



# “We have never stopped innovating”

With several German Design Awards (and a Tableware International Award of Excellence!) under its belt, **Mesa Ceramics** is a young company on the rise. CEO Francisco Braga tells Tableware International why he sees a future in digital printing and we get to share insight into a new HoReCa project...

## Francisco, how has 2023 been for Mesa Ceramics?

Overall, we believe that 2023 has been a positive year, a year full of challenges and some setbacks. But we have been resilient enough and we have had the opportunity to

and the retraction of the market, particularly in the retail sector.

But settling down is not an option for us, so we have never stopped innovating and developing products that are modern and attractive, using the most

International for Serveware. We also won an award from Host Milano, the Smart Label, which recognised that the use of digital printing technology helps to achieve a unique and innovative product, while at the same time helping to be ecologically efficient as it doesn't use any toxic material and only requires a single firing process. Even though 2023 was full of challenges, we were able to face them, thrive and learn even more. So, we believe we're ready for a new year full of opportunities.

also a great way to innovate, to think outside the box, because we saw it as another opportunity to create new products and open up new markets.

## In your opinion, where does the future of the tableware industry lie – is it in HoReCa or is there a future in retail too?

We see the future of the tableware industry in both retail and HoReCa. However, we believe we will see a “new normal” in the sector over

*“There is a lot of prejudice in our industry about the use of decals... but we truly believe this is the way forward”*

make a difference in our factory, in our people and in our products with the innovations that we have implemented. We are still dealing with the consequences of the huge increases and instability in the energy sector, which have really affected us,

environmentally friendly technology available on the market. We also believe that the international design awards we have won help to validate our strategy, as they recognise innovation, quality and design. In 2023 we won the German Design Award for Excellent Product Design, an Iconic Award for Innovative Interior, and a Tableware

## What challenges has the company faced?

We have faced many challenges, including rising costs and all the geopolitical instability around the world and its consequences. We felt the need to diversify the markets we sell to and broaden our presence. This diversification allowed us to benefit from a little less instability and to be confident of positive results. Overall, it was

## Wine by Chef Rui Mota



## Find them!

Mesa Ceramics will be at **Ambiente, Hall 12.0 B76**

# Fresh innovation

**Francisco Braga** tells us about ID7 – Mesa’s new development in stoneware created for the HoReCa sector



“The constant commitment to process development and product innovation is in our DNA. ID7, our new vitreous stoneware development, is the result of two years of in-depth research carried out by internal and external teams, with the aim of finding a solution for increasing the resistance of

our stoneware while maintaining a fine and elegant product without compromising our ecological values.

With this new body, we developed the ÚNICO range. ÚNICO reinforces our strategy of positioning ourselves through product/material/technology differentiation. From a design point of view, we developed a very specific briefing for our outsourced designer, Nick Holland, to be mindful that we want to grow in the hospitality sector. Therefore the ÚNICO range had to increase the chip resistance while keeping the design refined and thin.

Nonetheless, we like to create disruption. We made a breakthrough when we started using digital printing technology consistently, and now we’re betting on a product that uses an innovative clay that offers strength, elegance, and lightness. This is a product that has the strength of stoneware and the elegance of the finest porcelain, with an ecological core that is so fundamental to us.

This product’s innovation is based on its technical characteristics, which allow it to achieve a quality far above the average through a single firing. This is very important because it allows us to save up to 49 per cent of gas and reduce CO2 emissions into the atmosphere up to 42 per cent when comparing with a company that uses two or three firings.

We are certain that in the future the ceramics industry will have to adapt to reduce its environmental footprint. And the fact that this is a very elegant and lightweight product with a much lower ecological footprint than the average in our industry has already earned it a German Design Award in 2024.”

the next few years, as the hospitality sector continues its gradual growth in line with the pre-Covid trend of prioritising travel and restaurant experiences. We expect the retail sector to have a better year than 2023, but still a slower recovery than HoReCa, as the geopolitical situation is still very volatile and we are generally facing problems with inflation and energy costs.

**There has been some criticism – particularly with the prevalence of digital printing – that there is not enough innovation in tableware design at the moment, what is your view on that?**

We do not identify with this statement. The growth of our business in a short space of time shows otherwise. We have managed to create differentiating products that combine reactive glazes with digital printing to create totally different patterns and designs.

Digital printing has a different language to decals or hand painting. We need to know how to use the technology to our advantage

involve reducing the use of gas and lowering the CO2 emissions to the atmosphere. We’re already seeing plenty of other industries adapt and evolve into new ecological ways of doing things, and we strongly believe the pioneers of ecological innovation are going to be the ones who resist through this paradigm-changing era.

The digital printing is also a flexible technology that allows Mesa Ceramics to try new designs on one piece at each time, avoiding big trial productions in order to approve designs. This technology uses, on average, less than 0.5g of paint per piece, which is a very low quantity with no waste per piece as the technology releases the exact quantity needed to create digital effects desired.

Digital printing is a very functional new technology that allows us to produce high quality products faster, while aiming to eliminate waste and resource consumption, both in terms of finished products and raw materials, as well as protecting workers in their daily working environment.



and not try to replicate what others are doing. Fortunately, we’ve been able to find our own voice and make our products distinctive and recognisable.

There is a lot of prejudice in our industry about the use of decals as the preferred means of decorating tableware. For us, the issue is very much about the type of manufacturing decisions that each company has made. It’s natural that

companies that are organised to apply decals are not prepared to invest in a completely different technology that requires changes in terms of investment in digital printing machines and new kilns. But we truly believe this is the way forward. The use of digital printing technology allows us to fire all our products in a single process. This is important in the sense that it allows us to make massive gas savings of around 49 per cent and a reduction in CO2 emissions of around 42 per cent compared to hand painting and decals, which require between two and three firings with extra hours and higher temperatures.

We believe that sustainability is a central theme in our culture and that in a few years’ time the industry will have to adapt and reduce its ecological footprint, which will, of course,

**Will you be attending Ambiente, why is it such an important trade show?**

Ambiente marks the start of the year for us and is one of our most important events. We’re usually full of energy and looking forward to presenting our new products and ranges to the

**“The ceramics industry will have to adapt to reduce its environmental footprint”**

world, and this year will be no different.

Ambiente is where we meet our customers, partners and friends and, as it is an order-taking show, it is where we present the new products and discuss new business, creating new partnerships and enriching existing ones.

There’s been a great sense of pride and positivity about the buzz and atmosphere we’ve experienced on our stand in recent years, and our expectations for this year are similar, if not higher. We had some very special moments last year as Ambiente is the venue for important awards such as the German Design Award (which we were fortunate enough to win for the third year running) and of course the Tableware International Awards of Excellence, which is a very selective and special event.