

JUGS AND VASES

To make an elegant, classic jug form with a neck and a belly, aim to start with a cylindrical form of a height equal to about twice its width. When you centre and hollow, create a good, even, flat base of a width to suit the form. It is helpful to establish the height of the neck at an early stage. On the example shown opposite, it is roughly one-third of the cylinder's height. The rim is generous in order to carry a pulled handle and the neck needs to be slightly concave to create an adequate space for a hand between handle and pot.

You will need about 300 g (10 oz) of clay for a small creamer, 450 g (1 lb) for a jug holding 500 ml (1 pint) and between 900 g to 1 kg (2 lb–2 lb 3 oz) of clay for a one-litre jug. Beginners should practise with about 400–500 g (14 oz–1 lb 2 oz). Here I am using 1.75 kg (3 lb 14 oz) of clay.

1. The concave neck

Press the curved rib into the neck of the form while gently pulling the rim out towards the tool into a slight flare.

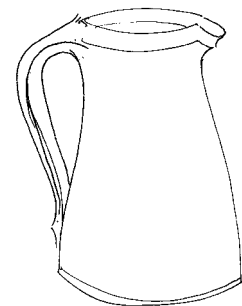
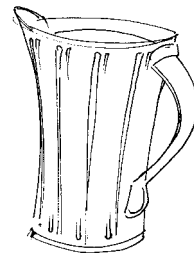
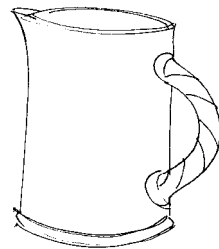
2. Bellying out

- You may need to lightly lubricate the interior and exterior of the wall. Turn the wheel slowly and begin to stroke out the shape from the base of the wall. As you move your fingers up inside the pot, pressing outwards, use a rib to offer gentle counter-pressure on the outside. The tool simultaneously dries and refines the surface.
- Don't try to extend the belly to its full girth in one movement. The form reaches its widest point at the shoulder.
- Now press the rib into the base of the collar. This junction between belly and neck is a crucial point of stress, so take care not to make this too weak or thin when throwing the form.
- Repeat the move as required. Keep a close eye on the line and proportions of the belly as it grows.
- A metal kidney flexed into a curve can act as a former to finalise and smooth the surface and silhouette of the belly.

The form will look lighter and less dumpy if the widest point of the girth comes slightly more than halfway up the height of the belly. Be careful not to make the shoulder too horizontal, as the neck may start to collapse inwards.

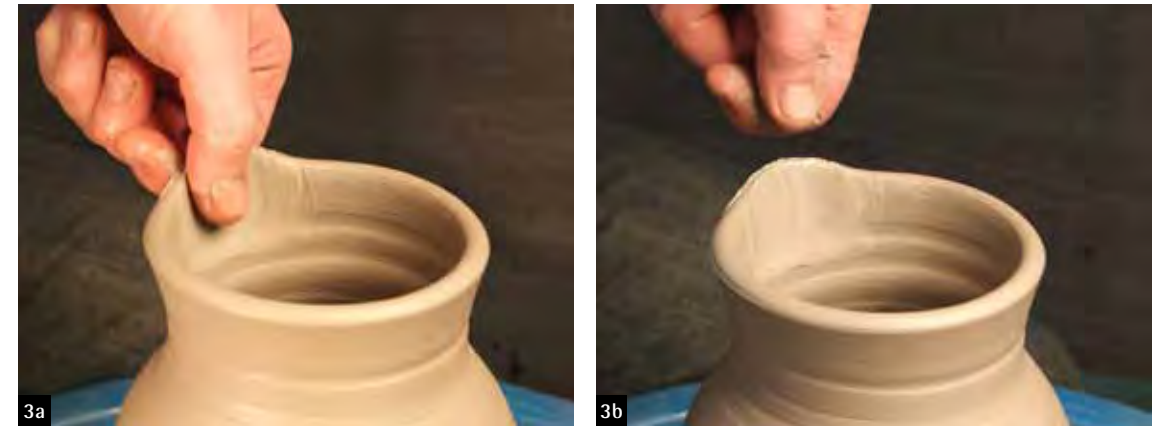
Forms with a narrow neck may require the use of a bellying rib or stick, allowing you to reach down inside and push out the shape.

I always like to have a lamp on a flexible arm fixed to or near the wheel so that I can illuminate and study the interior of the form. By doing this, you can see how well the interior shape corresponds with the exterior shape, and learn to assess where there is unwanted weight or weakness.



A variety of jug shapes.





3. Preparing the rim before forming a pouring lip

We have already looked at the importance of having extra weight at the rims of your pots to prevent them from warping. This is of even greater significance when you are creating lips and applying handles: the rim, collar or shoulder of your form needs to be stronger still.

The way you form a pouring lip will depend on the shape and character of the pot. On a small form you may want a fine rim on which to form a lip directly. Here, the generous rim will first need thinning where the pouring lip is to be formed.

- a) Wet your thumb and crooked forefinger and gently thin and stretch the rim at the place where the pouring lip will be, using a light grip and upward strokes. Take care not to snap finger and thumb together as you come off the rim or it will become sharp and ragged.
- b) Move your grip from side to side, creating an upstanding curve. If need be, the edge of the curve can be gently refined with a light stroke of the chamois leather.

LEFT: Large jug, John Jelfs, 2010. 38 cm (15 in.), combed tan ball clay slip, soda fired. Photo by Jude Jelfs.

RIGHT: John Jelfs in his kitchen with a favourite jug by Ray Finch, made at the Winchcombe Pottery.



4. Forming the lip

- The width of the pouring lip needs to fit the type and size of your form. Form the aperture with your thumb and forefinger, which need to be towel-dried to make them stick to the rim slightly. Keep the forefinger of the other hand wet and, pointing down into the pot, begin to stroke or waggle it from side to side, gently stretching the 'throat' into a 'U' shape.
- Continue this action while letting your finger rise and become more horizontal, making the lip turn outwards in an overhanging 'pout'.
- The finished pouring lip should have a clean, crisp leading edge. Its width, throat and character should suit the jug form. When seen from above, it should have a distinct 'U' or even 'C' shape, coming away from the rim of the form.



TIPS

- Form the lip as you complete each pot, even while it is still on the wheel. If the pot has begun to dry, this action may cause the rim to split. Correct any distortions by gently pushing either side of the lip – if it appears off-centre, for instance.
- If the rim is already thin and weak, the action of lip forming may distort the pot irrevocably during making or kiln-firing.

Refining and finishing

It takes experience and great skill to throw a shape like this, of 1.5 kg (3 lb 5 oz) or more, without the need for any further refinement or weight reduction. If your pot was thrown on a bat, it is sometimes useful to trim and refine it before wiring it off. This can be done quite soon after the pot has begun to dry, but before fully leatherhard.

Trimming an upright form

The bat must be re-centred and stuck lightly on to a clay pad.

- Trim the lower wall, keeping an eye on the overall line as it rises towards the belly.
- If required, a flared edge can be neatly created, followed by a shallow undercut (useful to hold when dipping in slip or glaze).



Pulling the handle from the rim

In the sequence of images shown here, the rim of this jug shape is deliberately generous in order to support a handle being pulled from it. Start by preparing a pulled stem of a scale and length to suit the size of form.

- 1 Score the appropriate area of the wall generously with a wet toothbrush. Take the handle stub and slightly flare the butt end by tapping with a fingertip. Score the end with the toothbrush.
- 2 Bring the butt end up to the pot and, supporting the wall on the inside, press the two firmly together.
- 3 Carefully weld the edges of the join and seal with a wet finger.
- 4 Once you are satisfied the handle is securely fixed, hold up the jug with the handle hanging vertically down over a bowl of water and continue thinning and refining the handle as described earlier (see p. 57). Do not let the handle over-thin or weaken anywhere, particularly not close to the pot, and keep the handle hanging in line with the jug lip.
- 5 Now hold the handle horizontally.
- 6 Withdraw the supporting hand but leave a finger or two beneath the handle, close to the pot, and allow the handle to bend into a natural curve over them. Lightly attach the lower end of the handle to the wall. Study the handle's length, curve and line, adjusting its lower fixing as necessary.
- 7 Weld securely, trim any surplus and refine. Examine the hang of the handle. Subtle alterations to its curve may be carried out by stroking its inside surface with a wet finger. (Again, a droop may be corrected by drying the pot standing on its rim.)

The weight, length and character of the handle should be dictated by the pot. Avoid over-fastidious retouching, as it can remove not only the fresh liveliness of the maker's hand but also the kind of detail over which a glaze will break in colour very nicely.

