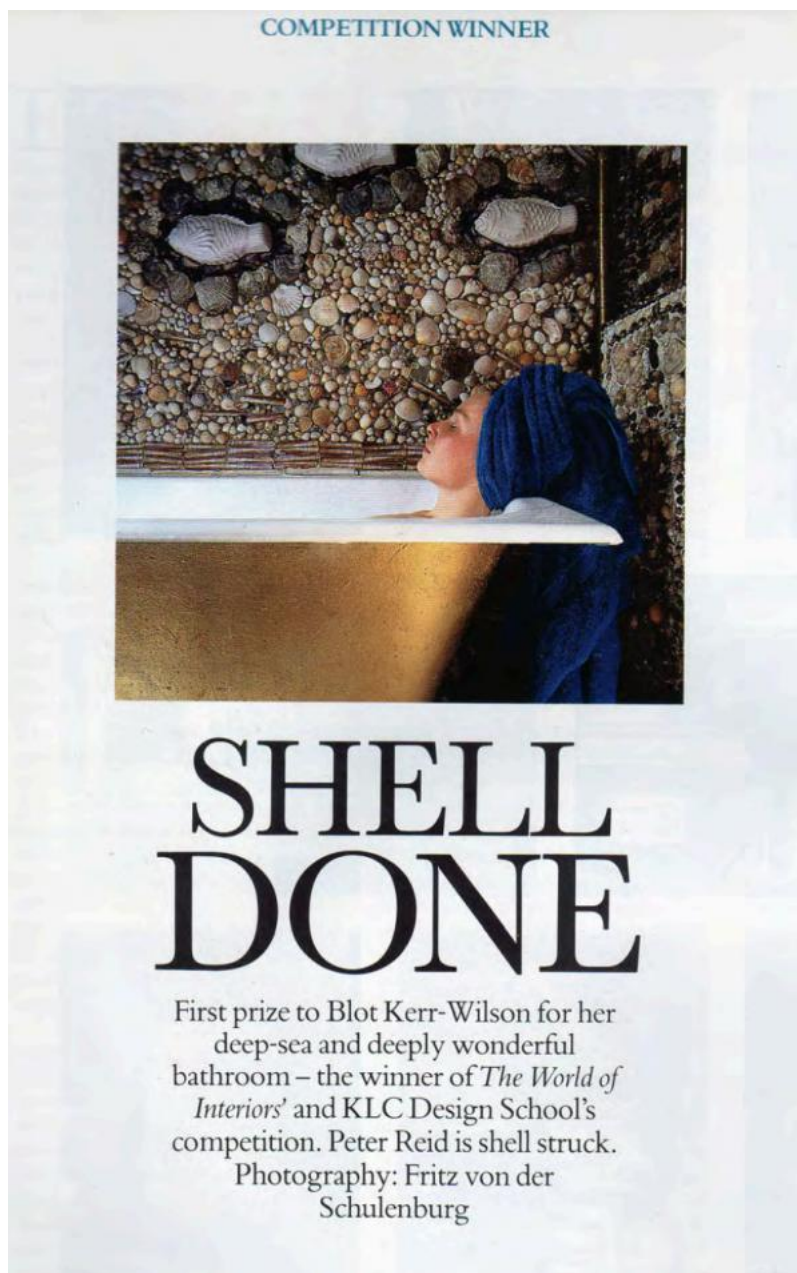


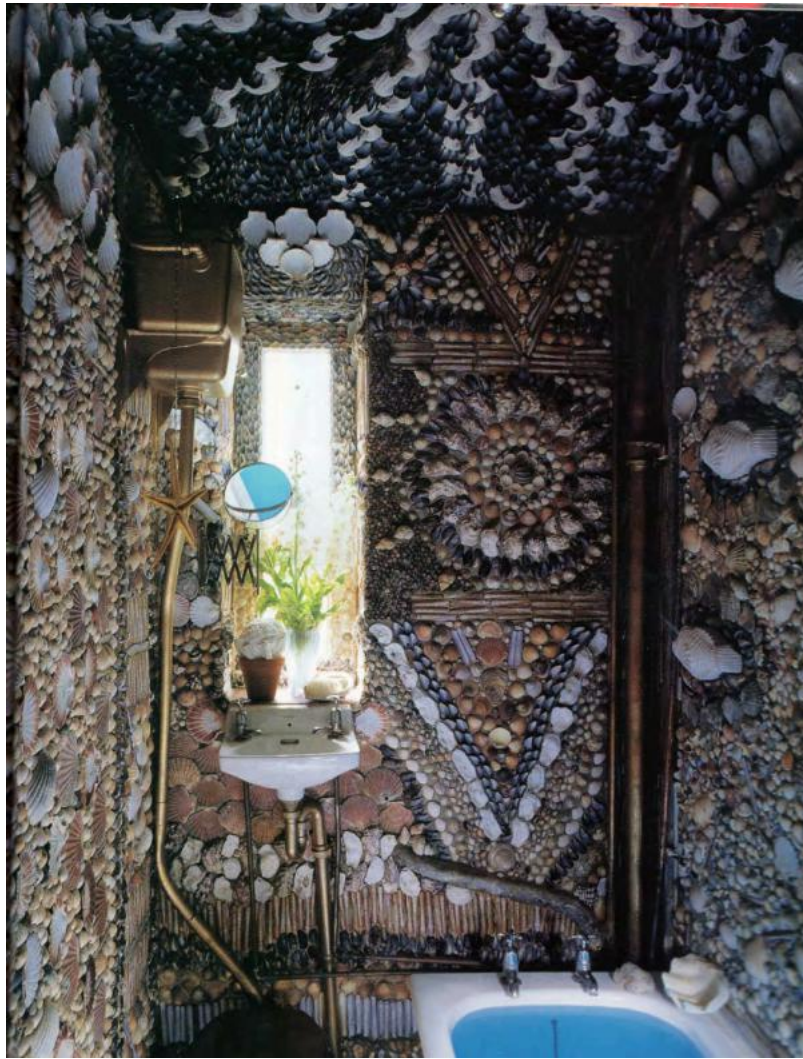
DIVE INTO THE MESMERISING WORLD OF BLOTT KERR-WILSON

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Maria vividly remembers her first glimpse into the mesmerising world of shell artist [Blott Kerr-Wilson](#), courtesy of The World of Interiors magazine in 1993. Blott had entered a 'Design a Room' competition and snapped up first prize with the bathroom in her Peckham council house, which she had transformed into a shell grotto. The kind of fantastical-folly one doesn't forget!





Blott's first big haul came with the hurricane of 1987, when she gathered bagfuls of shells washed up on the beach in Southend. Pre-Brexit, she'd source mussels from paella producers in Spain, and collected them on the beaches in La Rochelle and Brittany. Now, she mostly sources British shells that are a bi-product of the food industry, scrubbing and preparing them by hand.



"Since Brexit, sourcing has really changed! It forced a lot of UK shellfish farmers out of business as they relied on exporting, which is just too complicated now. We really don't eat a lot of shellfish here. But lots of mussels would go to Belgium and France, and winkles to China where they're eaten as an aphrodisiac! I've been really lucky to start sourcing from the East London Canning Company and Sea Sisters, who are championing ethical British seafood, but overall it's really tragic."

It wasn't until 2014 that Blott and Maria finally had the chance to collaborate on a project, with the creation of a mussel-adorned bathroom for an artist client in London.

"Before we first worked together we kept crossing paths through mutual friends and strange coincidences," remembers Blott. "Once, I went canoeing with friends and they suggested we drop in on someone for tea... and it turned out to be Maria's father!"

Blott joyfully recounts how she sent a sample of spiralling mussels in a beautiful wooden tangerine box, which failed to arrive at Maria's studio. Insisting it had been safely delivered, the courier sent a photo of the person who had signed for it, and Blott joked that they should get the sack. Maria replied, "Unfortunately I can't sack him. He's my husband!"



"For this bathroom, we worked exclusively with two types of mussel. Maria wanted them to look natural, even with the white worm casts still fused on. So I cleaned away all of the meat, but not the reality of their life in the sea."

"Maria has such an amazing vision of what she wants, an incredible eye," muses Blott. "She is one of those people that one feels immediately close to. She's a friend, but also someone that I look up to. I'm sure she doesn't know the influence she has on us all!"





"Each piece comes together very organically, without a set plan. The pattern evolves with me, and it's only as the work unfolds that it comes together. When I arrive it's such a mess. There's lots of cement and dust and debris. Which means there has to be a huge amount of trust between myself and Maria... she really just has to believe I can do it!"



"Inevitably, there's a moment when I close the door and I know that I might not see that room again, which is something I've got very good at. I was recently talking to a friend who works in tapestry, and she explained how her stitching changes depending on her emotions, and I realised I'm exactly the same. The patterns that emerge reflect my thoughts... so if I'm happy and flowing, or gripped by a crime audiobook, I can see it reflected on the wall. I'm SO emotionally invested whilst creating, but the moment I'm done, I can hand it over."

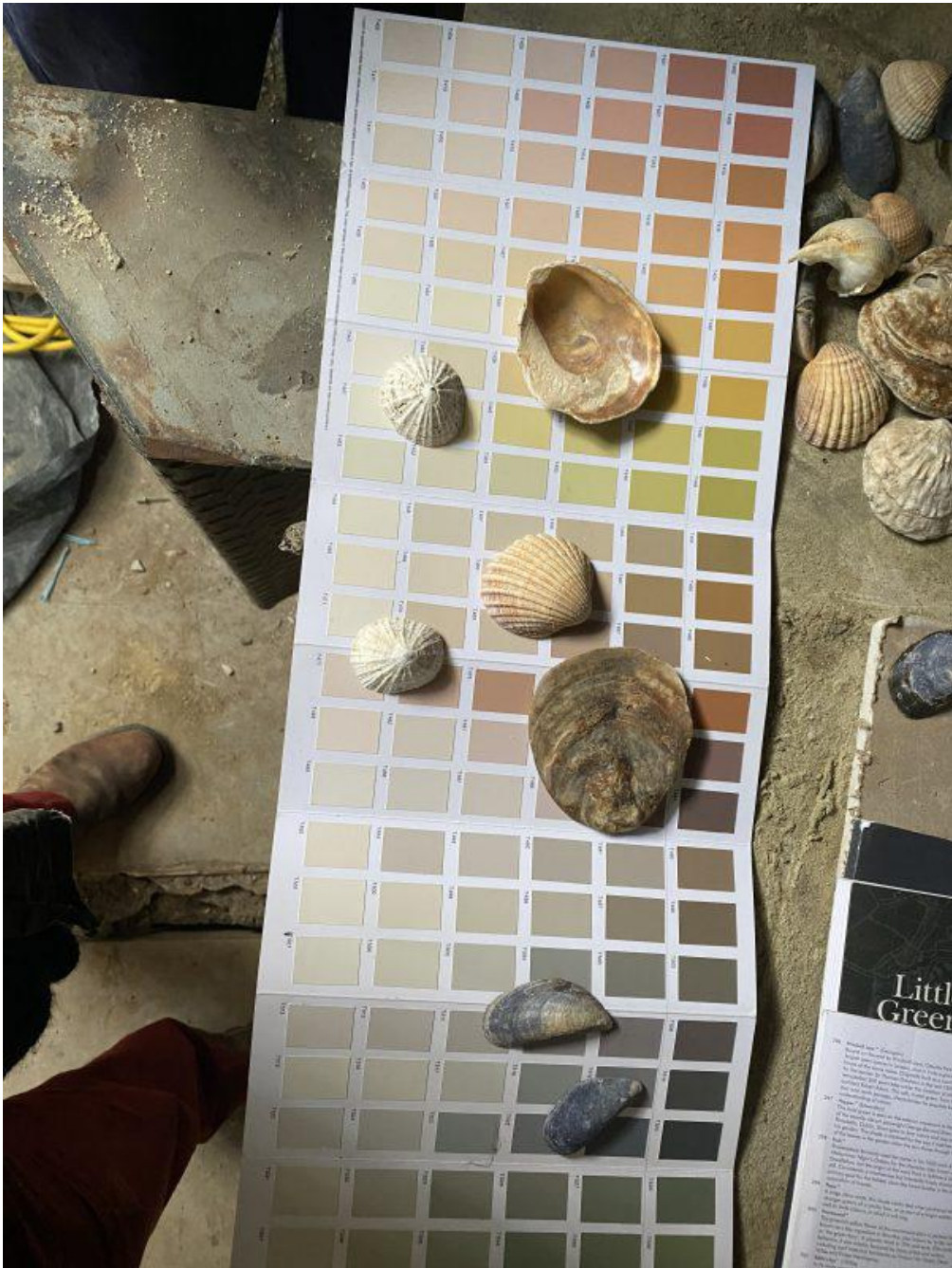
Most recently, Blott helped RETROUVIUS transform the ladies washroom at [The George in Rye](https://www.retrouvius.com/the-george-in-rye/), which is adorned in shell species native to the East Sussex coast.





"The inspiration for this room came from the Rye Scallop Festival. This is where Maria is so clever," says Blott. "British shellfish can be pretty boring individually, but en masse they have so many marvellous colours and tones, they take on a different feel altogether."

Entering the room for the first time is a delightful experience, and the most iconic spot for a shell-fie!

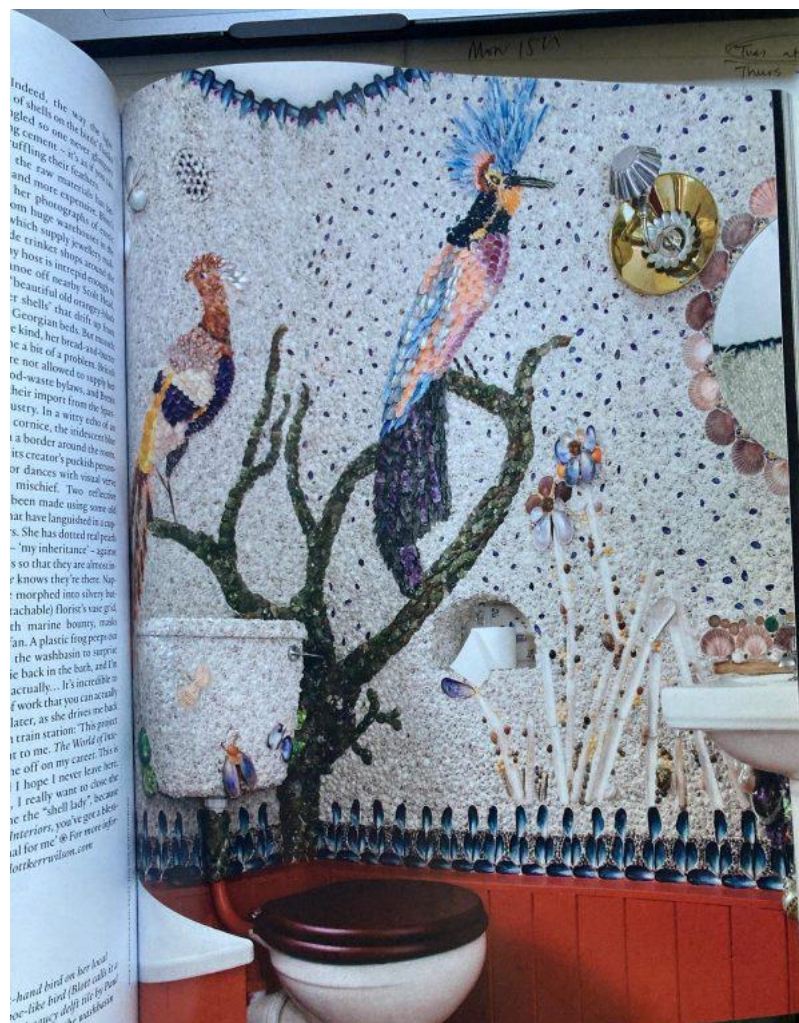


"It's comforting that my work doesn't feel fleeting. Often when I talk to clients about a big project, like a shell house or a grotto, we're discussing generations to come. People commission them for longevity. I recently had a chance to revisit a piece I finished around 20 years ago. What was lovely is I'd forgotten I could use shells in that particular way, so I felt like I was learning something new from what I've done before."

"There's a deep crossover in mine and Maria's philosophies when it comes to reuse... we both take something that people discard and turn it into something that's valued and beautiful."

This month we've loved seeing Blott's work glistening amongst the pages of *The World of Interiors* once again, a showcase of her latest 'conch-clad wonder'. The bathroom in her new Norfolk home, bejewelled in exotic birds, precious pearls and magnificent mussels.

Bravo Blott!





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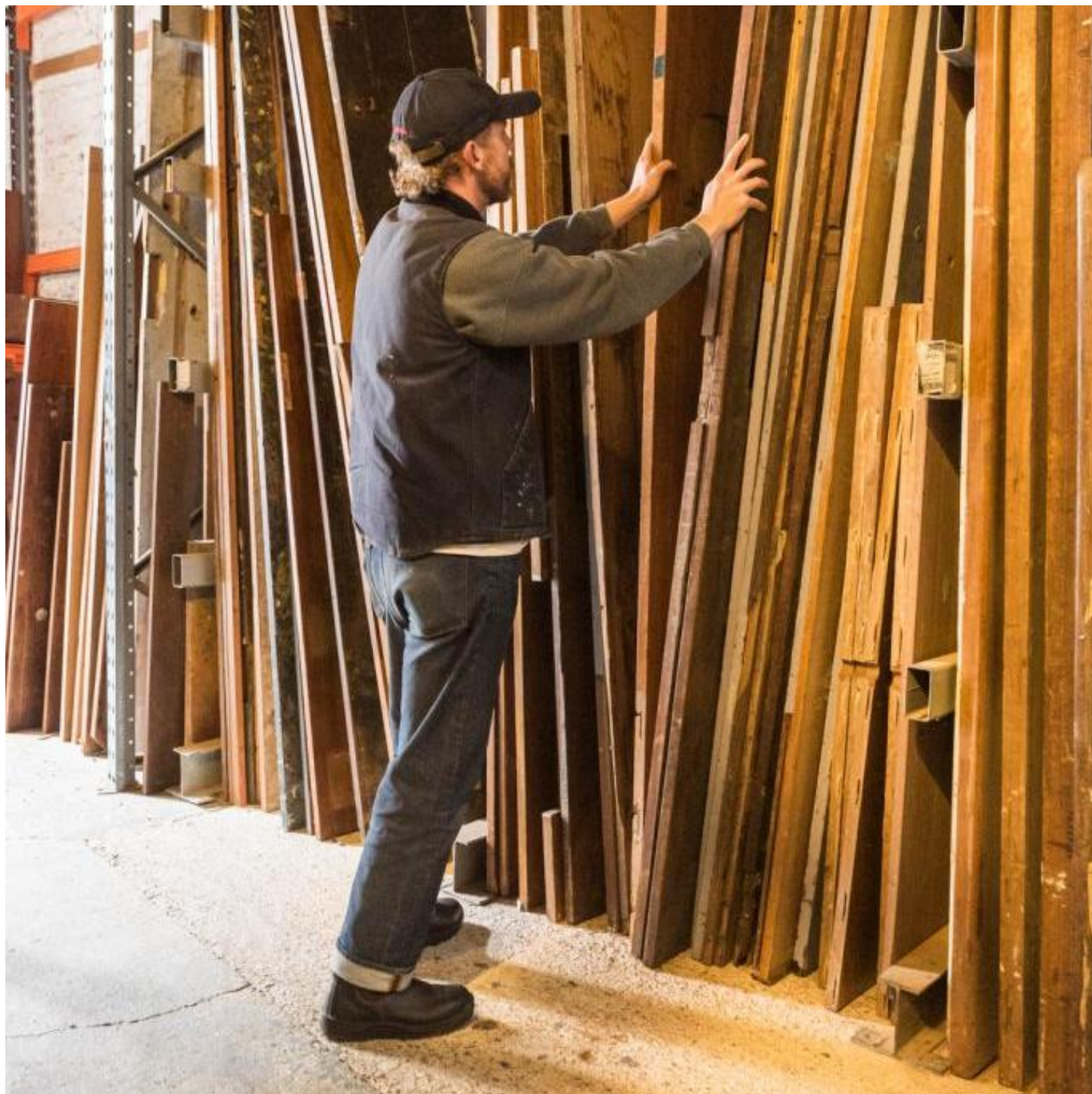


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