

A woman with short brown hair, wearing a blue long-sleeved top and a light-colored apron with a red waistband, stands in the doorway of a converted stable. She is holding a large stack of papers. To her right, a wooden easel holds several sheets of paper with hand-drawn designs. A red fabric is draped over the easel. In the background, a desk with a computer monitor and various papers is visible. To the left, a window with a black metal frame is partially visible. A bicycle with a wicker basket is parked outside the doorway. The ground is covered with fallen autumn leaves.

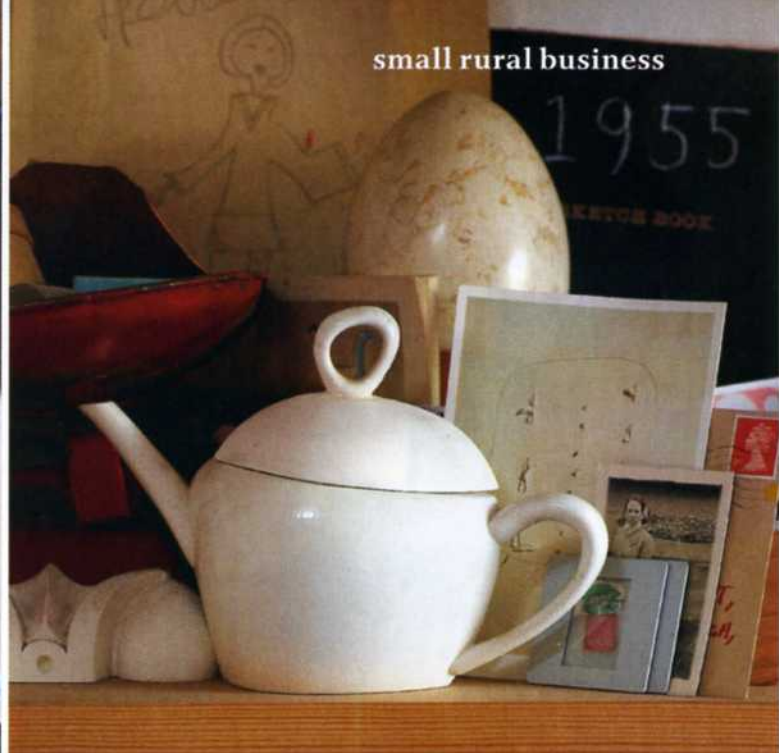
# Beauty in UTILITY

*A love of vintage domestic artefacts and everyday household objects has been the inspiration behind a young designer's quirky handprinted home accessories*

WORDS BY CAROLINE REES PHOTOGRAPHS BY ALUN CALLENDER

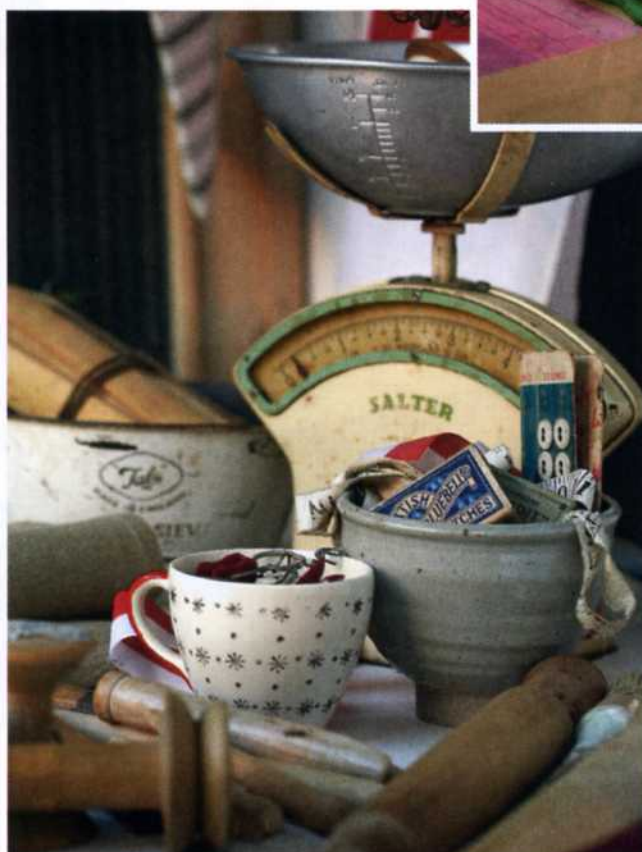
THIS PAGE Teresa at her studio in a converted stable. OPPOSITE PAGE Aprons and stationery are among the practical items that bear her distinctive designs

small rural business





*"It is essential for me that my products are functional and will take on their own character with wear and tear"*



There aren't many people who would get excited about old fuses, but textile artist Teresa Cole is thrilled with her collection, neatly taped to a piece of card. "Aren't they lovely? I like their worn, faded colours and sense of history," she says enthusiastically. But it's not just electrical paraphernalia that gets her pulse racing; sets of vintage scales, yellowing cards of buttons, cotton reels fashioned into clothes pegs and assorted kitchenalia are just some of the other domestic pieces used to inspire her textile designs and stored in her small Leicestershire studio in Barrow upon Soar.

"Both my grandpas hoarded 'treasures' in their sheds, which have fascinated me since I was a child," Teresa explains. "One had a lovely old collection of watering cans, and the other had jars screwed to the underside of a shelf with brackets and bolts in them." Following in their footsteps, she has given this family penchant her own personal style, searching auctions, flea markets and car-boot sales for household bric-a-brac that other shoppers leave behind. "Most of my inspiration comes from seeing the form and beauty of utility items in a new way," says Teresa, who screen-prints images of these collected household objects (and the odd boat or bird) onto her own range of tea towels, bed linen, napkins,

aprons and bags. "The commercial route of drawing flowers and things never really appealed to me," she says. "Even at art college I was drawn to the proportions of old iron radiators and air vents, which no one else seemed to be interested in doing."

After graduating from Loughborough University's School of Art and Design, she took work to local craft fairs and sent off handmade photo books of her designs to selected galleries. "I always wanted to go into business myself and I decided to take a friend's advice and not get a job because it might make me settle for a regular income rather than pursuing my ambition of self-employment," she says. The gamble paid off, and she was soon awarded a grant by the Crafts Council that enabled her to buy equipment and rent a studio for a year. With this, a loan from the

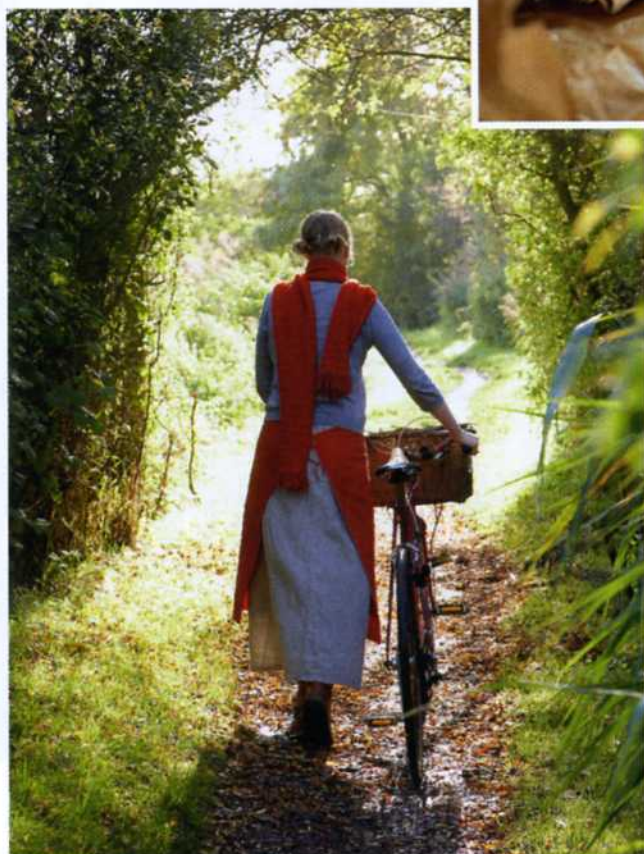
Prince's Trust, and funding from the Arts Council, she launched her textile business in earnest, which she named Teresa Green, from 'Trees are green', her old family nickname.

Teresa's morning commute now involves a peaceful 20-minute cycle ride along the Grand Union Canal to her workshop in a converted stable block. "I'd looked around industrial estates but they were so bleak and depressing," she says. "I wanted an old building with its own water supply and stumbled across this yard. It's perfect." Inside, a huge orchard ladder leads up to a light-filled loft space, where Teresa can work at her designs by a circular window overlooking the courtyard. "It's a serene space - and an adventurous one," she says, crawling under a beam. The A-frame apple ladders are her favourite artefacts. She has another two at home: one is used for hanging clothes and the other as a trellis in the garden. She depicted the ladder on bed linen with the theme, ▷

**LEFT, FROM TOP Teresa works on her designs in a loft space reached by an old orchard ladder; she screen-prints using a squeegee to distribute colour evenly; inspirational kitchenalia**



*"I've always worked with a lot of red and green: red seems to lift most colours, while pea and grassy greens are very fresh"*



in French, of "the ascent to bed". She likes playing with language in her imagery. "Last year I did a 'pan for sauce', rather than a saucepan. Often, you hear a phrase but don't think about its meaning."

The summer months are spent preparing for the autumn shows. She starts by flicking through magazines and takes out the various bits and pieces she has been collecting for inspiration over the past year. She then draws up her negatives on to acetate film, makes her stencilled screens and starts her sampling. "I can sometimes spend half a day re-drawing an image till I'm happy with its proportions," she says. She prefers to bring out a limited new range each year rather than keep adding to existing stock. "I might reintroduce some old designs in different colours or as limited editions, but I like to keep it fresh. Otherwise, your customer base wouldn't grow as much." That said, Teresa doesn't regard herself as a business brain. "I just enjoy my work. The bird images sold well so I've done more, but I try not to be led in that way. I did spades and cars once, which weren't overly popular, but I really wanted to do them."

For now, extra cash is brought in by her once-a-week job teaching textiles at Nottingham Trent University, which enables her to devote at least two days solely to printing. Her printing table is the size of a double bed, onto which she sandwiches fabric – this time a cotton

tea towel – with her chosen stencilled screen before scooping a ridge of coloured ink across the top and smoothing it over with a squeegee. "I've always worked a lot with red and green," she says. "Partly because many old domestic objects are those colours, but also as red seems to complement, and lift, most shades, while pea and grassy greens are very fresh."

Her charming, spare, sketchy style is a carefully conceived look. "Often, my work is about elongating things, delivering a sense of what they are but not trying to depict the actual object photographically. And I like the designs to have space rather than being too busy," she says. The crisp simplicity is heightened by the use of linen and cotton, all sourced in the UK (Teresa loves natural fabrics that soften with age, to the extent that she doesn't ever wear

synthetic materials). She does some of the small-scale sewing herself with help from placement students, but has aprons made up locally and purses put together by a small family company in the north-west. Orders are then packaged, in traditional brown paper and string, with a label typed on an old manual typewriter.

"It's essential for me that my products are functional," says Teresa, as she lifts the stencil from the freshly printed tea towel, before hanging it up to dry on one of the many washing lines that criss-cross her studio. "I could just make framed artwork, but I like the fact I'm creating domestic items that people will use again and again – things that will take on their own character with wear and tear." Rather like her own cherished collection of bygones, in fact. 🐾  
Teresa's work can be seen at [www.teresagreen.co.uk](http://www.teresagreen.co.uk) (01509 261691) and at The Contemporary Craft Fair, Mill Marsh Park, Bovey Tracey, Devon from 5-7 June ([www.craftsatboveytracey.co.uk](http://www.craftsatboveytracey.co.uk)).

**LEFT, FROM TOP Teresa hangs a freshly printed tea towel up to dry; orders are packaged in traditional brown paper and string; Teresa's commute involves a peaceful cycle ride along the canal**