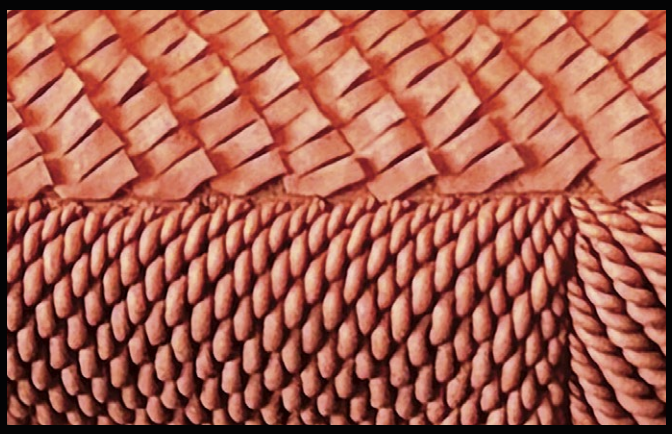
studio talk

Process and Perspectives in Clay

2026





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Cover Top row, left to right: Jaden Estes Carlson, Deb Sullivan, Maxwell Henderson. Middle row, left to right: Anna Kruse, Natalie Thedford. Bottom row, left to right: Andy Foster, Bianka Groves, Kyle Lascelle.

Letter from the Editors

Welcome to the 2026 issue of *Studio Talk!* Brought to you by the staff of *Ceramics Monthly* and *Pottery Making Illustrated,* this compendium is filled with articles by ceramic makers to watch and discover. The following pages feature eight artists who open up to readers about their inspiration, thoughts on ceramic trends, and their role in the ceramics field. Several of these innovative thinkers also take us step by step through the techniques they use and the tools that help them realize their ideas. Others share a sneak peek into their studios and talk about their day-to-day practices. We hope you enjoy this deep dive into the creative minds and lives of fellow ceramic artists.

Holly Goring, Managing Editor, *Ceramics Monthly* and *Pottery Making Illustrated*

Margaret Kinkeade, Editor, *Ceramics Monthly*; Associate Editor, *Pottery Making Illustrated*

studio talk

Process and Perspectives in Clay

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Studio Talk is published by The American Ceramic Society, P.O. Box 1555, Westerville, OH 43086-1555, USA.

www.ceramicartsnetwork.org

ceramics MONTHLY

PotteryMaking Illustrated

CERAMIC ARTS NETWORK

FINDING JOY AND HAPPINESS IN CLAY

by Deb Sullivan

Editors: What role does color play in your work?
Deb Sullivan: Color stops me in my tracks. The green moss clinging to red brick, the orange California Poppy growing on the median, the blue morning glory winding its way up the fence. The colors in the garden are my inspiration. For me, bold color reflects the joy and happiness I get from putting my hands in the clay and forming an object out of a lump of mud. Color is an extension of the forming process, and the two cannot be separated.

I think of the color as a gift of happiness and joy that I can give to a person. I see their smiles, I hear their stories of taking my mug down from the shelf every morning, and how it brings joy to the beginning of their day. Color is a symbiotic relationship between the maker and the user. I sew joy and happiness into the pottery and, like a cast spell, it transfers to the person holding the mug. It's the color that seals the deal.

Eds: What do you do to push yourself to stay engaged with the field of ceramics?
DS: I have found a generous community of artists online and off. I have some friends that I met at a community studio over 35 years ago and new friends, too, all of whom I learn from and share my experiences with. The clay community shares and lifts each other up like no other. I have taken workshops, watched countless videos on CLAYflicks and Makers Spark, followed a thousand artists on Instagram, and visited many museums and galleries. This community of artists is a constant inspiration, and my work is a culmination of all the potters, ancient and current. I've digested bits and bobs over the years and made them my own.

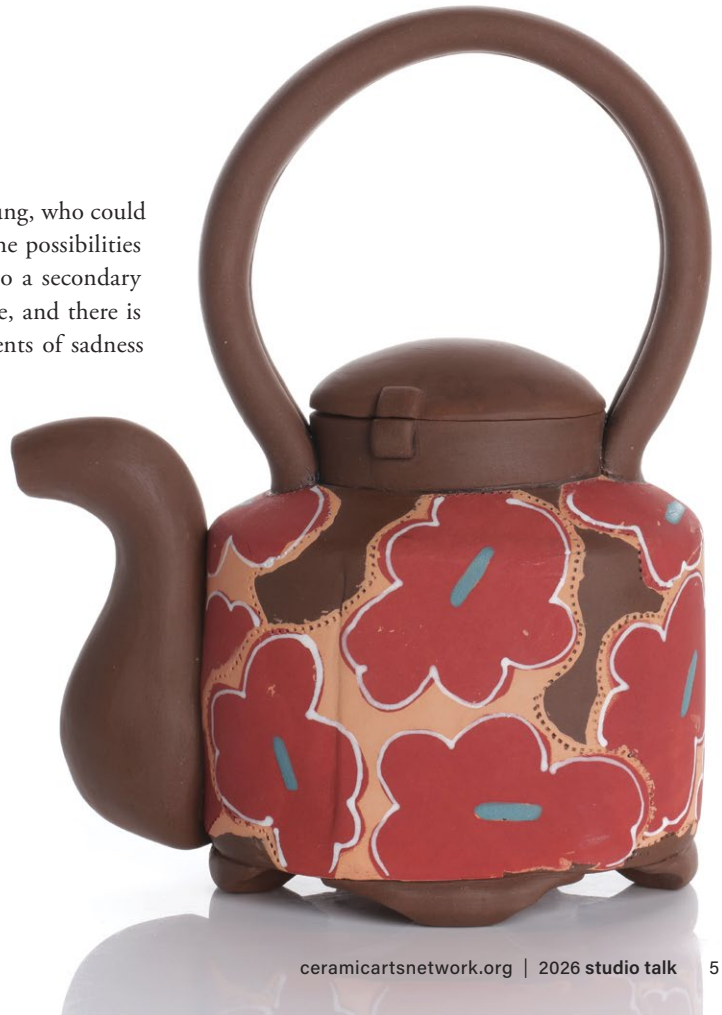
Eds: What is the most valuable advice you have received as an artist?
DS: There is a throughline of advice I've gotten from many artists over the years: play, experiment, don't be too precious, and failure can be your friend.

Over the last few years, this advice was driven home after participating in the Finding Your Voice mentorship with Naomi Clement. As I have honed my style and shifted into production, I take at least two months at the beginning of each year to experiment with new forms, colors, and patterns. This year was teapots–the apex pottery form. Experimentation keeps my practice engaging, inspiring, and fresh.

“There is a throughline of advice I’ve gotten from many artists over the years: play, experiment, don’t be too precious, and failure can be your friend.”

I wish I’d had an older, working artist in my life when I was young, who could have advised me about how to live as an artist. I had no idea of the possibilities and chose a more conventional path forward, putting my art into a secondary position. Now I know there are many ways to have an art practice, and there is no right or wrong path to follow. Even though I have had moments of sadness thinking about what I might have accomplished had I put my art first, it is fruitless to look back. I am looking forward to seeing where I go from here.

To learn more, visit www.debsullivanpottery.com or follow on Instagram @deb.sullivan.pottery.



Opposite *Three Happy Vases*, up to 10 in. (25.4 cm) in height. **Above** *Cut Your Flowers Back in the Fall, Butter Dish*, 9 in. (22.9 cm) in length. **Right** *Red Poppy Teapot on a Lazy Day*, 9 in. (22.9 cm) in height. **All** Slab-built ceramic, underglaze transfers, fired in oxidation to cone 5, 2026. *Photos: Mark Serr.*

PROCESS: Puffy Butter Dish by Deb Sullivan

The butter dish is two pieces, a bottom dish and a lid, decorated with both underglaze tissue transfers and newsprint slip transfers. I print my transfers using silkscreens made by ScreenBurning.com. The lid is topped with two puffy leaves and a flower for the handle. I roll ¼-inch (6.3-mm)-thick slabs using Laguna Smooth Red clay, which is ultimately fired to cone 5 in an electric kiln.

Tools Needed:

- Slab roller or rolling pin
- Make Templates: "Bow Tie" 10 × 4 × 5 in. (25.4 × 10.1 × 12.7 cm)(A), "Ear" 5 × 3 in. (12.7 × 7.6 cm)(B), Strip 15 × 2.25 in. (38.1 × 5.7 cm)(C) and Oval 7 × 4 in. (17.8 × 10.1 cm)(D)(as pictured in image 1)
- Plywood press mold: Spherical Rectangle Shape (8 inches long × 2½ inches at the end × 3½ inches in the middle (20.3 × 6.3 × 8.8 cm))
- Stiff foam block
- Ribs, serrated and plain
- Pin tool
- Fettling knife or X-Acto knife
- Craft foam
- Scissors
- Pen
- Small dry sponge
- Clean water
- Damp box or plastic wrap
- Decorating slip, colored
- Underglaze tissue transfers and newsprint transfers (printed by you or purchased from your ceramic supply store)
- Underglaze
- Brushes
- Pony roller
- Optional: ¼-inch (6.3-mm) thick slab sticks

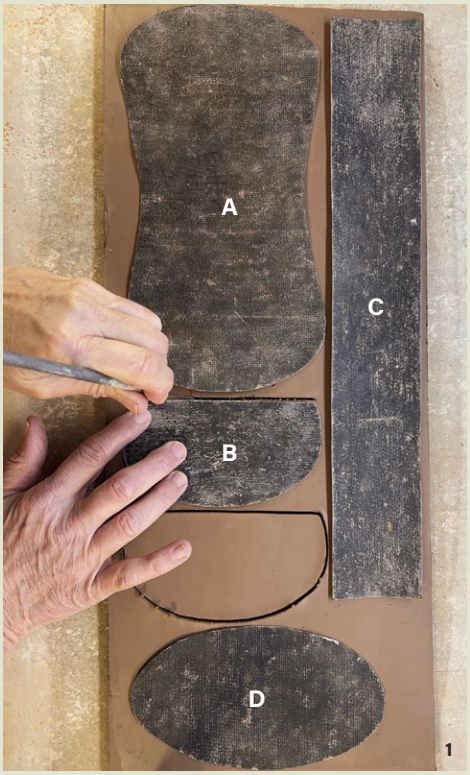
Preparations

Roll out a ¼-inch (6.3-mm)-thick slab to about 21 × 9 inches (53.3 × 22.8 cm) and cut out the butter dish parts (1). Use templates and your pin tool to cut out pieces: (A) Bow Tie × 1, (B) Ears × 2, (C) Strip × 1, and (D) Oval × 1.

Make the Puffy Dish

Use the plywood press mold to trace two outlines on a tissue transfer and cut them out. Set them aside. Then, place the bow-tie-shaped slab on a foam cushion, center the spherical-rectangle plywood press mold on the slab, and press into the cushion (2). Keeping the wood and the slab together, flip them over and rest the plywood press mold on blocks or jars to raise the slab away from the table. The bottom of the dish should be facing up. Gently compress the bottom over the plywood form. Lay one of the underglaze tissue transfers onto the bottom of the dish, dampen with a sponge, and use your rib to burnish the transfer. Slowly peel it away, making sure you get a good print. Leave this to set up to leather hard.

Flip the dish over onto a drywall board and remove the plywood press. Decorate the inside of the dish with the second underglaze tissue transfer (3). Next, make the puffy handles that go on the ends of the dish. Take the two ear-shaped slabs and place them on a foam block. Press into each slab center using a small dry sponge (4).



1 Place templates on a ¼-inch-thick slab and cut out. **2** Place the bow-tie-shaped piece on foam and press down with the rectangular plywood mold. **3** Place the tissue transfer, cut to the interior shape of the tray, on the clay, dab with a wet sponge, and gently burnish with a soft rib. Peel back the tissue transfer.

They will be bowl-like from pressing the centers. Align the edges of the puffy handles with the ends of the dish and shape to fit. Slip, score, and attach on each end (5).

Make two thin coils about 5 inches (12.7 cm) long and four small ¼-inch (6.3-mm) balls, slip and score each coil, and attach along the dish rim between the puffy handles (6). Attach a ball at the ends of both coils where they meet the puffy handles and set the dish aside.

Make the Domed Lid

Take the strip slab and cut a 45-degree bevel at one end, flip the slab, and bevel the other end. While the slab is still flat on the table, cut a 45-degree bevel along the top of the slab from one end to the other. Form the slab into an oval, slip and score the beveled ends, and attach (7). Make sure the beveled top is on the inside of the oval. Shape check: Shape the oval wall to fit inside the dish. Remove.

To make the top of the lid, drape the oval slab over the top of the wall (8). (This piece will be flipped over and attached to the wall.) The oval should be soft leather hard. Press the lid top down into the oval hole inside the wall so that when it is flipped over, the top will be domed. Finally, cut around the top so that it is flush with the wall. Then, go back around and cut a bevel at an inward angle, toward the center. Score around the bevel and remove. Now, score the bevel on the inside of the wall, add slip, and attach the domed top.

4 Place the two ear-shaped pieces on the foam and press into the centers to puff them out. **5** Attach the puffed-up ears to the ends of the dish. **6** Add thin coils and balls to the sides of the dish. **7** Make a 45-degree bevel on the ends and top of the strip. Make an oval-shaped wall with the strip, beveled top facing in, and fit it into the dish. **8** Place the oval slab over the top of the wall and press it down so that, when flipped, it will be a dome. Flip and attach the domed lid to the oval wall.

Decorate

Use the oval, strip, and ear-shaped templates to cut out tissue and newsprint transfers. Set these aside. Paint the tops of puffy dish handles with slip (9) and let the slip dry until it loses its glossy shine. To test if it's ready, touch it with your finger—no slip should come off onto your finger. Do not rush this part or your print could smear! Place the ear-shaped tissue transfers over the slip and print as you did on the bottom and inside of the tray (10). Next, print the oval-shaped tissue transfer on the domed lid.

Paint the newsprint transfer with slip (11). **Note:** The slip color you choose will be the background color. Once the slip loses its gloss, print it around the side of the butter dish, using your rib to burnish, and finish by peeling off the transfer (12).

Make the Puffy Leaf Handle

Draw a 2 × 1-inch (5 × 2.5-cm) outline of a leaf in the center of a 5 × 3-inch (12.7 × 7.6-cm) piece of craft foam. Then, poke your scissors into the middle of the leaf and cut it out. Draw the outline of a flower in the center of a 5 × 5-inch (12.7 × 12.7-cm) piece of craft foam and cut out the same as the leaf (13).

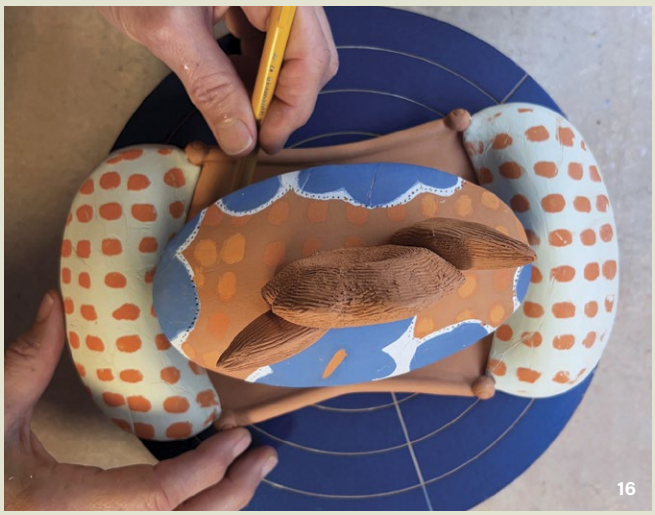
Roll a 10 × 10¼-inch (25.4 × 26-cm) slab and cut it into six pieces. Lay the craft foam on the stiff foam block and place one of the six slabs on top. Use a dry sponge to press the clay through the hole (14). Place the slab on the table, puffy side up. Repeat this process for a total of four leaves and two flower pieces. Slip and score the leaf edges, pressing the edges together. Repeat the process to make the second leaf and flower. Attach the leaves and flowers to the domed lid, making sure to slip and score well (15). Poke a tiny hole in each leaf and flower with a pin.

Dry, Bisque, Glaze

I recommend leaving the lid on the dish while drying and firing, as this keeps the lid and dish fitting well and keeps the base dish flat.

Once bisque fired, use a pencil to trace a line around the lid onto the dish (16). Remove the lid and draw an oval at least a ¼ inch (6.3 mm) inside the traced line. Paint the inner oval with glaze and carefully replace the lid, making sure it isn't on top of the glaze (17). Paint the leaf and flower handle with underglaze and add additional accents (18), if desired. Fire and you're done!

9 After using your templates to cut out tissue and newsprint transfers, paint slip onto the puffy dish handles. **10** After the slip has dried to a satin sheen, place the tissue transfers onto the puffy handles. Dab with a damp sponge, gently burnish with a soft rib, and peel away the tissue paper. **11** Paint the newsprint transfer with slip and let it dry to a satin sheen. **12** Wrap the lid wall with the newsprint transfer, burnish with a soft rib, and peel back the newsprint. **13** Cut out six small slabs for the flower-and-leaf handle. Press the clay into the craft foam to make the pieces puff out. **14** Slip and score the edges of the two flower halves and attach them together. Repeat with leaves.



15 Attach the flower and leaves to the top of the lid. **16** Bisque, then trace an outline of the lid onto the dish. **17** Paint an oval of glaze ¼ inch in from the line. **18** Apply underglaze to the flower-and-leaf handle and any other accents. **Below** *Blue Poppies Floating in the Sky During the Day, Butter Dish*, 9 in. (22.9 cm) in length, slab-built ceramic, underglaze transfers, fired in oxidation to cone 5, 2026. *Photo: Mark Serr.*

ENDLESS MOMENTS AND INTRIGUE

by Anna Kruse

Editors: What techniques do you use and why?
Anna Kruse: My sculptures are coiled and pinched. At the core of each piece is a coiled vessel or pinch pot; from that starting point, I am able to add, play, and respond to the piece unfolding. The creation of a piece is usually a fair amount of editing, lobbing off sections that aren't working, readjusting curves, and finessing movement. While I do revise a fair amount, I also try to build relatively quickly. This results in looser, more organic forms. While some light sketching might occur before beginning a piece, the sketch is usually very loose and just enough detail for me to understand what I was thinking about at the time. I view the creation of the piece, the active pinching, as another form of sketching. I am often working out the final form as I am making it, which requires me to stay active in the making process. I prefer to work on multiple pieces at a time, so that when I need to step away from one, I can think about it while working on another, and vice versa.

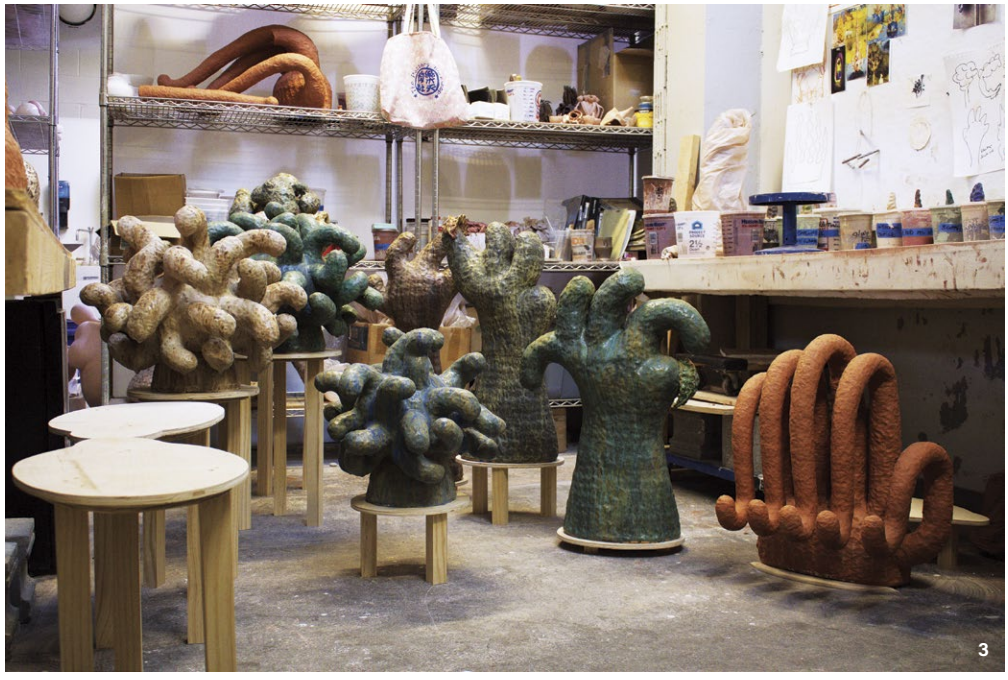
I rarely go back over and smooth surfaces, as the indents and undulations that result from pinching create moments for the glaze to break and pool on the surface. Work is usually glazed with anywhere from two to eight different combinations of oxides and two to three different glaze bases, resulting in a depth of surface. There will be moments of matte that absorb the light, allowing the form to be the focus, and moments of gloss, bouncing light and directing the eye to a small detail or movement. Glaze is usually fired to cone 02; however, many of the firings are done by sight. As the desired temperature approaches, I begin looking at the sheen of the surface and if drips are forming on the ends. I typically wait until I see glaze actively oozing from the end of a piece before shutting the kiln off or starting a slow cool.

1 Kruse in her studio working on the first half of *Twin Flame*, 2026.

> **“I do dream of a home studio . . . that overlooks the yard where I can watch my dog sunbathe and connect more fully with the natural world . . . .”**

Eds: What excites you about the field of ceramics?
AK: The ceramic field seems to be in this constant state of expansion, and what really excites me is seeing all of the different ways everyone approaches the same material. The field of ceramics is endless in the ways individuals can deep dive into their research, and it’s exciting to see what shifts are happening because of these investigations. This expansion of what ceramics is or accepts also seems to be creating more of an openness in relation to other materials or ways of making.

I am currently writing this as I prepare for the 2026 NCECA conference, and it’s truly inspiring seeing my social-media feed filled with upcoming exhibitions, lectures, and pop-ups. It’s such a rich community and not one that every discipline shares. Several exhibitions during this conference highlight the ability of clay to be combined with other materials, including wood, neon, metal, and plastics. There is such a phenomenal breadth and level of experimentation occurring within our field.



2 Clockwise from the top left: *Ambivalent Fecundity*, 19 in. (48.3 cm) in height, stoneware, low-fire glaze, 2026. *Soft Haze*, 18 in. (45.7 cm) in height, stoneware, low-fire glaze, 2026. *Laminar Flow*, 18 in. (45.7 cm) in height, stoneware, low-fire glaze, 2026. **3** Finished works begin to fill Kruse’s studio in preparation for “Invisible Flower(s),” a two-person exhibition with Kyle Larson at 934 Gallery in Columbus, Ohio.

4 Exterior of the Center for Visual Arts at Kent State University. **5** *Ambivalent Fecundity*, *Soft Haze*, and *Laminar Flow* glazed and awaiting their final firing. **6** Studio shot of works in progress, including several bisque-fired pieces awaiting glaze in the back. The two works in progress are *To Appear Suddenly* (back) and *Interconnectedness* (front).

Eds: What do you think is the role of a maker within our current culture, and how do you think you contribute to it?

AK: In a climate that is overrun with instantaneous and superficial gratification, it's the role of the maker to create a moment that causes someone to stop, slow down, and observe. Sitting with an object long enough to take in all of its details and intricacies reestablishes a sense of wonder and curiosity about the world.

Making work is a way of world-building, and by disseminating it, through shows or online, it's an invitation to participate, to observe, and to react. I think about little challenges I give myself sometimes: to watch a single flower from bud to bloom over the course of several days, or sit and observe the grass long enough to notice small insects or other minute details, and how these acts can be translated back into the work, to have soft moments that create a pause or bodily response. I think a sign of a successful piece is when someone feels inclined to move around it or bend lower for a closer inspection; when the body becomes involved in the looking process, you know there is a sense of excitement or curiosity.

My work is heavily inspired by flora and fauna, as well as how one relates to the world around them, and I think much of this is rooted in my childhood. I always felt like my backyard was full of endless moments of intrigue; I was obsessed with flowers and bugs and never shied away from dirt. My current work, at the core of it, capitalizes on this childhood sense of wonder, fragility, and care. Never wanting to squish a bug, but rather placing them in my hands for a closer look, wanting the blooms to last forever, feeling a sense of stability when other aspects of my life didn't grant that feeling. All of that, and more, shows up in the work.

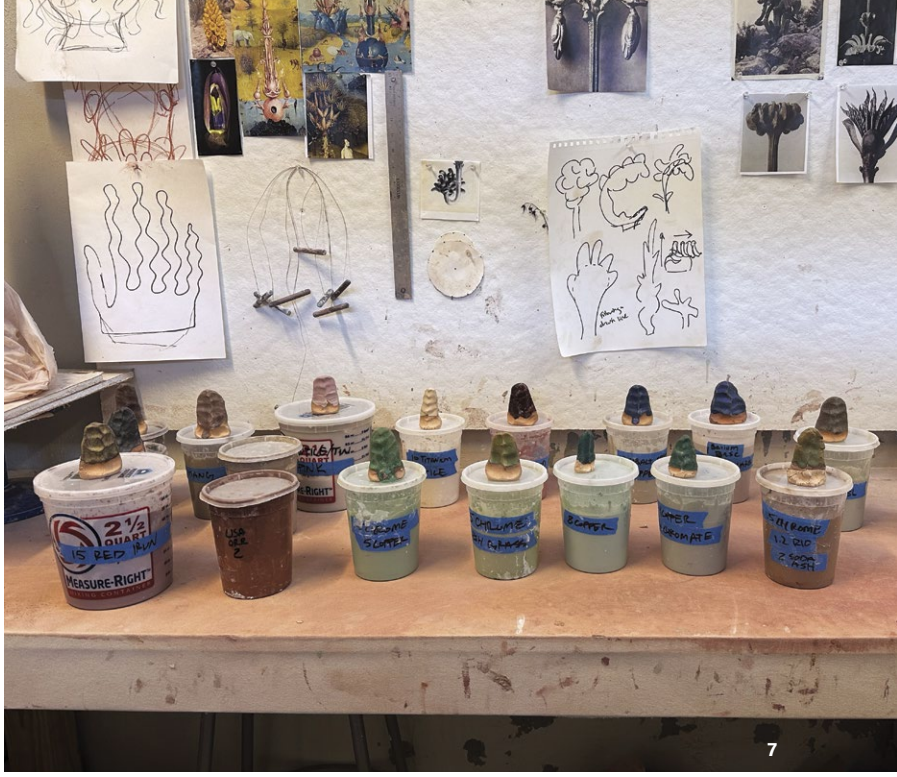
A Flexible Space

My studio is located within the Center for Visual Arts on the Kent State University campus in Kent, Ohio, where I am currently an assistant professor in ceramics. Especially for one situated in an academic building, my studio is quite spacious. The university, and therefore my studio, is only a quick 5-minute drive from my home, making it accessible and easy to pop into when needed.

My studio is a long rectangular configuration with my desk at the front, leaving the back half for my practice. The space has a very tall ceiling, which helps it feel open, and there is a large second-story window several feet up that lets in lovely ambient light. I have two long, narrow tables on either side, allowing the majority to be open floor space. Considering I work large and am often placing pieces on furniture dollies or stools, it's great to have the space mostly open and flexible. I have two large wire racks on the side and at the very back of the studio, which are great for storing smaller work, glazes, books, and other studio tools. I am regularly rearranging, taking work to my storage unit, and cleaning to keep the space workable and flowing.

Kent State has fantastic facilities, with three Soldner mixers, a fully stocked glaze lab, and a kiln room that has four Bailey gas kilns, a soda kiln, and ten electrics with two small test kilns—there is no shortage of materials or kiln space. The kilns easily accommodate larger work, and having access to the facilities makes my practice possible. It is a very quick walk to everything I might need. The sculpture studio is down the hall with a fully equipped woodshop, which allows me to easily build pedestals and studio furniture.

While I am very fortunate to have access to the facilities, it's also great that I am able to work alongside the students. I think it's really special that they can engage with me while I work on my own research. This semester I have been working toward several exhibitions, which have required me to come in after hours and on weekends. I think when students see me staying late to finish work or coming in on a Saturday night, it helps set a precedent in the studio and keeps the energy flowing.



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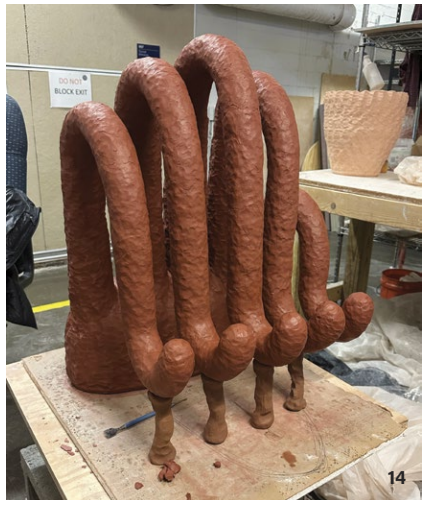
8

Shifts and Arrangements

Now that I am approaching the end of my third year at Kent, I am planning some shifts to the space, which will make it more modular and accommodating. One of the longer tables, mostly used to store bisque pieces waiting to be glazed or finished work, I would like to cut in half and add casters to better fit my height and allow it to move more easily in the space. I would like to create better storage for my plastic, drywall, and everyday tools. The number of times I lose my favorite tools while building because they move around my tables is far too frustrating. My glaze tests are currently in a box, a few are on a short shelf above my desk, but most live lumped together. This summer I would like to make a glaze board that shows combinations that I return to along with line blends of colorants.

7 Glazes with test tiles all lined up for easy access and to help visualize each works' color palette. Drawings of potential pieces can be seen pinned to the board alongside reference photos. **8** *Twin Flame*, Standard's Brooklyn Red, 29 in. (73.7 cm) in height (each), fired to cone 1, 2026. *Photo: Christopher Liu.*



9–14 Kruse's work is coil built and entirely hollow with no internal supports. Shown in progress here, *Digging in soil, bending towards light,* began as a coil-built mound and was added to slowly, working all fingers simultaneously. **15** *Digging in soil, bending towards light*, 25 in. (63.5 cm) in height, Standard's Brooklyn Red, fired to cone 1, 2026. *Photo: Christopher Liu.*

In terms of conserving energy, materials, etc., I mix my own glazes, most of my own clay, and manage all of my reclaim and glaze waste. Glaze tests are dried and crushed for future projects and clay reclaim is dealt with when full. Rarely does material make it to the trash. Sculptures that end up not being showable are broken down for parts or taken to my yard. I have a stack of bits and pieces I hope to work with once the pile becomes substantial enough.

While I am incredibly fortunate to have an on-campus studio, I do dream of a home studio, one with a door and a window that overlooks the yard where I can watch my dog sunbathe and connect more fully with the natural world that drives so much of my practice. I look forward to a time when my practice can be a bit quieter and my space is my own; it's a dream that is a long way off, but one I will hold onto.

To learn more, visit www.annakruse.com, or follow her on Instagram @ceramic_beans.

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INTENTIONAL SOFTENING

by Maxwell Henderson

Editors: What is the most challenging aspect of working in clay (either technically or in terms of building a career)?
Maxwell Henderson: The most challenging part of working in clay is that it can humble you in every possible way. Technically, you can do everything right, and the kiln will still remind you that you are not fully in control. Career-wise, I think the harder part is how easy it is to tie your sense of self-worth to the work, especially in a field where so much feels uncertain, competitive, and conditional.

Left *Vessel (Gradient)*, 19½ in. (49.5 cm) in height, stoneware, glaze, fired to cone 10 in soda kiln, refired to cone 05, 2025. **Above top** *Vessel*, 7 in. (17.8 cm) in height, sandblasted stoneware, glaze, fired in oxidation to cone 6, refired to cone 06, 2025. **Above** *Vessel* (detail).

> “A teacher staying after school, someone sharing knowledge, someone opening a door, those things can completely change a person’s life.”

Eds: What do you do to push yourself to stay engaged with the field of ceramics?
MH: What keeps me engaged is curiosity. I try to stay close to the questions that still feel alive to me instead of chasing whatever seems impressive or important from the outside. Right now, that looks like continuing to ask what ceramics can be, what glaze can do, and how a piece can hold things that feel opposed. Community also keeps me engaged. Being around people who care deeply about clay reminds me of why I wanted this in my life in the first place.

Eds: What is the most valuable advice you’ve received as an artist?
MH: The most valuable advice I’ve received is more the example of people who took time for me. A teacher staying after school, someone sharing knowledge, someone opening a door, those things can completely change a person’s life. That taught me that generosity matters just as much as talent, and that whatever I contribute to this field, I want it to benefit other people too.

To learn more, follow him on Instagram @mh_pottery.

Above *Vessel (Big Red)* (detail). **Right** *Vessel (Big Red)*, 21 in. (53.3 cm) in height, stoneware, glaze, fired in oxidation to cone 6, refired to cone 06, 2025.

1

Materials and Setup (1)

Gather the following:

- Pre-mixed gloop glaze (CMC-added, clay-like consistency)
- Mason stains or other colorants
- Gram scale (0.1 g resolution preferred)
- Small containers or cups for weighing
- Mixing tools (spoon, rib, or similar)
- Work surface (ware board or table)
- Plastic sheeting
- Brick or weight
- Towel
- Container of water or spray bottle
- Notebook for tracking ratios

2

Dividing the Base Material (2)

Begin with 900 grams of glaze and divide it into three parts:

- Color A: 250 g
- Color B: 400 g
- Color C: 250 g

Keep Color B larger, as it functions as the center of the transition and will not be repeated in the gradient.

Preparing Color Wells and Mixing Color

Form each portion into a shallow well to contain the colorant during mixing. I recommend labeling each portion as Color A, Color B, and Color C. Add materials like ilmenite at this stage if you want surface variation, such as speckling (3).

Weigh and add colorants directly into each well. You want to calculate stain from the dry weight, not the wet weight. Multiply the wet weight by 0.70–0.75 to estimate dry material (4, 5).

Example:

900 g wet glaze × 0.75 = 675 g dry

For 4% stain:

675 × 0.04 = 27 g

For individual portions, calculate from each portion's weight.

Example (Color A, 250 g wet):

250 × 0.75 = 187.5 g dry

187.5 × 0.04 = 7.5 g

If using multiple stains, divide the total percentage between them. You want to mix thoroughly until the color is fully incorporated. The glaze should remain firm, but workable. Use a test tile as a reference while mixing to maintain consistency.

3

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5

Establishing the Gradient (900 g System)

Move from A to B to C without repeating B as a full step.
Work from:

- 250 g A
- 400 g B
- 250 g C

Divide them into about 15 portions, each roughly 60 g. Build the gradient in two transitions: A to B, then B to C. Shift the ratio slightly with each portion so the change remains consistent. At one end, use mostly A, gradually introduce B until you reach full B, then repeat the same progression from B to C. For example, one portion may be around 50 g A and 10 g B, then 45 g A and 15 g B, then 40 g and 20 g. Keep the change between portions even rather than exact. Lay all portions out in order before forming (6, 7). Keep them in sequence. If one portion is misplaced, the gradient will break.

Building the Stack

Begin by rolling each portion into coils or flattened segments. Then, stack them in order from A through C, placing each layer directly on the previous one. Try to control moisture as you work. Use water sparingly to rehydrate the glaze if it begins to stiffen. Apply a thin layer with your fingers or a brush, if needed, to help layers adhere (8, 9). Do not over-wet, as the material will begin to slump. Keep the work surface dry. Use a towel to dry the table after wiping it down so the glaze does not stick.

Laying and Firing the Slab Flat

Once stacked, remove the weight, lay the slab flat, and adjust and refine the edges (10). Place the slab flat on a freshly kiln-washed shelf and position hard bricks around the slab to retain heat and slow the cooling cycle, reducing cooling cracks (11).

Fire to cone 04. This firing transforms the slab from a matte, chalky state into a fully fused sheet. Handle the slab once cooled. It should be rigid and glassy. The surface will have softened, and the colors will settle into one another. The edges will round slightly (12).

If the slab cracks at this stage, it will not reliably fuse back together in later firings. Remove any stuck kiln wash using a wire brush or by sandblasting.


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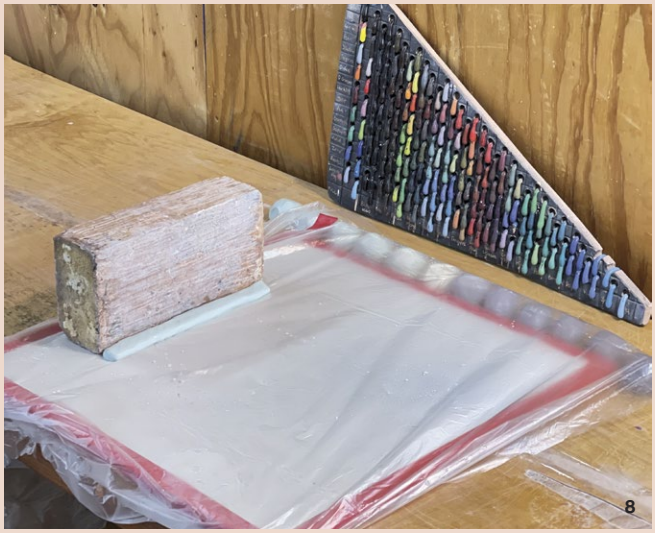
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1 Materials and tools laid out for the process, including glaze, stains, scale, and reference tests. **2** Glaze portions weighed and divided into equal units for consistent batching. **3** Measured glaze portions prepared for color mixing, labeled. **4** Dry materials (stains/oxides) measured and added to glaze portions. **5** Glaze colors fully mixed with colorants to achieve distinct base colors. **6** Individual portions subdivided further to establish a gradient range within each color. **7** Expanded gradient sets showing incremental shifts in value across multiple clay portions. **8** Clay portions arranged sequentially in preparation for stacking. **9** Stacked layers compressed together under weight to consolidate the gradient.

Positioning on the Mold and Firing Setup

Place the fired slab over a kiln-washed bisque mold. Use a bisque mold with no undercuts so the piece can release after firing. Balance the slab so it rests naturally across the highest point of the form (13). Do not force it into position.

Place hard bricks around the setup. Use them again to retain heat and slow the cooling cycle, reducing the risk of cracking (14).

Slumping the Form

Fire the piece so the slab softens and settles over the mold (15).

Control movement through temperature:

- Around cone 06: minimal movement
- Around cone 04: moderate forming
- Toward cone 02: increased fluidity

Allow the kiln to cool slowly before removing the piece. Remove remaining kiln wash with a wire brush or by sandblasting as needed.

Flattening the Foot

Place the piece on a coarse diamond-padded bat on the wheel and grind the bottom until it sits flat. Use water to reduce friction. Switch to a finer grit to refine the surface (16). Once sanding is complete, add mineral oil where sandblasted, then wash.


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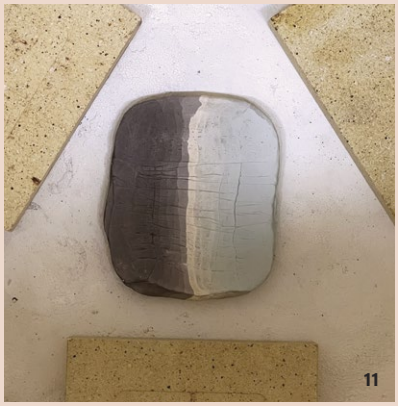
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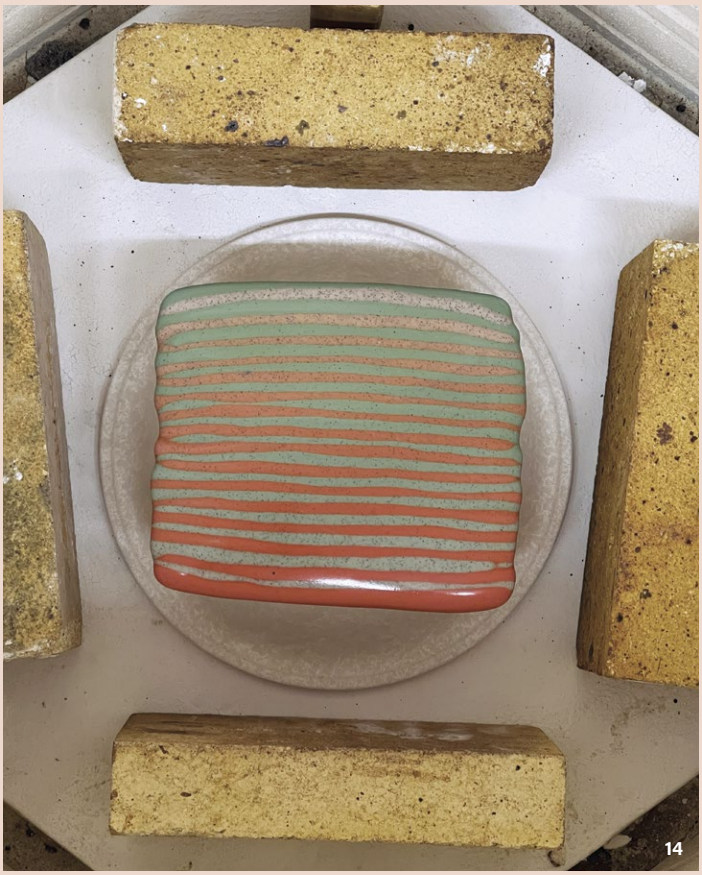
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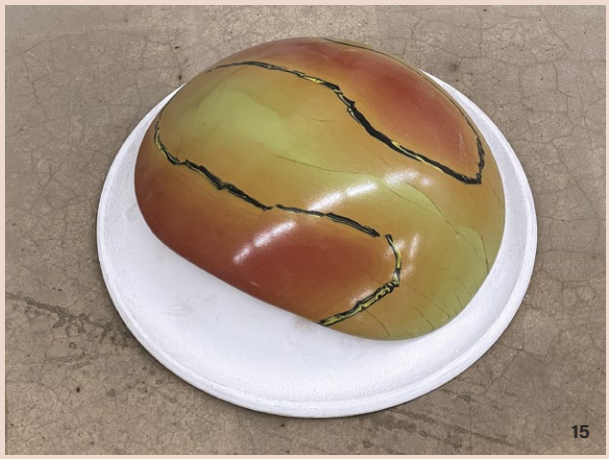
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10 Flattened slab after compression, showing blended color transitions across the surface. **11** Unfired slab placed on a kiln-wash-coated shelf with bricks positioned to retain heat during cooling. **12** Examples of flat-fired glaze slabs at cone 04, shown as separate finished test pieces. **13** Example of a fired slab balanced on a kiln-wash mold prior to slumping. **14** Top view of slab positioned on mold inside the kiln, with bricks arranged to moderate cooling. **15** Example of a slab after firing and slumping over a mold, showing final formed surface. **16** Example of a finished form being ground on a diamond pad to flatten the base for stability. **17, 18** *Oops! All Glaze bowl*, 8 in. (20.3 cm) in diameter, sandblasted glaze, fired to cone 04, 2025. **19, 20** *Oops! All Glaze bowl*, 12 in. (30.5 cm) in diameter, sandblasted glaze, fired to cone 04, 2025. **21, 22** *Oops! All Glaze bowl*, 11 in. (27.9 cm) in diameter, sandblasted glaze, fired to cone 04, 2025.

KNOWLEDGE THROUGH EXPERIMENTATION

by Andy Foster

Editors: Who is your ideal audience?

Andy Foster: I have often found that people are attracted to my work for its surfaces and its content. The contrast between matte and gloss surfaces created in the soda kiln invites people to look closely and find the subtle colors and moments hidden within the illustrations. The pots that I enjoy the most in my own home are ones that reveal themselves slowly over time. Whether it is the way the slip looks like it is floating in one spot that got just the right amount of soda, or a subtle tone of green that wasn't noticed until it was in just the right light, I like that the things I make will only unveil their secrets through consistent use.

Eds: What is the most valuable advice you've received as an artist?

AF: I have been lucky to have spent my academic and professional career surrounded by many wonderful friends and mentors who have helped shape my practice. When I teach, I often catch myself repeating some of the things they have taught me, and it takes me back to when I was just a beginner in Ceramics 1.

Back when I was getting my BFA at Houghton College (now University), I remember watching my ceramics professor, Gary Baxter, lead the class in loading the gas kiln for the last firing of the semester. I remember taking note of his pace, how he never seemed to rush, and yet everything got done. Now that I am out of school and establishing my own professional practice, I am trying to embody that pace.

When I graduated, I started renting space at the Flower City Arts Center in Rochester, New York. After a while, I applied for their residency program and was lucky enough to be chosen. Kyle Lascelle, the studio manager, and I would often talk at length about our mutual love of pottery. His critique of my work would push me to look beyond the objects in front of me, and toward the wider ceramic world. I began to look to the past for inspiration, a trajectory that has culminated in my current body of work.

Left Floor jar, approximately 3½ ft. (1.1 m) in height, stoneware, slip, fired to cone 9 in a soda kiln, 2025. **Opposite top** Plate grouping, various sizes, stoneware, slip, fired to cone 9 in a soda kiln, 2025. **Opposite bottom** Pitcher, 12 in. (30.5 cm) in height, stoneware, slip, fired to cone 9 in a soda kiln, 2025.

“The pots that I enjoy the most in my own home are ones that reveal themselves slowly over time . . . I like that the things I make will only unveil their secrets through consistent use.”

Eds: What do you see as the current trends in ceramics, and where do you see yourself in that field?

AF: The wonderful thing about our field right now is that there are so many artists doing vastly different things, and this makes it hard to nail down what I might define as a “trend”. If I’m being honest, I feel like I make an effort not to notice any specific trend because I feel like my best work comes when I am only making my work for myself. I seek out processes and techniques that fulfill my goals instead of trying to join in on whatever the new big thing is.

As for where I fit into our field, I like to think that my work memorializes our forebears, whose ingenuity and craftsmanship laid the foundations for anyone who chooses to work with clay. I hope that when people view my work, they are reminded that pottery today is the product of knowledge gained through generations of experimentation and hard labor, and that to work with it in the ways we now can is a privilege. I often think about George Ohr, who made some of the most incredible pots the world may ever see, only he did it a half-century too early.

To learn more, visit www.andrewfosterpottery.com or follow him on Instagram @andrew_foster_ceramics.

The first step is to create a plaster slump mold. I use the smoothest possible clay for this part of the process, as it requires less refinement of the final plaster form, although any throwable clay will do. Begin by laying a clay slab onto a bat on your wheel and attaching a 1-inch (2.5-cm)-thick coil around the edge of the slab (1). How thick the base slab is and where you attach the coil determines how deep and wide the final object can be. For example, if a wide, flat platter is desired, you could start with a 1-inch (2.5-cm)-thick slab and attach the coil 8 inches (20.3 cm) from the center, which will produce a 16-inch (40.6-cm)-diameter platter (before shrinkage).

Pull the coil up so that the interior height is about 1½ inches (3.8 cm) (2), keeping in mind that you will be pouring plaster into this form and the wall will need to hold for the entire time it takes the plaster to cure. Refine the interior shape with a metal rib and use a large loop trimming tool to define the lip and the well of the plate (3). What you see now will be what the final plate form looks like, so it is important to make everything as refined as possible.

While the clay is still wet, take the bat to a level table. Make a rough estimate of how much plaster you will need by treating the clay mold like a cylinder and finding its approximate volume. You can find a chart online for the appropriate water-to-plaster ratio for whatever plaster you are using. Mix plaster and water, using warm water and a high-speed drill to speed up the curing time. When the plaster starts to thicken, pour it into the mold and leave it to cure for about an hour (4). Once the plaster has cured, tear it out of the clay form. Clean up any sharp edges with a rasp (5). I leave the mold to dry in front of a fan or near a hot kiln until it no longer feels cool to the touch, which may take a couple of days to a week, depending on humidity.

Using the Mold, Forming Your Platter

When the mold is fully dry, center it on the potters wheel, preferably with a piece of foam underneath to prevent it from sliding around. Roll out a slab that is slightly thicker than you want the final piece to be, and compress one side until it is smooth. Drape the slab, smooth side down, onto the mold and compress


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1 To make your plaster hump mold, begin by attaching a 1-inch (2.5-cm)-thick coil to slab base. **2** Compress coil down to connect and then throw coil to 1 inch (2.5 cm) in height. **3** Use metal rib to shape and compress base, and a trimming tool to define the well and rim of the plate. **4** Move to level surface and pour plaster into the clay basin form. **5** Remove sharp edges with a rasp and allow mold to dry completely. **6** Flip the mold over and compress a clay slab onto the convex curve of the mold. **7** Remove excess clay with needle tool. **8** Attach a coil where the well meets the lip of the plaster mold. **9** Throw and refine the foot of the platter. **10** Once the platter is flipped, trim and clean the rim.

the slab onto the mold while the wheel spins, moving from the center out to the rim to prevent any air pockets from forming (6). Use a needle tool to cut the excess clay around the edge (7). Roll out a long coil and attach it at the point where the well of the plate meets the flange, making sure to slip and score (8). Throw the foot until it is the desired depth, then use a rib to round off the bottom of the foot (9). You may have to use a needle tool to level the foot if it becomes too uneven after the initial throwing. Once you are happy with how the foot looks, drape the form with plastic and leave it to firm up.

Once the platter is firm enough to mold its shape, place a bat on the foot and flip the platter in one smooth motion. The plaster mold should lift free, but may need coaxing with some compressed air. Return the platter to the wheel and use your trimming tools and ribs to round the rim, making sure not to deform it (10). Leave the platter loosely draped in plastic until it is the consistency of a sharp cheddar cheese. Apply wax in quick, confident strokes with a brush, making sure to consider the layout of your design as you go (11). It may be helpful to draw the design with a soft pencil first, but bear in mind that if the clay is too soft you may leave unwanted marks. Consider waxing the foot as well; it will make cleanup after the slip application easier. Leave the wax to cure for up to one day, depending on the brand, making sure to keep the platter covered. Apply your slip by either dipping (12) or pouring. Do not attempt to clean up the waxed areas until the slip has dried enough to touch; then, gently clean with a damp sponge or paper towel.


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13


14

11 Use a brush to decorate surface with wax resist. **12** Once the wax has dried, dip the platter into slip. **13** Slip-decorated charger, 14 in. (35.6 cm) in diameter. **14** *Twin Bird Charger*, 15 in. (38.1 cm) in diameter. **13, 14** Stoneware, slip, fired to cone 9 in a soda kiln, 2025. *Photos: Elizabeth Lamark.*

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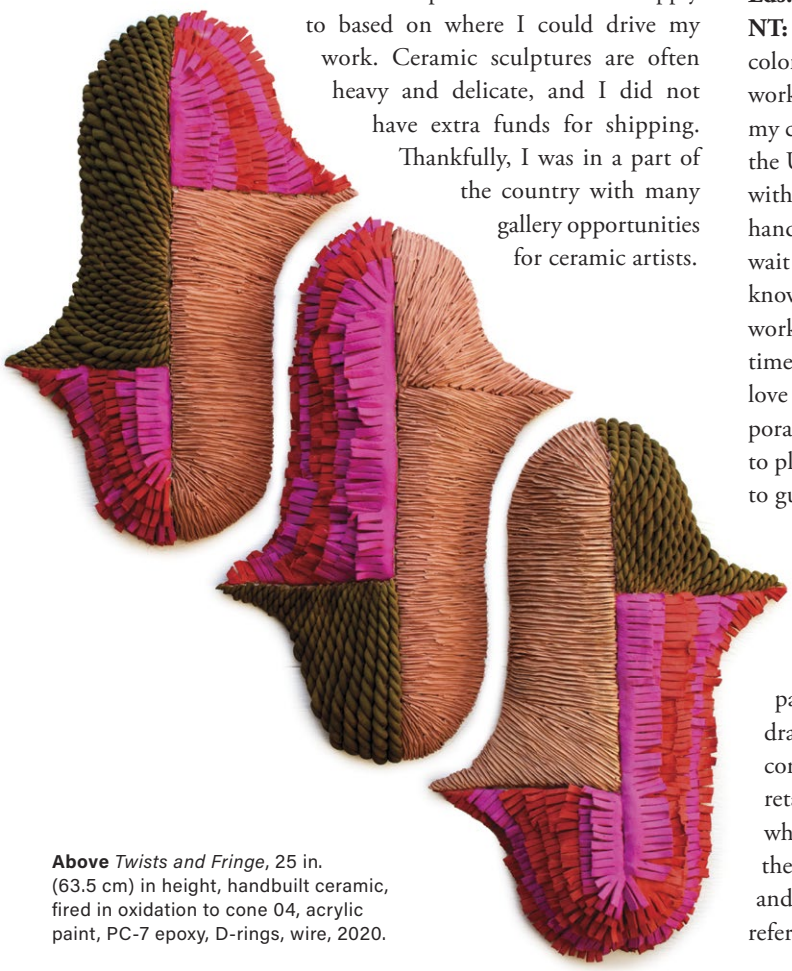
CLAY AND THE HUMAN EXPERIENCE

by Natalie Thedford

Editors: What is the most challenging aspect of working in clay (either technically or in terms of building a career)?

Natalie Thedford: The exciting and challenging part of dedicating oneself to a creative life is that there is no roadmap. Working with clay brings its own set of challenges alongside that broader uncertainty. I took five years between undergrad and graduate school to develop my studio practice and strengthen my portfolio. For the first three years, I taught ceramics in a high-school setting and further developed my technical abilities during the summers by attending workshops at places like Penland, Haystack, and Anderson Ranch. For the latter two years, I lived and worked in Northern California, actively applying to juried group shows. I limited the scope of what shows to apply to based on where I could drive my work. Ceramic sculptures are often heavy and delicate, and I did not have extra funds for shipping. Thankfully, I was in a part of the country with many gallery opportunities for ceramic artists.



Above *Twists and Fringe*, 25 in. (63.5 cm) in height, handbuilt ceramic, fired in oxidation to cone 04, acrylic paint, PC-7 epoxy, D-rings, wire, 2020.

My studio practice was transformed when I went to graduate school at the University of Colorado Boulder, in part because I had a dedicated studio space for the first time. Until then, I had been working in rooms of various homes and apartments, constantly shuffling working surfaces and storage for delicate works. Once I had my own space with walls I could drill into, seeing my large installations take shape was thrilling. Since graduating, one of the biggest challenges has been sustaining access to that kind of space—balancing the cost of living with maintaining a studio. It has made me especially aware of how vital residencies and subsidized studio spaces are, and how much more support is needed for artists.

Eds: What role does color play in your work?

NT: I love color, especially color combinations like complementary colors that pop when used next to each other. I was intimidated to work with color for a long time. I mostly focused on the forms of my ceramic work until I took an oil painting class in undergrad at the University of Tennessee. The challenge for me, when working with clay, was that the color results were fairly removed from the handbuilding process. You have to do so much testing and then wait for the results to come out of the kiln, a day or so later, before knowing what they will look like in the end. The immediacy of working with richly pigmented oil paints and responding, in real time, to the colors applied to the canvas helped me realize that I love vibrant colors and that I wanted to figure out how to incorporate rich hues into my ceramic work. Now, I've figured out how to play with color in the sketching stage and use that information to guide my surface application later.

Eds: How do you come up with the forms (or surfaces) that are prevalent in your work?

NT: My work is grounded in textile manipulation and fiber craft traditions I grew up around in East Tennessee, particularly through my grandmother, an expert seamstress. I draw directly from quilt structures, sewing patterns, and fabric construction, translating those systems into clay. Some forms retain a clear geometric relationship to specific quilt blocks, while others are pushed into abstraction. That same logic drives the surfaces: I build them through repetition, treating coils and slabs as strands of fiber or strips of fabric. Even when the reference is no longer visible, it remains the underlying structure.

Above *Situated Strands*, 12 ft. (3.7 m) in length, handbuilt ceramic, fired in oxidation to cone 6, aluminum, E6100 epoxy, 2024. **Left** *Situated Strands* (detail).

When I reach an impasse in the studio, I return to those origins and resolve the work through the logic of textile construction rather than ceramic tradition.

That translation from fiber to clay is not just formal—it is conceptual. I first understood the transformative power of creativity through literature, and I approach my handbuilt forms with that same awareness of authorship, access, and voice. Feminist writing, including Emily Dickinson and Linda Nochlin, is central to how I frame the work. Nochlin's question—why women have been excluded from dominant art histories—points directly to the conditions that shaped both artistic production and recognition. While writing has historically offered one form of access, textile and domestic craft traditions carried equally complex systems of knowledge and expression, often without visibility or attribution.

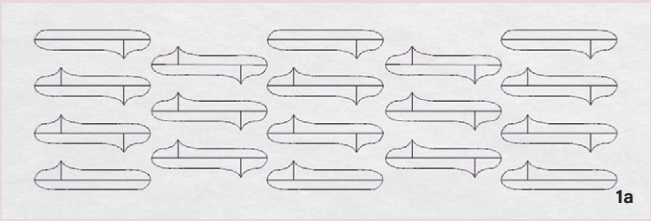
I use clay, a material that has survived and continues to teach us about ancient cultures, to assert the weight and permanence of those less visible histories. The work is materially dense, highly structured, and deliberately constructed—refusing any reading of softness as passive. Through scale, surface, and color, I translate labor-intensive, historically marginalized practices into a form that cannot be overlooked. These complex multidimensional compositions support an equally complex understanding of the human experience, especially the experiences of those who have been previously simplified, flattened, or overlooked.

"Through scale, surface, and color, I translate labor-intensive, historically marginalized practices into a form that cannot be overlooked."

To learn more, visit www.nataliecelestethedford.com or follow her on Instagram @nat.thedford_studio.

Begin by developing a sketch to scale for the overall installation and determine the shape of the individual forms. I like to design mine with CAD softwares like Rhino3D. Print out copies of the black and white sketch and play around with color combinations until you reach a desired color arrangement.

Handbuild one original form out of clay for each of the forms that will make up the installation, then make a plaster mold from these forms. Additionally, you make a template for the slab that will be attached to the back of the forms when they are released from the mold. Use the plaster mold as a slump mold and attach the ½ inch (1.2 cm) slab to the back of the form by slipping and scoring. I recommend punching holes in the slab for even drying and firing.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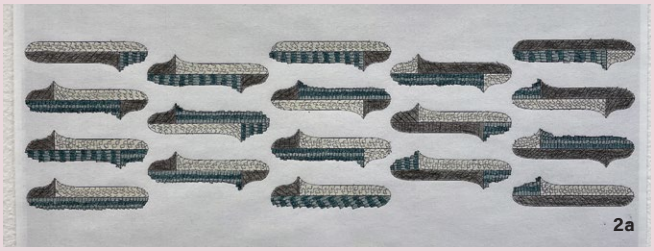
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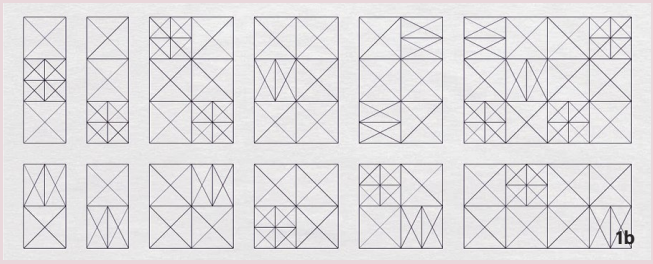
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2b


3a


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3b

1a, 1b Using digital software to design and layout your installation allows you to adjust as needed in the planning stage. **2a, 2b** Once the type and number of parts has been determined, print out your installation layout and play with color and texture until satisfied. **3a, 3b** Hand build one of each part type, encase in cottles, pour plaster over each clay prototype to make mold, and allow to fully dry. Using each prototype footprint as a guide, create a slab template for the back of each part. **4** Press slab of clay into the plaster slump mold and attach ½-inch thick slab to the back of the form by slipping and scoring. Before attaching, cut holes in the slab for even drying and firing.

Developing the Surface

Next, you will determine what textures will cover the surfaces of your forms. My surface textures start as hundreds of extruded clay coils and thin strips of clay slabs. They are inspired by aesthetics related to textile manipulation techniques and fiber craft traditions. Slip and score the textures to the forms during the leather hard stage. Once the whole form is covered in texture, discreetly poke several holes through the hollow forms with a needle tool for even drying and firing. Slowly dry these forms so that the textures do not pop off of the forms.


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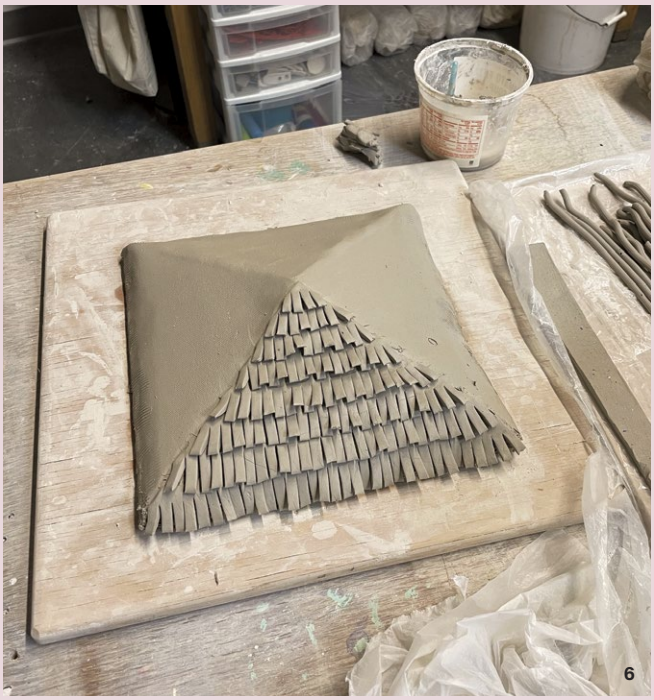
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8b

5 Extrude clay coils and roll thin slabs before beginning to add texture. **6** Slip and score the textures in layers to the forms in the leather-hard stage. When adding thin slabs as fringe, begin from the bottom of the form and work your way to the top. For coils, work from one straight edge to other following the curve of the designated design area. Once the whole form is covered in texture, discreetly poke several holes through the hollow forms with a needle tool for even drying and firing. Dry slowly under plastic to prevent cracking or the slabs and coils from popping off the forms. **7** Once bisqued, apply surface color with underglazes, slips, glazes, etc., with brushes or sprayers and then fire again. You can also finish using cold surface techniques like house paint. **8a, 8b** Once color has been applied, begin to lay out the design and determine orientation of each piece to match the plan determined in step 2.

If you're not using a clay body that has your desired final surface color, apply surface color with house paint, slips, glazes, etc. with brushes or sprayers. Then, fire again if needed. Lastly, apply French cleats and spacers of the same depth, to the backs of the forms with E6000 or E6100. I recommend doing this in a uniform location on the backs of the forms for installation ease.

10

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10 Once you know which direction each will hang, apply French cleats (top) and spacers (bottom) of the same depth to the backs of the forms with E6000 or E6100 epoxy. To simplify installation, add these wooden cleats to the same spot on each piece. **11** *Caesura* (and detail), 10 ft. (3.1 m) in length, hand-built ceramic, fired in oxidation to cone 04, acrylic paint, aluminum, E6100 epoxy, 2023. **12** *Labors of Love* (and detail), 17 ft. 2 in. (5.2 m) in length, hand-built ceramic, fired in oxidation to cone 04, acrylic paint, Baltic birch, E6100 epoxy, 2022.

12

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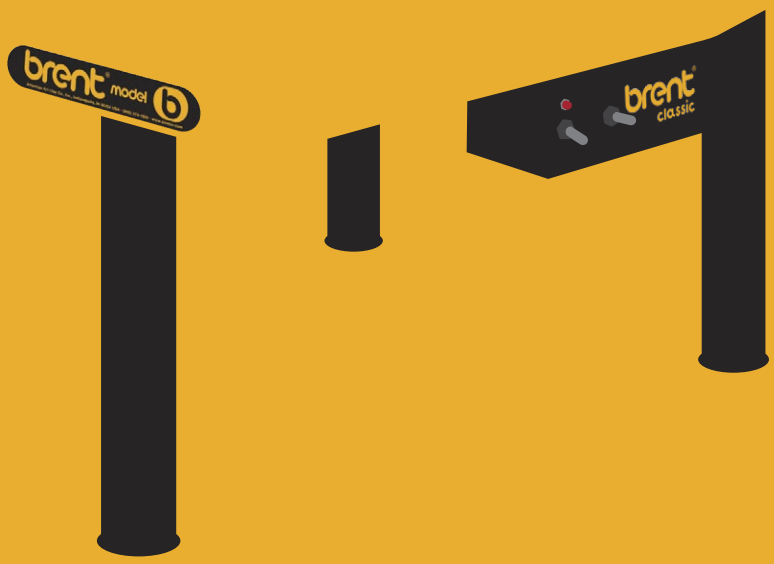

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MANAGING ARTISTIC CHAOS

by Kyle Lascelle

Editors: How do you come up with the forms (or surfaces) that are relevant in your work?

Kyle Lascelle: A lump of clay is chaos, similar to an empty canvas or sheet of paper, representing an infinite number of possibilities. The form is like building a puzzle without a picture, and I like it that way—it's half the story. Form, for me, is a coalition of historical profiles of vessels, the simultaneously improvisational and systematic act of sitting at the wheel (or banding wheel) and making something, partnered with the ratio-based conversation that exists between foot, rim, and belly (lots of caliper measurements).

The puzzle (object) is then populated with surface, the second half of the story, adding skin to the bones. The surface is informed by a sometimes grueling, sometimes joyful, process—a juxtaposition of dialectics between negative and positive space, squish and rigidity, learning and unlearning, expansion and contraction, and the composition informed by form and detached from form.

This complex tapestry between form and surface is then stitched together (with a golden thread of delusional hope) by meditations of my relationship with artistic practice, personal anecdotes, and visual puns—all cloaked with moments of recollected whimsy.

I am currently looking at a lot of Staffordshire figurines and teapots, funk art motifs, Italian majolica, and 18th-century Delftware for inspiration. I look and then forget, keeping no reference pictures in the studio. This allows for a rhythmic trickling jingle of precedents rather than accidental reproduction.

Everything can go wrong during clay's magical transformation to objecthood. Within the management of the infinite chaos of form and surface in our silly-serious medium, there endures an evergreen truism that exists between the subtle concave and convex curves and coils of a work of art: "Follow your bliss!" This is what binds chaos to artistic faith.

Above *Terracotta Pouring Pot*, 9½ in. (24.1 cm) in height, earthenware, fired in oxidation to cone 04. **Left** *Cabbage Oyster Plate*, 14 in. (35.6 cm) in width, porcelain, fired in oxidation to cone 6. *Photos: Elizabeth Lamark.*

Eds: What do you see as the current trends in ceramics, and where do you see yourself in that field?
KL: A maker's hands are a connection to both the clay and their own thoughts, feelings, and emotions. I subscribe to the thought that we are our experiences, whether it be of spirit or of mind. The clay is an extension of ourselves. A ceramic scrapbook of the identity of a maker at the time of creation. A snapshot of little moments, long-held beliefs, aesthetic judgments, and contradictions—all existing in the delicate process of decisions, forever frozen by the kiln. I think this is true both for someone touching clay for the first time and for a maker who has committed their life to the medium.

I go back and forth on the concept of trend. Sometimes it can be reductive to the individual freedom of artistic expression. But if we are individuals made by experience, others (collective/canon) must be a part of the calculus—rooting the individualism of an original work of art to a specific time, space, and history.

I recognize there are trends and fashions that are recognizable, distinguishable, and therefore performed in this specific moment in ceramics. I see two:

1. The popularity of cone-6 oxidation. I think this is due to the accessibility of electric kilns versus atmospheric alternatives and an acknowledgment of one's own environmental footprint.
2. Material as an aesthetic concept (virtue through denigration). I have been seeing an embrace of the exaggeration of material qualities such as puffy, runny, cratery, and foamy glazes—intentionally making aesthetic choices based on what would have been perceived as mistakes, departing from the conventional wisdom of the past—a maximalist way of seeing beauty in the unique qualities of specific ceramic materials.

Admittedly, my first reaction to the question is to reject seeing my work as a trend or trendy. The truth is, I don't usually think about where I or my work exists in the field. However, I will accept that I am an amalgamation of both individual and sociological considerations. To quote Maria Von Trapp, "Nothing comes from nothing."

What gives me the weirdest combination of great fear and relief is that, when panning out and putting ego aside, we all get categorized at some point.

Eds: What role does color play in your work?
KL: There are boundless possibilities in limitations. I have my glaze palette, an opaque satin/matte base, a majolica, and a transparent base. Having these limitations of glazes and building color in oxidation allows me to prioritize my intuition. Through this, I'm able to use the emotive quality of color by rhyming my color choices with historical archetypes and making those allusions. Rhyming, not always through analogous harmony, but untidy, bright saturation. Like a messy desk where only I know where the important paper is.

To learn more, visit www.kylelascellepottery.com or follow on Instagram @kylelascellepottery.

Above *Gradience of Deconstructed Utility with Majolica Foam,* to 18 in. (45.7 cm) in height, stoneware, fired in oxidation to cone 6. **Right** *My Exceptionally Bright Son,* 30 in. (76.2 cm) in height, white earthenware, fired in oxidation to cone 04. *Photos: Elizabeth Lamark.*

"Within the management of the infinite chaos of form and surface in our silly-serious medium, there endures an evergreen truism that exists . . . follow your bliss!"

Throwing and Shaping the Main Form

Begin with about 2½–3 pounds (1.1–1.3 kgs) of clay (I personally like to eyeball it). In this case, I am using white earthenware, but any clay will do. Open the base wide to have full access to the bottom, and compress a concave curve with the curved end of a metal rib. This will prevent S-cracks and create the trajectory of what will be a teapot form. Leave about ¾ inch (1.9 cm) of clay at the bottom, allowing more options in the trimming process. Close in the lip and begin pulling a cylinder. After the first pull, make a memory mark with your finger. This mark will later be where the lid will sit (1). Once you have a well-balanced cylinder, shape the form with two stainless steel ribs, one on the inside and one on the outside (round facing round). When the form is about 80% of the way done, shape the inside with one of the ribs (2). Shaping only the inside at this stage makes for a more animated, less static form. Using a wooden rib (or anything with a 90° angle), reinforce the rim where the lid will sit. Measure the inside and the outside of the rim with calipers (3) and set the fledgling teapot form aside to firm up and rest.

Throwing the Lid

The lid (for this particular lid system) is really just a carefully measured double-rimmed bowl. Use the caliper measurements as a guide. The most important measurement for this lid is the inside circumference of the outer ring. Be sure to look at the shoulder of the teapot body since that will give an indication for how deep to open the clay—I like the lid to be a continuation of the form (4). As for the inner ring (lid catch), don't worry about measuring perfectly—it just needs to be long enough to catch while tilting the teapot forward. The tighter the measurement to the inside circumference, the shorter the catch can be. The looser the catch measurement, the longer it should be.

Trimming

Trimming takes place at the soft, leather-hard stage. I like trimming on the softer side. For me, the clay works better as a recording device, generously displaying a softer line quality. Use the lid measurements to inform the width of the foot (5). For trimming the lid, (6) I prefer to trim on top of the vessel—it is easier to see the

1 Center 2½–3 pounds of clay and throw a cylinder leaving the floor ¾-inch thick. **2** Once you have a well-balanced cylinder, open and round using two metal ribs (one inside and one outside). **3** Use the corner of a wooden rib to reset and shape the rim. Use calipers to measure outer and inner diameter, and record measurements for later use. **4** Throw lid using caliper measurements as guides. **5** Trim teapot body at soft leather hard using the lid diameter as guide for the trimmed foot diameter.

silhouette of the pot. Pay close attention to how the lid is interacting with the vessel: Is it an extension of the form? Does it work more like a frame or a continuation of the form? If the pot is a conversation, then the finial works as a form of punctuation. Thoroughly slip and score the top of the lid, and throw the finial using the lid as a bat (7). The larger the finial, the smaller the pot looks; the smaller the finial, the more visual volume. On this pot, I went with a hearty kitchen finial.

Off the Wheel (Assemblage)

Start with a slab. I always say that the beginning of a slab constructed spout is a trapezoid with a smile (8). The width of the base will be the connection to the body—the wider the base, the larger the opening. Cut your trapezoid with a fettling knife. Use a roller to give the tip of the slab a slight gradient, like a wedge (9). This will produce a better pour once fired, easily cutting the water. Then, give the slab a miter cut (a 45° bevel on each side of the slab). Gently fold the slab until the 45° angles meet, lightly wet (no scoring) and smooth the seam (10).

When shaping the spout, bend the tip of the spout forward, then use the thumb to belly out the bottom, where the spout meets the pot (11).


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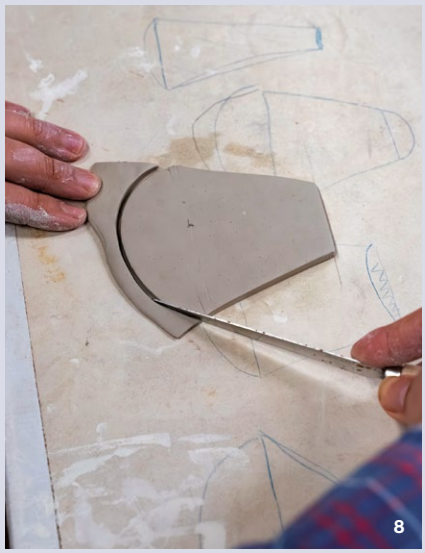
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6 Trim the lid by placing atop the trimmed teapot. **7** Score and slip the top of the trimmed lid and add a small amount of clay. Center and throw finial for lid. **8** Cut out a curved-edge trapezoid from a slab to create a spout. **9** Use a pony roller to shape the thickness of the slab into a wedge. **10** Bevel the two long edges of the slab, lightly wet, and gently shape into a tube. Use fingers to smooth the seam. **11** Add curves to the spout by bending the narrow end forward and then use your thumb to belly out the wider base, creating a slight S-curve.


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This should look a lot like an upside-down captain's pipe. Decide where the spout should connect to the pot. The tip of the spout should be the same height or slightly higher than the rim, if the spout is too low, the pot won't fill to the top. I like to connect the spout slightly below the widest point of the pot. Use a pencil to trace the opening (12). Set the spout aside and make the holes with a drill bit or a fettling knife. Slip and score, and attach the spout. Once firmly on the teapot, adjust the spout to your liking.

For the handle, make a memory ridge with the tips of the thumbs (13). When pulling the handle, the ridge will not disappear completely—it will create a smooth spine along the back of the handle (14). While pulling off the side of the form, be sure the handle is firmly attached. As the handle is drying, adjust the handle to taste. I like the curve of the handle to pair with the curve of the spout.

There you have it, a teapot (15). This will function as a generous canvas for any surfacing needs. I started the decorative process by adorning the tip of the spout with the head of a serpent.


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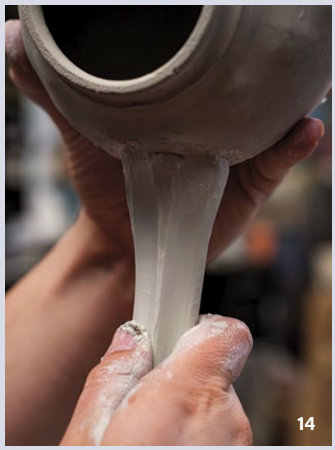
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12 Connect the spout slightly below the widest part of the pot, and use a pencil to lightly mark placement before setting spout aside. Add small holes in the body of the pot inside drawn line, then score around line, slip, and attach spout. **13** Begin handle by pinching a spine down a thick slab strip. **14** Attach the handle to the teapot and continue to pull and shape. **15** With the teapot assembled, you can now add decorative elements, if desired. **1–15** *Photos: Sydney Maas.*

Left *Teapot Looking Back*, 8½ in. (21.6 cm) in length, earthenware, fired in oxidation to cone 04. *Photo: Elizabeth Lamark.*

ABUNDANCE AND RESOURCE

by Bianka Groves

Editors: What is the most challenging aspect of working in clay (either technically or in terms of building a career)?
Bianka Groves: The most challenging aspect of working in clay is, without question, time. Clay has absolutely no interest in my schedule, my deadlines, or my ambitions; it operates on its own slow, stubborn timeline. But sometimes I'll test the limits of rushing things. I'll throw, trim, inlay the surface, and bisque all in the same day while holding my breath hoping for survival. There's a lot of waiting in ceramics: waiting for things to dry, waiting for the kiln to cool or heat up, waiting to find out if what you thought was a good idea actually was. It's a practice that constantly reminds you that control is limited and patience is not optional. Timing with clay has its own rules and its own surprises, and that's one of the reasons why I can't stop working with it.

Right now, that challenge is amplified by the fact that I'm intentionally shifting my practice mid-career while in graduate school. Which, on paper, sounds like growth and ambition, but in reality, it often feels like I'm a beginner again. I'm working with new clay bodies, experimenting with different firing techniques, and trying to unlearn habits that once felt dependable. The things I used to rely on no longer behave the same way, and the learning curve is steep. It's exciting, but it's also inefficient, unpredictable, and deeply humbling. There's a real tension between wanting to take full advantage of this moment. It's a rare window of time where experimentation is not only allowed but expected. The reality is that experimentation is expensive, time consuming, and often unsuccessful. Clay doesn't reward urgency, and it definitely doesn't reward ego, so I'm constantly negotiating between pushing forward and accepting that progress might look like failure for a while, but I think that's okay.

Eds: What role does color play (or not play) in your work?
BG: Color in my work tends to take a backseat, or at least refuses to be the loudest voice in the room. I've always been drawn to a limited palette. Black and white, in particular, feels direct and calming. It strips things down to contrast, form, and surface without the distraction of too many decisions. But, in contradiction, I'm deeply attracted to the warm, earthy, more complex colors that emerge from atmospheric firings or from working with locally sourced, hand-dug clay. Those surfaces carry a kind of depth that doesn't feel applied so much as revealed. I'm currently working on how to mix the two.

1 Groves throwing a bowl in her home studio in Santa Fe, New Mexico.
2 Throwing at her standing wheel amongst bisqued and finished works.
1, 2 *Photos: Eric Arce.* **3** Yunomi, turquoise porcelain, inlaid black slip.
4 Three jars, porcelain, inlaid black slip.

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So while I'm not uninterested in color, I am cautious of it, especially when it starts to do too much, too quickly. I sometimes add hints of color hidden in my inlay designs to create a subtle surprise. I'm more interested in surfaces that unfold slowly, where quiet shifts in tone or texture hold attention over time. In that sense, color becomes less about decoration and more about atmosphere or something that supports the work rather than dominating it. Whether it's the starkness of black and white or the unpredictable tones of atmospheric firing, I want color to feel embedded in the material, not layered on top of it. That just goes for my work though. If you look through my kitchen cabinets, they're filled with an explosion of pots by other potters made with all the colors of the rainbow.

"Clay doesn't reward urgency, and it definitely doesn't reward ego, so I'm constantly negotiating between pushing forward and accepting that progress might look like failure for a while, but I think that's okay."

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Eds: What excites you about the field of ceramics?
BG: What excites me most about the field of ceramics is that it refuses to stay still. There's a constant shift happening. I love seeing new artists emerge or in awe of watching an established artist take an unexpected turn. The boundaries of what ceramics can be continue to expand. It's a field that holds a deep respect for tradition while also making room for experimentation that can feel completely unhinged in the best way. One moment you're looking at a perfectly thrown, historically grounded vessel, and the next you're seeing work that barely resembles clay or glaze at all.

There's also something genuinely exciting about watching the material science evolve alongside the artistic side. New glazes, new processes, new approaches to firing. Some of them feel almost absurd in their complexity or ambition, and that's part of what makes them compelling. It opens up possibilities that didn't exist before, or at least weren't accessible in the same way. Seeing artists push ceramics to extremes, testing its limits and reimagining what it can do, is especially energizing. It's a reminder that even within a material that has been around for thousands of years, there is still so much left to discover.

At the same time, ceramics maintains this grounding in the physical and the functional. It never fully lets you drift away from the reality of making, of touch, weight, heat, and everything else involved. That balance between innovation and material accountability is what keeps me invested. It's a field where you can chase new ideas, fail repeatedly, and still feel like you're part of an ongoing conversation that stretches far beyond your own work. And despite all the waiting, all the unpredictability, and all the things that can (and will) go wrong, there's still something incredibly satisfying about pulling a piece out of the kiln and realizing, even briefly, that it worked.

Studio Life

My studio is in my backyard in Santa Fe, New Mexico. It's small, less than 100 square feet, but it has a perfect window with views of the desert. Sometimes, instead of getting any work done, I'll sit and watch all the birds at the feeders and even get to see the occasional coyote, deer, or rabbit. It's like I have my own built-in wildlife park. The studio is just big enough for a wheel, a small pug mill, a workbench, and some floor-to-ceiling shelving that my uncle and I built.

My favorite aspect of the studio is definitely the window, with spectacular views and all that warm New Mexico sunshine and natural light. The light shifts throughout the day in a way that quietly marks time, something that feels especially fitting when working with clay. It also helps for photographing work at my little make-shift photo booth. My studio works just fine for the size and quantity of all the functional pots I make. My least favorite part is the size; however, there are many more positives so I don't really dwell on how small it is. I make it work. And if I need more room, I'm usually able to figure it out. I have a little Paragon kiln from

5 *Mountain Mug,* porcelain, black and turquoise slip, inlaid black slip. **6** *Dot Yunomi*, porcelain, slip, glaze. **7** Working primarily in functional forms, Groves pushes herself in the studio to complete large-scale bowls alongside mugs and smaller vessels. *Photo: Eric Arce.*

8 The back porch holds Groves' kiln shed, housing one of her two electric kilns. **9** With plenty of natural light, her small studio feels expansive and provides plenty of inspiring desert views. **8, 9** *Photos: Eric Arce.* **10** Groves takes a break on the steps of her home studio with her dog, Muddy. *Photo: Kate and Jack Lennie.*

the 1970s, perfect for the last-minute, emergency twenty (max) mug order, that happily rages to cone 10. I also have a Skutt 1027 tucked in a shed on my back patio.

For the past several months, I've been digging wild clay and processing it in the graduate studios on the UNM campus. My home studio isn't set up for the larger coil-built pots that I make from the iron-rich wild clay. For those, I've been making good use of my large kitchen counter. It's a little ridiculous when trying to cook, but it works, and small spaces have a way of teaching you resourcefulness and patience.

Water conservation is a major concern here in the desert, and I try to be as mindful as possible in my studio practice. I've developed a system for limiting water use: there's no running water in the studio, and I rely on refillable containers and reuse the water for washing, mixing, etc. Most of my firings are electric, which helps reduce fuel consumption, but I'm also in the process of building a small soda/gas kiln and a pit to fire some of my low-fire, hand-dug clay, which isn't the most environmentally friendly. I make every effort to conserve resources while still experimenting and pushing my work forward to find a balance between creativity and environmental responsibility, just like working with clay itself.

I'd love to expand my studio someday, and I hope to make that a reality. The most perfect studio I've ever seen belongs to Betsy Williams. She has the space, views, and kilns of various firing methods nestled right on the edge of a Northern New Mexico National Forest. Plus, her studio buildings are made of traditional adobe bricks and other locally sourced materials. Her studio is truly inspiring. For me, the dream studio would be a combined creative space with a clay studio, metal shop, and bike workshop that I could share with my husband, artist and avid cyclist, Sonny De La Cruz, and of course, space for our dogs.

My best tip for anyone setting up a studio is not to stress about having all the best equipment. I think we, as artists, are naturally resourceful and handy, and the ceramics community is full of generous people who will always be willing to help out. Buy used whenever you can. It's another way to be sustainable, and it makes the search more fun. My little Paragon kiln came from a classified ad for $200 and it's still going strong nearly ten years later. Or, if you need to, load up a car and drive to borrow or rent kiln space. My first real setup after undergrad was a wheel in my kitchen, then later in a living room. You'd be surprised how easily you can make do with what you have, and it seems like somehow, the things you need have a way of getting to you.

To learn more, visit www.biankagrovesdelacruz.com.

PATTERNED BY PERCEPTION

by Jaden Estes Carlson

Editors: Who is your ideal audience?
Jaden Estes Carlson: My ideal audience is people who surround themselves with objects that mean something to them, who live with handmade work, and who recognize the value of living with objects that carry stories. That can be a collector, an interior designer, or someone who is simply building a home filled with meaningful things. I am especially drawn to an audience that appreciates pattern and can think of it beyond decoration, understanding that a surface can hold memory, repetition, comfort, and tension all at once.

I also think about viewers who have a relationship to the Midwest and the Great Plains, whether they live here now or carry it with them elsewhere. The landscape and culture show up in my work through structure, restraint, and repetition. My audience does not need to know the full backstory to connect, but I love when someone recognizes the feeling, like a quilt, a tile floor, a kitchen table, or a familiar place you return to again and again.

Eds: How do you come up with the surfaces that are prevalent in your work?
JEC: When developing the patterned surfaces in my work, I begin with a sketchbook dedicated to collecting and studying patterns. After considering the form, I select a motif and scale that best suits its proportions and surface. I often look to the International Quilt Museum in Lincoln, Nebraska, for inspiration, where I am able to study firsthand how patterns operate on fabric. Quilts reveal what draws me to pattern in the first place: its mathematical precision and the way it inevitably distorts and shifts when applied to something fluid and dimensional.

I also draw inspiration from the world around me, finding patterns in clothing, tiles, stationery, floors, and architecture. Color plays a critical role in how a pattern is perceived and can completely transform its impact. By changing a color palette or adjusting value relationships, the same pattern can be read as structured or soft, restrained or expressive, allowing each surface to feel distinct even when the underlying motif remains the same.

Left *Vessel from The Arrangement No. 1*, 17 in. (43.2 cm) in height, coil-built terra cotta, terra sigillata, underglaze, glaze, fired to cone 04 in an electric kiln, 2025. *Photo: Siera Nikole Photography.*

“Quilts reveal what draws me to pattern in the first place: its mathematical precision and the way it inevitably distorts and shifts when applied to something fluid and dimensional.”

Eds: What do you do to push yourself to stay engaged with the field of ceramics?
JEC: I stay engaged with the field of ceramics by actively seeking out opportunities to learn and experience work in person. I make a point to visit exhibitions whenever possible, regularly read major ceramics publications, and participate in online webinars and in-person workshops that offer perspectives different from my own practice. Each summer, I try to do a workshop, which consistently proves impactful, whether the influence is immediate or emerges gradually over time.

Beyond individual skill building, I value staying connected to the field as a whole by paying attention to broader conversations around material, labor, surface, and scale. Engaging with how artists are responding to contemporary cultural and aesthetic questions helps me understand where my work fits within the field and ensures that my practice remains responsive, informed, and evolving.

To learn more, visit jadenestescarlson.com or follow her on Instagram @jadenestescarlson.

Above Estes Carlson with her work installed at The Lux Center for the Arts in Lincoln, Nebraska, 2025. **Left** *In Common, In Contrast*, 18 in. (45.7 cm) in height each, coil-built terra cotta, terra sigillata, underglaze, glaze, fired to cone 04 in an electric kiln, 2025. *Photos: Siera Nikole Photography.*

PROCESS: Constructing a Coil-Built Vessel by Jaden Estes Carlson

This vessel is built in stacked directional segments using coils, alternating inward and outward movements to create shifts in plane and rhythm. The form develops gradually through controlled moisture stages, allowing for clean transitions and crisp edges.

Building the Base Form

Begin by rolling out a slab and cutting a circle for the base using a cookie cutter. Roll a coil and press it firmly into the perimeter of the base. Add coils in small groups, about three rows at a time, blending and smoothing before continuing upward (1).

Continue stacking and blending coils while gradually widening the form. Stop when you reach the first directional shift in the profile (2). Using an X-Acto knife, cut a subtle curve into the rim. Now, allow the form to reach a soft leather-hard stage (3).

Creating Directional Shifts and Expanding the Form

Once the form has stiffened slightly, score and slip the rim. Begin adding coils at a steep inward angle to create the first directional change (4). After every two or so coils, pause to blend and refine the surface. Use a kidney rib to sharpen the transition by dragging it along the seam where the old and new planes meet (5)—this helps define a crisp edge (6). Continue building inward until you reach the next shift in direction (7).

Place a cookie cutter directly above the original base and cut out a centered opening (8). Allow the form to reach a soft leather-hard stage. Score and slip the rim. Begin building outward using a flattened, slab-like coil (9). Continue expanding until the next directional shift (10). Cut another subtle curve into the rim using an X-Acto knife, making sure the high and low points oppose the curve below. Let the form firm up again.

Repeat the inward-building process, adding angled coils and refining the transitions with a rib to maintain crisp edges.

Tools and Materials

- Clay body suitable for coil building (I use a low-fire terra cotta)
- Rolling pin
- Circle cookie cutters (various sizes)
- Scoring tool
- Slip
- X-Acto knife
- Rubber kidney rib
- Terra sigillata
- Underglaze
- Glaze

1 Begin by rolling out a slab and cutting a circle for the base using a cookie cutter. Roll a coil and press it firmly into the perimeter of the base. **2** Continue stacking and blending coils while gradually widening the form. Stop when you reach the first directional shift in the profile. **3** Using an X-Acto knife, cut a subtle curve into the rim. Allow the form to reach a soft leather-hard stage. **4** Once the form has stiffened slightly, score and slip the rim. Begin adding coils at a steep inward angle to create the first directional change. After every two or so coils, pause to blend and refine the surface. **5** Use a kidney rib to sharpen the transition by dragging it along the seam where the old and new planes meet. **6** This helps define a crisp edge.

Repeating the Segment Structure

Next, you want to cut another centered opening aligned with the base. Allow the form to reach a soft leather-hard stage. Score and slip, then build outward again using a flattened coil (11). The final outward section should be slightly taller, as it completes the form.

Now, cut a final curved rim, offsetting the peaks and valleys from the previous segment (12). You want to let the rim stiffen slightly before finishing the top.

Finishing the Rim and Adding the Grid

Roll a small ½-inch coil and pinch it into a triangular profile (13). Score and slip, then attach it to the interior of the rim. Blend the seam along the top edge while keeping the triangular profile intact (14). Allow the rim to firm up slightly before moving into surface work.

Once the form is leather hard, begin laying out the surface design. Using an X-Acto knife, divide the vessel vertically by marking opposite points on the rim and extending lines down the body (15). Continue subdividing each section until a full vertical rhythm is established. Then begin adding horizontal divisions, working from the base upward. These can follow the form's curve or remain straight, depending on the desired tension (16). This grid becomes the framework for surface patterns.


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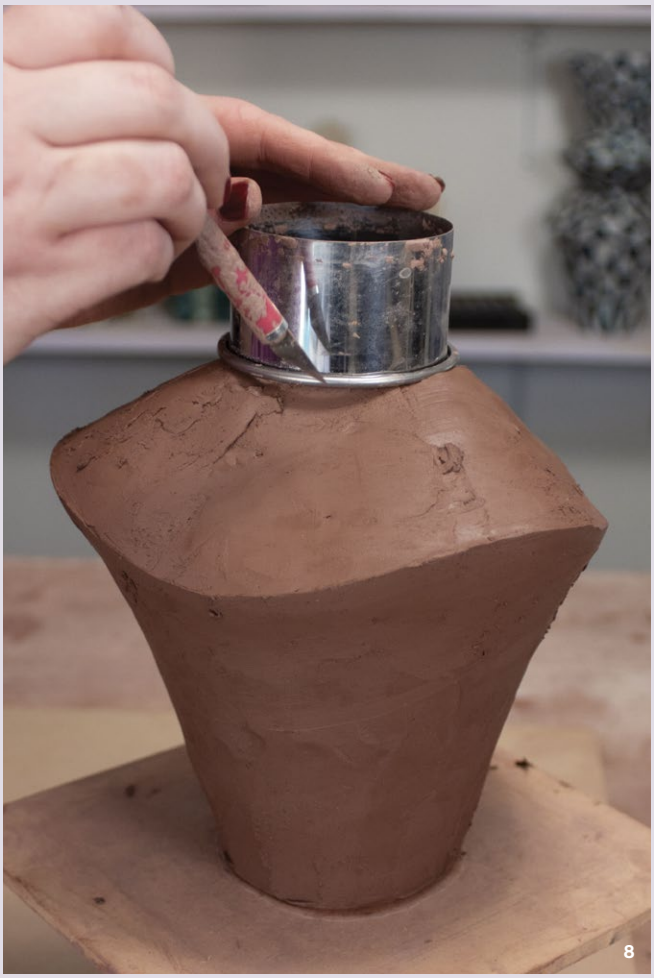
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7 Continue building inward until you reach the next shift in direction.
8 Place a cookie cutter directly above the original base and cut out a centered opening. Allow the form to reach a soft leather-hard stage.
9 Score and slip the rim. Begin building outward using a flattened, slab-like coil.

Adding Surface and Firing

Use the grid as a guide for geometric surface design. Patterns can vary, but alternating directional marks create a strong visual rhythm (17). For this piece, diagonal lines are alternated within each section to create movement across the form. Continue the pattern across the rim so the surface reads as continuous. I often go back to this simple pattern, exaggerating different aspects of the lines or the color application.

Allow the vessel to dry completely to bone dry. I find that at this stage I can surface the fastest due to the quick dry time of the materials. Apply terra sigillata to selected sections, alternating with underglaze in the remaining areas to build contrast and shift how the pattern is perceived across the surface (18). Adjust color placement and value relationships to explore how the same motif can read differently. Once dry, bisque fire the form according to your clay body. After the bisque firing, glaze as desired, and complete the final firing. I like to do a glaze wash and finish the interior with a glaze color that is close to the color of my terra-cotta clay body. I bisque fire to cone 06 and glaze fire to cone 04 in an electric kiln.


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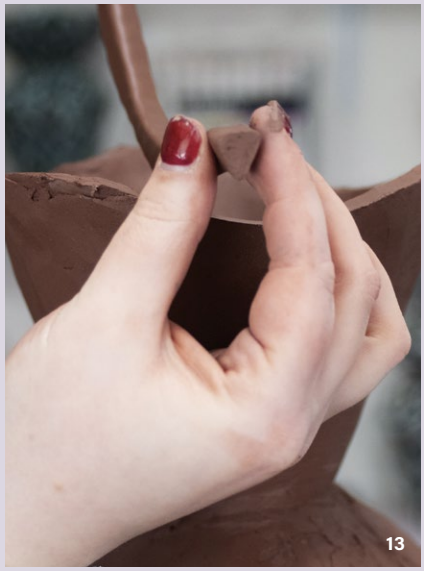
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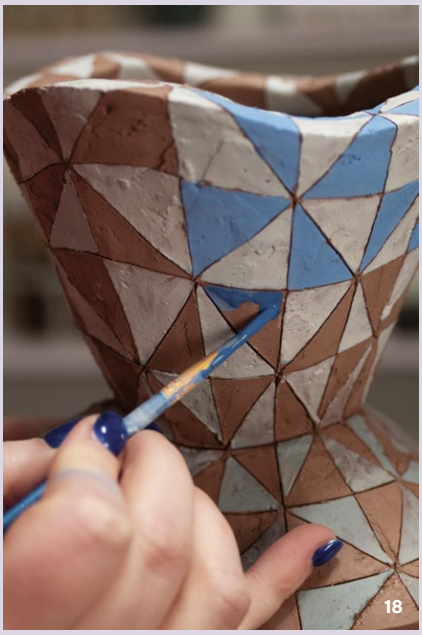
10 Continue expanding until the next directional shift. **11** Score, slip, and then build outward again using a flattened coil. This final section is slightly taller to complete the form. **12** Cut a final curved rim, offsetting the peaks and valleys from the previous segment. Let the rim stiffen slightly before finishing the top. **13** Roll a small ½-inch coil and pinch it into a triangular profile. **14** Score, slip, and then attach it to the rim interior. Blend and allow to firm up before beginning surface work. **15** Once leather hard, begin laying out the surface design. Using an X-Acto knife, divide the vessel vertically by marking opposite points on the rim and extending lines down the body. **16** Then begin adding horizontal divisions, creating a grid, working from the base upward.



17 Use the grid as a guide for geometric surface design. Patterns can vary, but alternating directional marks create a strong visual rhythm. For this piece, diagonal lines are alternated within each section to create movement across the form. Continue the pattern across the rim so the surface reads as continuous. I often go back to this simple pattern, exaggerating different aspects of the lines or the color application. **18** Allow the vessel to dry completely to bone dry. Apply terra sigillata to selected sections, alternating with underglaze in the remaining areas to build contrast. Bisque then glaze as desired and complete the final firing. **Right** Vessel, 15 in. (38.1 cm) in height, coil-built terra cotta, terra sigillata, underglaze, glaze, fired to cone 04 in an electric kiln, 2026.

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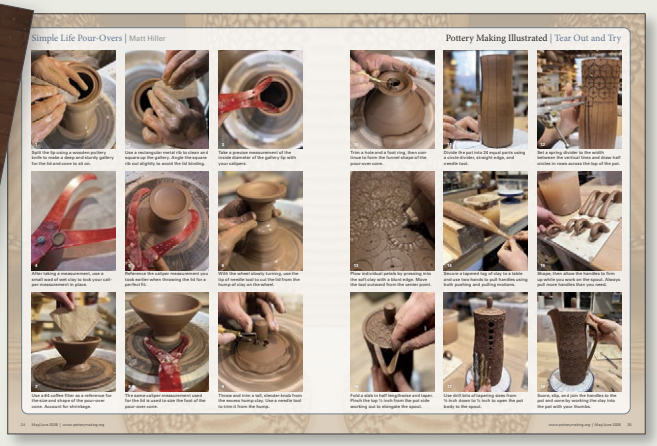

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GLAZES

Frozen Pond

Kathy McGuire ▸ SPECTRUM HIGH FIRING GLAZES
December 29, 2022

Decided to do some experimenting with AMACO® C-1 Obsidian as a base for this combo. It turned out better than expected. It's Bee Mix fired to cone 5 with a 30 minute hold. AMACO® C-1 Obsidian x3 inside and out. Spectrum Textured Autumn x2 with Spectrum Running Hot Chowder x2 applied in a pattern. I think I will call this combo "Frozen Pond."

Spectrum 1173 Running Hot Chowder (RHC) is the catalyst for changes. It is unique in the way it fragments, then reconfigures the layers of glazes, in unexpected and truly unimaginable ways.

Kathy continues to experiment with glaze combinations. Look for her dramatically different Molten Ice and Midnight Blues.
Follow Kathy @klm4655

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Photo by Bibi Bielat

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