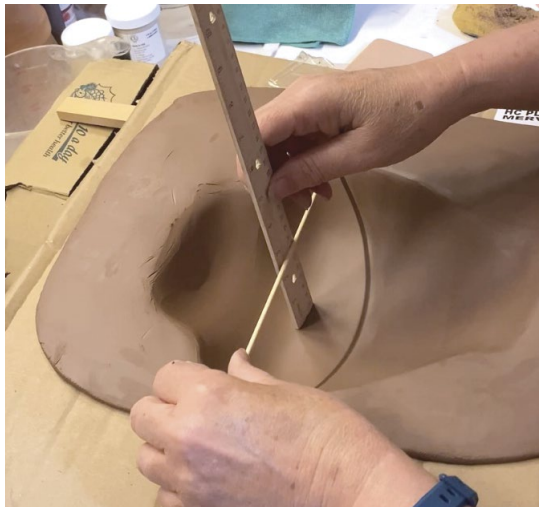
2026 clay workshop HANDBOOK

Knowledge and Techniques for the Studio



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2026 clay workshop HANDBOOK

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ceramics MONTHLY

PotteryMaking Illustrated

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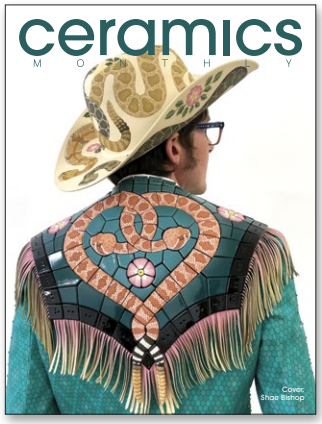
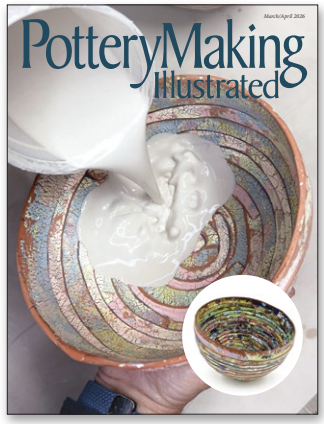
Welcome to your workshop! Whether you enjoy throwing, handbuilding, surface design, glaze testing, or all of the above, we've pulled together several things for you to try out once you get back to your studio.

If you're familiar with *Pottery Making Illustrated* and *Ceramics Monthly*, then you already know they're packed with practical information, projects, and techniques. The articles shared here provide a sampling of some of the great content in each issue.

You'll also find a wealth of information on the magazines' websites: www.ceramicsmonthly.org and www.potterymaking.org. Guests can access their choice of articles for free on a limited monthly basis. For more tips and techniques, check out hundreds of free posts and scores of how-to videos on the Ceramic Arts Network (ceramicartsnetwork.org). Enjoy your workshop!





Holly Goring, Managing Editor,
Ceramics Monthly and
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Margaret Kinkeade, Editor,
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Cover (clockwise from top left): Rachel Donner applies paper shapes to lay out her design; Clare Unger's finished greenware cup handbuilt with bisque-fired slab molds for texture; Jacquie Blondin uses a tombo to check the depth of one half of her vessel; Donna Bloye brushes colored slip onto a plaster slab; Rebecca Sabo begins her rocking vase by throwing a bottomless tapered cylinder.

Dynamic TRANSFERS

by Donna Bloye

Decoration has always been the most engaging part of creating with clay for me. I consider it right from the beginning of a piece, when my energy is high and my creative spark is fresh, rather than leaving it until the end. I have a penchant for bright, attention-grabbing, punchy tones that spark a strong emotional response—joy, energy, even perhaps a little bit of chaos. Bright colors make my work visually interesting and dynamic, and they make it feel alive and full of movement.

A Sense of Endless Possibilities

Initially, to create my pieces, when studio time was limited, I utilized a mono-printing technique; however, as my time allocated to studio activities grew, so too did my desire to develop my creative process. Newsprint was replaced by plaster bats. By decorating a piece in this way, the imagery could become an integral part of the form itself, embedded within the walls of the piece, rather than simply applied after bisque to the surface like paint on a canvas. Working on plaster allowed for impulsiveness and surprises, which was exciting to me.

Creating monotypes with plaster is a spontaneous and versatile process—drawing with slip trailers and painting with colored slip: painting directly onto the plaster; using underglazes like watercolors; using more bold, thick, and opaque mark making, like with acrylics; screen printing onto the plaster slab with underglazes; or even combining all these processes to create unique, mixed-media work. There is so much room to experiment and that sense of endless possibility really invigorates me.

Preparing a Bat and Colored Slips

For this technique, first cast a plaster bat on which to decorate. I cast slabs onto a flat, smooth surface and use cottle boards to contain the plaster, ensuring that the surface onto which I am pouring the plaster is as smooth and even as possible for the best quality work. I check that my table or desk is level in all directions using a level, so that when I pour the plaster, the bat is level too. When making bats and slabs, I always use #1 Pottery Plaster, which is finer and more durable than other types of plaster. After the plaster is set, allow the bat to fully dry, so that it can absorb the moisture from the slip and turn it to a leather-hard slab for handbuilding (1).

Finished vessels showing a wide range of dynamic marks that can be made using the monotype process. The mark making is spontaneous, using both brushes and slip trailers, with vivid and uplifting colors that have been further enhanced by two coats of HG Tile Protector.

The next stage is to prepare colored slips. I work exclusively with Scarva's porcelain FLAX Paper Clay. It is best to use a decorating slip that matches the clay body so that the shrinkage rates are the same. In this instance, that is not possible as the small particles of flax paper would clog up my fine-tipped slip trailers, but to keep the shrinkage consistent, I use a porcelain decorating slip, which I then color with Mason stains. Using between 4% and 8% stain per weight of slip will achieve the bright, bold colors I like to work with (2). Once the slip and stain have been mixed together, pass the mixture through a 120-mesh sieve, then add premixed sodium silicate (1 tsp) and water (150 ml) solution to the colored slip, a drop at a time, until the slip reaches the consistency of milk (3). The addition of the water/deflocculant mixture makes the slip much more fluid, but without oversaturating it and dulling the quality of the color. It also means that the slip will move through the thin-tipped slip trailers with ease and without clogging, allowing me to make fast, fluid, expressive marks on the plaster. Decant some of the colored slips from the tubs into slip trailers to prepare for drawing directly onto the plaster. The remaining decorating slip is stored in lidded tubs for later use.

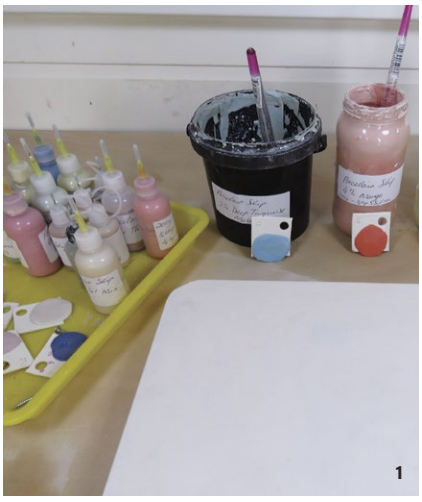
Decorating the Surface

Now it's time to get to work on the plaster. The most complex part of the process is remembering to work in reverse. When you paint directly onto canvas, you work from background to foreground; however, for this process, you must begin with the foreground. So you will start with the slip trailers, adding a range of impulsive marks and patterns (4), working your way across the bat, trying to find balance in the composition. The dry plaster quickly wicks away moisture from the slip-trailed marks allowing you to move on to the next layer, usually drops of color squeezed from the slip trailers (5).

Sometimes I work instinctively with squiggles, circles, and crosses, then other times I am more controlled and create patterns using various colors (6). Moving onto the paintbrushes allows me to flood the background (7). You are trying to achieve balance in the composition as you work across the plaster, building up the background with a range of brightly colored slips until all the plaster surface is covered (8, 9). As you progress, the plaster continues to draw moisture from the decorating slips.

Casting a Clay Transfer Slab

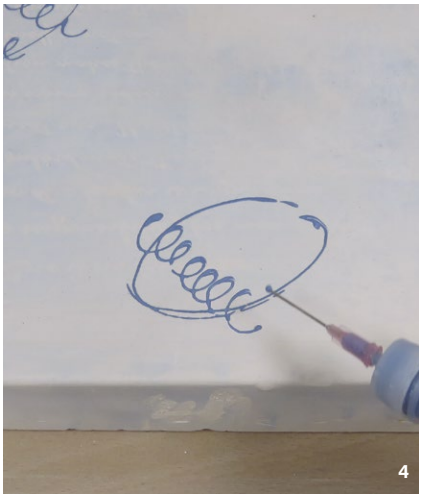
I roll long coils of a contrasting clay and use them to build walls around the perimeter of the plaster bat, ensuring that they are pressed down firmly and will not allow the wet clay to seep underneath (10). The FLAX Paper Clay casting slip is poured onto the decorated plaster bat to create an even layer (around ¼ inch (6 mm) in depth) covering the entire colored surface (11). It is then left to firm up. The plaster gets to work again, drawing the moisture from the wet casting slip. After waiting about an hour, cut away the clay walls surrounding the edge. This is an important step as it allows the clay to shrink further as it dries and prevents tears in the decorated surface. After 3 to 5 hours, the clay slip has firmed to a leather-hard state, and can then be gently lifted up from the plaster surface using a soft rib to reveal the image underneath (12).



Make a large plaster bat with a smooth surface, and dry it thoroughly before using it for monotypes.

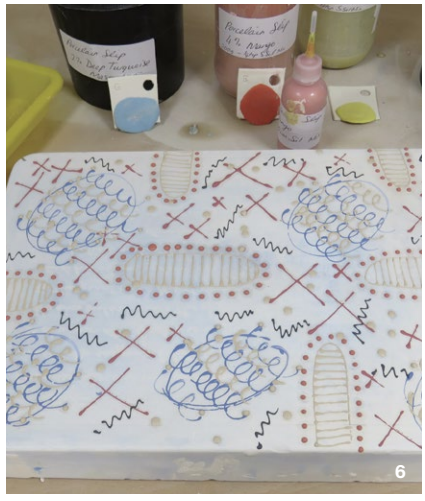
Weigh out 4% of a stain and add it to the porcelain decorating slip, which has already been weighed out, and mix.

Pour sodium silicate/water mixture into the colored slip, drop-by-drop until it is the consistency of milk.



Start with the blue slip trailer to add patterns over the plaster. Looped lines are my favorite marks to make.

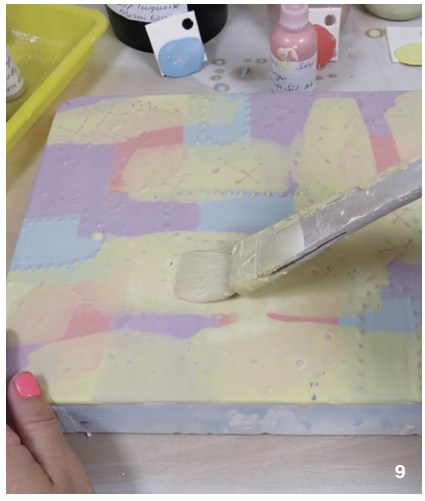
Add lots of dots next, which are a regular feature in my work, along with circles, lines, and crosses.



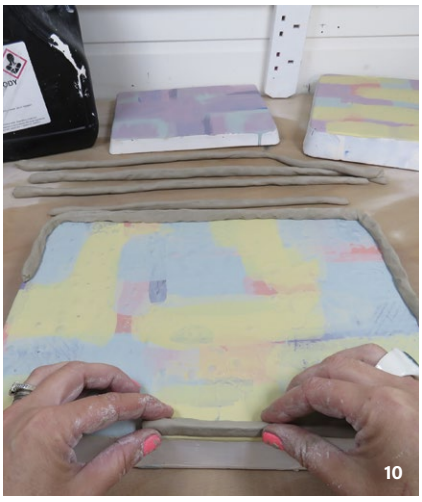
Fill the plaster surface with patterns and mark making before moving on to the painted background.

Build areas of color on top of the slip-trailed patterns. Try to use contrasting colors so the slip-trailed lines stand out.

Fill in any further spaces in the background with another slip color and leave some areas uncovered.



Finally, add a bright pop of color for the last layer. The plaster surface is now ready for the casting slip.



Make a wall using coils around the plaster bat perimeter. Make sure the join is secured to the plaster.

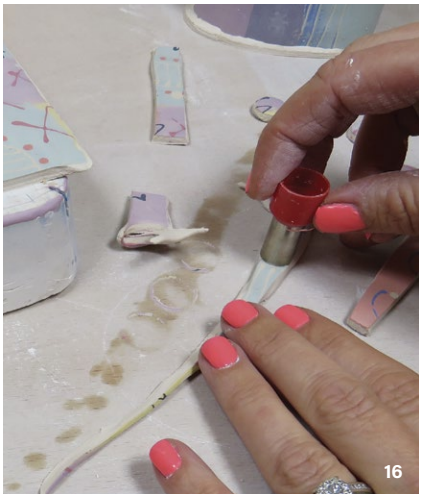
Pour the casting slip to a depth of approximately 6 mm. Use the tip of a needle tool to gauge the depth.

Remove the coils to prevent the slab from tearing as it dries and shrinks. Later peel back the soft leather-hard slab.

Trim the edges of the slab to create a rectangle using a right-angle tool. Keep the trimmings to create extra pieces.

Overlap and join the edges of the slab to create a vessel shape, using a cardboard tube for stability.

Secure the overlapping join using a pony roller, pressing firmly against the clay and the cardboard tube.



Using a small circle cutter, cut buttons out of the trimmings. Keep them to add to vessels or to make earrings.

Allow the slip to dry fully before cutting and fettling the base. Add the buttons for added interest.

Leather-hard vessels. Colors get paler after drying and bisque firing. They pop after being glaze fired and sealed.

Top and above Three coats of Mayco Stroke & Coat are applied to the interior walls using a brush. The exterior walls are left unglazed, but are sealed with two coats of HG Tile Protector. Apply the tile protector with a chamois (leather cloth) and allow it to dry between coats.

Creating a Base

While the clay slab firms up slightly (it should be able to stand upright on its edge, but remain flexible enough to bend into a cylinder shape), roll out a 5-mm-thick slab for the base of the vessel. I do this in the same clay body as the casting slip. When the decorated slab of clay is ready to be removed entirely from the plaster bat, set it on a canvas sheet and use a right-angle ruler to cut it into a rectangle to make the base level (13).

Next, shape the decorated slab around a cardboard tube (14). Score and slip the edges pressing them firmly against each other and against the cardboard tube, then secure the join by rolling over it with a pony roller (15). Once the joins are tidied up, you can remove the tube and shape the vessel into an oval. Allow both the bottomless vessel and the base slab to firm up to the same moisture level.

From the slab trimmings, cut out small shapes (16) to apply to the vessel's exterior to add further interest (17). When the vessel walls and base are firm enough, score, slip, and join them; however, don't trim the shape of the base until the two are secured together and the joins tidied (18).

Drying

The vessels are dried slowly, covered at first with a plastic bag for a week, and then uncovered for another two weeks before they are bisque fired to 1832°F (1000°C) in an electric kiln. Preferring to keep the tactile quality of the colored porcelain on the outside of the vessel, I glaze only the inside, using three coats of Mayco Stroke & Coat in a color that complements the external walls and glaze fire to 2264°F (1240°C). At this temperature, the colored porcelain slips become much more vibrant, and to further enhance their vibrancy and protect the walls from stains, coat the work using two coats of HG Tile Protector.

Donna Bloye is a ceramic artist from Belfast, Northern Ireland. Some will know her from her Instagram page, Oto NI pottery (@oto.ni.pottery), where she regularly shares reels of her processes and images of her screen-printed ceramics. Others will know her as the winner of the Great Pottery Throwdown in 2024. She has a passion for ceramic surface decoration and is currently developing a body of work that combines traditional screen-printing processes with flax paper porcelain vessels. Learn more at www.otonipottery.com.

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Magnetic Pin Dish

by Rachel Donner

I became obsessed with sewing in 2022 and knew that I wanted to create some ceramic sewing notions to go with my new hobby, but I wasn't sure what to make. One day, I found some mass-produced metal magnetic pin dishes, which gave me the idea to make ceramic ones as a fun and exciting project!

Throwing and Trimming

From about 12 ounces (340 g) of clay, throw a small and relatively thick dish, about ½ inch (1.3 cm) at its thickest and 5 inches (12.7 cm) in diameter (1). You want excess thickness to be able to trim out a pocket deep enough to fit a magnet and to make the dish solid and stable enough to use during sewing and pinning.

When the dish is leather hard, use a foam bat to trim the foot. I trim it just like a regular dish, but again, leave the clay a little thicker to account for the recess for the magnet (2). The tricky part here is making sure that the foot ring clears the magnet. Otherwise, you get a wobbly pin dish because it is resting on the magnet, rather than on its foot. Test the depth of the magnet's recess with the magnet itself throughout the trimming process to make sure it is deep enough. It is also important to trim the clay in the recess to be as thin as possible (an ⅛ inch (3.2 mm) or less). The thinner the clay, the more strongly the magnet will capture the pins from the surface of the dish—but it can't be too thin! Otherwise, there is a risk that the dish becomes very delicate, maybe even translucent, above the magnet. Of course, the other tricky aspect of the process is that you have to trim the recess to be a bit larger than the actual magnet to account for the clay shrinkage during firing.

Decorating

After trimming the dish, but while it is still leather hard, you can start decorating. I especially have fun referencing quilting patterns when deciding on how to decorate the surface of the dish. Usually, I start with a layer of inlay. Inlay involves cutting or stamping into the clay and then filling in the grooves with colored underglaze (3). After inlay, plan out a pattern to stencil onto the dish, leaving the rim empty to frame the artwork. Once the design is complete, hand-cut paper stencils and apply them to the clay by soaking them in water (so that they stick to the surface), using a sponge to dab away excess water (4). Then, paint on three layers of underglaze to bring out the pattern. Once the underglaze is no longer tacky, peel off the stencils (5). Finally, use a metal rib to clean up the edge of the dish.

Firing and Finishing

I bisque fire to cone 04. For the smoothest foot possible, wet sand the foot and any imperfections away from the dish at the bisque stage. After bisque firing the dish, I sign it, wax the foot, and dip it in glaze. I use Campana Clear glaze (6). Finally, glaze fire to cone 6 in an electric kiln.

When the dish comes out of the kiln and has cooled, first polish its foot with 220- and then 400-grit sandpaper for a very smooth finish. Then comes the magnet! I attach a 22-mm-diameter by 2-mm-thick neodymium magnet (Powerful! Be careful!) using super glue (cyanoacrylate, or "CA" glue, to be specific) into the recess on the bottom of the dish (7, 8). Let the glue cure for 24 hours. Then, the dish is ready to be put straight to work holding sewing pins!

Rachel Donner holds a BFA from the University of Northern Colorado. She has been an artist in residence at the Archie Bray Foundation, University of California Long Beach, Red Lodge Clay Center, and Watershed Center for the Ceramic Arts. She currently maintains a full-time studio practice in Santa Fe, New Mexico. You can find her on Instagram @racheladonner and on her website racheladonner.com.

Throw the pin dish on the wheel, making sure there is enough thickness for the foot and magnet recess.

Trim the pin dish, paying attention to both the recess for the magnet and the thickness of the plate.

Inlay a design of your choice onto the porcelain surface. This can be cut with an X-Acto knife, sharp pin tool, or stamped.

Soak pre-cut paper stencils in water. Apply the wet paper stencils to the leather-hard pin dish, being sure to remove any air bubbles.

After painting underglaze over the stencils, carefully remove the stencils to reveal the design. Bisque fire dish.

Sand the bisqueware with wet/dry sandpaper to smooth out the foot ring, then dip the dish into a bucket of glaze.

After the final firing, glue the magnet into place.

Let the glue cure for 24 hours before using.

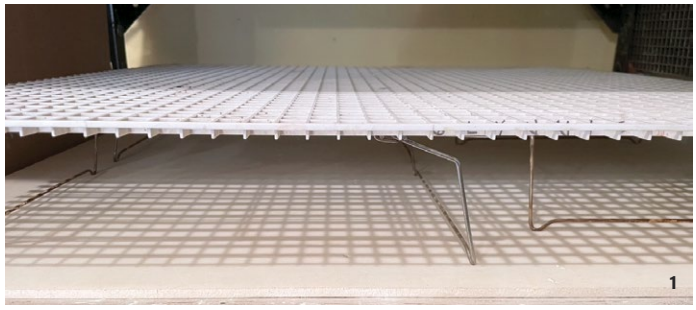
Avoiding Warping

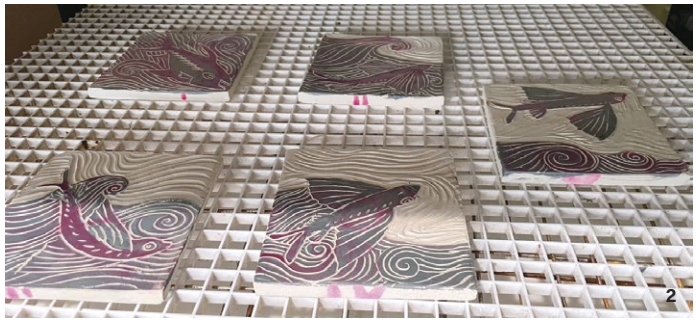
by Glynnis Lessing

Warping can be a problem in any drying situation, but especially for tiles and large, flat items, as the drying air comes in contact with the top surface but is unable to reach the bottom as it sits on a surface. The top will contract as it dries, causing deformation, which the clay will remember in the glaze firing.

Many people sandwich their tiles between two pieces of drywall and flip them regularly, others use sealed bags of sand to weigh down the tiles to keep them flat, but I was making low-relief tiles and had no time nor patience for these methods.

Credit goes to my tile teacher, Mike Skiersch, who discovered an inexpensive solution in the building department of a hardware store. A ceiling panel called "egg crate" costs about $13–20 per 2 × 4-foot panel. When propped up, so air can circulate under it, tiles or even trays and other large, flat items can be laid on this so that they dry evenly and without requiring a lot of time-consuming attention. I raise my panels on 2 × 4 boards or stacking baking racks (1), then just set my tiles on there and forget about them (2). I work in porcelain, which is particularly sensitive to uneven drying, so it is important to be careful not to bend or curve your tile much as you are picking it up or moving it.





1 Prop an egg crate up 2–4 inches (5–10 cm) off the supporting surface (shelf/table). **2** Carefully transfer tiles to it and let them dry.

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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

spectrumglazes.com
see more cone 5 glazes or to locate a distributor

Photo by Bibi Bielat

Cardboard Slump Mold

by Jacquie Blondin

This quick, mess-free, space-saving means of producing slump molds expands the possibilities of handbuilding forms in the studio.

The following instructions outline how to create a simple and inexpensive slump mold to make bi-lateral three-dimensional forms.

One of the first workshops I attended as I shifted my art practice to ceramics was led by Lesley McInally, where we used thick cardboard produce boxes as molds for paper-clay slabs. I've since adapted this method to a single cardboard template, though I still use the produce boxes for support. Unlike traditional molds, cardboard slump molds create volume without pressing against a rigid structure. They are compact, inexpensive, and easy to make. A cardboard slump mold uses negative space to create a 3D form by stretching the clay downward with gentle pressure and gravity.

Cardboard templates can be symmetrical or asymmetrical, giving you endless possibilities for creative forms. You can make single parts and add to flat slabs to make wall pieces or matching pairs to make open or closed forms for functional ware or sculpture, even extending the volume with additional slabs. Once you've tested your template, you can recreate it using durable or permanent materials.

Designing and Scaling an Idea

Start by sketching your ideas. This vase series was ignited by an image of a Persian jug in Robin Hopper's *Functional Pottery* book and a quest for gradual proportional changes using parabolas. I was aiming for a step-by-step change in height and width within each iteration.

Scale up to the desired size using grid paper for precision. For symmetry, fold the paper vertically and cut one half like a paper heart (1). I recommend starting with a size about 8 × 10 inches (20 × 25 cm) for the opening, with 4 or more inches remaining on the template for strength.

Tools

- Scissors
- X-Acto knife
- Metal ruler
- Cutting board
- Serrated rib
- Long-bristle brush
- Rasp
- Metal rib
- Silicone rib

Supplies

- Paper
- Sharpie marker
- Thick corrugated cardboard (⅛-inch thickness)
- Produce (banana) box
- Wooden bars
- Drywall boards
- Dry-cleaning plastic
- Clay slabs
- Slip

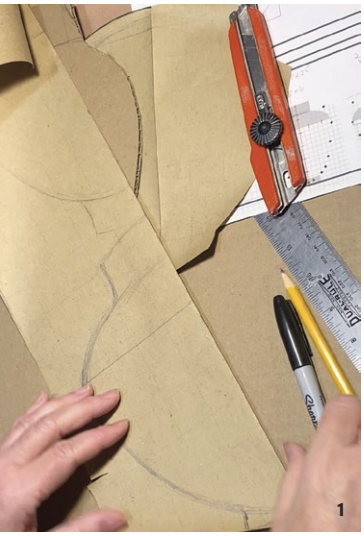
Cutting the Cardboard and Safety Concerns

Look for thick corrugated cardboard (⅛-inch thickness will do and avoid folds for greater strength). I use Amazon boxes. Center your template on the cardboard, placing it against the grain to avoid bending. Outline it with a marker for clarity. Use a cutting board and an X-Acto knife to shallowly cut the cardboard until it's fully released (2). If cutting straight lines, use a metal ruler. Label one side "A" and the reverse "B" for optimal alignment.

Using the Template

I keep 3–4 produce boxes in my studio for transporting and storing work at different stages. Ask for them at your local grocery store. If your template does not fit directly on the box, use wooden bars to support it. I used my rolling pin slab rails, yardsticks, and leftover wood trim (3).

Place side A up over a produce box and wooden bars for extra support as needed (4). Roll your slabs to about ⅜ inch (1 cm) thick,

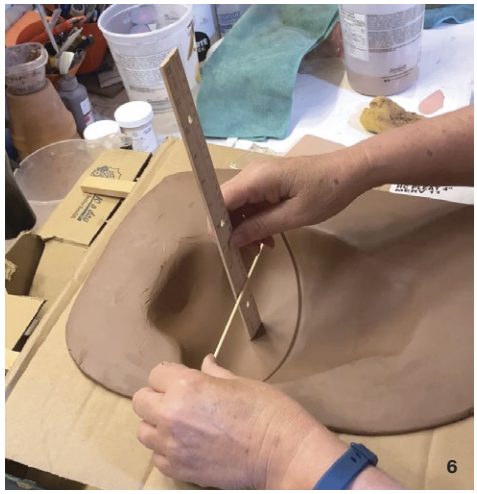

1


2


3

4

1 Draw vessel profiles and scale them up using paper. **2** Cut the symmetrical vessel profile out of the center of a large piece of cardboard. **3** Arrange supports to keep the cardboard slump mold elevated. **4** Place the cardboard template onto the supports to test the fit.



5 Form one slab into the cardboard slump mold. **6** Drape and form a second slab into the slump mold, and measure its interior depth. **7** Slumping two slabs in the same mold creates sides A and B, shown here. **8** Trim the excess clay, then join the two halves by scoring and slipping and adding a coil to the join. **9** Bisque-fired vases made using cardboard slump molds.

ensuring each extends 1½ inches (4 cm) beyond the template's open space. Center a slab over the template. Apply gentle pressure to add volume both lengthwise and across the width, being careful at the edges to avoid tearing (5). Record your movements and measurements on paper or directly on the template to replicate them for side B to reach a close match in volume (6). Be open to and embrace the irregularities and inconsistencies that may arise with this organic method.

After the clay firms to a soft leather hard, remove it from the template, flip it onto a plastic-lined drywall board (7), and wrap it up. Let the cardboard template dry out before reusing it. To make side B, repeat the steps.

Trimming and Connecting the Sides

Both sides should be at the same level of firmness for the best connection. If one side gets too firm, place it in a damp box to equalize. Before you use a sharp blade to cut the excess clay away, think about the surfaces you want for the connection. For extra support, add a soft coil on the interior circumference to align the two sides (8). Score, slip, and attach. Use a serrated metal rib to close the exterior seam. Add additional coils where needed to strengthen the exterior seam. If creating a vase, use your hands or other tools to gently expand the volume at the top and bottom to widen those areas. Smooth out the coil on the interior with a long-bristle brush through the holes on each end. Score, slip, and attach a slab for the bottom. When the clay is a firm leather hard, use a rasp to refine the edges. Use a smooth rib to refine the surfaces. If making a closed form, add a pinhole to aid in consistent and even drying.

Go Beyond Bi-Lateral Symmetry

In my own work, when the connected clay form was still soft enough to manipulate, I went beyond the basic bilateral symmetry in three ways. I created a dynamic flow line across the surfaces by gently rubbing with a rib tool along a line and pushing it out from the inside. On another vase, I created rotational symmetry by tapping the edges into a twist. Lastly, I increased the volume of a four-sided form by attaching side slabs of the same thickness, adding depth between the main parts (9).

Jacquie Blondin is an artist, educator, and entrepreneur based in Mississauga, Ontario. She holds a BA from McMaster University and a BEd from Queen's University. With over 30 years of experience as a visual arts teacher and 20 years working in clay, Blondin now focuses on creating functional and sculptural ceramic work in her home studio, often blending handbuilding and printmaking techniques into her process. A dedicated member of her local pottery guild, she shares her passion for ceramics by teaching classes for adults and youth, both in-person and online. Her experience in education also led to the creation of the Spin Wiper, a glazing tool designed to support potters in their craft. Blondin regularly showcases her work and creative journey on Instagram, connecting with a wider community of ceramic enthusiasts. For more, visit www.jacquieblondin.com.

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Industrial-Inspired ROCKING VASE

by Rebecca Sabo

Many potters look to the natural world for inspiration, but many years of selling industrial parts such as sprockets and gears have been the greatest influence in my work. I make functional forms that look like they came out of an old factory, covered in rust, grime, and graffiti. Some designs are easily identifiable and some are abstracted. The design on this rocking vase was inspired by a zipper, of all things. For pots that have glaze-resist patterns, I use a stoneware clay body that contrasts with the glaze and then choose a glaze that does not run so the design remains intact.

Initial Considerations and Form

The body of the rocking vase is thrown on a bat while the bottom is made from a hand-rolled slab. Before starting, consider how wide you want your base to be. The wider the base the more rock or lift you will get. For a small vase, approximately 4 inches tall by 7½ inches wide (10.2 × 19.1 cm), use approximately 1½ pounds (0.7 kg) of stoneware clay for the body.

Center the clay and flatten it, like you would for a plate, to about 6 inches (15.2 cm) in diameter (1). Then, open the piece up (2) all the way down to the bat (3). Pull up the wall (4) and

Center 1½ pounds (0.7 kg) of clay low and flat as if throwing a plate, and open all the way to the wheel head.

Once opened, begin to pull the walls up, and then collar the opened mound into a cone shape at the top.

Continue to collar the vase up, further forming the cone. Use a sponge on the exterior to facilitate easy throwing.

Keep pulling and coning until the wall is ¼–⅜ inch (6.4–9.5 mm) thick using a sponge on the exterior.

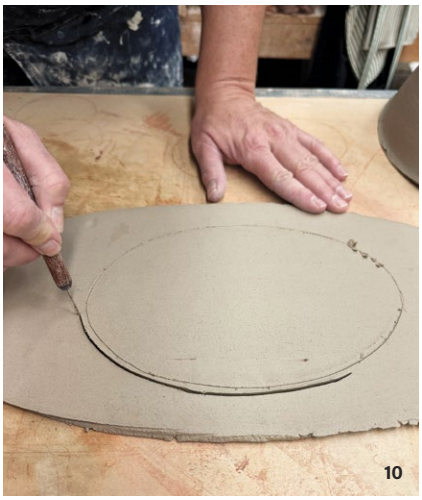
Use both hands to shape the thrown form and persuade it into a noticeable cylinder shape. Be sure to set the rim to keep the form centered.

Once you have the cone shape you want, set the rim and use a sponge to clean the surface of any excess slurry.

Refine the outer surface with a soft rubber rib, removing any throwing lines and compressing the wall.

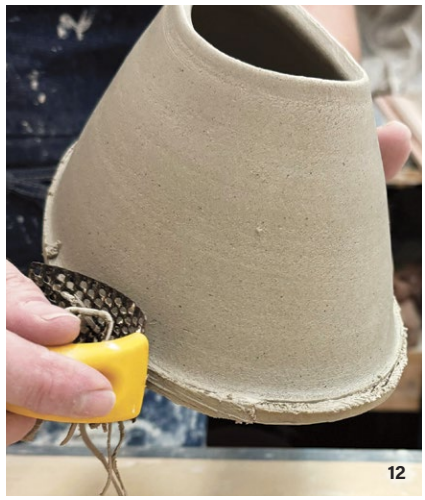
After throwing, leave the cone to firm up to medium leather hard on the bat. Wire off and gently press into an oval.

Roll out a slab for the bottom and mark the edge of the oval by rocking and tracing the edge.



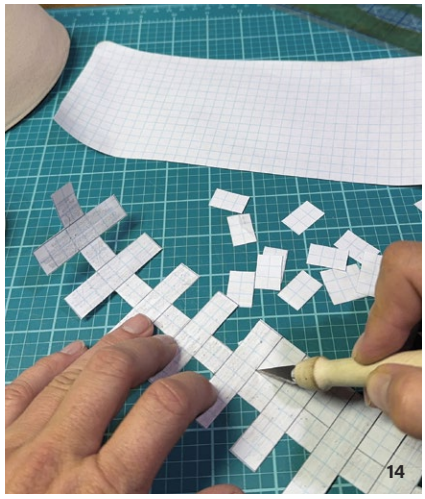
Cut out the base slab with your knife on the outside of your marked line by ¼–½ inch (6.4-12.7 mm).

Score and slip the base to the body and gently rock back and forth to compress. Use long-handled tool to secure the inside seam.



After the attachment is set, use a Surform tool to shave off the excess slab clay until the base is flush with the body wall.

Finally, use rib and sponge to clean up the surface of the vase, let the piece dry, and then bisque fire.



Using graph paper reinforced with clear tape, draw and cut out your pattern. Tape makes it durable and reusable.

Trace the edges of your templates or a pre-cut design in pencil and then fill in with wax resist prior to glazing.

Glaze your piece by dipping, brushing, or spraying, and clean the glazed edges of the pattern with a wooden tool.

Clean up glaze on the base of your vase, paying close attention to the crisp edge where the body meets the base.

Rebecca Sabo's finished rocking vase, fired in a reduction atmosphere to cone 10 in a gas kiln.

collar it (5) into a cone shape (6). The wall thickness should be about ¼–⅜ inch (6.4–9.5 mm). The mouth, or top of the cone, can be as narrow as you like. Refine the shape and smooth out any throwing rings and excess moisture with a soft rubber rib (7). Leave the cone on the bat and let it firm up slowly to medium leather hard.

While the cone is drying, make the bottom by rolling out a slab approximately ¼-⅜ inch (6.4–9.5 mm) thick. It should be larger than the base of the cone and longer than it is wide by a few inches. Compress the slab with a plastic rib and add texture with stamps or rollers if you like. Let this set up to medium leather hard.

Altering the Form

When the cone is medium leather hard, it's time to alter the shape. Medium leather hard is dry enough to shape easily without collapsing, but not so dry that it cracks when you squeeze it into shape. Run a wire under the cone then set the cone on a worktable. Gently squeeze the cone so the bottom becomes an oval (8). You will see the sides start to lift. Once you are satisfied with the width of your cone, you can check the lift of the ends. If you want more lift, squeeze the cone more to make it narrower, or you can remove clay from the bottom of the cone with a Surform.

To increase the lift by removing clay, mark the center line of the body and work from the center outward removing material from both sides evenly until you get the lift and rock you want.

Joining the Body to the Base

Once the body is shaped it's time to add the base slab. Place the body on the slab and rock it to each side while marking the outline with a needle tool (9). Trace the outline slightly larger than the actual base. Remove the body from the slab, then cut out the base (10). Score and slip the body and base, then attach. Press the base to the top firmly, rock back and forth (11) to make sure the bottom is securely attached. Compress and clean up the attachment from the inside of the vase using a long-handled brush or sponge. Use a Surform to clean up and shape the bottom edge of the vase (12). Finally, do any necessary cleanup on the surface (13), let the piece dry, and then bisque fire it.

Applying Patterns and Glazes

When your vase comes out of the bisque, it's time to design the surface. There are many ways to make patterns. I use graph paper reinforced with clear tape because it is an inexpensive option. Draw a pattern on graph paper and apply clear tape over the drawing. The clear tape helps keep the pattern from tearing when you cut it out (14) and makes it more durable if you want to use it more than once.

If you have access to a vinyl cutter, it is ideal for making intricate and reusable patterns. You can also draw your design freehand onto the bisque-fired form.

This form has a large face, making a front-and-center design the obvious choice. Another option is to encourage the viewer to engage with the vessel by placing the design on the narrow ends, creating a bit of mystery. This invites the viewer to peek around to see the design in full and suggests a more interesting display. To show off the complete design, the vase must be displayed at an angle.

Lay your pattern on the vase and trace your design with a pencil, then apply the resist with a brush over the pattern (15). I usually use wax but depending on your design, liquid latex will also work. Wax the bottom of your piece as well.

Glaze the piece by dipping, brushing, or spraying. When choosing a glaze, pick one that is stable/stiff. Runny glazes will distort your design. After glazing, look over the resist pattern and clean up the edges with a pointy wooden tool or a bamboo skewer (16). Clean up the base so you have a crisp line between the body and the base.

Fire the glazed piece (17) to the appropriate temperature. This piece was fired to cone 10 in a reduction atmosphere (18).

Rebecca Sabo began her pottery journey in 2000 and has been making work in her free time at The Red Kiln Pottery Studio in Salt Lake City since 2007. See more of her work at industrialsafari.etsy.com and follow her on Instagram @industrial_safari.

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Ceramics Backpack

by Maya Rumsey

Look outside traditional ceramics sources to find a special-use backpack that is an ideal piece of equipment for taking a handful of pieces to events and exhibitions.

Two years ago, as I was getting ready to go to the National Council on Education for the Ceramic Arts (NCECA) conference, I found myself facing the familiar challenge of how I was going to carry my pots around.

The previous year, I used a small case I found online. It said it was for makeup artists and had adjustable, firm, padded dividers inside. I thought it was pretty good, but the main problem was it was quite small. When I posted a video of it online, someone commented that it looked like a camera case. That little offhand remark stuck with me.

Going Down a Rabbit Hole

Over the following year, that idea marinated in the back of my mind. Eventually, I started looking into actual camera gear cases, and wow, I had no idea how many options were out there! At first, I went down a rabbit hole of rolling camera suitcases. While tempting, they felt a little too bulky. I thought these would be perfect for transporting pottery, especially if the pieces were really fragile. I wanted something I could easily wear while walking around a conference all day, not something I'd need to drag behind me. That's when I realized there are camera backpacks, too. The really great thing about these camera backpacks is that there are so many styles, shapes, and sizes to choose from, most designed with padded, modular interiors and comfortable straps.

Finding the Perfect Backpack

After spending what may have been an obscene amount of time online, reading reviews, and looking at measurements, I decided on a K and F Concepts camera backpack for about $85. One feature I love is that the main compartment unzips fully from the front, so you can see and access everything inside at once (1).

Inside, it came with several Velcro-secured dividers that could be repositioned to fit the shape and size of what I was carrying. I even bought a few extra insert panels online to create more compartments to fit more mugs inside. And even better, since they are just Velcro, you can rearrange them easily on the spot. While I may not want to ship them like that, I feel my pieces are completely safe inside.

Another feature I like is that the top section of the bag functions like a standard daypack, which has also come in handy. On the plane, I had my essential travel items; then during the conference, I used it to carry a smaller pouch for my jewelry, business cards, and stickers (2). There are side pockets, pockets inside pockets, and a flat back pocket you can open from the side that would fit a laptop. I usually stash some paper for wrapping up pieces under the pots and in the back compartment. I even put some small boxes, folded flat, in the laptop spot for a few of my more fragile pieces to get packed up.

1

2

1 The camera backpack fully opened from the front, with packed pottery easily displayed and accessible. **2** The smaller pouch is well suited for smaller items like stickers and ceramic jewelry.

Possibly my favorite part of the setup is the string of battery-operated fairy lights I added to the inside of the main compartment. I attached them with small safety pins. Opening the bag up and turning on the lights is just so much fun! It may not be super functional, but it creates a little bit of magic.

If you're someone who needs to transport ceramics regularly to events, exhibitions, classes, or even just from your home to your studio, I would highly recommend looking into camera bags. These bags are designed specifically to protect fragile cargo and to be able to reconfigure depending on what you're carrying. Perfect for pots!

The beauty of repurposing tools from other fields is that they often solve problems we didn't even realize could be solved. I never knew I could love a backpack so much (3)!

Maya Rumsey is from Toledo, Ohio, and graduated with a BFA from Bowling Green State University in 2008. She now lives with her husband and two daughters in Coeur d'Alene, Idaho, where she works out of her backyard studio built in 2024. To learn more, visit melissa-maya-pottery.myshopify.com or follow her on Instagram @mayamelissapottery.

3 Maya Rumsey with her camera backpack, in use.

Stitched Mug

by Clare Unger

Ceramics have been part of my life for as long as I can remember. I learned to appreciate ceramics at a young age through the work of my great, great uncle, William Staite Murray, a founding figure of the British Studio Pottery movement. In 1939, he and his wife, Kathleen, traveled to Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) to visit their niece, my grandmother. The Second World War broke out, and, for a variety of reasons, they never returned to England. As a result, my family had a substantial collection of William Staite Murray pots and paintings, which were greatly treasured and admired, particularly by my mother. Her enthusiasm for his pots influenced me to love them too.

Developing a Love of Clay

Despite having such an illustrious relative, I had very few interactions with clay while at school and during my BFA degree. However, when I moved to London in 1996, I took the opportunity to study ceramics, enrolling in a foundational ceramics course through a community college. It was a comprehensive introduction to ceramics, but more than anything, I felt an affinity for clay that I hadn't experienced with any other artistic medium.

My husband and I returned to live in Zimbabwe in 1998 and then moved to Sydney, Australia, in 2001. These moves, along with the birth of our children, resulted in me taking a long break from ceramics. My love of clay was rekindled when, in 2010, I again began to study ceramics, eventually completing a diploma and an advanced diploma of ceramics. I was fortunate to be taught by some of Australia's leading ceramic artists including Barbara Campbell-Allen and Trisha Dean. After completing my studies in 2017, I set up my own studio and began to focus on making functional ceramics, using my family history as inspiration.

The pots made by William Staite Murray were a large presence in my formative years, but so too were the stitched textiles made by Kathleen Murray. My mother drew inspiration from these to create her own textiles. When I emigrated to Australia, she entrusted me with a small collection of these fabrics. Noticing how the stitches were intentionally used as a way of mark making, I began to consider if I could somehow integrate stitching

Yunomi-style tea cups, 3 in. (8 cm) in height (each), Keanes 33 mid-range clay, cobalt and manganese oxides, white underglaze, cobalt wash, mid-range satin matte glaze, mid-range clear glaze, 2025.

into my ceramic practice. As a starting point, I decided to create my own hand-stitched samplers. This allowed me to explore the use of simple stitches as a way of making marks, first on cloth and then on clay.

My intuitive response to clay is to handbuild using coils, but the embossing technique that I developed to transfer my stitched designs onto clay slabs necessitated the development of soft-slab handbuilding skills. It has taken me many years to develop these skills and it is an ongoing process of learning.

Preparing the Slab

Every project begins with an idea that is researched and developed through drawing and painting before stitching the sampler begins. The stitched sampler is rolled onto, then removed from a clay slab to make the embossing tile. Slow drying between boards ensures that the embossing tile remains flat. Once dry, I bisque fire the embossed slab to cone 06.

Begin by rolling out a clay slab using ⅛-inch (3-mm)-thick wooden guides and then cut out the shape of the item to be made using a paper pattern, a cup in this case (1). I dampen the surface of the embossing tile with water before placing the cut slab onto it (2). Then, cover the clay with a piece of cloth (to prevent it from sticking to your fingers and lifting off the surface) (3) and press methodically over the entire surface (4). When the clay slab is lifted off the tile, the embossed stitched design is revealed (5). Due to the pressure applied during embossing, the clay slab becomes larger and must be recut to the correct size using the pattern (6). I pinch each end of the slab to thin the clay (7), ensuring an even thickness when the two ends overlap. Cut perpendicular slits where each dart will be positioned and cut one side of each dart, from the top of the slit to the edge of the slab, angling the knife blade so that the edges are beveled.

Carefully place the slab face down on the table. I run my finger along the top edge of the slab to create a soft beveled edge that will become the lip of the cup (8) and then cut an approximate 45-degree bevel along the bottom edge of the slab. Cut out the opposite side of each dart, creating V-shaped notches, again angling the blade of the knife to bevel the edge (9). The depth and width of the V-shaped notches (or darts) change the angle at which the bottom part of the cup will curve to meet the base. I mark measurements on my pattern, which must be followed accurately to achieve a symmetrical form. The darts not only help to shape the bottom of the cup, but also create the illusion of a pleat—another subtle textile reference.

Making All the Components

Before beginning to assemble the cup, I prepare all the other components needed: the foot ring (1 9⁄16 in. (4 cm) in diameter); the handle (3 15⁄16 in. (10 cm) long and 19⁄32 in. (1.5 cm) wide); and a 2-in. (5-cm)-diameter disk, cut from the same ⅛-in. (3-mm)-thick slab as the cup, that will form the base of the pleated cup.

The foot ring is made using a bisque mold created for this purpose (10). I cut the handle out using a pattern (11), then gently pull it with a wet hand to soften the edges (12), and then curl it into the desired shape (13). Cut out a disk using a cookie cutter and emboss it using the same embossing tile (14).

Creating the Cup

A coil-built and bisque-fired hump form determines the size and shape of the cup. Place the disk of clay on top of the form and pinch around the perimeter of the disk to thin it slightly (15), then score and add slip. Next, place the prepared slab around the form (16). The two ends, which were pinched, scored, and slipped, should overlap slightly and be pressed together to fit snugly.

Carefully apply slip to the scored beveled edges of the darts (17). Fold down each section to join with the disk of clay, forming a pleat. I soften the edge of each pleat with my finger (18).

Adding the Foot Ring

The foot ring is added next over the join between the disk and the wall of the cup. I allow the cup to firm up slightly before removing it from the form, and, using my fingertip, push the clay outward from the inside of the cup (19). This gives the cup a fuller, more voluminous appearance while simultaneously smoothing the joins inside the cup, and is repeated several times during the making process. This process needs to be done sensitively to ensure that the form is not distorted and that the clay does not crack.

Rest the cup upside down on top of a slightly larger form. This ensures that the rim remains circular during the making process.

Attaching the Handle

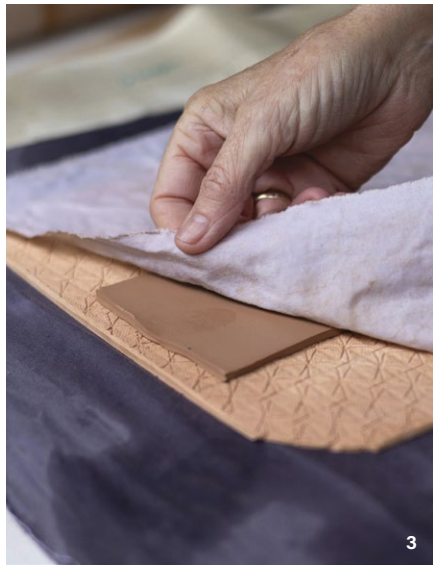
When both the cup and the handle are leather hard, attach the handle. Use a circular cookie cutter to cut the bottom edge of the handle, shaping it to fit onto the curved body of the cup (20). Trim and refine the top curl of the handle so that it does not impede the fingers from gripping the handle comfortably. Score and slip both the handle and the area where it will join the cup before attaching (21, 22). I check that it is sitting in the correct position by viewing from different angles, including from above. Add small coils to strengthen the bottom attachment area (23).

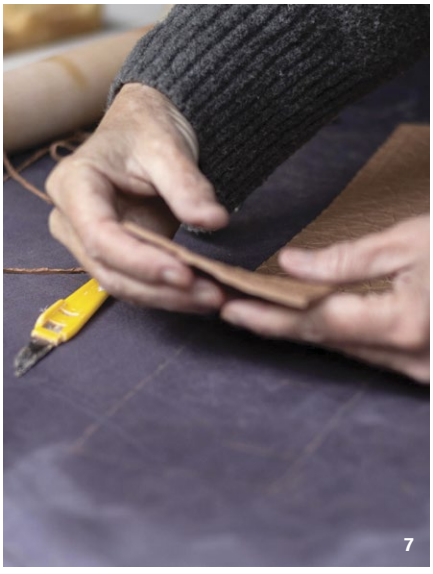
Finishing Touches and Decoration

When the cup is almost dry, scrape the inside surface with a metal kidney rib to create a smooth curve (24, 25).

Mono-printing and dry-brushing techniques help to reveal and enhance the low relief of the stitched patterns transferred to the clay slab at the start of the process. I sometimes use diluted oxide or underglaze washes to add color and to illuminate the texture of the fabric itself, which, along with the stitching, is imprinted in the clay. I use a limited selection of glazes, which includes a commercially available clear glaze and two signature glazes developed through glaze workshops. Limiting my range of glazes has allowed me to fully explore how slips, oxides, and underglazes can be utilized to add variety and interest. Finally, I fire my work to cone 6 in an electric kiln (26).

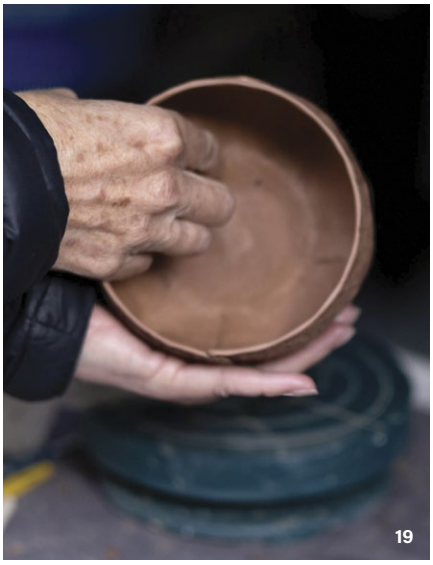
Clare Unger grew up in a small rural community in Zimbabwe and now works from her home studio in Sydney, Australia. Her work has developed from a love of ceramics and textiles, both of which continue to be a source of inspiration in the development of her processes and practice. To learn more, visit www.clareungerceramics.com or Instagram @clare_unger.

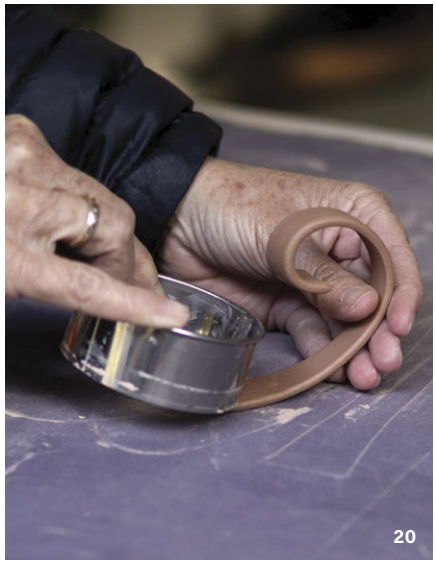


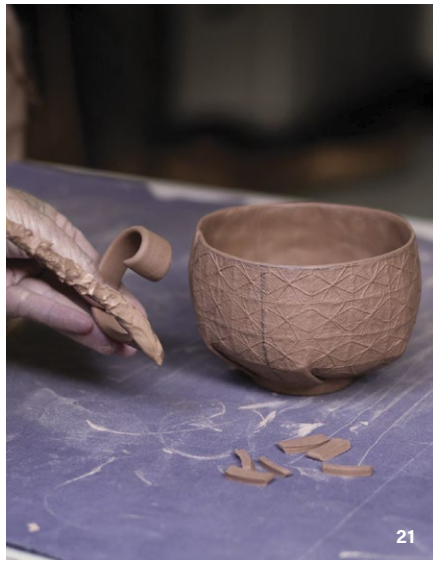


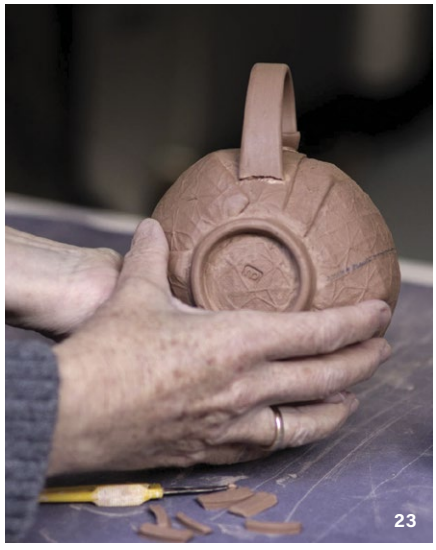
1 Roll out a thin slab and cut out the cup piece using a pattern. **2** Dampen the surface of the embossing tile with water. **3** Cover the clay slab with a piece of fabric before embossing. **4** Use two fingers to press methodically over the entire surface of the clay slab. **5** Reveal the embossed clay slab. **6** Cut a slit where a dart will be positioned, using the pattern as a guide. **7** Pinch the ends of the clay slab. **8** Gently bevel the top edge of the slab using your finger. This will be the lip of the cup. **9** Score all edges to be joined using a knife.

10 Form the foot ring using a bisque mold. **11** Cut out the handle using a pattern. **12** Gently pull the handle, softening the edges and beginning to create the curve. **13** Set the handle on its edge and shape into a loose spiral to firm up. **14** Cut a circular slab for the cup base. All the components for making the cup include: the base disk, foot ring, handle, and main slab. **15** Place the circular slab on top of the bisque mold. **16** Wrap the rectangular slab around the bisque mold, overlap the two ends, and gently push together to join, leaving the seam visible. **17** Apply slip carefully to both edges of each dart and fold each section down to join with the base disk, forming pleats. **18** Attach the foot ring while the cup is still on the form. Use your finger to smooth the pleats.









19 Smooth the interior surface to seal and secure all the joins inside the cup. Next, push the interior wall of the cup outward by applying pressure with your fingertip to add volume. **20** Use a cookie cutter to cut a curved, beveled edge at the bottom of the handle. **21** Brush slip onto the beveled edge and score the attachment points on the handle. **22** Score and apply slip to the corresponding spots on the cup, and, while supporting the wall from the inside, attach the handle. **23** Add a small coil to the area where the bottom of the handle meets the cup to strengthen the connection. **24** Use a flexible metal rib to scrape the interior to create a smooth, curved surface. **25** The completed greenware cup. **26** The finished cup after the bisque and glaze firings.

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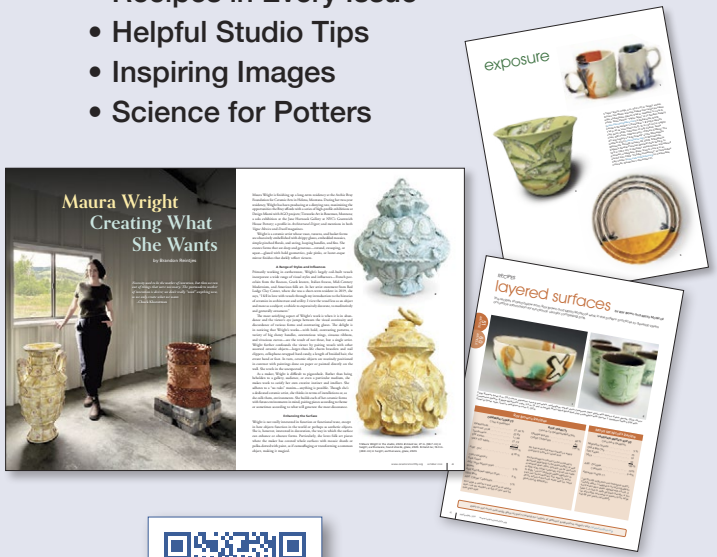

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