

Hang It Up

by Annie Chrietberg



Christine Boyd's *Crow Platter* performs double duty as a wall hanging artwork and a functional serving dish.

I first came across Christine Boyd at an art fair. Her booth was irresistible—the work drew me in with its high-contrast, dynamic surfaces, which read well from a distance. Upon approach and engagement, my interest continued to grow, to the point where I had to own a piece, and have her work become a part of my own everyday existence. Christine's work has a rough-hewn aesthetic that carries through form, decoration, and also, I discovered as I used it, function. Her plates are burly enough for everyday use, but not at all cumbersome and stack well.

Creative Engineering

That's enough, isn't it? What more could you ask from a plate? The wonderful thing about Christine is that she naturally dwells on more than form and function and doesn't attempt to rein it in. In addition to surrounding herself with decoration and pattern, she has a mind that travels beyond the usual boundaries and an innate sense of engineering. These interests are clearly evident in the efficient system she's designed for hanging everyday plates that's easy to use and remove (*figure 1*).

Christine's system uses common sewing snaps and picture-hanging wire (*figure 2*) to create removable hanging devices for serving pieces and everyday plates. She carves keyhole-

shaped grooves into the backs of her plate rims when they are in the leather-hard stage. The grooves have a bevel or undercut below the surface to hold the snap on the hanging device in place (*figure 3*).

Tooling Up

Christine made three special tools for creating the slots that correspond to the shrinkage of her clay body and the size of the snaps. She makes these tools out of long straight pins (the kind used for quilting), dowels and lots of hot glue. "I don't make tools for reasons of economy, but rather because the things I need don't readily exist," she explained. "I'll come up with an idea that needs a specific shape, and rather than spend weeks looking for something, I'll just get out some metal and pliers and make what I need."

Tool #1 is used to start the slot and it looks like a square trimming tool with a wire extension on one side (*figure 4*). This longer wire acts as a pivot point to facilitate the cutting and removing of a disk of clay (*figures 5 and 6*). The other end of the tool is used to smooth out and compress the cut surface.

Once the disk of clay is removed, she uses tool #2 to cut the slot (*figure 7*). She makes three cuts with this tool. For the first cut, she holds the handle horizontally, level with

the surface of the plate (*figure 8*). Starting at the circle, she cuts a groove that's about an inch long towards the top edge of the plate. She finishes the cut with a quick upward flick, and carefully removes the trimmed clay (*figure 9*). This cut goes through the surface of the clay and exactly matches the depth of the circle, but doesn't cut through to the front side of the plate rim.

The second and third cuts are made by holding tool #2 vertically to create cuts that run beneath the surface on either side of that first slot, to create a channel beneath the surface of the clay that will allow the snap to travel up

to the top of the slot and hold the wire securely in place (*figure 10*). Cuts two and three are started at the top of the channel and cut back towards the circle, by inserting the cutting edge of the tool through the channel and rotating it clockwise for the right side, and counterclockwise for the left side (*figure 11*). This is the only way to cut these, as the bit of clay cut away with each stroke needs to be removed through the circle. It's very important to note that all these cuts are meant to create a smooth and level gallery or channel for the snap below the surface of the back of the plate.



1 The back of one of Boyd's plates, with the wire in place.



2 The wire is held in place by a sewing snap fastened to it.



3 The hanging wire in the slot on a finished, fired plate.



4 Tool #1, used to create the circle at the bottom of the slot.



5 Insert the tool into the clay until the pivot point hits the works surface, then twirl it to make a circle.



6 Lift the tool after completing the circle to remove the disk of clay.

Christine then uses tool #3 to tamp down, gently widen and smooth this internal space so that the snap may travel freely in and out (*figure 12*). **Tip:** Bits of grog can obstruct or hinder the smooth operation of a sliding snap so be sure to press bits of grog left behind into the surface.

Some Assembly Required

To get the correct amount of wire, Christine stretches the wire across the back of a finished plate, measuring roughly 2½ inches past each slot (*figure 13*). She uses 15-pound weight, plastic-coated picture-hanging wire rather than the

uncoated type because it's kinder to her hands as well as the user's hands. She recommends you also buy one of the special picture wire winder tools available at frame shops and hardware stores that make tidy, secure coils. The last thing you want is for that wire to unravel and have a plate come crashing down!

Christine first feeds the wire through the front side, then through the back of the snap, so that the loop of wire is at the back of the snap (*figure 14*). Then she takes a pair of snub-nosed pliers and gives the wire and the snap a good crunch to compress both the wire and the snap itself (*figure*



7 Tool #2, a rectangular loop of wire on a stem, creates the slot and channel for the wire and snap.



8 Holding tool #2 horizontally, place it at the top of the circle, level with the surface.



9 Drag the tool up towards the top of the plate so that it cuts a channel or slot in the surface.



10 Insert tool #2 vertically into the slot to create undercuts on both the right and the left of the channel.



11 Starting at the top of the channel, move towards the circular opening so you can easily lift out the clay.



12 Use tool #3 to compress, smooth and widen the surface of the inside the channel.

15). She uses both the male and female sides of snaps, they both work fine. Next, she feeds the wire into the coil-winding tool, which secures the snap in place (figure 16). After one side of the wire is complete and put in place, Boyd presses the middle of the wire up to the point she wants it to be when the plate is hanging on the wall (figure 17). She then bends the other side of the wire where the snap should seat, and repeats the process of threading a snap, crunching it and creating the wire spiral.

When Boyd sells a piece with one of her hanging mechanisms, she demonstrates how to install and remove it. She

also includes a card that says, “This hanging device is designed to be removed easily, to allow the plate to be used for serving food.”

It’s the little extra things like Boyd’s hanging devices that go a long way toward opening up dialog with a stranger who approaches you and your work! ■

Annie Chrietzberg, a studio potter and frequent contributor to PMI, lives and works in Denver, Colorado. To see more of Christine Boyd’s plates, as well as her other work, visit her website at www.allclay.com.



13

To find the length of wire, pull it across the back of the plate and add 2½ inches beyond the slots.



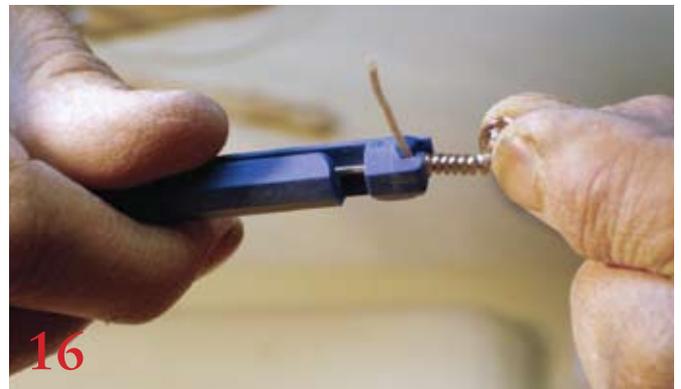
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Thread the picture-hanging wire through the snap from the front side so the loop is on the back side.



15

Use snub-nosed pliers to compress both the wire and the snap, to avoid having the mechanism snag in the channel.



16

Using a wire winder, secure the snap onto one end of the picture hanging wire.



17

Insert the completed end, press the middle of the wire up to the appropriate amount, then bend the other side of the wire where the snap should seat.



Hare Parallelogram, 9 in. (23 cm) in height, by Christine Boyd.