

SCALING

it down

by Liz Zlot Summerfield



One of the first responses I hear when someone views my work in person for the first time is “I didn’t realize it was so small.” Most often, our work is seen in magazines, posters, and presentations, so to get an accurate sense of scale (even with dimensions provided) can be tough. Talking about scale is a conversation I welcome, because I am a firm believer that it is highly important to our work. Scale is not often discussed unless the work is quite large or quite small. I believe each person’s sense of scale is relative to their own body. What might be small to you could be large to me. It is important to be in touch with your own scale, and I suggest you do this by paying close attention to the objects you surround yourself with on a daily basis. If you collect art, is it large or small? If you wear jewelry, is it large or small? Do you prefer a large cup of coffee or a smaller cup that you will refill several times? Your experience with these objects changes due to their scale, thus scale has the ability to communicate. If we are observant about the scale of our work, it informs and answers many of the questions pertaining to the form and surface. Not many surfaces will transfer successfully from small scale to large scale and vice versa. The surface and form must relate to the scale. In thinking about scale this way, it is no longer an afterthought, but rather an integral component to the whole piece. In my case, bigger is certainly not better.

Sketch to Pattern Making

How do you journey from a drawing in your sketch book to a paper pattern? Start with a clay sketch that will become the rough draft of your pattern. Make a cylinder (either by pinching, coiling or from a slab) and attach a bottom. The cylinder should be similar in scale to the intended final piece. Draw lines on the surface of the cylinder anywhere you intend to create a seam. Cut along the lines and lay the sections out flat, creating a two-dimensional shape (1). Trace the flat clay sketch onto a malleable material, such as construction paper. Cut out the paper pattern. You now have a rough draft of your pattern. To ensure proper measurements, fold the paper pattern, as you would in making a paper snowflake, and cut off any uneven edges.

To test your pattern, roll out a slab and trace the pattern. Fold the slab to create the basic form, then take note where the pattern needs adjusting. Alter the pattern and continue the back and forth between clay and paper until you are satisfied with your pattern. Trace the pattern onto a more durable material to create a master pattern. Paper patterns can easily be rescaled on a photocopier to create larger or smaller sizes of your original design.

Rolling and Tracing

Roll out a ¼-inch-thick slab large enough to fit your pattern. Run a rubber rib along the surface of both sides of the slab to compress the clay particles and remove any canvas texture. Place the pattern on the slab, and first trace it with a needle tool before cutting it out with a knife—the needle tool line creates a valley for the knife to follow. Hold the knife perpendicular to the slab and cut in one even motion (2).



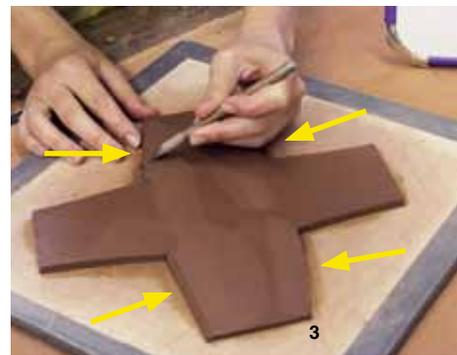
Opposite: Lidded pitcher on brick, handbuilt earthenware, slip-trailed patterns, terra sigillata, underglaze, glaze, 2014. **Above:** Lidded box on brick, handbuilt earthenware, slip-trailed patterns, terra sigillata, underglaze, glaze, wire, 2014.

Beveling, Folding, and Shaping

The slab is ready to bevel and fold once it has lost its stickiness but it is still very soft to touch. To create a greater surface area for the slabs to connect, you will need to bevel the edges. Before you begin, here are a few simple hints to beveling.

Hold the knife as you would a pencil and remind yourself that your wrist should not be contorted or uncomfortable during the beveling process. If you are right handed, you will always work on the left-hand side of the piece. In order to accomplish this, you need to turn your board to orient the piece as you cut all of the bevels. One common problem with beveling is being too tentative. The knife should cut through the clay at an angle with the tip running along the surface of the board.

The following beveling instructions set the pot up in a geometric fashion; creating four equal sides. To begin, start from the top of the piece and run your knife along the edge at a 45° angle until you finish cutting one side. Repeat this step on all four sides, remembering to turn the board after each cut. Once you bevel the first half of all joins, flip the slab over and bevel the side of the seam adjacent to the first bevel. Note (with the arrows in the image) that you are always beveling on the opposite side of the slab (3) to create each join.



To prepare for folding up the sides, brush the beveled edges with slip (there is no need to score due to the wetness of the slab). Lift two adjoining sides and begin to overlap the beveled edges starting from the bottom of the pot (4). Gently join the slabs together, working your way around all four sides of the pot. Once the pot is standing on its own, take a rubber brayer and roll the edges together to create a firm connection. The brayer connects the seams, leaving a visible line, whereas a rib will smooth them together, eliminating the seam line. Make these decisions based on your own personal aesthetic. There is no need to add coils to the inside seams due to the wetness of the clay. You have now created your cylinder. Allow the pot to firm up to soft leather hard in order to address the bottom and add volume.

Adding Volume

Set the pot on a banding wheel, wet your fingers, and gently push out the inside walls. This stretches the slab and adds a curved, volumetric surface. Work around the pot until all four sides are addressed.

To form the feet, the pot must still be at the soft leather-hard stage and hold its shape. If the clay is too wet when forming the feet, the bottom will sag, and if it is too dry it will crack along the bottom. Using the fatty part of your thumb, gently tap between the seams on all four undersides of the pot (5). This forces the bottom to become concave and simultaneously creates four feet for the piece to sit on. Once the feet are formed, place the pot on a level surface and bend the feet to eliminate any wobbling.

If you choose to stamp into the clay surface, now is the appropriate time while the clay is a soft leather hard and can accept the texture (6).

Constructing the Lid, Flange, and Spout

Once the pot is a stiff leather hard, you are ready to create the lid. Prepare the pot by leveling the rim. This is easily done with a Surform. Roll a small ¼-inch slab about the size of the opening of the pot. Place the pot upside down on the slab and trace around



1 Handbuild a cylinder to make a pattern. Cut it apart to give a visual from the 3-D form to the 2-D paper pattern. 2 Trace the pattern and cut along the valley created by the needle tool with an X-Acto knife. 3 Bevel the edges to create more area for the join. Flip the slab over and do the same bevels on the sides adjacent to the first bevels on the backside of the slab. 4 Gently tack the slabs together from bottom to top all around the pot. Use a rubber brayer or rib to secure the slabs. 5 Tap all four edges between the side and bottom of the pot to create both feet and a concave bottom. 6 I push a carved bisque stamp into the outside surface of the pot, while holding one hand on the inside of the pot. 7 At the leather-hard stage, cut the lid away from the pot holding your X-Acto knife horizontal to the pot. This should be done in one motion. 8 Finger tack a thin slab around the inside rim of the pot. The flange only needs to be slightly higher than the top of the pot to hold the lid in place. 9 Cut away clay from the pot just inside the traced line of the spout, so that there is enough surface area to attach the spout. 10 Use slip made from your clay body to decorate the exterior of the pot. The consistency of the slip along with the pressure used will determine the quality of line you create. 11 Underglaze is one solution to add color to the pot whether it is used for large blocks of color or small impact areas. 12 The slabs used for constructing the brick are stiff leather hard and beveled on all sides of the slab. The bevel cuttings are saved to be later used as seam fillers. 13 Attach all four sides to the bottom slab. The bevel cuttings fit snug into the corners of the pot and eliminate any need for rolled coils. 14 Once the five-sided pot is dry enough for handling, flip it over and adhere it to the sixth slab. Clean and compress the seams with a rubber rib. 15 After the pot is bisque fired, apply tape to mask the areas not intended for glaze. Peel away the tape before glaze firing.

the opening. Remove the pot and cut along the traced line, then soften the cut edges, taking care not to stretch or deform the traced slab. Hold the slab in the palm of your hand and rub it with your thumb or a rib to create volume. Score and slip the pot and adhere the volumetric slab to the pot with the rubber brayer. The pot is now an enclosed, hollow form. Create a line where you intend to cut the lid away from the pot. Insert your knife perpendicular to the pot and cut an even line (do not saw back and forth) (7). Slowly spin the banding wheel while you cut the lid away from the pot. Rest a finger or part of your hand against the banding wheel as you work to stabilize your hand and encourage an even cut.

It is appropriate to adhere the flange to the inside of the pot when the lid and pot are no longer in danger of being distorted from movement. Roll a thin slab (about 1/8 inch thick and 3/8 inch in height) from soft clay. Score and slip the top inside rim of the pot. Finger tack the flange to the inside of the pot leaving just a small overhang which will eventually catch the lid from sliding (8).

Clean up the seam between the pot and flange with a rubber-tipped tool and avoid using any water on the flange. Adjust the flange slightly inward with wet fingertips, so that the lid easily slips back into place on the pot. The lid will need to dry and fire on the pot to ensure a proper fit.

To create the spout pattern, start from a rounded triangle or ice-cream cone shape. Alter the shape of the spout by elongating or rounding the edges. Once the shape is cut from the pattern, gently squeeze the slab in half to create a trough where the liquid will flow. Add a decorative cap by attaching a small slab of clay onto the top of the spout. Mock the spout up on the pot and make sure it is centered. Once it is placed, trace the spout and cut just inside the trace line leaving enough clay for the spout to attach to the pot. Score and slip the pot and attach the spout to the pot (9). Clean up the connections with a rubber-tipped tool. If you applied a decorative cap, once the piece is leather hard drill a hole through the front of the spout to allow liquid to flow.



Floral and striped pail, handbuilt earthenware, slip-trailed patterns, terra sigillata, underglaze, glaze, wire, rubber, 2014.

Building Up the Surface

At leather hard, the pot is at the appropriate stage to slip trail and add any additional decorative clay components. Slip trailing with your clay body creates a subtle, raised surface without a change in color. To prepare the slip, slake down your clay body to a yogurt-like consistency and run the prepared slip through a sieve to eliminate any large particles.

Practice dispensing the slip through a slip trailer on paper to make sure the line quality is what you desire. The size of the metal tip and the consistency of the slip will determine the quality of line (10). After the slip's sheen has disappeared, loosely cover the pot under plastic until it becomes completely bone dry.

At the bone-dry stage, brush three coats of terra sigillata onto the slip-trailed portions of the pot. The terra sigillata will thin out over the raised areas and pool in recessed areas. It is the perfect solution for textured surfaces located on the outside of the pot. It is used primarily on outside surfaces as it is not a glaze surface that seals the clay and may soak up moisture. Burnish the terra sigillata until you see a waxy sheen.

In addition to terra sigillata, I apply AMACO Velvet underglaze to any portion of the pot that requires color (11). The Velvet line of underglazes are versatile because they offer you the choice to leave

the surface unglazed (raw and dry) or glazed (shiny and slick). Although underglazes may be applied at the leather-hard, bone-dry, or bisque stage, I prefer to apply them at bone dry, which leaves me the option to carve back through to reveal the clay body.

After the bisque firing, clean the pot inside and out with a lightly damp sponge. Wax the lid flange (for easier clean up) and pour or brush a liner glaze inside the pot. Wait until the surfaces are completely dry before applying any additional glazes to the outside of the pot. To create stripes on the lid, draw pencil lines as a guide. Apply glaze (I prefer commercial glazes due to their brushability) with a small brush, and clean up any runs with an X-Acto knife before glaze firing.

Constructing the Pedestal Brick

The brick is a six-sided, hollow form made from leather-hard slabs. The dimensions of the brick are directly related to the pot that sits on it. This rectangular pattern consists of three total templates; two for the sides and one for the top and bottom. Roll, trace, and cut slabs as described for the pitcher form. Allow the slabs to set up until they become leather hard. Bevel all four edges of each slab but only on one side of the slab (12). As you bevel, save the bevel cuttings in a plastic bag for later use. Take one slab cut to size for the side of the box and slip and score all four edges and attach it to the bottom slab. Do this for the three remaining slabs that make up the sides of the box. In lieu of rolling small coils, use the bevel cuttings to fill the spaces along the bottom and sides (13). Run a rib on the outside edges to strengthen and secure the seams of the form. Allow this form to set up until the bottom is a stiff leather hard and can be flipped without sagging.

Once flipped, attach the top of the brick by placing the five-sided form on the sixth leather-hard slab (14). Secure and clean up the seams with a rubber rib. Poke a small hole on the bottom to allow air to escape during the drying and firing process. Place a small weighted board on top of the brick to eliminate warping while drying. Once dry, apply 2–3 coats of AMACO Velvet underglaze, allow the brick to dry, then bisque fire.

To prepare the surface for stripes, use a slightly damp sponge to clean the surface. Apply tape to mask off the areas that will be left unglazed (15). Brush on 1–2 coats of glaze and peel away tape before glaze firing.

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Check out an article by Katey Schultz on Summerfield's work from the April 2009 issue of *Ceramics Monthly*, and an excerpt from her DVD in the digital version at www.ceramicsmonthly.org.

