

At The Pottery Shop



Souvenirs deck the shelves



The artist at work - Ajith
Perera deep in thought as
he prepares to sketch

Like the melodious strains flowing from a holy place, the tinkling of bells serenades the visitor into a sense of piety and quiet wonderment. The sight guides the soul into a feeling of harmony with nature.

Words Jennifer Paldano Goonewardane **Photographs** Dilshi Thathsarani

The small room is streaked with an abundance of russets and auburns. Forms and figures fill the space. Some are rutted, rough and even comical, whatever the shape, the quaintness in the interior is obvious. And out of the coarseness of a creation emerges a piece of exquisite art and beauty. The Pottery Shop at the Majestic City mall is absolutely steeped in an aura of ethereal beauty.

It is not just any pottery shop in Sri Lanka. It is a pottery shop showcasing a range of 'Studio Ceramics', a high-fired product that looks very much like the unadorned clay products manufactured in Sri Lanka, but with a refinement that includes a mixture of several minerals to create a delicate piece of pottery item. Thus, the range of pottery items filling the shelves of this small shop is amazing.

The confines of the shop is a story in itself; a story of the lead designer and a love for nature. One thing is quite obvious; all seem to be in love with the elephant. The mighty pachyderm adorns almost half of the decorative and utility items on display. The only design on a plain plate is the foot mark of an elephant. The mugs and cups in black are plain if not for the stamp of the elephant's paw; some others in earthy brown are adorned with paintings, but the tea pot with the elephant's trunk as the spout is an adorable creation. Elephants with arms and legs stretched out, in funny and weird poses in different sizes, colours and shapes are simply lovable; affectionately rowdy and comical. Ajith Perera, the creative hand

behind the Pottery Shop emphasises that people's love for the animal is undeniable and coupled with his affection for the gentle giant and for nature, the products have a stroke of tradition and universality.

The creations are a product of a fluid mind, where the shapes and forms sometimes mean nothing. It is for the eye of the beholder to deduce the utility value of a pot or a cylindrical container. Some shapes are so much like the unadorned cooking pots commonly used in our kitchens, the difference being that these are decked with motifs and colour. "What I create are mere shapes. They are a fusion of universal designs and inspirational creativity. I leave it to the customer's discernment to decide whether a piece is to be used as an ornament or a water jar. People who walk into this shop ask not for the utility value of a product, but appreciate it for its aesthetic quality" explained Ajith, who is self taught, but, amply endowed with the hands of an artist.

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The eyes wander to the sound of tinkling that ceaselessly pervades the room. Beautiful wind chimes tell a story from nature. One tells the tale of the elephant and the forest, another depicts the birds of the sky and the fish of the sea and yet another the sanctity of the Bo tree and the fragrance of blossoms. A lover's story narrated in hearts and flowers sway in unison. This quintessential emblem of homely elegance has been moulded by a passionate set of hands with a story in mind; it is more than just the sound of the chimes, it is a reminder of nature's bounty and the beauty of life.

Some glazed and others plain, the pottery items manufactured by the company are durable, usable in all modern equipment, such as the oven, microwave oven and the dish washer, with no change in colour, decoration or shape. The Pottery Shop has a wonderful collection of gifts and souvenirs.

The appealing range of mugs for the mother, father, brother, sister, friend and lover, for any and every occasion is delightfully cute with a funny face and equally sloppy writing. More serious, very regal and aristocratic in appearance are wall plates with temple art illustrating Jathaka stories. Door bells and hanging lamps, tea sets and dinner sets, soup bowls and curry bowls, water holders and flower vases, chiselled and filleted with lines, waves and circles, with paintings of

abstract and human, the works of art glean a refinement to a long-established industry that is displayed with so much passion and flair at the Pottery Shop.

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