

Squared Casseroles

by Mike Baum



PHOTO BY JAY BACHEMIN

Square and rectangular casseroles glazed and reduction fired to cone 10 in a gas kiln.

During the 30 years I've worked as a potter, my customers have always given me suggestions on what pots to make. Many years ago, someone asked me to make a rectangular open casserole suitable for baking lasagna, brownies, etc. The design I came up with is made with two thrown sections and is large enough in the wet stage (10–15% larger than the finished piece, depending on your clay body) so that when it comes out of the glaze firing, it is the right size

to fit a lasagna noodle. The bottom slab is usually thrown the night before the top section is made so it can stiffen up. I try to time the drying process so that both pieces are the same consistency when attached together. The following technique can be used to make all kinds of differently shaped pots.

Throwing

Using a bat rather than the bare wheelhead, throw a flat slab for the bottom of the casserole. I use 5¼ pounds of clay to create a 16 inch di-



1
Throw a slab for the bottom of the casserole.



2
Throw a low wide cylinder and cut out the bottom.



3
Pull on opposite sides of the cylinder to create a rectangle.



4
Square up the sides using yardsticks or boards.



5
Trace the inside of the top section onto the base.



6
Cut away the excess clay from the thrown slab base.

PROCESS PHOTOS BY JUSTIN POOLE

ameter slab (figure 1). Remove the bat from the wheelhead and set the slab aside to dry.

Center 4¾ pounds of clay on another bat and throw the top section as a low wide cylinder, 14½ inches wide by 2¾ inches high. I like to have a thick, round rim at the top, which helps protect the finished pot from cracking and chipping. After the top is thrown, cut the bottom out using a wooden rib to shave away the excess clay, leaving a ½ inch lip (approximate) around the whole inside (figure 2). This bottom inside lip makes it possible to attach the top and bottom sections without using a coil.

Altering

After the top piece has stiffened a bit, wire underneath it and shape it into a rectangle. The clay should be slightly “tacky” at this point but firm enough so it doesn’t slump when shaped. Hold your hands about nine inches apart, grasp the rim at the top with your fingertips and pull your hands gently away from each other (figure 3). Repeat the same on the opposite side. Next, pull the corners away from each other on the sides that haven’t been shaped. Continue the pulling and shaping process until you have a basic rectangle.

While the top is still flexible, hold



Score then apply slip to the slab.



Align the top onto the slab and press down to attach.



Press the bottom lip of the top section onto the slab.



Create stitch lines, then blend the top and base together.



Cut away excess clay from the bottom using a metal rib.



Smooth the slab and wall transition using a rubber rib.

two rulers or cut yardsticks on opposite sides of the form and push all the sides in slightly (figure 4).

Assembly

When the top is leather hard, pick it up and place it on the bottom slab. Trace the inside (figure 5) and then cut around the outside with a fettling knife. Remove the cut pieces from the bat (figure 6).

Lift the top from the bottom slab. Using a fork, score and slip the area where the top was sitting and apply slip (figure 7).

Place the top back on the bottom and align the two sections (figure 8). Press the bottom lip of the top sec-

tion onto the bottom slab. Smooth with a sponge and flexible rubber rib until they are seamlessly joined together (figure 9).

Pull the tines of a fork upward along the outside from the bottom slab into the top piece. The resulting lines will look like stitches all around the bottom seam. With your fingers, smooth the marks out and meld the two pieces together (figure 10). Keep the pot on the bat to stiffen up a bit.

Finishing

Place a bat over the top and flip the pot so its bottom is facing up. First with a metal then a stiff rubber rib, smooth out the roughness where the



13
Bevel the bottom edge using a vegetable peeler.



14
Attach pulled handles using water or slip.



15
Create a pattern and reinforce the handle attachment.

two sections were attached (figures 11 and 12). Run a vegetable peeler around the bottom edge to bevel it (figure 13). Smooth the beveled edges with a damp sponge. Flip the pot back over. Now you're ready to attach the handles.

I pull the handles and then bend them into horseshoe shapes. Whatever your final handle or lug design looks like, make sure they will not extend far from the profile of the finished piece, otherwise they will be

prone to cracking due to heating and cooling (and therefore expanding and contracting) more quickly than the rest of the piece. Wet the handle sides that face the pot and press them firmly on (figure 14). Push the handle ends flat and pinch off the excess. Decorate with your fingertips or stamps (figure 15).

Move the pot onto a fresh, dry bat so that the bottom dries evenly with the top. Allow it to dry slowly before bisque firing and glaze firing.