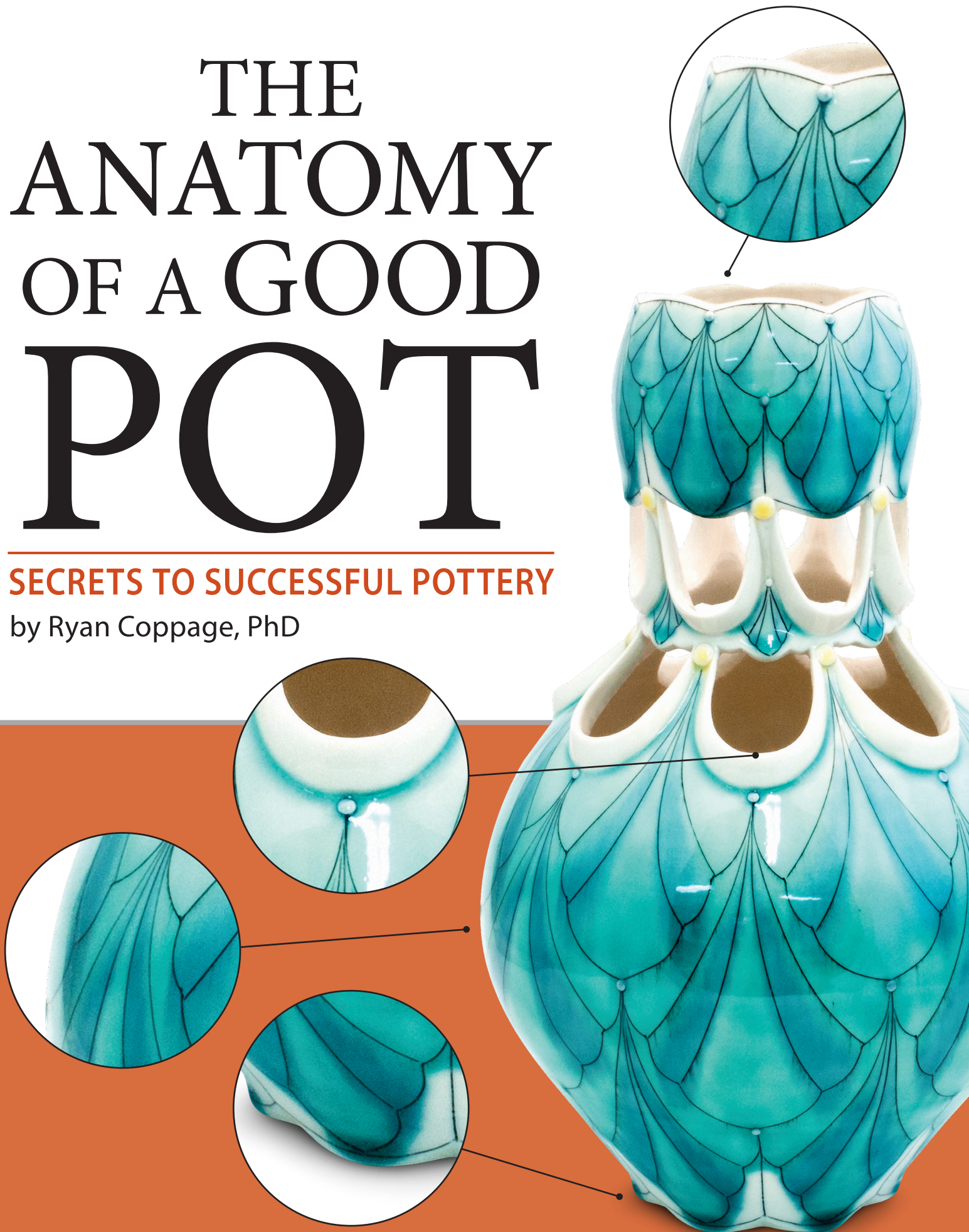


THE ANATOMY OF A GOOD POT

SECRETS TO SUCCESSFUL POTTERY

by Ryan Coppage, PhD



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Front Cover Image: Andrea Denniston's *Tulip Vase*, 12½ in. (32 cm) in height, wheel-thrown and altered Grolleg porcelain, black underglaze inlay, layered colored glazes, fired to cone 7 in oxidation, 2017.

Back Cover Image: Sanam Emami's *Cup*, 3 in. (8 cm) in height, wheel-thrown stoneware, laser cut stencils, slip, fired to cone 6 in oxidation, 2020. *Photo:* Del Harrow.

Table of Contents Images (left to right): Zachary Wollert's wood-fired bowls, 6 in. (15 cm) in diameter each, wheel-thrown Baco Red Stoneware, Levin shino slip wood fired, 2016–2018. Andrew Gilliatt's *Collector Set of Bowls*, 6½ in. (17 cm) in diameter, slip-cast colored porcelain, glaze, decals, fired to cone 10 in oxidation and reduction and cone 018 in oxidation, 2017. Kevin Snipes' *Fuk Dat*, 11 in. (28 cm) in height, slab built and pinched porcelain, underglaze, oxide wash, and glaze, 2012.

Introduction Images (left to right): Matt Fiske's *Blue Basalt Cups*, *Basalt Stand*, 22 in. (56 cm) in length, porcelain (cups), 'Melon Boulder' Basalt from King Hill, Idaho, glaze colored with 5% prospected Basalt, reduction fired to cone 10, 2016. Leah Leitson's *Moon Bowl #8*, 12½ in. (32 cm) in width, hand-built porcelain, salt fired to cone 10, 2018. *Photo:* Tim Barnwell. Andrea Denniston's *Mugs*, 4¼ in. (11 cm) in height, Grolleg porcelain, wheel thrown with pulled and attached handle, black underglaze inlay, colored glazes layered with clear glaze, fired to cone 7 in oxidation, 2017.



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IMPLIED THICKNESS & WEIGHT

More often than not, the rim indicates a vessel's weight or heft. As somewhat of a prankster (which becomes of anyone with three brothers), I used to throw delicate, thin vessels with intentionally thick and exaggerated lips. I would put them on a critique table and ask that they be picked up for review and consideration. It was a delight to see individuals brace themselves and tense their muscles before lifting the vessels—as the bevel was so hearty that they were sure the vase was going to weigh 15 pounds. Upon lifting it, with anticipated strength applied to said lift, my critiquers would accidentally lift the vase

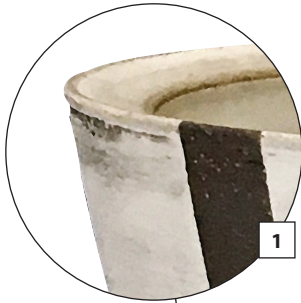
up above their shoulders first with excessive effort and then look on in confusion. I found it interesting how such a subtle, single component of a ceramic object could completely dictate perception and be so misleading on a subconscious level.

On the next few pages, you'll notice how artists use the thickness of the bevel and opening to indicate weight, and in doing so, communicate function and heartiness of the vessel. It's quite common for porcelain vessels to be made thinner and appear more delicate, and for stoneware and earthenware pots to be made thicker and heartier by appearance.

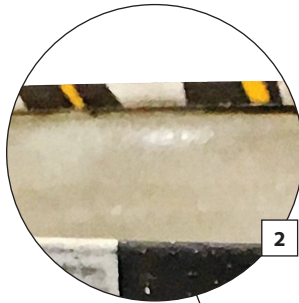


Mike Gesiakowski's *Trough*, 7 in. (18 cm) in width, hand-built stoneware, wood fired to cone 9 in an anagama kiln and down fired, 2011.

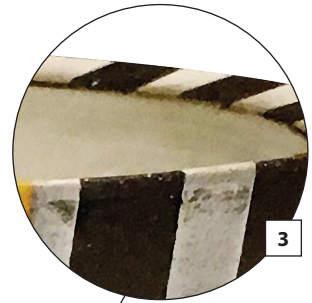
1 The linear and mildly convex lip profile is complemented by a soft, convex side contour.



2 The opening bevel denotes function via a medium thickness; a sharp, linear profile; and a modern combination of lines and soft curvature.

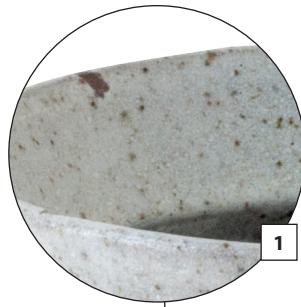


3 The geometric surface decoration envelops the bevel and continues to its inner edge; this effect helps unite the outside with the inside.



Eric Heerspink's bowl, 7½ in. (19 cm) in diameter, dark stoneware, terra sigillata, glaze fired to cone 5 in an electric kiln, 2018.

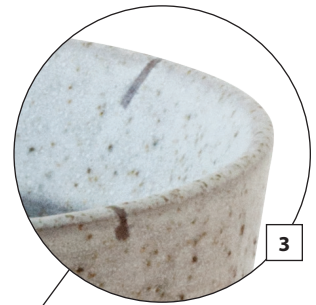
1 The opening bevel is linear and extremely deep. It has thickly set walls and looks heavy in weight. This is likely to absorb heat from a hot drink—akin to the intentional heft (and heat capacity!) of a diner mug.



2 The distinctly linear contour of the wall and angled handle are mirrored in the lip's bevel. These strong elements are cohesive with the shape, cut, and confetti design.



3 The top lip is softened, which encourages a pleasant drinking experience—admit the sharp lines, contours, and modern aesthetics of the mug. Although the mug is very angular in nature, the edges have been softened as a consideration of functionality.



Adam Gruetzmacher's *Diner Mug*, 3¼ in. (8 cm) in height, wheel-thrown stoneware, masking-tape-resist pattern, glaze fired to cone 6 in an electric kiln, 2017.

PROCESS: ADAM GRUETZMACHER'S DINER MUG BEVEL



1 Center and open for a flat-bottomed cylinder. Begin with a short, compressive pull and establish a wide, flat rim parallel to the wheel head. **2** Pull the walls of the cylinder, being mindful of the positioning of your hands. As your inner hand arrives at the bottom edge of the rim, switch from a pulling position to a supportive one. As your outer hand finishes pulling the outer surface, your inner hand should continue to support the inner face of the rim with the goal of a defined flat taper. Aim to create a defined, flat inner rim and a straight, flat outer wall. **3** After thinning the walls, use a rib to straighten the sides of the cylinder and flatten the inner pitch of the rim. The outer edge should be thin enough to drink from comfortably but not so thin as to be sharp or delicate. Use a chamois or sponge to soften the edge. **4** Use a kidney-shaped-rib to define the underside of the rim. Remove excess slip with a sponge and clean up both planes of the rim one last time with a rib. Finish by wiring off of the bat. True up the sides of the cylinder with a trimming tool and soften the bottom edge with your finger once leather hard.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Ryan Coppage grew up in rural Kentucky, far enough out in the woods that you had to be mindful of your gas gauge to ensure you could make it back to town. Coppage attended Murray State University and received his BS and MS in chemistry, while also taking ceramics classes with John Utgaard. He split his PhD between the University of Kentucky and the University of Miami, afterward accepting various visiting professor positions before landing at his current home and teaching at the Visual Arts Center of Richmond. Currently, Coppage is Director of Introductory and Inorganic Laboratories at the University of Richmond, where he pursues glaze design research. Coppage frequently writes for *Ceramics Monthly* and *Ceramics Technical*. He also teaches glaze design, characterizes aesthetics, fusses over handles and handle attachments, and tinkers in the glaze mixing room in attempts to find new shortcuts around modern glaze recipes, techniques, and applications.



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The best handmade pots have a certain quality that sets them apart from others. Achieving this elusive quality can be quite a challenge for new potters. When potter, author, and scientist, Ryan Coppage, PhD, was developing his skills and voice as a potter, he set out to define what makes a pot successful. He approached the task like a scientist, cataloguing hundreds and hundreds of images of the best in contemporary pottery on his hard drive, and making copious notes of the strengths in each piece. He discovered that he was noting the same aesthetic elements over and over. When he began considering these elements—openings, contour, elevation, visual cues, and balance—in his own work, his work began to improve. Later, he would teach these elements to beginning students and saw marked improvement in their pots.

In *The Anatomy of a Good Pot*, Coppage explains how these five components are the building blocks to refined, thoughtful pottery. In each chapter, Coppage goes through individual aesthetics, one by one, building up to a full visual analysis of various works and voices in clay. Beautiful images of the finest work in contemporary ceramics are accompanied by detail shots with discussion focusing on the design elements Coppage outlines throughout the book. In addition to those detail shots, you'll also find twelve Process Studies that demonstrate how the artists create their signature elements, as well as Artist Spotlight discussions expanding on the artists' creative processes. And finally, Visual Success boxes discuss key design elements about that pot. While nothing can replace the hours that must be invested in honing one's skills to gain mastery of ceramic materials, this book will give you a leg up on developing a strong aesthetic voice in clay.

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