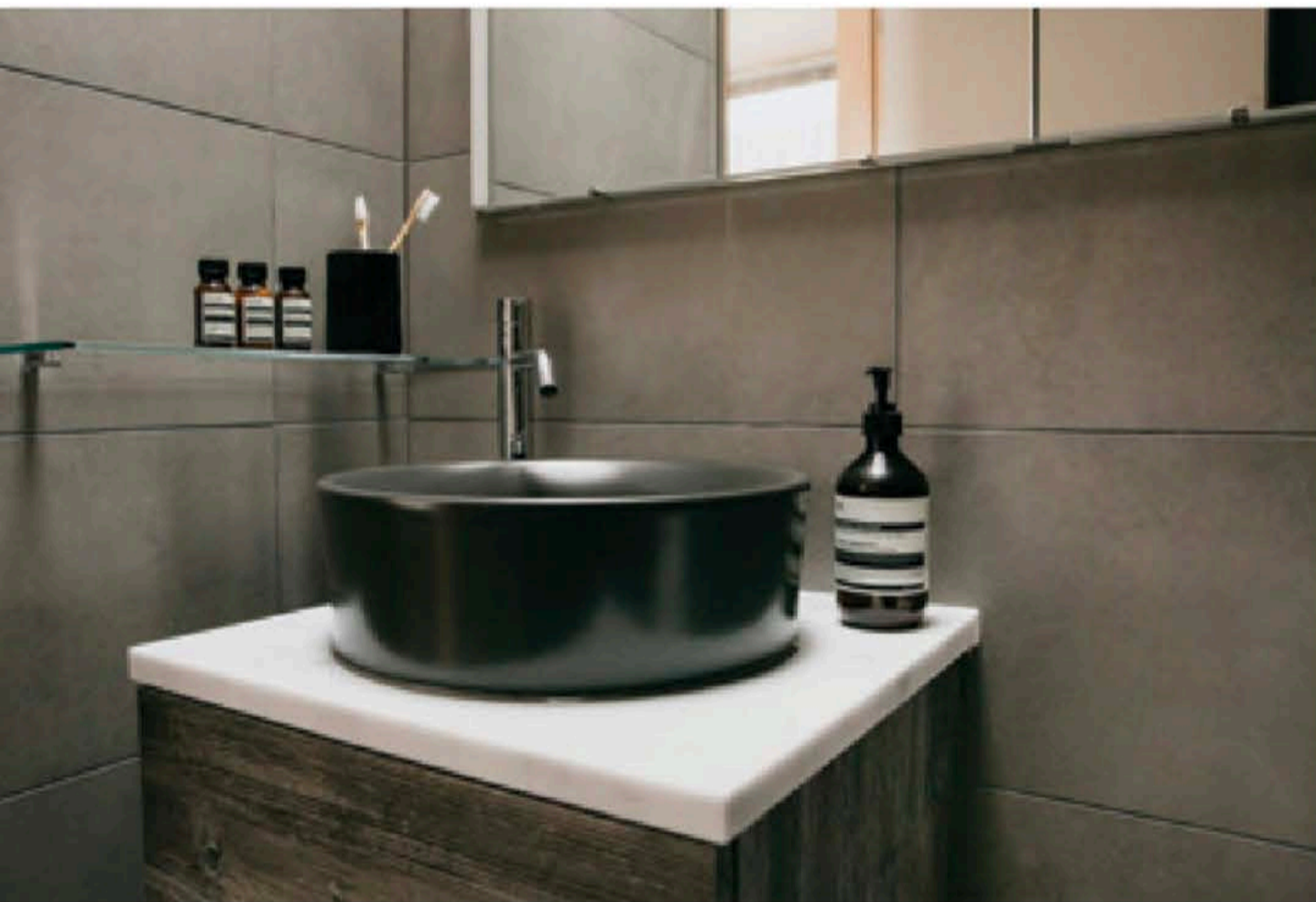




designer
DESIGN
TRAIL



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NEC Birmingham





CHARLIE SMALLBONE
Founder, Ledbury Studio

What materials do you most enjoy working with and why?

Traditionally, metal has served as a practical rather than decorative choice in the kitchen, largely reserved for appliances and handles. More recently, however, metals have come to the forefront of kitchen design and I see this continuing for some time yet. Having worked with metal, and also with liquid metal finishes for a number of years now, the idea of broadening the application of metal really attracts me. The trend, for me, is metals in the kitchen that look good, have a reason to be there, and will last.

What's the best part of your job?

For me, it's about the enjoyment that one gets from working with talented people, bringing something to life and creating something that inevitably is more complex as a result of

working together. Sometimes, working like this can take you in a direction that you didn't necessarily think you were going to go. It's a matter of being broadminded and open enough about the whole process to be able to accept it and enjoy it whilst you do it, because you may well end up with something that is better than you originally imagined it would be.

What is the biggest challenge facing designers today?

The perennial challenge of keeping things fresh. To keep designing things that are interesting, that work and are relevant.

What have you been inspired by recently?

I recently revisited the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford, which has fantastic collections of art and archaeology going right through the ages. I find the incredible items of jewellery, metalwork, and pottery originating across the ages really inspiring. The skill of the artisans and the techniques developed all these years ago are just amazing.

If you could change one thing about the industry, what would it be?

I would like to see more genuine product innovation at a mass-entry level giving the consumer a greater breadth of choice. The industry seems to be both prescriptive and restrictive of choice possibilities for material selection. There's a practical reason for this, which is that people want to make money. So, they're all producing stuff that they know they can sell. But the inevitability of this is that it runs contra to the idea of originality and design, because all you see is repeat, repeat, repeat. I don't know what the answer is, but I wish there was a way to get more individuality and more originality into the products that designers are able to use for their clients.