

Sarah Tracton

This award-winning Melbourne lighting designer has infused her handcrafted porcelain lights with delicacy and skill drawn from her fine-arts practice.

STYLING *Olga Lewis* | PHOTOGRAPHY *Tim O'Connor*



MC Escher lithograph reproduced courtesy of The Escher Museum, The Hague.

“Transitioning from fine art to design has been a learning curve. As an artist, you create instinctually; as a designer, you always have to have the end-user in mind.”

Growing up, I was rarely without a pencil or paintbrush in my hand. My earliest art memory was drawing an outback landscape. I was about five years old and I remember marvelling at the variety of iridescent colours in my pastel set. That fascination with material combinations stayed with me and led to my studies at the National Art School in Sydney. **I’m always curious to master new materials and techniques.** Pen ink, charcoal, lithography, clay, filmmaking, paint – no medium is off limits. Next on the horizon is the development of a rechargeable battery system which will allow customisation without touching wiring inside walls. I’m also looking at wireless motion-sensing, touch controls and prismatic configurations of my flat-sheet lighting. **Why lighting? The concept of creating functional art captivates me.** When I realised how exquisite the translucency of porcelain was, lighting was an obvious next step. Beautiful lighting has a powerful positive effect on our senses and its impact is immediate. Because my lighting is handmade, it lacks the geometry of machine-made pieces. But it’s those imperfections that give a piece – and a room – individuality.

I love exploring the infinite possibilities of porcelain, especially its translucent properties when paired with LEDs. Porcelain is an exquisite, yet challenging material to craft with as it’s very sensitive to temperature changes and humidity. If cracks occur during firing, I make the pieces whole again with gold leaf using the *kintsugi* technique, which creates unique pieces with a new type of beauty plus prevents wastage of this precious material.

Before hitting the studio, I get caffeinated and go for an epic early morning walk. I spend my day immersed in iridescent coloured stains, glazes, paper pulp, brushes, mixers and porcelain slip. In their early drying stage, the lights are so fragile that they can break with the slightest misstep on the way to loading the kiln for their firings. I take notes to record colour alterations and shrinkage rates. My technical collaborator and I will also chat about the progress of our residential commissions, analysing architectural plans and new designs we have on the drawing board. We are always looking to push boundaries in both technology and scale.

I really prefer to work in a quiet environment. Silence enables me to enter an almost

hypnotic immersion state of flow, which, for me, is optimal to creativity.

Good work-life balance is important too. I try to achieve it with as much screen-free time as possible, reading, and shopping for fresh produce from the farmer’s market.

I always get a thrill out of collaborating with renovators looking to commission unique lighting for their residential projects like they would choose art for their homes. It might be a loft in Brooklyn, New York, or the conversion of a 1920s church in northern NSW – no two projects are alike. When the lights are finally installed and switched on is also very special.

My biggest achievement is turning what I love to do creatively into a small business. **My biggest challenge has been transitioning from fine art to such a technical design field** – it was quite a learning curve. As a fine artist, you create instinctually; as a designer – in any field – you always have to have the end-user in mind. Winning a 2021 Good Design Award for my Lucent Collection was validation that I have made that transition successfully.

I’m currently completing a commercial cookery course at the William Angliss Institute. Producing ceramics is a collision between water, heat and atmosphere, which is very much like the cooking process. The endless possibilities of flavour and temperature combinations intrigue me as much as colour theory and the tactility of clay.

I really like to immerse myself in the things I’m learning, so *Larousse Gastronomique* by Prosper Montagné – the chef’s bible! – is on my reading list too.

I adore paintings from all eras, but especially masters of chiaroscuro and the Romantics. Caravaggio, Pierre-Paul Prud’hon, Francisco Goya, and Michelangelo. The graphic work of MC Escher is amazing too.

Iconic design comes in many forms. Some of my favourites are the luxe gold and glass tables by Pierre Vandel and elegant Danish furniture from the mid-20th century, but I also love a Rubik’s Cube and cochlear implants.

Travel is an endless source of inspiration for my work. Japan’s northernmost island, Hokkaido, is absolutely stunning. I also love New York for its indomitable 24/7 creative energy.

My dream project? Creating drawings and porcelain chandelier lighting for a 12th-century chateau in France. **H&G Sarah Tracton; www.sarahtracton.com.**



SARAH’S FAVOURITE THINGS
From top Drawing Hands lithograph by MC Escher. Mid-20th century Danish rosewood armchair, Pamoto. Dyadic Float wall light by Sarah Tracton. Vintage coffee table by Pierre Vandel.

OPPOSITE Sarah, pictured with some of her recent works, says she loves the “ethereal, almost celestial” quality of porcelain lighting.