Angela Mellor is one of Western Australia’s foremost ceramicists. She is internationally acclaimed for her almost impossibly delicate minimal white vessels, vases and sake sets, and as one of the principal contemporary ceramicists exploring the incorporation of paperclay as a sculptural element with fine bone china. Since undertaking her Honours degree in 1997, the primary focus of Mellor’s practice has been the exploration of light and organic form as the basis of an aesthetic in fine bone china.

She draws her inspiration from the natural world: the sublime qualities of sea and sky, the forms and textures of subterranean environments (limestone, coral), driftwood or the shoreline—to vary the opacity of her pieces. She also employs a sponging technique to alter inserts, often cast from natural elements—rock faces, weathered driftwood, as well as limestone cave formations and most significantly, the play of natural light upon the landscape. Mellor attributes this fascination to her amazement at the quality of Australian sunlight after first emigrating from the United Kingdom in 1994.

Mellor’s trademark is the incorporation of paperclay inserts, often cast from natural elements—rock faces, driftwood or the shoreline—to vary the opacity of her pieces. She also employs a sponging technique to alter inserts, often cast from natural elements. Mellor’s work in 2002 was at Utopia, London, with Urs Roth from Ropa Lighting, as a potential collaborator. In her words: ‘Roth and I have been working together to develop a range of custom-lit works that could fully realise the potential of her exploration to date. We arranged a meeting between Mellor and Gerard de Wind, Director of Western Australian lighting design specialists Mondo Lucé, who provided the lighting system for Craftwest Gallery when it was renovated in 2001.

Roth and Mellor want to profile the role of lighting in the arts, and the value of such work, as well as playing a crucial role within the work itself. He suggested one of their primary suppliers, Urs Roth from Ropa Lighting, as a potential collaborator. In her words: ‘Roth and I have been working together to develop a range of custom-lit works that could fully realise the potential of her exploration to date. We arranged a meeting between Mellor and Gerard de Wind, Director of Western Australian lighting design specialists Mondo Lucé, who provided the lighting system for Craftwest Gallery when it was renovated in 2001.

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Roth and Mellor have recently produced a number of test pieces designed to address the technical challenges of their work, primarily the shrinkages that occur during the firing process, and how they then affect the ease with which electrical components can be attached. The prototypes incorporate halogen lights, as well as a number of sample LEDs not seen in Australia.

Amid the current debate surrounding the relationship between craft and design in Australia, partnerships of this nature suggest the enormous potential for collaboration with industry. They not only broaden the potential for craft practitioners to extend their practice into commercially viable production, but also foster innovative shifts in their research and gallery work.

Mellor’s upcoming solo exhibition at Craftwest will incorporate both her solo works—custom lit by Roth—and their collaborative works, which include large-scale installations and more functional hanging and wall-mounted lights. Mellor and Roth are already anticipating the extended life of their collaboration in commercially viable manufacturing.