

**Right and below right:** Jesmonite, a plaster, acrylic and cement liquid mix, is used to make "Rustiles", inspired by the shape of London bricks, to line an installation by Ariane Prin at London Design Fair next month (arianeprin.com)



**Far right:** silky bespoke cast surfaces by Katie Gillies, priced up to £800 per square metre (katiegillies.com)



**Below:** the Rust homeware series by London maker Ariane Prin is cast from Jesmonite mixed with iron dust, which gradually oxidises to acquire a brown pattern. Large vase, £590; small vase, £160; mini pot, £50, and medium tray, £390 (arianeprin.com)



# Design trends

## Jesmonite

By **Barbara Chandler**

**D**ESIGNERS' material of the moment is Jesmonite. That's the brand name for a water-based cement/plaster/acrylic mix, already beloved by building restorers, set builders and now increasingly by designer-makers and artists, who are using it to create many different kinds of homeware.

Outside the trade, most people have never heard of it. "A couple of years back we hadn't either, but had noticed intriguing pieces with an appealing, tactile finish," says Jimmy MacDonald, director of the forthcoming London Design Fair, a large show at the London Design Festival. Running from September 21-24, it's open to the public the weekend of September 23-24 (london-designfair.co.uk).

MacDonald is pushing Jesmonite as the fair's "material of the year", to be celebrated in an ambitious installation. "Few people realise what this material can do – you can make almost anything with Jesmonite," he says.

"Yes, Jesmonite is a chameleon, really," agrees Tim Sharman, technical director of the British company that invented the material nearly 35 years ago. "It can copy minutely the look, colour and texture of wood, stones, metals, and even leather and fabrics." The Jesmonite mix – a tightly guarded secret – can be poured into the most

intricate of moulds, or layered over surfaces, where it quickly sets and can be further sanded, painted and/or sawn. The result is robust, fireproof, solvent-free and often lighter than the material it mimics: stone, iron or solid timber, for example. Pieces have been made for buildings inside and out, in can't-tell-it-apart detail, and it's the go-to material for theatre and film sets, and shop window displays.

"Sculptors love Jesmonite," observes **Christopher Cox**, of Cox London in Pimlico, who makes dramatic sculptural furniture, lighting and wall pieces. "This material is non-toxic, durable and casts with great definition. It can easily be tinted and mixed with other mediums and in its rawest state resembles plaster or stucco."

Now many more designers are in on the act, fostered by the Jesmonite brand itself, which sponsors individual new makers. It has set an aesthetic ball rolling that's rapidly gathering speed.

**B**ACK to the London Design Fair and a studio in Hackney, where French-born **Ariane Prin** is making hundreds of rectangular Jesmonite tiles. Mosaic-like, they will line her ambitious bar-style installation. Each tile is subtly different, depending on its mix and how the surface is reacting to air. Par-



**Below:** Stephanie Tudor graduated from Central Saint Martins in 2013. She pours Jesmonite into silicone moulds, and then sands back the surface to expose textures within (stephanietudor.co.uk). This trinket bowl costs £170 (the newcraftsmen.com)



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