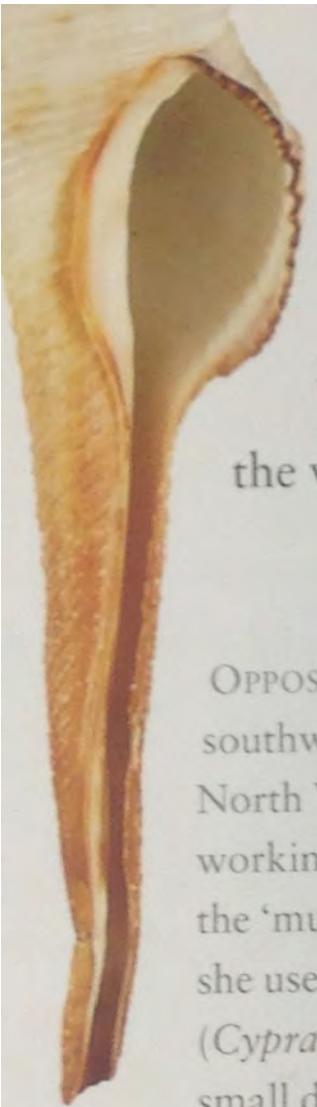


INGRID THOM



# THE SHELL

A World of Decoration  
& Ornament



have been moulded in the finest bone china; their designs woven into silk fabric. There are no art forms in which shells have not featured. This book pays tribute to the aesthetic shell, and celebrates the wealth of creativity that it has inspired.

OPPOSITE Shell spiral wall in a cliff-top retreat in southwest England, 2006, by Blott Kerr-Wilson (b. 1962), North Wales. Kerr-Wilson is the most innovative shell artist working today. To create this magnificent spiral, inspired by the 'music' and movement of the waves on the beach below, she used only three species of shell: Gold-ringer Cowries (*Cypraea annulus*), white Bubble shells (*Bulla* sp.), and small dark Nerites (from the family *Neritidae*). Several thousand shells were needed to complete the piece.



# THE BEAUTIFUL SHELL

*Shells form a felicitous group, and the sight of them may inspire lofty ideas as to form, in architects, sculptors, and even in painters.*

Edm  Fran ois Gersaint, French shell trader, 1736



To the human eye, shells are small objects of great beauty. Their myriad shapes, textures and colours defy the imagination, and many people regard them as works of art in their own right. Yet in the natural world there is no deliberate investment in making shells beautiful. Unlike birds, whose fine plumage has evolved to attract the opposite sex, molluscs are guileless. They are simply genetically programmed to build their shells as the best forms of protection available to them. Camouflage may be a factor in some cases, and possibly – although scientists are uncertain – even some form of communication, but beauty does not come into the equation.

To those of us who are drawn to them, however, shells rank as sublime creations; their beauty is like nothing else, and its accidental quality only adds to their appeal. Anybody who can reach a seashore may find shells and be enthralled by them. They are irresistible to adults and children alike, and



there are no national boundaries that limit the pleasure they can give.

Artists and craftsmen since time immemorial have found inspiration in the archetypal beauty of shells, and have sought to capture its essence in every creative form. Shells have been portrayed by painters in every genre. They have decorated buildings, furniture and costume. Jewellers may thread them on a simple cord, mount them in gold, or surround them with gemstones. Sculptors cast them in bronze, and chisel their forms in stone. Their shapes have been moulded in the finest bone china; their designs woven into silk fabric. There are no art forms in which shells have not featured. This book pays tribute to the aesthetic shell, and celebrates the wealth of creativity that it has inspired.

OPPOSITE Shell spiral wall in a cliff-top retreat in southwest England, 2006, by Blott Kerr-Wilson (b. 1962), North Wales. Kerr-Wilson is the most innovative shell artist working today. To create this magnificent spiral, inspired by the ‘music’ and movement of the waves on the beach below, she used only three species of shell: Gold-ringer Cowries (*Cypraea annulus*), white Bubble shells (*Bulla* sp.), and small dark Nerites (from the family *Neritidae*). Several thousand shells were needed to complete the piece.





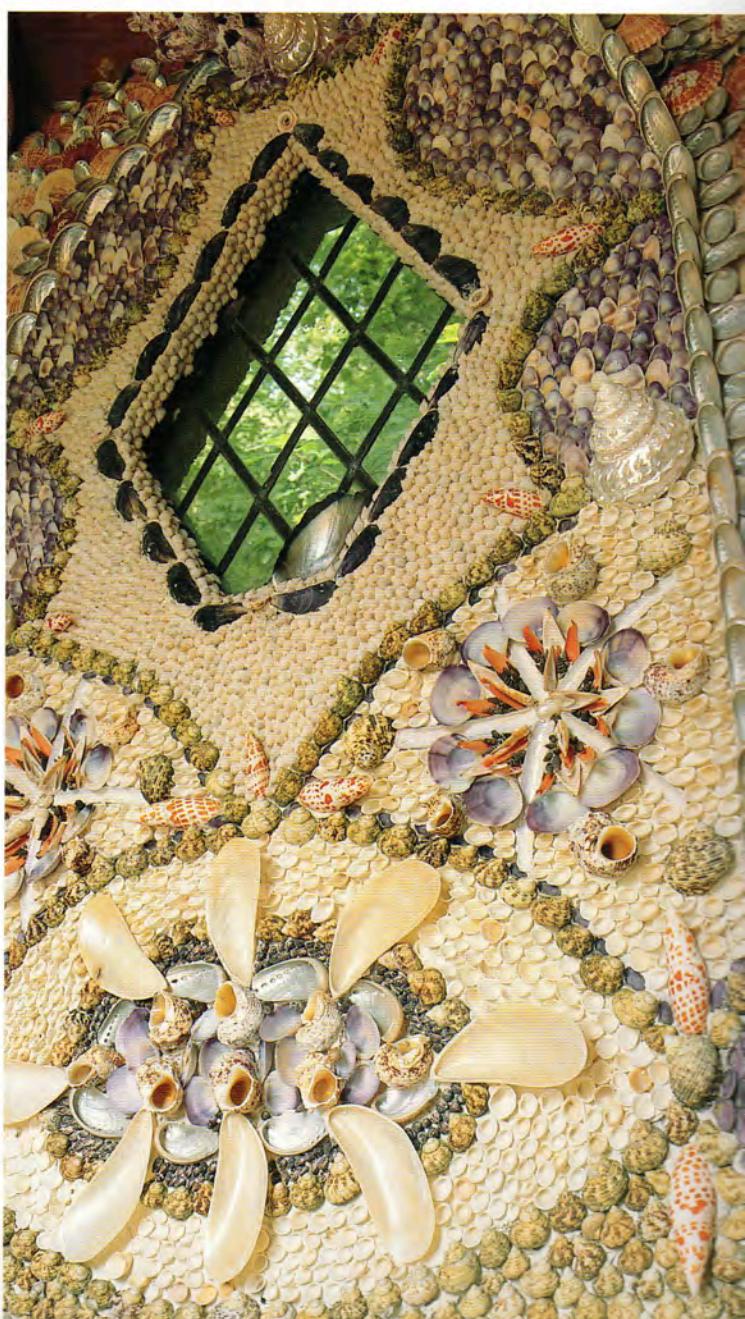
## BELOW LEFT

WALL OF A SHELL HOUSE AT BALLYMALOE COOKERY SCHOOL, Shanagarry, County Cork, Ireland, 1995, by Blott Kerr-Wilson (b. 1962), North Wales. For this commission the artist wanted to create a wholly new style of architectural shell design. She used many different shells to create its modern geometric pattern, which is consciously reminiscent of knitting and textile designs. The shells in the lower section of the wall were recycled from the kitchens of the cookery school.



## BELOW RIGHT

SHELL WALL OF A CROQUET PAVILION, in the garden of a private house in Wales, 2004, by Blott Kerr-Wilson. This small octagonal building is a feminine and restful retreat, the shells predominantly blue, pink, cream and silver. Kerr-Wilson used considerable numbers of iridescent Donkey's Ear Abalone shells (*Haliotis asinina*), which together with pearlized Trochus shells (*Trochus* sp.) encourage a rich glow of light in what had previously been a small dark building.





DETAILS OF A SHELL ROOM in a private house in Mustique, 1998, by Blott Kerr-Wilson. The artist was invited to cover the walls of the entire room using only two types of shell: Common Blue Mussels (*Mytilus edulis*) and Glistening Abalone (*Haliotis glabra*). Working without plans or sketches, she simply allowed her creativity to take her forward. The result is one of her most spectacular pieces of work, in which thousands of blue and silver shells flow and swirl in undulating waves across the walls. Three thousand fibre-optic threads placed within the Abalone shells create a gentle and subtle lighting effect.

