

**Workshop from Home with Melissa Mencini  
Resources for August 24, 2021**

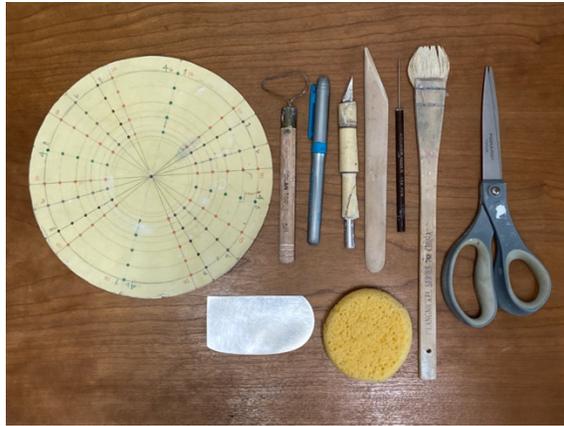
- Melissa’s studio is 12’x16’ (192 square feet) and she has a separate kiln shed that measures 6’x10’ (60 square feet).
- All of Melissa’s pots are made with Coleman Porcelain from Aardvark Clay in California.
- She bisque fires to cone 06 using the pre-programmed medium speed.
- Melissa glaze fires to cone 8 in oxidation (using the pre-programmed medium speed in an electric kiln) with a 4-minute hold, which usually takes the kiln a bit closer to cone 9. All of her decal firings are a fast fire pre-program to cone 018.
- She fires all of her work in electric kilns in an oxidation atmosphere. Melissa currently has a Skutt 1227, a Paragon, and an L&L kiln.
- Melissa uses Amaco underglazes. All of the bright colors she uses are from the Velvet line. She also uses the white and black from the LUG line. Although she will not be using underglazes during the webinar, you can use underglazes with the technique that she will demonstrate.
- Melissa uses a wide variety of glazes depending on the application. The glaze she uses for the technique that is being demonstrated in this webinar is Mayco’s Stroke & Coat glazes. She finds that most colors in this glaze line work all the way to cone 10, and a lot of them work in reduction and oxidation atmospheres.
- Melissa throws everything on the wheel (she uses a Brent) and she handbuilds elements like teapot spouts and pulled handles.

**Melissa’s Favorite Throwing Tools**

Flexible metal rib (Melissa cuts one side)	Wooden knife	Wooden-handled needle tool (They are shorter and slightly flexible compared to the standard metal ones)
Cheap yellow sponges	Pointy, 8 or 10 round paint brushes	Dolan trimming tool (The pear-shaped tool, number 511)

**Melissa’s Favorite Decorating Tools**

Decorating disc to divide pots	Silhouette cutting machine	Banding wheel
X-Acto knife	Langnickle 1–1.5” brushes	Good scissors
Pencil	BIC “Mark It” pen	Overglaze decals



Throwing Tools



Decorating Tools

### Glazing Materials

Clear Glaze: Cone 7–9, oxidation	
Gerstley Borate	21%
Wollastonite	8
Nepheline Syenite	30
EPK Kaolin	10
Silica	<u>31</u>
	100%

**Note:** Always test new glazes before mixing large batches.

### Links to Melissa Mencini:

Instagram- @melissamencini <https://www.instagram.com/melissamencini/>

Facebook- Melissa Mencini Ceramics <https://www.facebook.com/Melissa-Mencini-Ceramics-136199503667536>

Website- [www.melissamencini.com](http://www.melissamencini.com)

Online Shop- <http://www.melissamencini.com/shop-1>

### Overglaze Decal and Decorating Resources:

The overglaze decals that Melissa uses are made out of screen-printed overglaze enamels. She fires all of her overglaze decals to cone 018 on a fast fire pre-program. When layering overglaze decals, each layer needs its own firing to cone 018 before adding another layer of decals.

<https://www.trinitydecals.com/>

<https://www.theceramicshop.com/store/category/40/242/decals/>

<https://www.milestonedecalart.com/stock-decals>

<https://www.olympiadecals.com/Decals-C570.aspx>

<https://baileydecal.co.uk/>

<https://xpressiondecals.com/ceramic-or-glass/ceramic/>

<https://www.silhouetteamerica.com/>

<https://mkmpotterytools.com/product-category/decorating-disk/>

<https://www.marylandchina.com/china-painting-supplies/gold-platinum-lustres.html>

<https://ceramicartsnetwork.org>

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# EYE ON PATTERN

by Melissa Mencini

Creating a pattern with glaze using the techniques that I do takes a bit of planning to make a successfully designed pot, and my process is not without its awkward moments. I don't always cover the entire surface with decoration with the hope that the patterned section will accentuate the volume and form of the pot. I create subtle plane changes on the surface of each pot with my flexible metal rib while I make it on the wheel to designate areas for the pattern to start and stop (1). I need to be very thoughtful in placing those lines because the pattern can become overwhelming quickly if I designate too large of an area for surface embellishment on a smaller pot. Decorating this way allows me to create depth in the surface by contrasting bare clay, shiny glaze, and floral overglaze decals that only allow you to see snippets of what exists behind it all. All of the layers of patterns make me think about when nature takes over a dilapidated building and your view of the once rigid architecture becomes obscured by foliage.

## Choosing the Best Glaze

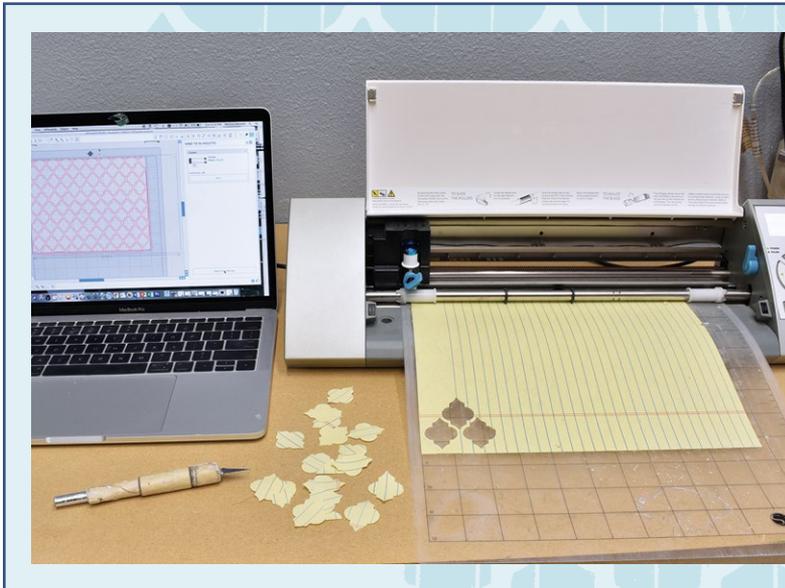
The Moroccan tile pattern on my pottery is created using Mayco Stroke and Coat glazes on the exterior. I decorate these pots when the clay is leather hard and I use paper-resist stencils that are cut on a Silhouette die cutter (see Creating Resist-Pattern Stencils on page 30). I recognize that the way that I apply this

decoration may be unconventional; it forces me to work tidy and make sure there is absolutely no glaze left in any areas that might cause problems in the kiln.

It is important to note that using a commercial glaze for the exterior that is specifically formulated for painting provides me many benefits over homemade glaze because it acts like thick slip, allowing me to load on a heavy coat without the glaze dripping. Also, because of the addition of gum solution, the glaze hardens when it dries, allowing me to attach additional parts such as handles and spouts to the leather-hard form after decorating with the glaze. If I used the glaze I make in my studio, it would become too powdery when it dried, and holding the piece to attach other elements would make the glaze come off. Another benefit to using commercial glaze is that it is incredibly forgiving, meaning that brush marks all melt away in the kiln.

## Applying the First Pattern

As I said before, I apply this specific layer of decoration when the pots are leather hard. One of the reasons I decorate before adding attachments is that working this way gives me the ability to create a seamless pattern. For a teapot, after the pot is thrown, I make sure the lid fits and attach a knob, then divide the pot into eight or ten equal sections, depending on the volume of the pot and the size of

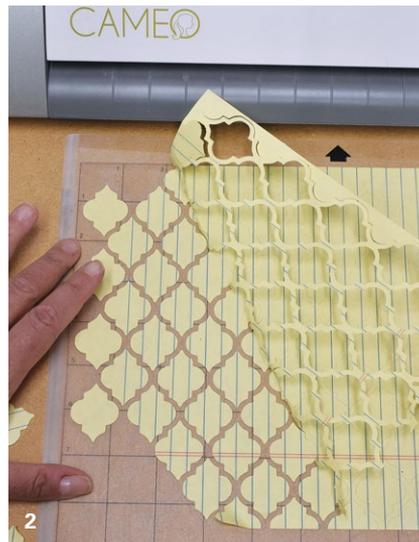


### CREATING RESIST-PATTERN STENCILS

I create the Moroccan tile paper stencils by first creating a pattern in Adobe Photoshop then exporting it to the Silhouette software to cut out the design. I utilize a paper-cutting machine for this design because I cut out thousands of tiles of varying sizes to decorate my pots. When I use other paper stencils that I don't need in abundance, I cut them out free-hand. You do not need Photoshop or a cutting machine to create amazing patterns, you just need a bit of patience and some good scissors. Another option for cutting out paper for resist is to use paper punches that come in a wide variety of sizes and shapes available in the scrapbooking sections of craft stores.



1 Create the start-and stop-lines for the decoration using a flexible metal rib.



2 Prep and peel the freshly cut Moroccan tile-shaped stencils for the resist process.



3 Attach a lid stopper on the rim of the pot so that it is in line with the handle.



4 Run a finger around the perimeter of the paper tile to ensure all edges are sealed.



5 Use a brush to apply Mayco Stroke and Coat glaze on the exterior of the pot.



6 Peel the paper stencils off of the freshly glazed pot before the glaze hardens.



7 Remove the dried glaze where the handle will be attached.



8 Score and slip the area where you removed glaze, then attach the handle.



9 Drill holes where the teapot spout is going to be attached.



10 Clean up the seam. Don't remove any glaze decoration on the body of the pot.



11 Map out where the decals are going to be placed on top of the fired surface.



12 Soak the decal sheet in water to release it from the backing.



13 Carefully lay the fragile decal sheet onto the pot.



14 Smooth and apply pressure to the decal using a soft piece of cotton fabric.



15 Cut and remove the excess decal that overlaps the start-and-stop lines.



Moroccan tile stencil (2) that I use. It is very important that there is enough space between the tiles for that pop of shiny glaze (where the paper tiles sit will be bare clay), so I would rather err on the side of fewer divisions than to risk overlapping tiles and having no glaze. I attach a little decorative nubbin on the top rim of the pot that catches the lid when the teapot is tipped forward in use (3).

Next, I dip the paper-cutout versions of the Moroccan tiles in water, then lay them down, running a finger with a bit of water on it around the exterior of each edge to make sure that it is completely adhered to the clay (4). If the tile is not completely secured, it will lift when you apply the glaze and no longer act as resist. **Tip:** I use Tops brand yellow legal paper for the resist stencils because it does not expand when it gets wet and it peels off clean.

After all of the tiles are affixed to the pot, I paint two coats of Mayco Stroke and Coat glaze on the surface (5). As soon as the glaze has set up a little bit but is still wet, start to peel off all of the paper tiles (6). If you wait too long to peel the tiles off, the gum solution in the glaze will cause it to chip and you will end up needing to do a lot of repair work.

### Adding Attachments After Decorating

When the glaze is leather hard and no longer shiny, I attach a handle (pulled off of a larger carrot of clay) on the side of the pot where the lid-catching nubbin is located and then attach a spout (built from a slab) directly across from the handle. Attaching handles and spouts to pottery that is already covered in glaze can be a bit tricky, but not impossible. I whittle away at the attachment ends of the handle first to ensure a snug fit. Next, I mark around the handle attachment space, but instead of scoring and slipping the surface, I scrape off all of the glaze inside that mark (7). Next, I score and apply slip to both surfaces for attachment (8). Since there is already decoration surrounding the attachments, I have to carefully clean up the seam by keeping the brush on the side of the attachment, and I only allow the very tip of the brush to sweep away any excess slip. The spout is attached using the same method, except I drill holes to act as a built-in strainer (9), then clean the seam with a brush (10).

Once everything is attached, I decorate the lid and then let the pot sit under plastic overnight so that the water content of all of the parts can become homogeneous. The next morning, I take the pots out and carefully paint glaze on the spout and handle, making

sure to scrape off any excess glaze that may have landed on the design.

### Glaze Touch Up and Firing

At this point in the process, there is only glaze on the outside of the pot. The liner glaze on the interior will be applied after it is bisque fired. I wait to add the liner glaze until after the bisque firing because adding so much wet glaze to an already fragile and wet pot would cause it to break down and possibly lose its shape. After the pots are dry but before bisque firing them, I need to make sure that there is absolutely no rogue glaze on the bottom or in the lid gallery that will cause sticking in the bisque or glaze firing.

After the pots are bisque fired to cone 06, I do any necessary glaze touch up on the exterior, making sure that there is enough glaze on the spout and handle. Then, I glaze the interior and pop the piece back into the kiln for the glaze firing. **Note:** Stroke and Coat glazes are formulated to be fired to cone 05–06 with the capability of going to cone 6. I fire my work to a hot cone 8, cool cone 9. If you are going to fire a glaze that is formulated for a different temperature than your target temperature, make sure you test it on the clay you will be using! Commercial glazes are very forgiving, but should always be tested before putting them on your best pieces or if firing them in a way that differs from the manufacturer's instructions.

### Decal Application

I use a blue chintz motif decal sheet (11) and I carefully apply it over the area of the pot with the Moroccan tile pattern. I roughly measure out the size of the decal sheet that I think I need to cover the area and cut it a bit larger than that. Next, I soak the decal in room-temperature water (12) until the decal starts to separate from the paper backing. I remove the clear printed sheet, discard the paper, and lay the decal on top of the pot approximately where it needs to go (13). Being extremely gentle (the decal tears easily), I readjust the decal to sit in the right spot. I use a soft piece of cotton cloth to squeegee the excess water out from under the decal (14) and use extra force to make sure the decal adheres to the area of the pot that does not have glaze. After the decal is in place, I use an X-Acto knife to cut off the excess decal (15) that extends beyond the area of glaze pattern and fire it again to cone 018. The decals stick more easily to shiny or slick surfaces, so it takes a bit of extra pressure and coaxing to get the decal to stick to an unglazed surface.

As I stated before, I love for the overlapping design of the floral pattern to obscure the Moroccan tile below. Leaving areas slightly exposed to the hidden pattern underneath creates more depth in the surface and gives the user the opportunity for further exploration of the form and patterns.

*Melissa Mencini is a full-time studio artist and educator in Austin, Texas. She built a studio in her backyard so that she could be close to her dogs, cat, chickens, garden, and husband while she makes work. She is originally from Cleveland, Ohio. She has spent many years teaching and taking part in artist residencies across the US and she still loves traveling to teach workshops and do short-term residencies all across the world.*

[Ceramic Arts Network](#) is an online community serving active potters and ceramic artists worldwide, as well as those who are interested in finding out more about this craft. CeramicArtsNetwork.org provides a wide array of tools for learning about and improving skills in the ceramic arts, and a place for artists to share ideas and perspectives about how their art and life interact to shape each other.

CeramicArtsNetwork.org provides a free daily newsletter, access to *Ceramics Monthly* and *Pottery Making Illustrated* magazines, and the International Ceramic Artists Network (ICAN), and links you to all the related products and services that these groups offer.

CeramicArtsNetwork.org is owned and managed by The American Ceramic Society, a more than 120-year-old non-profit organization that promotes the professional needs of the international ceramic arts community.

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