

# INTERIOR DESIGN<sup>®</sup>

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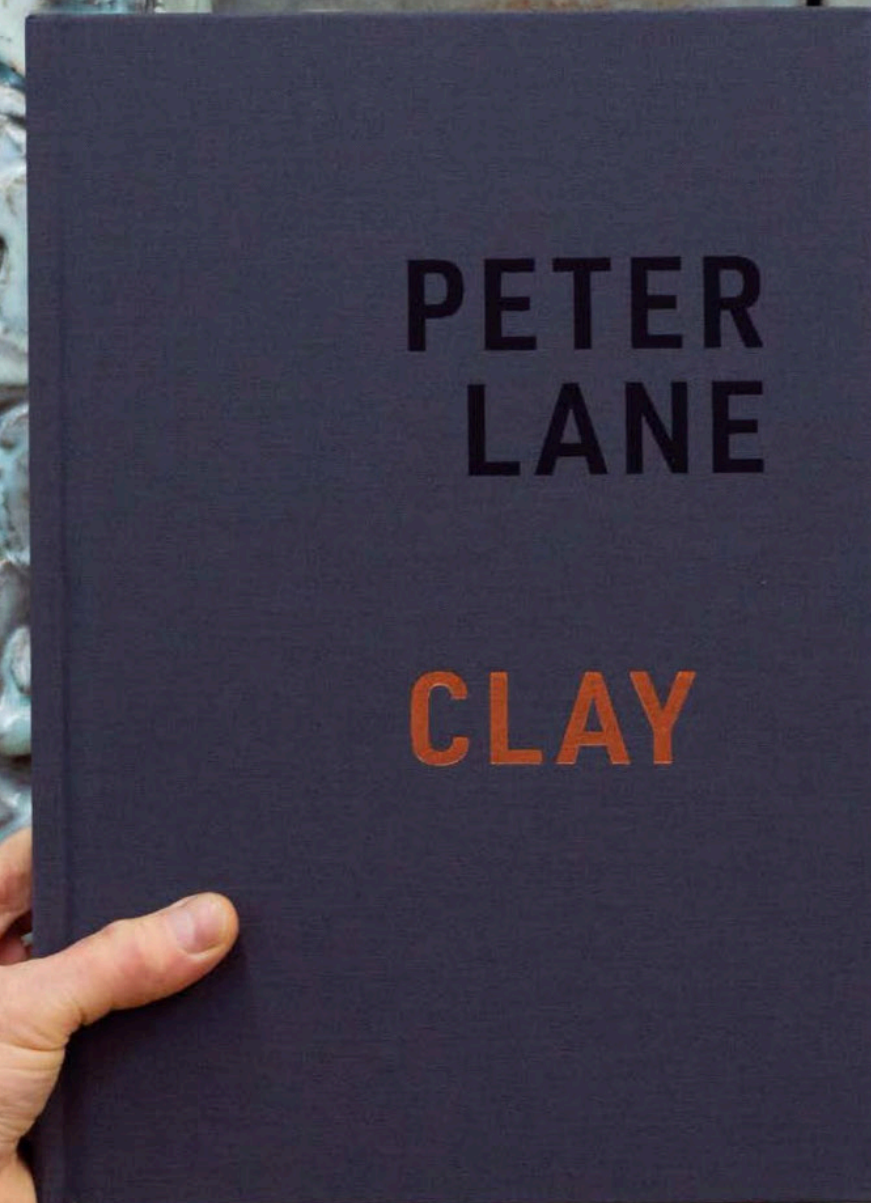
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# *terra firma*

A magnificent monograph explores New York ceramic artist Peter Lane's large-scale architectural installations, monumental furniture, and decorative work

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excerpted from: *Peter Lane: Clay, Scholes Press, 2022*  
photography: *jeff klapperich*







**The work begins on the floor.** Together with a team of five or six assistants, ceramic artist Peter Lane lays down a field of clay, several inches thick. Then this huge slab is sculpted using hand tools, marked out into a grid using a laser, and cut into modular units. These components are then separately glazed and fired. Metallic leaf, white or yellow gold or perhaps palladium, is selectively added. Finally, the work is installed on a wall—Lane conceives each composition as site-specific—and asserts itself as complete and monumental, a hybrid of art, craft, engineering, and architecture.

Lane occupies a unique position in contemporary ceramics. This is in part due to the sheer scale of his enterprise—his 10,000-square-foot Brooklyn studio boasts the largest kiln capacity in New York City—and also a matter of interdisciplinarity. His work sits somewhere between sculpture, painting, architecture, and interior design, though he doesn't much mind what you call it. He came by this open-minded attitude early on. Lane's first forays into art were as a painter, with a strong line in texture—he mixed sand into his works, creating rich surfaces that anticipated his later production. It wasn't his natural métier, though, and he knew it.

A happenstance encounter in 1994 with mid-century modern pottery in a Miami Beach boutique got him thinking about ceramics. By the time he got back to New York, he had decided—"not without a sense of irony," he says, given the hobbyist associations the medium had at the time—to head to Greenwich House Pottery. This venerable Arts and Crafts institution had been a crossroads for leading talent in the field for over a century. It was a good place to fall in love with clay, and right away he was hooked. As a painter, Lane had always been more concerned with materiality than imagery; here was a discipline that was all materiality, all the time.

The first things that Lane made at Greenwich House were functional lamp bases, but his horizons were expanding fast. A series of trips to Japan, beginning in 1998, exposed him to that culture's aesthetic sensibility, in which artistic pottery and purely decorative painting both have a place. Very much in this spirit, he developed a distinctive idiom that could be applied to a diversity of contexts and scales: tableware, vases, furniture, murals, complete interiors. Designers and architects such as Chahan Minassian and Peter Marino noticed him and began to include him in their projects. Soon he began receiving his own independent ➤

**Previous spread:** The subject of Peter Lane: Clay holds the monograph up in his Brooklyn, New York, studio, where the maquette for an installation completed in 2017 at the Hôtel de Crillon in Paris provides a powerful background; photography: Peter Lane Studio.

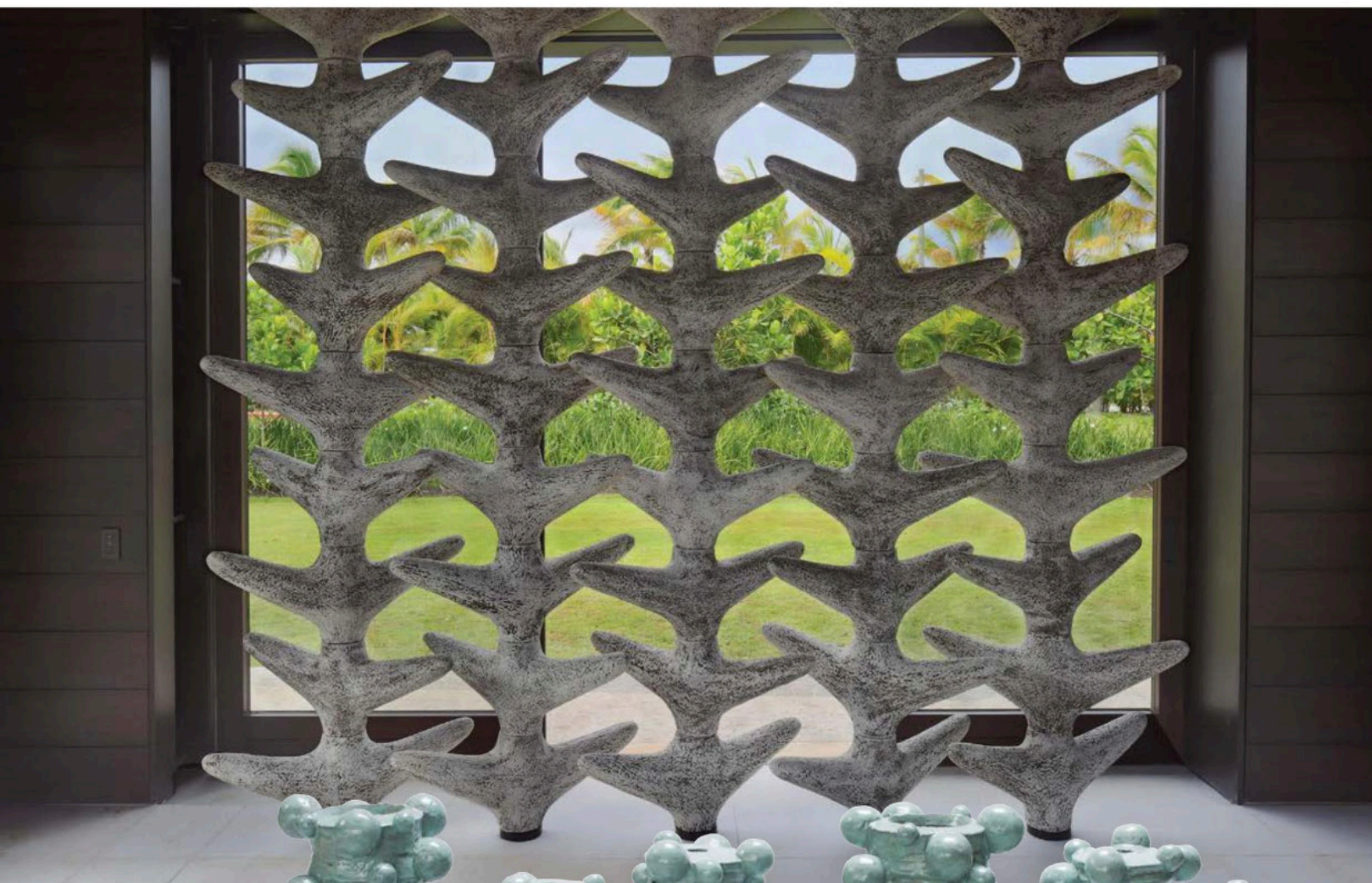
**Top:** A work in progress for an exhibition at New York's Salon Art + Design in 2021; photography: Peter Lane Studio. **Bottom:** Lane's hands working raw clay.

**Opposite top:** The ceramic artist in front of a study for his 2016 series *Wasteland* at his studio.

**Opposite bottom, from left:** A detail from a 2018 custom installation at Atelier Peter Nitz in Zurich, Switzerland. Part of a wall sculpture commissioned in 2014 by Chahan for a New York apartment overlooking Central Park.







**Top, from left:** A custom ceramic screen commissioned in 2018 by Peter Marino Architect for a house in the Caribbean. Designed by Pembroke & Ives in 2019, the dining room in a New York house featuring a custom wall sculpture. A detail of a 2009 outdoor sculpture installed on a poolside wall in a Miami residence; photography: Whitney Cox. **Center:** A group of celadon-glazed Cabochon sculptural vessels with sphere motifs from 2019. **Bottom, from left:** Arranged in an S shape, a five-section Ring table from 2016. The completed work for the Salon Art + Design exhibition, installed in the studio; photography: Peter Lane Studio. Lane at work in the 10,000-square-foot studio. Also in the studio, a vignette comprising monumental vessels, planters, and pedestal tables in front of a wall sculpture. ➔





commissions, largely for residential settings. It turned out he had a genius for monumental bespoke work.

One of the keys to Lane's success has been his ability to achieve both consistency and variation. His work is immediately recognizable, with its characteristic deep relief textures and gilt spheres. Within his well-established vocabulary, however, Lane is always finding new possibilities. The most obvious variable is his glazes, which he makes up from scratch. These range widely, fully exploiting the chromatic possibilities of minerals like cobalt, manganese, and copper (Lane describes the extraordinary interactions that occur in the kiln as a sort of "fast geology"). The grid that Lane imposes on his material landscapes is also important to their effect. This is a practical necessity, of course—tilework has been executed in this way for thousands of years, to enable manufacture, firing, shipping, and placement—but Lane infuses this basic format with an unusual degree of sculptural interest. Patterns of striation, perforations, or accordion folds (the latter suggested to him by a wooden washboard that he saw in the gift shop for New York's Museum of African Art) move across this regular backdrop, like melody lines swerving over a bass line. The grid almost—but not quite—disappears under the biomorphic tide.

Lane's largest commission to date—an interior for the Hôtel de Crillon in Paris—was completed in 2017. Working with Minassian and architect Aline Asmar d'Amman, he created the walls for the hotel swimming pool, which adjoins a spa area and lies underneath a courtyard. Skylights provide daytime illumination. This was part of a major renovation of the 18th-century building, which happened to proceed at the same time as similar projects at the Ritz Paris and Hôtel Plaza Athénée. As *Architectural Digest* noted at the time, "Unlike that of its competition, which hewed closer to preservation, the aesthetic here has gone from preserved-in-amber ancien régime to a streamlined opulence that feels very of the moment."

Working on such high-profile commissions, and on residences for private clients (including celebrities like Robert Downey, Jr., who commissioned a sculptural fireplace for his house in Long Island), puts Lane in a rarefied cultural echelon. Yet in so many ways, he is a totally unpretentious person. Lane is hands-on in the studio every day, working almost entirely with clay, which is after all just a specialized kind of mud. This all-but valueless material will be transformed through a long succession of alchemical procedures, then sent off into the world, where it will enact yet another transformation, infusing blank space with a perfectly calibrated mood and physicality. Like all successful artists, Lane aims higher all the time. But his feet are firmly planted, standing on solid ground. 🍷

**Top:** Shelf upon shelf of ceramic-glaze test samples displayed in the studio. **Bottom:** A 2014 wall relief, installed and dramatically lit by Chahan, in a residence in Gstaad, Switzerland.

**Opposite top:** The custom ceramic wall sculpture with gold leaf details in the pool at the Crillon, a collaboration with firms Chahan and Culture in Architecture and one of Lane's largest commissions to date. **Opposite bottom:** The Central Park apartment relief sets off a chair custom made in 1970 for the French designer Henri Samuel; photography: Jose Manuel Alorda.

