



THIS PICTURE: Astrid sits beside some of her ceramic pieces, including 'Botanical Sculpture' (to the right of Astrid, on floor, back left, 75cm H), £995, The Conran Shop.

BLOOMING MARVELLOUS: ASTRID DAHL

Given that she works from a studio in South Africa's beautiful KwaZulu-Natal Midlands, surrounded by indigenous forests, fields of wild flowers and imposing mountains, it's not surprising that Astrid's ceramic artworks are inspired by nature. However, it wasn't from outside her window that she drew inspiration for her recent collections. It was from a book on the work of turn-of-the-century German botanist/photographer Karl Blossfeldt, renowned for capturing the beautiful forms and textures of plants through magnification. Similarly, Astrid's larger-than-life 3D interpretations of his photographs in unglazed clay give the simple plant forms dramatic architectural impact. And, just like architectural endeavours, they're a logistical challenge to make. 'Suspending heavy petals from the narrowest of connections is particularly difficult,' she says. But the breathtaking results are worth any risks. Her perfectly formed 'Botanical Sculpture' (above, on floor, back left), showcased by The Conran Shop, won an ELLE Decoration South Africa Design Award in 2004; and a concoction of concentric whorls inspired by dried seed-pods (above, on table, at front) won her another award in 2005. Asked if her works are, in essence, African, she says, 'No, they just reflect the beauty of plants, which is a universal thing.' She does, however, admit that South Africa's ever-changing cultural landscape drives her. And the sunshine makes her happy. Such beautiful objects could only be the product of a happy soul.

IN BRIEF

Name: Astrid Dahl.

Studied: diploma in Ceramics at KwaZulu-Natal Technikon.

Works: from home in Nottingham Road, KwaZulu-Natal (on the Midlands Meander, a route through the area populated by numerous craftspeople who open their studios to the public – visit www.midlands.kzn.org.za).

Likes: weekends, swimming in the sea, gardening, fixing-up old furniture, and interesting fabrics.

Dislikes: waking up early and worrying.