

# Electric Firing

Creative  
Techniques



Ceramic  
Arts  
Handbook  
Series



*Edited by* Anderson Turner

The American Ceramic Society  
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# Contents

Low-Fire Electric Reds <i>David L. Gamble</i>	1
Low-Fire Surface Decoration <i>Gail Kendall</i>	5
DaNisha Sculpture: Beauty in Simplicity <i>Eleanor Piazza</i>	8
Using Majolica Glazes <i>David L. Gamble</i>	14
Jitka Palmer: Narrative Vessels <i>Jim Weaver</i>	16
Using Colorful Underglazes <i>David L. Gamble</i>	18
Kesl and Tilton: A Collaboration <i>Don Pilcher</i>	23
Scott Bennett: Craft on Craft <i>Glen R. Brown</i>	29
V'Lou Oliveira: Iconoclasm and Wit <i>Andrew Phelan</i>	35
Pennsylvania Redware <i>Denise Wilz</i>	40
China Paint: How Low Can You Go? <i>Paul Lewing</i>	45
Joan Takayama-Ogawa: China Paint and Lusters <i>Judy Seckler</i>	49
Versatile Recipes: Engobes, Slips, Glazes, and Self-Glazing Clays <i>Gerald Rowan</i>	55
Homage to Palissy <i>John McCuiston</i>	61
Kelly King: Surface and Form <i>Jennifer Graff</i>	63





Creating Neriage Blocks <i>Faith Rahill</i>	69
Laura Kukkee: Slip Decoration <i>Anderson Turner</i>	75
Testing Your Clay <i>Paul Andrew Wandless</i>	83
Building a Gas/Electric Kiln <i>Mel Jacobson</i>	88
An Anagama and an Electric Kiln <i>Daryn Lowman</i>	93
Converting an Electric Kiln for Wood and Gas Firing <i>Bruce Bowers</i>	96
Ten Basics of Firing <i>Bill Jones</i>	103
Kiln Checkup <i>Bill Jones</i>	107
The Oxidation Reverberation <i>Jayne Shatz</i>	109
Color and Texture <i>Jonathan Kaplan</i>	115
Designing with Wax Resist <i>Marj Peeler</i>	117
Wood-Ash Glazing at Cone 6 <i>Harry Spring</i>	120
A Wood-Fired Look <i>Richard Busch</i>	123
Transitions and Transformation <i>Geoffrey Wheeler</i>	127
Adding Depth to Your Glazes <i>Lisa Bare Culp</i>	131
Kiln Firing Chart	133

# Low-Fire Surface Decoration

by Gail Kendall



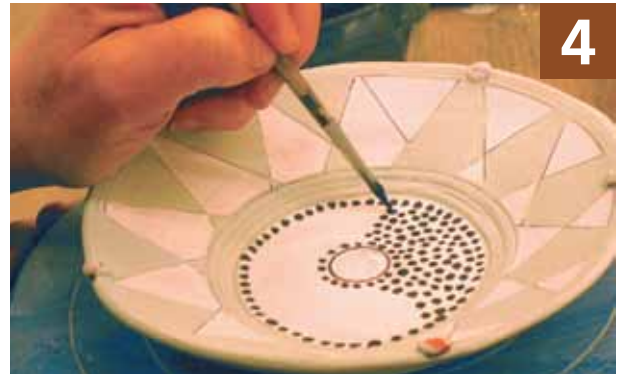
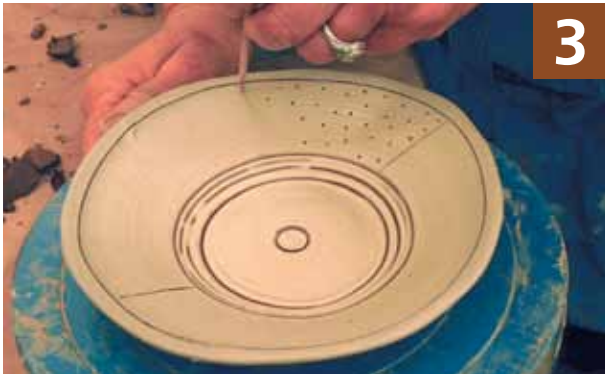
Finished plates,  
approximately 8  
inches in diameter,  
with glazes and lus-  
ter, fired to cone 03.

Back in the 1960s, only the low-fire process afforded access to a broad range of saturated colors. With various encapsulated stains that have come onto the market, a whole range of reds and oranges have become reliable at high temperatures. I still work with low-temperature materials for philosophical reasons as much as anything else. My goal is to align my work aesthetically to its peasantware ancestors from Europe and Great Britain. One of the aspects of peasant pots that I love is the casualness of construction and glazing that is common to the finished object. Village potters collecting scant remuneration for their la-

bors could not invest huge amounts of time in their work. It's likely that more basic and less controlled firing technologies also contributed drips, splotches, blurring and other variations that add to the overall feeling of freedom that I admire.

## Process

First, greenware is painted with White Slip (figure 1). I use brushes with either coarse or soft bristles, depending on the desired surface texture. Small areas missed are allowed to remain. Next, I draw through the slip on the surface (figure 2). I use a sharp knife to cut through the slip to trace the shape of an edge, or create a design or texture. I also may use sgraffito techniques to texture areas



with a stick or pencil, or draw other patterns onto the surface, revealing the red clay under the slip (figure 3). Once the pot is bisque fired to cone 03, I paint the entire surface with a black underglaze—watered down as much as possible but still opaque when applied. After it dries briefly, I wash it off with clean water and a sponge, retaining the black in the recessed details. I let the piece dry thoroughly and then begin applying fields of small, black underglaze dots (figure 4).

I always use a food safe commercial clear glaze on the interior of all soup tureens and teapots, or any other form that may hold liquid.

Fashionable or not, I am pleased with my work when it displays a lustrous gloss of just the right thickness and juiciness.

I apply four or five coats of Gerstley Borate Base Glaze in the remaining unglazed areas (figure 5). I enjoy the subtlety of commercial gloss next to my own gloss glazes, which have a softer appearance. I then fire these pieces to cone 03. After the work comes out of the glaze firing, I may add some 24K burnished gold luster to handles, small buttons of clay, or other details (figure 6). This luster is formulated with small amounts of yellow ochre that rises to the surface during the final firing to cone



017. Finally, The luster is then bur-  
nished with extra fine steel wool to  
reveal the beautiful shine of 24K  
gold (figure 7).

The final appearance of any pot  
is affected by every stage of the cre-  
ation process, beginning with form-  
ing. I allow joins, scrapes, scratches  
and other imperfections resulting  
from handbuilding to remain on the  
surface of the finished greenware.

Prior to the bisque firing, I care-  
fully brush or smooth away the little  
bits of piled up slip that build up on  
the surface from the sgraffito tech-  
niques. Tiny bits of slip, if allowed  
to remain through all the firings,  
can become sharp enough to cut or  
scratch the user.

In my work, I want to counter the  
tendency low-fire gloss glazes to look  
like plastic or patent leather. Even  
though the surface is shiny, the  
transparency of glaze allows one to  
see through the layers and down to  
the red-brown clay and black stain.  
Even the brushstrokes, which some-  
times show in certain glaze combi-  
nations, add to this feeling of depth.

## Recipes

### White Slip

Cone 06–10

Feldspar . . . . .	25.0 %
Ball Clay . . . . .	25.0
Kaolin . . . . .	25.0
Silica . . . . .	25.0
	<hr/>
	100.0 %

This slip is easy to mix, can be applied on green-  
ware and bisque, and works from cone 06 to cone  
10. The black stain I apply to bisque cleanly wipes  
off this slip.

### Gerstley Borate Base Glaze

Cone 03

Gerstly Borate . . . . .	55.0 %
EPK Kaolin . . . . .	30.0
Silica . . . . .	15.0
	<hr/>
	100.0 %

#### Blue

Cobalt Oxide . . . . .	2.0 %
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#### Rich Green

Copper Carbonate . . . . .	6–8.0 %
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#### Rich Yellow

Rutile . . . . .	6–8.0 %
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This glaze is a slight variant of a Wayne Higby  
1-2-3 raku glaze. I mix up 5-gallon buckets of  
clear, Rich Green and RichYellow. I have on hand  
½ gallon of Blue. The rest of the colors I use come  
from mixing these glazes together: Yellow Green:  
three parts Rich Yellow to one part Rich Green.