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NUMBERS GAME

Cary Nowell's playful ceramics add up to another success for the enterprising designer

BY TESSA SOUTER

California-based designer Cary Nowell is a born entrepreneur. When she gave up a thriving business making children's clothing two years ago to spend more time with her young family, she soon fell into another venture. She and a friend spent an afternoon at a paint-your-own ceramics workshop. It was so soothing that Nowell, who majored in painting in college, started going alone to make gifts. Before long she was setting up a studio and launching her own line of ceramics called Tabletop (from \$35 for a cup to \$195 for a platter).

The collection represents a melding of her favorite things: numbers ("I love their shapes, the simplicity of the graphics"), bright colors, and stark black and white. "I'm as busy as ever," says Nowell, who spends three mornings a week at her studio painting and firing each piece and every afternoon with her kids. "But it's a relaxed busy," says the designer, who insists she wouldn't want to build another big business. "I was so market-driven before—having to put out a collection and then get it into production. Now if I want to paint a 35 I just paint a 35." ■

Doing the numbers: Nowell (left, in her big light-filled studio) moves from a black-and-white palette (above) to brights (below). Her son and daughter (right) show their ages—Abigail high-fives a platter while brother Peter holds a vase.



JAMIE HADLEY, PRODUCED BY SARAH A. S. BALL FOR MORE DETAILS, SEE READER INFORMATION