t I? And he’s hard. All my work is about reaching out and optimism and joy, and Ferdinand was solitary.’ His wife and only son had died in childbirth, and there are reports he was lonely. ‘But he *did* like dressing up. There was something flamboyant about him.’ Latching on to this, Kate actually ended up making two Ferdinands. *Young Ferdinand*, the smaller and more restrained of the pair, is covered with sky-blue and ash-grey vermiculation, again from the portico. The coral-like pattern crops up on *Baron Ferdinand* too, criss-crossed with the bay leaves from the portico’s carved columns. A pitched lid, drawn from a roof, is topped by a daisy-covered bird from the baron’s aviary. And on both, little boxes – a reference not just to his collection, but also to Kate’s 2014 ‘Magma’ range – whizz around the vases’ necks. ‘It was all about his energy. His life force.’

And indeed, the whole collection is palpably vital. Take the *Estate* vases. Kate’s favourites, they’re marked with the trees planted by Ferdinand’s gardeners, a snaking path and the historic names of the fields before the estate was created, drawn from old maps. From the vases’ autumnal pied beauty to her squash- and parsnip-laden *Eythrope Hot-Pot*, each of these pieces is buzzing with life, and not just that of Alice and Ferdinand. ‘Waddesdon isn’t just about the Rothschilds,’ she tells me. ‘It’s about the gardeners, plumbers, cooks... It’s about place, it’s about people and time’ ■

Prices from £280. *Kate Malone: Inspired by Waddesdon* runs at The Coach House, The Stables, Waddesdon Manor, Aylesbury, Bucks HP18 0JH, until 16 Oct. For opening hours, ring 01296 653203, or visit [waddesdon.org.uk](http://waddesdon.org.uk). To contact Adrian Sassoon, ring 020 7581 9888, or visit [adriansassoon.com](http://adriansassoon.com). For more information on Kate Malone, visit [katemaloneceramics.com](http://katemaloneceramics.com)

Top: in the potter’s kiln room, glazes, mixed by Kate to her own recipes, are stored in white tubs in the corner of her glaze bench, which is made of Kee Klamp fittings. Overhead, a glass ceiling lets as much natural light into the room as possible. Facing the work station is her kiln (above). One of the largest private kilns in London, it can hold one of Kate’s larger pieces, or about 15 smaller ones at a time. The door behind, just visible, leads to the garden