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THE ARTISTS: The Wizard of Clay, Jim and Jamie Kozlowski

Jim Kozlowski started what is now The Wizard of Clay Pottery over 42 years ago. Together with his son Jamie, they have been working on perfecting Cone 10 crystalline glazes for the past 6 years. As you can see by the pictures they are experts at what they do. The Wizard of Clay supplies over 80 galleries throughout the world. They have eight Skutt kilns and fire every day to keep up with the demand.

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Crystalline glazes are one of the most difficult glazes to develop. To try to develop them on a production basis is close to impossible. High zinc based glazes are used to “grow” these beautiful fan crystals on the porcelain vases. In the glaze firing, the kiln is brought to Cone 10 and then precisely cooled to one or more holding temperatures which allow the crystals to develop. Everything from the glaze formulation and application to the kiln firing needs to be perfect.

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Amy Santoferaro prepares a mold. See story on page 25.
Fired Up
Fixing Holes

EDITORIAL

Creativity is merely a plus name for regular activity. Any activity becomes creative when the doer cares about doing it right, or better. —John Updike

One of the things I really like about clay is that you can come up with some really cool ideas and bring them to life within a very short period of time. I got to do this recently when I discovered that woodpeckers decided that my cedar sided house was good enough for a multi-family residential unit. When I looked at what they were doing—creating perfectly round poker chip sized holes—I knew I needed to find a solution soon before the rest of the woodlife learned about it.

When I got up on a ladder, I soon realized that hole production on my house was not new. It seems that previous owners just used sheet metal, caulk and paint to hide the problem. My solution was to treat this like an assignment and come up with something a little different. The result, as you can see in the photo, is a woodpecker hole cover that’s not only functional (it covers the hole and hopefully scares off new construction) but also adds a little character to the side of the house, which will soon look like a trophy wall of exotic birds!

While the artists in this issue are not all covering holes, they are solving problems creatively. Bill Shinn uses molds for making large pots at what they were doing—creating perfectly round poker chip sized holes—I knew I needed to find a solution soon before the rest of the woodlife learned about it.

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While the artists in this issue are not all covering holes, they are solving problems creatively. Bill Shinn uses molds for making large pots while Richard Notkin uses small thick molds to press tiles. Marcia Selsor makes oval molds for her Baroque-like creations, and Amy Santoferraro takes molds and presses them into foam rubber. And then there’s Stephani Stephenson taking perfectly flat tiles and showing us how to bend them, or Don Hall doing the math for us and showing how to make a six-sided form.

We know you’re looking for better ways to do some of the regular activities in your studio, and we’re grateful for the authors and artists sharing their ideas and solutions. So now to the studio to make a mold or just make a better plate.

Problem: Woodpeckers building without permits.

Solution: Cover the hole with a trophy.
Like many potters, I began learning pottery by throwing. After many years, I began handbuilding, purchased a slab roller and many contented hours followed. Here is a project on how to build a six-sided box with no throwing skills needed. The angles involved can be used for any six-sided form, so, by adjusting the measurements, you can make a piece of any height or width.

Hexagonal raku box, bisque fired to cone 04 and glaze fired to cone 07, post-firing reduction in newspaper. For the glaze I use the old faithful: 80% Gerstley borate, 20% nepheline syenite with 3% tin oxide.

1. Make a template for the piece you’re making. Include foot and lid pieces as needed. The box here will be 5 inches wide.

2. Roll out a ¼ to 5/8 inch thick slab and allow it to dry for a bit. Make a stencil from the pattern, mark the slab and cut out. Pieces should match.

3. A six-sided form needs edges trimmed at a 30° angle. You can make wire cutter from a 2x3 inch piece of wood with a ¾x1½-inch notch.

4. Dampen and score each edge. Fold up the sides and attach each one at a time to its neighbor. The clay should be damp enough to not crack.
5. Place coils on the inside of each seam and smooth them out.

6. Using a metal rib, clean up the outside of each seam.

7. For the top, trim all three edges of the triangular panels to 30°.

8. Score and dampen the edges of each panel and assemble them.

9. Attach coils to the inside, smooth out then attach the lid to the base of the form.

10. Now it is time to cut off the lid. Use a needle tool to score a line around the form. With a fettling knife held at an angle, cut off the top.

11. When cutting the lid, use a half circle in one side as a key so that it’s easy place the lid.

12. Using the 30° tool, cut the edges off the sides of each foot segment. Assemble and attach the base adding coils to the seams.

Don Hall is a clay artist living in Turlock, California. He teaches drawing at Modesto Junior College. You can view more of his work at www.donhallworks.com and email him at mail@donhallworks.com.
Why 2 women in remote Montana have fired only Paragon kilns since 1972

Pioneer Pottery near Roscoe, Montana is so isolated that bears come right up to the studio and smudge the windowpanes with nose prints.

Janet Hero Dodge and Julie Dickinson began Pioneer Pottery in 1972. They converted a horse stable built in 1910 into a pottery studio.

Janet and Julie planned to fire with propane; in the meantime, they bought a Paragon square K-6H electric kiln. But they were so satisfied with the Paragon that they never converted to propane firing. Over the years they just bought more Paragons and have been firing them ever since.

“The glazes I developed for the electric firings had the softness and subtlety I had hoped for with propane,” said Janet. “So I never quite got around to building that gas kiln.

“In 1978 we added a Paragon K-6HS square kiln so we could glaze fire back to back when necessary. This allowed us to move pots steadily through the firing cycle and fill special orders quickly. In 1980 we added a square Paragon K-6A to our kiln collection. All the kilns are still functional.”

Janet and Julie fire their glazes to a flattened cone 9. At this temperature, their matte glazes soften and absorb iron from the clay. “Some of the glazes are quite bright for electric firing,” said Janet. “We’ve been real happy with our Paragons. They’ve held up well and produced good results.”

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When you think of all the particular names you need to learn and understand to make pottery, it’s not difficult to understand that the same is just as true with mold making. While there’s nothing really complicated about mold making, understanding “what’s what” will help you better understand the whole process when getting started. Here are some of the common terms used in mold making.

**Blocking:** This is the process by which a mold part is developed by hand forming clay up to the parting line to develop a surface upon which a mold section is then cast in plaster.

**Consistency:** Each type of plaster has its own consistency, or the amount of water necessary to set up 100 pounds of material to achieve the desired absorption and strength. For instance, Pottery Plaster #1 has a consistency of 70, which means 70 pounds of water are necessary to set up 100 pounds of plaster.

**Cottle:** A flexible form that contains the fluid plaster once it is poured. It can be a simple piece of linoleum flexible flooring or sheet metal flashing. A thick clay slab or a thrown ring can also be used. Cottles are used mostly for round or oval molds.

**Draft:** Perhaps the most important plaster term ever! Draft is deviation from the vertical, and is necessary for any plaster part to be removed from another part, or if plaster is cast into a form. If there is no draft, the part will not release.

**Model:** The model is the original piece from which the mold is to be made. It can be your original piece of pottery, a found object, or you can create the model from wood, plaster or other appropriate material. The model needs to be oversized to account for the shrinkage of the clay over drying, bisque firing and the final glaze firing.

**Mold Boards/Mold Forms:** If the model is best contained by a square or rectangular shaped mold, rigid mold boards that have an angle iron or wood strip along one edge work best. These are easily clamped together and by combining boards of different lengths, any sized square or rectangular box form can be made to contain the wet plaster. Four clamped mold boards are referred to as a mold box. The activity inside the box is called working in the box. Mold boards can be made of wood and need to be sealed or oiled so that the plaster does not stick to them. Any laminated particle board works well.

**Mold Key:** To keep your mold parts indexed together, a mold key is used. This is a simple depression, female or negative section in the plaster surface that can be cut with a variety of tools. Its corresponding part, or male or positive section, happens when fluid plaster is cast making another mold part, the male or positive part then lines up perfectly into the female.
Mold Strap: Densely woven fabric webbing strap with a special buckle on one end used to tightly band mold parts together when slip casting. Small multiple part molds can be held together with heavy-duty rubber bands. The larger the casting mold, the more pressure the wet ceramic slip exerts and the mold parts need to be held together securely to avoid a plaster disaster.

Parting Compound: Plaster sticks to plaster and for that matter, to most any other porous material. To be able to make multiple part molds and to have your poured and cured plaster release from whatever it is poured onto or into, a parting compound must be used. Parting compounds just penetrate the surface of the mold only. Never use Vaseline, it is too viscous and leaves surface blemishes. Also known as separating agents, the best parting compounds are Fels Naptha Soap, Crystal Mold Soap, Butcher’s Wax or Polyurethane Parting Compound.

Parting Line: This is the line that separates an entire piece into two or more parts so that it can be successfully cast. The mold must separate so that the piece can be released from the mold. A casting mold can have any number of pieces that are necessary to accommodate any undercuts or changes in direction that the original piece may have. Parting lines can sometimes follow the most obvious path, other times a very circuitous one.

Plaster Disaster: What happens when a cottle or mold board setup is not securely held together either with mold straps or clamps resulting in liquid plaster everywhere.

Reverse Curve: An “S” type curve is an example of a reverse curve, or a curve that doubles back onto itself. A reverse curve on a form cannot release itself from a plaster mold. An additional mold part must be created or the mold configured differently to account for this change of direction.

Seam: Wherever mold parts meet, a seam (sometimes called a fettle) results in the molded piece. This seam can be removed with a fettling knife or other tool. Fettling is the act of removing this seam.

Slip Reservoir: Sometimes confused with spare, it is that part of the mold used to contain a quantity of liquid clay/slip in the casting process. As water from the slip in a casting mold is absorbed into the mold wall, extra slip in the slip reservoir flows into the mold.

Undercut: Just as it sounds, a change of direction that goes back into itself. An example of an undercut is a certain profile of a trimmed foot on a bowl. Plaster cannot release from an undercut. To enable this type of foot to be slip cast, an additional mold part must be made or the plaster mold must be configured in a different way.

Waste Mold: Sometimes it is necessary to cast a scrap or incomplete mold part so that a fully functional mold section can be cast against it.

There are many more terms just for mold work, but these are a good start. Learning plaster working techniques requires time and diligence. Plan on making many mistakes and learning from them. My best advice is to read as much as you can from the many available texts, and don’t be afraid to try anything, as you will certainly learn by doing.

Jonathan Kaplan has worked in ceramics for more than 30 years as an artist, potter, designer and educator. For comments, contact him through his website at www.jonathankaplanceramics.com.
One thing that potters never seem to have enough of is shelf space. While store-bought units are generally flimsy or expensive, inexpensive strong high-capacity shelving can be built quite easily from common, cheap (often free) wood pallets. One can often obtain many pallets of the same dimensions just by offering to haul them away. When you do find pallets stacked by dumpsters or loading docks, their location usually implies they’re being discarded, so all you need to do is ask. And if there is a charge, it’s minimal.

Many Sizes

Pallets come in a variety of sizes and are usually made with two to four 2×4 frame members with slats nailed to the top (and oftentimes the bottom) that don’t extend past the edges of the frame. A common pallet size is approximately 37 inches square with 6–8 slats on both the top and bottom. Note: Pallets larger than 40×54 inches should not be used in the manner described here, but can be cut to give more desirable dimensions.

The three dimensional “thickness” of the pallet as a shelf, as opposed to a single board, adds greatly to the strength of the unit. The slatted nature of the pallet allows for airflow up and down through the shelves, not just over the shelf, making them especially well suited for drying ware or molds.

One of the shortcomings of commercial shelving is the lack of shelf depth. With pallets as your shelves you can have as much depth as you have room for or need. The 30 inch square or 30×34-inch pallet provides a 30-inch shelf depth and are ideal for lining a wall. The 37 inch square and larger sizes work well as units out in the middle of a room where the shelf can be accessed from more than one side. In both cases, multiple units with the same shelf spacing placed side by side or in a row offers an extremely versatile storage solution.

Shelf Spacing

You can also choose whatever kind of shelf spacing (vertical distance between shelves) you need for the kind of work you do, i.e. if you do plates or tiles you can have many closely spaced shelves. I usually make the first shelf spacing from the bottom quite large, 18–24 inches (for larger, heavier items), then a couple of 12–16-inch shelves, two or three shelves that are narrower at approximately shoulder level, then one or two taller shelves on top. When planning shelf spacing, be sure to take the thickness of the pallets into consideration.

Process

Inspect pallets for stray nails and staples before cutting or drilling. The wood in pallets is often quite hard, so use sharp bits and a good electric drill for pilot holes. Pilot holes are a necessity for lag bolts (and helpful for nails too); they keep the wood from splitting and allow the fasteners to be completely driven into the wood. Work on a hard flat level surface.

Lay the first pallet on the floor and brace it on two sides with something heavy such as a box of clay. Successively stand each 2×4 upright at the corners of the pallet and loosely clamp each in place (figure 1). Tap each upright into place so that it is flush with the end of the pallet 2×4 and vertical by the level, tighten the clamp. Drill pilot holes through the upright and pallet. Use at least two lag bolts with washers per joint (figure 2). Note: If only one is used, the single fastener acts as a pivot point, and the whole unit can fold like a drying rack.

Remove the clamps. Set a cardboard box with the dimension of the desired shelf spacing in the center of the pallet (figure 3). Place the next pallet into the uprights and onto the box. Lift each corner of the pallet approximately ¼–½ inch off the box (this allows for easier removal of the box after the shelf is fastened) and loosely clamp (figure 4). Using a level on each side of the shelf, tap the shelf into level and tighten the clamps. Drill and bolt then remove clamps and box.

Repeat these steps with desired shelf spacing until you get to the next to the top shelf. You can top it with a pallet or by nailing a piece of plywood across the ends of the uprights if the load on the top shelf will be light (figure 5). Go back and tighten all the bolts. You can add one or two 1×2 or 1×4 diagonal braces to the sides of the unit that do not have the uprights on them for added stability.
Odds and Ends

If you're going to cut pallets down to more desirable dimensions before assembly, use a reciprocating saw with sharp blades. Circular saws are difficult to use for this and usually do not have the depth of cut needed, and saber/jigsaws usually do not have enough power to cut through the pallet.

One very common pallet type is a 30×42-inch version where the slats extend approximately 4 inches past the edge of the 2×4 frame on each side. This pallet can be made into an excellent wall unit by cutting off the slats that extend out from the frame on the four corners where the uprights are fastened.

Cheap, strong, easily-built shelving is possible for all studio sizes using pallets. They’re great for drying ware due to their slat construction. Be advised however, there is one problem with having plenty of shelf capacity; stuff expands to fill the available space.

List of Materials

- Pallets of the same size and construction
- Four 2×4s of the desired shelf height
- 3/16×3-in. lag bolts (8 per shelf)
- 5/16 washers (8 per shelf)
- Drill and wood bit of appropriate size for pilot holes
- Four C-clamps or carpenter’s clamps
- Spirit level
- Socket wrench and correct socket for bolts
- Hammer
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Back in the mid ’80’s when I was using stoneware clay, I just pretended to get nice colors. I tried white stoneware and several other whitish clays – even tried several other company’s porcelain, but Jiki is superior.

Eric Abraham
World Renowned Creator of Phantasmagorical Porcelainous Productions Eric Abraham’s Flying Pig Studio and Salley Lucas, Kansas
The wheel has been the predominant tool for the potter for centuries. But while it has few limitations, its product is always round, so the potter must make an effort to deviate from this shape. Also, it takes unusual skill and strength to create larger forms. For producing work on a larger scale, you can abandon the wheel and switch to other techniques, such as coil construction, extruding or using molds. Molds can be made from simple found forms or compound curved shapes designed for other purposes.

Simple Molds
For simple two-sided forms, my favorites are cardboard tubes and sections of plastic irrigation pipes cut into two curved slabs and covered with newspaper to prevent sticking (figure 1). For four (or more) sided forms, square blocks or wooden molds work well (figure 2). To avoid having to assemble a number of flat pieces, you only have to wrap the clay around a found or constructed shape. The only size limitation is the size of the kiln.
For maximum volume or width for a round shape, a combination of both mold and wheel can be use for quickly making punch bowls and platters (see *Extruder, Mold & Tile: Forming Techniques*, The American Ceramic Society, 2008). Molds made with coil construction, although time-consuming to make, have infinite possibilities for shapes. Once completed, one of these molds becomes an almost permanent device for rapidly creating large pottery or sculptural forms.

### Making a Two-piece Mold

If you cannot find the shape you want, you can make a simple two-piece mold, or more complex sculptural shapes that might require three or even more segments (figure 3). Plaster press molds last much longer than slip-casting molds because they’re not exposed to any deflocculants like those used in casting slip—I’m still producing variations on a shape pressed from a mold created more than twenty years ago! Before starting a large mold, use a thrown shape for making a smaller version and become accustomed with the process. Molds can be invaluable to the production potter, and for those wishing to explore new possibilities with shapes and surfaces.

When making a simple two-piece plaster mold, you can throw or handbuild your original. I prefer to draw out the shape of the mold on a sheet of Plexiglas, which has a smooth surface so the plaster won’t stick. Using coil construction, build the piece up and inward (figure 4). Paddle the form roughly into the desired shape (figure 5), then when leather hard, scrape it with a large rib to obtain the final shape (figure 6). If the form is supposed to be symmetrical, create a cardboard template to serve as a guide.

To pour the first half, build a clay dam around the shape and prop a board at 90° on one end if you want the mold to stand vertically (figure 7). After the mold has set up, you can make a clay collar to cast a pedestal base, which allows the mold to be used horizontally (figure 8).

After the plaster hardens, peel out the coiled clay and allow the mold to dry out. This might take several days. To make the second half of the mold, press a thick slab of clay into the mold. Make two halves and leave the second in the mold. After the first pressed section has become leather hard, place it over the piece in the mold (figure 9). Notice that bricks are used to set up the dam to the necessary higher level. Do not forget to form clay “keys” or half circles around the base. This will form depressions in this half and create a matching positive counterpart in the opposite side of the mold.

After soaking the plastic surface, pour a thin layer of plaster and allow to harden. This thin layer supports the following poured layers.

After the plaster has set up overnight, take apart and remove all of the construction clay. Do not try to use the mold until it completely dries. You now have con-
An optional foot adds stability when using the mold.

Make two halves from the mold and put together to complete the form.

Texture slabs prior to placing them in the mold.

Work slabs into the molds using a rubber rib, then bevel the edge of one. Leave an inch or more of extra clay on the other half to work into the beveled edge of the first half.

Reach through the bottom to rib the seam.

Tilt both sides upright and press together.

Place a slab on the bottom and rib to a concave surface.
structed a device that can, in a matter of minutes, produce monumental pottery or sculptural forms and will last for years.

Using a Two-piece Mold

After the mold has completely dried out, roll out a slab of clay. Add texture to the slab at this point if desired (figure 10). Place the slabs over the molds and press into place with a large curved plastic or metal rib (figure 11). On one side, cut a beveled edge, and on the opposite side, leave an inch or more of extra clay that will be worked into the beveled edge of the first half. Tilt both sides upright and press together the two halves of the mold (figure 12), then gently lower the combined two molds back into a horizontal position.

Reach through the bottom of the mold and work the clay together with your fingertips and a rubber rib (figure 13). Add a pad of clay to close off the bottom, and use a curved rib to create a concave surface (figure 14). This adds strength and prevents cracking.

Tilt the mold back up to a vertical position and let stand for several hours so the plaster will draw enough water out of the surface of the clay to strengthen it sufficiently for removing the mold (figure 15). Work the clay back and forth along the seams (figure 16), then smooth with a soft rubber rib. Once the clay has stiffened a bit, add a top to the pot (figure 17). The piece can be thrown, slab, coil or molded. Finish the bottom of the piece (figure 18).

Bill Shinn is a potter living in Santa Maria, California. Past articles by Bill that have appeared in PMI and Ceramics Monthly can be found in the Ceramic Arts Handbook Series (www.ceramicartsdaily.org). Contact Bill at shinn@sbceo.org for questions or comments.
Over a decade ago, relief tile and architectural ceramics lured me down a clay-clad path. Since then, I’ve immersed myself in the history of tilemaking and now focus on Spanish and Mission revival styles along with traditional Batchelder and Claycraft finishes, while continuing my original work in tile, sculpture and architectural ceramics. Last year I created a period fireplace surround for a 1920s California bungalow that was adapted from a Batchelder design the homeowner had seen and admired. (Ernest Batchelder was a tile designer and maker who worked in Southern California during the early part of the 20th century.)

There are a couple of methods for designing a fireplace surround, and you’ll need complete measurements and specs for all parts of the fireplace (figure 1). For the surround I’m demonstrating here, all components were combined in the forming process so the tiles curve from one surface to the next, unlike typical tiled surrounds where the mantel face tile and firebox return are made separately then assembled on installation and the tiles meet at the edges.

Making a Fireplace Surround

by Stephani Stephenson
Design and Template
I first plotted a general design and layout on the computer, adapting it to my measurements and enlarging everything by 9% to compensate for clay shrinkage (figure 2). I then sketched the design to scale on rosin paper, fine tuning the arch curve and angles of the cuts along the arch (figure 3). Once the design was finalized, I then traced half of the design onto heavy plastic sheeting (figure 4). This served as my template for both left and right sides of the surround.

Transferring the Design
For this surround, roll out a 1-inch thick slab of clay and transfer the pattern from plastic to clay with a water-based marker (figure 5). On my plastic template I had drawn a dotted line, 2¼ inches from the inner line of the arch. This line indicated how big the slabs would need to be to include enough clay for the firebox return along the arch. To make the 4×8 and 4×4 rectangular blocks for the lower surround, I rolled out oversized slabs that allowed for the firebox return and extra selvage on all sides.

Forming the Return
To construct the straight blocks below the arch, I place a 2×4 next to a plaster block measuring 12×18×3 inches. The 2×4 can be clamped or nailed down, but in this case the weight of the plaster block kept it in place. Since the base of my draw tool was made from a piece of 2×2, the edge of the 2×4 was set the width of a 2×2 away from the edge of the table and the plaster block was set against the 2×4.

I then place each slab with the “return” edge down onto the 2×4 and against the plaster (figure 6). A length of 2×2 helps me hold the edge of the slab in place. Holding the 2×2, I slowly ease the rest of the slab down onto the plaster, then use a broad flat paddle to flatten it (figure 7).

A piece of good quality wooden lath is drawn over the surface in a ‘screeding’ motion to further compress and flatten the clay (figure 8).

Shaping the Return
To prepare the clay for shaping with a draw tool (see box), moisten and compress the curve (figure 9). Lightly position the 2×2 base of the draw tool against the 2×4, placing one hand on both the base and the table edge and the other hand on the metal template. Pull the draw tool down the length of the table, continuing to press it against the 2×4 as you pull it along.

When you pull a draw tool to shape clay, you can go in either direction. The first pull should be steady but light since the metal template scrapes and removes clay as it’s drawn along, and catches if too much clay

Tip:
For a symmetrical design, draw or trace half of the design onto clear plastic with a permanent marker. Fold the plastic and trace the ‘half design’ onto the other half of the plastic. Unfold. On the reverse side of the plastic, retrace your lines with a water based marker. Place the plastic, right side up, onto moist clay. Rib or smooth the plastic onto the clay. Pull the plastic away to reveal your transferred design.
Tip: Placing a piece of rosin paper between the clay and the paddle hides the paddle marks.

Making a Simple Draw Tool

The sledge is a tool traditionally used to shape plaster or clay models for subsequent casting and reproduction of architectural trim. A draw tool is a variation of the sledge and is useful in making trim directly. Sledges and draw tools typically feature an interchangeable metal or wood template set into a heavy wooden framework.

Simple yet functional draw tools can be made from lightweight flashing, sold in rolls, or from straight or corner pieces of metal flashing. Both are readily available at your local hardware store. You can use 90° corner flashing alone or attached to a wooden base. Draw your template shape onto the metal. Lightweight flashing is easily cut with snips. Heavier flashing can be cut with a jeweler’s saw, hacksaw or jigsaw. Use a blade designed for cutting metal. Paraffin drawn along the blade may help. Make your cut just inside the drawn line. Finish shaping and smoothing with a file, then wet sand.

Tip: When I pull a draw tool, I visualize my upper body as a fixed extension of the draw tool, using my legs to move me rather than flexing my arms to pull, inhaling before I start, exhaling slowly as I pulled (think tai chi—slow even steady pull).

piles up. Re-wet the clay, make a second then a third pull, each time increasing pressure, deepening and defining the form. After the clay stiffens slightly on the plaster block, remove the 2×4, then compress and round the edge of the return.

Wobbles, gouges and false moves are generally made at the beginning and the end of each pull. Leaving extra clay at both ends of the slab allows for these errors on ‘landing’ and ‘takeoff’, yet give a smooth ‘flight’ in between! The ends are later cut away and discarded or recycled. To form the return on the arch or curved sections, transfer lines from the template onto a 2-inch thick piece of sheet foam and cut away the foam along the inner curve. Lay the arch slab onto the foam, letting the curved edge of the slab extend out 2¾ inches to form the return. Placing rosin paper between the foam and clay allows for easy repositioning over the foam. To form the return along the arch, I first place plastic food wrap over the slab, then use my palm, the fleshy part of my hand between thumb and forefinger and a soft rubber rib to ease the clay down over the foam, lightly compressing the clay, taking care not to stretch or distort it. To shape the return, I remove the metal template from the wooden base and pull it along the
curve, using the same pulling technique. Allow the clay to stiffen in place then trim and smooth the return edge.

**Cutting Tile Blocks**
To cut the slabs into tile blocks, use the transfer lines as guides, but double check them with a square. Place plastic food wrap over the slab and impress lines with a metal straightedge. Cut the tile by pressing straight down with a broad stiff putty or spackling knife (figure 11). This will create 90° cuts with well-finished edges. Curved portions of the return can be cut in a similar fashion.

**Finishing**
Leave the pieces in place until leather hard (figure 12). The keystone is made at the same time, but isn’t trimmed until all the other pieces are completed and laid out to dry to ensure that its size, side angles and return complemented the rest of the arch. Then, because I use a relatively smooth clay body, I hollow out the backs of the pieces at this stage (figure 13).

Bullnose tiles were needed for one base of the firebox, so that the firebox could be swept. Lower left and right corners of the surround needed to incorporate the transition from return trim to bullnose (figure 14). Additional shaping, smoothing and texturing with rasps was done at the leather-hard stage. Pieces were then dried and fired on edge, bisqued to cone 04, stained, then fired to cone 4. Hearth tiles were extruded, stained and fired in a similar manner. The surround is currently awaiting installation (figure 15).

Stephani Stephenson is a full time tilemaker, sculptor and architectural ceramist, currently residing in Encinitas, California. She is a member of the Potters Council and a popular presenter and workshop instructor. See her work at http://www.revivaltileworks.com.
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Press Forming with Molds & Foam

by Paul Andrew Wandless

Amy Santoferraro combines just about any process, method or material with clay if it enables her to ultimately achieve the visual result her work requires. She’s not alone in combining different methods and techniques with clay for new and more efficient ways to create work. It’s more popular than ever these days to seek out different processes to use with clay and the work created is aesthetically exciting and fresh as a result.

One such combination of processes is screen printing directly onto clay, then using plaster molds with thick springy foam to press-form the clay slabs into a variety of shapes. This method is fairly quick to do from start to finish and has even earned the name “Plate-O-Matic” due to its ease of use and predictable reliability.

Ceramic artist Linda Casbon was giving a collectors workshop at Watershed Center for the Ceramic Arts and Amy was her assistant. Linda taught this method (which she learned from one of her students) to Amy during this time. Amy has since put her own unique twist on the basic process using screens. I always enjoy hearing these stories about how everyone learns from each other regardless of who is the teacher and who is the student! Clay folk are always happy to learn from anyone and then share with everyone.

Amy is currently a resident artist and gallery assistant at The Clay Studio in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Provided with studio space and access to kilns, she’s able to fully explore the potential of what clay has to offer and is free to indulge all her artistic curiosities. The following method was demonstrated at The Clay Studio in her work space where she’s surrounded by clay tools, supplies and all the fun objects and drawings that inform her images and ideas.

You can create a shallow platter with a two-color, screen printed image using the following two-stage process. The first stage is to create the image by screening directly onto a prepped clay slab, and the second...
Silk Screening an Image onto Clay

Amy transfers images onto clay using a silkscreen process. In this example, she begins with a rectangular-shaped slab of clay about 3/8 inch thick, which she smooths with a rubber rib. The slab should be roughly 3 inches larger than the hump mold you’re planning on using to assure it conforms to the whole shape. (Note: Amy uses terra cotta for this demo, but any clay body can be used.)

For a base color, she then coats the surface with porcelain slip (figure 1) brushed evenly across the entire surface with a wide brush. Once the slip dries a bit and the shine is gone, she smooths it with a rubber rib to remove any brush marks (figure 2). Although porcelain slip is used here, you can use any white or tinted slip—whatever background you want for your piece. Tip: Prep two or three slabs at a time so you have extras to work with.

Screen a Two-Color Image

To make a two-color print, Amy uses two screens with images burned into them using diazo photosensitive emulsion. Each screen is printed using a different color with the first screen being the background pattern and the second screen the primary image.

Commercial underglazes need to be the right consistency for silk screening to avoid bleeding edges on the image. To get underglazes to the consistency of honey, Amy leaves them open overnight so some of the water can evaporate.

Before printing on the clay, you need to load the open areas of the silk screen with color. Amy applies a bead of underglaze across the length of the screen (figure 3), then using a squeegee with a stiff rubber blade, she draws the underglaze across the screen into the open areas (figure 4). Next, she applies another bead of slip on the screen then carefully lowers the screen onto the clay slab (figures 5–6). Once in place, she screens the image onto the slab creating a background of light blue circles (figure 7).

The second screen has several images in it so Amy uses wax paper on the bottom of the screen to block out all the images not being used (figure 8). The screen is then “loaded” with thickened black underglaze, lined up over the slab and screened over the blue circles (figure 9). The finished image is left to dry for 15–20 minutes or until it’s dry to the touch. Once the image is dry, check the slab to see if it has stiffened enough to handle but is still flexible (figure 10).

Forming the Plate

Center the clay slab on a piece of thick springy foam and use a damp sponge to clean the surface of the plaster hump mold (figure 11). Be sure the piece of foam is larger than the mold being used. Place the mold over the area of the print that will be the final composition, taking into consideration how the shape and depth of the mold will interact with the image you created. Trim a wide border, leaving enough clay to conform to the mold (figure 12) and remove the excess slab. Keep your trimming tool handy because you’ll need it after forming the plate.

Place both hands on the mold and press with slow even pressure until the back of the mold is roughly even with the surface of the foam (figure 13). While keeping pressure on the mold, trim and remove excess clay from the edge of the mold to create the rim (figure 14). Amy cuts at an angle so the rim also acts as a border. If you cut straight down, the rim will have more of an edge where the image or design would end at the perimeter.

Finishing Touches

To finish the plate, keep one hand on the mold, and flip the plate and remove the foam. Use a rubber rib to smooth the bottom of the plate (figure 15). Once the bottom is finished, flip the plate back over and remove the mold (figure 16). Finish the rim with a Surform tool and rubber rib.

Amy hand-glazed additional images on her plate. The finished piece looks wonderful and was simple to make. Once you have prepared slabs, this whole press forming process should only take about 15 minutes per plate.

Templates and Stamping

Like most techniques, you can vary this process. If screening isn’t your thing, try one of these alternatives to make plates or bowls that are even quicker to perform and use common items.

Choose a template or form with an interesting profile or edge. This can be a plastic form or even a drawn shape that you designed yourself. Trace and carve the shape of its perimeter into the clay creating the edge of your plate (figure 17). Use stamps with interesting designs or patterns to emboss a design, pattern or composition into the clay; then line up the plaster mold and press into the foam creating the depth desired for the piece (figure 18).
1. Prepare a slab and coat with slip.

2. Use a rib to smooth the surface.

3. Place a bead of slip on the silk screen.

4. Use a squeegee to charge the screen.

5. Place another bead of slip on the screen.

6. Carefully place the screen over the slab.

7. Squeegee slip to transfer the design to the slab.

8. Mask off areas of the screen you will not use.

9. A second screen with a second color is added.

10. Allow one slab to set up, but make sure it is still flexible.

11. Place slab on foam rubber and prepare a mold.

12. Trim excess clay from the slab before pressing.
Once the form is pressed, remove and clean up with a rubber rib and other finishing tools as needed. This is a really simple way to create a plate with a complex embossed design (figure 19). Glaze or slip can be applied in the recessed areas (mishima technique) or a simple celadon can be applied.

For more variations, try using cookie cutters, pastry or tart pans or small dough cutters and cut out forms. Press the clay into the foam with a half-sphere plaster mold and add a foot if desired. Leave the mold inside to act as resistance to press against when making the foot. Amy uses a small coil and attaches and smooths it with her fingers (figure 20). A damp sponge can also be used to run around the foot for final smoothing of the surface.

These are just two variations that can be applied to this Plate-O-Matic method, and the possibilities really are endless. Just keep a few things in mind when experimenting with this process. Remember that the hump mold you’re using must be slightly smaller than the slab so you’re sure to get a good rim after pressing into the foam. The foam itself needs to be at least 4 inches thick and “springy” so you can achieve good depth in the plates or bowls. Seat cushions work well or you can get thick springy foam at a craft store.

Paul Andrew Wandless is a frequent contributor to PMI as well as a studio artist, workshop presenter, visiting assistant professor, author, and Potters Council member. For more information, check out his website at www.studio3artcompany.com or email him at paul@studio3artcompany.com.
I’m intrigued by baroque styles and the oval is a natural baroque form. Rather than searching thrift stores for the perfect oval form, here’s a simple solution that combines a trick I remembered from college along with my technique for using gravity to create large hump molds. Note: In this technique for creating oval molds, each mold requires two oval frames—read on to discover why!

Create an Oval Frame
To make an oval frame you’ll need to start with a long string, two nails, a ruler, a pencil and a piece of ½−¾ inch thick plywood. Draw two intersecting perpendicular lines on the plywood for the length and width of the oval you want. Remember to take into consideration the size of your kiln. On the long axis, make markings out from the center every half inch or inch and drill holes at the marks for inserting a nail. Take a string and tie it into a loop that stretches to the length of the longer horizontal axis. With the string looped over the nails, hold a pencil against the string to draw an oval. Experiment with nails in different positions because you’ll find that the further apart the nails are, the more eccentric the oval becomes, and conversely, the closer the nails the rounder the shape (figure 1).

Once you have the outline of the oval drawn on the plywood, cut out the shape with a jigsaw that has a saw blade for cutting wood (figure 2). Place the oval on the plywood and trace around to make a second oval. Each mold requires two oval blanks.

Next, with a compass or scribe, trace a line an equal
distance about 2 inches from the edge all the way around each oval \( (\text{figure } 3) \). Now, drill a hole inside the inner outline large enough for your saw blade to fit loosely \( (\text{figure } 4) \). Cut along the line to create an oval ring. These rings are critical for the mold as well as the future lip support. Set one of the rings on \( 2\times4 \) scrap for raised support \( (\text{figure } 5) \).

### Creating Oval Molds

Note: For the purpose of demonstrating, and because I find it just as easy to do two at a time, I’m making two different size molds.

Find some fabric. In this case, I’m using a dense weave synthetic curtain material, although I’ve used canvas for larger forms. Staple the cloth loosely to the rim of the oval frame \( (\text{figure } 6) \). The looser the fabric, the deeper your mold, and be careful to avoid wrinkles. I have found it easier if the cloth is stapled to the edge of the rim.

Prepare plaster to pour into the cloth. I use a USG No. 1 Pottery Plaster for these molds available at all ceramic supply stores. Be sure the table or working surface is level. Let the plaster stand until it’s starting to set (a ripple across the top surface remains when you drag a finger across it), then pour the plaster into the cavity of the fabric. Before the plaster is completely hard, use a sheetrock blade and level the plaster to the board’s surface \( (\text{figure } 7) \).

After the plaster has set, flip the whole thing over, peel off the fabric and remove the staples from the wooden rim. Place the matching inside wooden oval in the corresponding position within the outer rim and make some marks for easy alignment \( (\text{figure } 8) \). Note: Since there are two rings and two wooden ovals, make sure you’re using a matched set.

Place the plaster form on the wooden oval, flip mold and oval onto a soft surface and fasten the wooden oval to the bottom of the plaster mold with three sheetrock screws of the appropriate length into the deeper parts of the plaster. The screw heads should be flush to the wood surface.

Using a Surform tool, clean the edges of the plaster form \( (\text{figure } 9) \). Bevel the inside edge of the other oval rim (not the one you’re using with the plaster mold). This bevel allows for the space of the thickness of the clay between the plaster form and the other rim.

### Making an Oval Form

To use your new hump mold, place the wood-backed mold inside the rim and sprinkle some powdered clay on it to prevent the wet clay from sticking \( (\text{figure } 10) \). Roll out a slab large enough to cover the outer edge of the rim. Flip the slab over with the oval frame still in place. Place the bottom oval rim—the one that fits the oval to which the mold is attached—on top of the slab and trim some of the excess clay so you can line
7. After pouring the plaster, screed the excess.

8. Place the oval inside the ring and mark them for easy alignment.

9. Use a Surform tool to clean up the mold after attaching it to the oval.

10. Place the mold assembly back into the oval ring. Sprinkle with dry clay or cornstarch.

11. Sandwich a slab of clay between the two oval rings then place over the mold.

12. Rib or comb the clay slab onto the mold.

13. Create an undulating rim if desired.

14. Or carve or impress a design on the rim.
up the oval rims (figure 11). Then grab the two rims sandwiching the slab and flip onto the mold. Remove the top oval rim.

Comb the clay onto the mold and rim with a rib (figure 12). Trim and clean up the edge. Replace the top oval rim, pick up the sandwiched clay and set the entire assembly on to 2×4s so that the bottom of the clay shape remains suspended. When you pick up this assembly, the plaster mold remains on the table and the clay is lifted between the sandwiched rims. Remove the top oval rim.

Now comb and refine the inside with a rib. At this stage, you can push the interior of the bowl deeper if you desire. To avoid warping later, keep the rim support either on the top or the bottom of the rim. You can work the top or bottom by flipping the piece using the sandwiching of the rims.

**Finishing Touches**

The lip at this stage becomes the focus of design. Here are three possible approaches: raising an undulating lip reminiscent of some sea shells (figure 13); applying sprigging with a Victorian flair; or carving a tropical floral pattern (figure 14). Extrusions for reinforcing the lips can also be incorporated into your design.

Now throw a foot by working some clay to the edge of the bat (figures 15–16). After it sets up, cut a beveled edge at the anticipated angle on the bottom of the bowl (figure 17). To ready a fragile lipped bowl, cover the upright form with a piece of egg crate foam and then a board or oval rim. The rim beneath the lip of the bowl in this position. Sandwich the foam, fragile lip and two oval rims and flip the bowl upside down. Now carefully put the foot into the right place so that it will allow the bowl to sit level. If you prefer, use handbuilt additions to stabilize the bowl.

Marcia Selsor is professor emerita at Montana State University and now resides in Brownsville, Texas. She is a Potters Council member and teaches workshops on architectural ceramics, raku and alternative firing practices. For comments, e-mail her at selsor@imt.net.

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A Workshop with Richard Notkin

A great thing about being involved with ceramics is the plethora of workshops being given by notable ceramic artists. Whether you’re a beginner, established artist, a student or teacher, there’s always something to learn from a well-given presentation. Even a collector can gain a greater appreciation of an artist’s body of work by learning about specific techniques and the reasoning behind them.

One of our most important contemporary ceramists maintains a full schedule of workshops across the country, and with good reason. Richard Notkin has a way of talking about his work that exponentially expands the possibilities of ceramics for his listeners. As he explains both how he does things and the reasons why he does them, students gain valuable insight into the artistic process and the dedication and mindfulness that go into each one of Notkin’s works.

Having attended one of Notkin’s workshops years before, I can attest to the fact that his students gain a fresh perspective. I caught up with Notkin this year at the Art Students League of Denver, where he was a part of their visiting artist series. To date, the Art Students League of Denver has brought in over 15 internationally renown artists to give presentations and workshops. Seeing the direct and meticulous way Notkin creates his intricate pieces is very inspiring, and he always includes slide shows, which are thorough and interesting. His slide shows include his work, his processes and tools, and shots of his reference materials in his studio.

Learning about the time he spends on each minute detail can be daunting. Of this Notkin explains, “Time is a tool, another material. You never waste time when creating, you invest time in your art. Once you have an ideal vision of what you’re trying to create, take all the time that is necessary to achieve that vision—don’t take shortcuts.”

A Cubic Inch of Clay

Notkin has come up with a great exercise to introduce the principals of the use of time and focus while working with clay. He starts his workshops with an exercise he calls “A Cubic Inch of Clay.” Every participant gets one cubic inch of clay and one uninterrupted hour to work with it. He is very Draconian about silence during this time, and doesn’t tolerate any conversation in the room, nor any use of personal music devices or other electronic distractions. Notkin’s instructions are simply “I want you to focus for one full hour and use your hands, your eyes and the clay. You don’t have to use all of the clay, but you must utilize the full hour. If you think you’re done before the hour is up, you must find something else to do with your piece of clay.”

At the end of the exercise, Notkin asked his students how they felt. One piped up, “I wish I had more time,” which was met with murmurs of assent from the crowd (I remember a similar reaction from the workshop I participated in years ago). The students brought their intricate gems up to a center table. The diversity in both form and approach was stunning. As people exclaimed over each other’s creations, Notkin told them: “Another reason for this exercise is that I wanted you to interact with your own feelings about clay, and about time and space, before exposing you to my aesthetics and ideas.” He emphasized that he was not trying to spread the gospel of small-scale ceramics, and that he had no “evangelistic purpose” in this workshop exercise. He said, “I’m not trying to be the Billy Graham of small-scale clay. I just wanted to get you to experience clay on a different level than you might otherwise have considered. Maybe it opened a few new doors and ideas, and perhaps, new directions for you, or maybe it was the most excruciating hour of your life and you will never repeat the exercise. Either way, you have learned something about your own unique approach to the clay.”
Choosing a Technique

Notkin was kind enough to let me highlight some of his tile-making techniques that he teaches in his workshops. He did emphasize, though, that this is not the exact way he works in his own studio. He takes far more time with each piece, and spends one to two hours hand-detailing each tile after pressing. He also builds tools and equipment specific to each project, such as his foot-operated tile press that is calibrated to work with his press molds to make tiles of a consistent thickness. Still, there is a lot of good material to absorb in his workshop demonstrations, more than enough information to get anybody started with press molds for small tiles.

As he was unpacking his tools, Notkin answered a student’s question of why he uses slip casting for some pieces and press molding for others: “It comes down to the purpose of the piece, whether that piece will be a teapot, or perhaps a tile or sculpture. My teapots are best as slip cast parts, combined in unique ways to create a series. Also, the slip castings are generally lighter than press molded pieces, which is quite nice for a functional or semi-functional vessel. And, the slip cast body of a teapot is quite structurally sound.”

The kind of surface he wants a piece to have will determine his choice. Slip casting, by the very nature of deflocculated slip, renders a very smooth and homogenous surface. With a press mold, he can use a more robust clay body, multiple clay bodies swirled together, and even program porous textures into the clay by wedging in particles that burn out in the firing, such as sawdust, vermiculite, perlite, Styrofoam peanuts and even crushed egg shells. Press molding lends itself to making thicker, more substantial objects, especially in large-scale ceramic sculpture.

Making a Press Mold

Notkin laid out his press molds and tools on the table (figure 1). The thing to note is that the thickness of his press molds (approximately 3 inches) not only makes them sturdy for the compression of the clay, but also corresponds to the frame box he uses to limit the thickness of the pressed tile.

Using a freshly pressed tile in lieu of an original carved tile (all of Notkin’s designs are carved as leather-hard clay prototypes), he showed the class how to make the press molds. While the clay was still wet, he set the tile on a small square board that was the same size as the tile and the inner dimensions of the cottle, a box-like form into which the plaster is poured (figure 2). This small board keeps the wet clay from being distorted when placing the sturdy rubber bands around the cottle (figure 3). Once the tile was in place, he mixed and poured fresh plaster into it, striking the top edge of the mold with a fettling knife when the plaster had set to a plastic state. This forms an even thickness to each of the molds, and also makes the backside of the mold smooth and level. A new plaster mold needs to be allowed to dry for approximately a week before use. Notkin dries his molds on old refrigerator wire shelves so that air can circulate around the entire surface of the molds.

Using a Press Mold

Using a dry press mold he brought for demonstration, he set it on a wareboard (figure 4). He prepared a long loaf of clay to the dimensions of the tiles (figure 5), which are about three inches square. He then set
1 Different kinds of press-molds that Notkin brought to the workshop to use for demonstration.

2 Notkin sets a tile of still-wet clay on a board that corresponds to the inside measurement of the cottle.

3 The tile is in place and the cottle is banded and ready to be filled with plaster.

4 The desired press mold is placed on a wareboard.

5 A loaf of clay is prepared then sliced into 1¾ inch pieces.

6 Prepared clay is placed on a mold.

7 Newspaper is used to keep the clay from sticking to the board.

8 A wareboard is placed on top and the package placed on the floor.

9 Notkin places his full weight on the top board to press the clay.

10 A pressed tile ready to be trimmed.

11 Trim the flashing by holding the fettling knife against the side of the mold.

12 A small square of wood is used to compress and square the edges of the tile.
the loaf vertically on one end, and marked it about every 1¾ inches. At each of these marks, he pulled a cutting wire through from corner-to-corner to keep each resulting slab of clay evenly thick and fairly flat. He picked up one of these substantial slices and patted the surface with his palm, which brought up and popped any air bubbles, and then smoothed it with his fingers, to remove all traces of texture left by the cutting wire.

The clay was placed precisely on the image surface of the press mold (figure 6), the frame set in place, then a sheet of cut newspaper placed on the clay (figure 7). The newspaper keeps the clay from sticking to the wareboard that he then placed on top. He picked the stack up (figure 8) and placed it on the floor, then carefully set his boot on the wareboard (figure 9), and applied his full weight. He quipped, “This is about a 190-pound press—all solid muscle, of course.”

The frame box is 3¾ inches deep, making it ¾ inches higher than the press mold. When pressing a tile, this keeps the board he uses to press the clay with well away from the surface of the mold. If the board were allowed to compress the clay until it touched the image surface of the press mold, it would damage both the mold and the tile being pressed. The space between the image surface of the mold and the board is the thickness of the tile, so as long as the molds are of uniform size, the resulting tiles are of uniform thickness.

After pressing the tile, he brought everything back up to the table, flipping it along the way, so when he removed the top wareboard and the frame, the press mold was upside-down on the charge of clay (figure 10). He then pinched the corners of the flashing (the extra clay around the edges of a mold after pressing), to compress the tile tightly against the corner portions of the mold, which prevents stretching and stress cracks at the corners.

He cut the flashing away very carefully using a fettling knife held tightly against the vertical side of the press mold with his index finger (figure 11), noting that at the end of the cut, the direction the knife moved is down, to avoid pulling at the corner of the tile. He made one careful cut, and then a second to really clean up the edge. After cutting, he used a small scrap of wood to compress and ‘square’ the sides of the tile (figure 12).

He then set the tile, still attached to the mold, aside to let it dry a bit. He told the students that he normally lets the tiles dry on the molds until they release on their own, which takes about 45 minutes to an hour. Nevertheless, he has marked one side of his press molds with an arrow to indicate the best side to coax the tile away from the mold if need be.

Notkin only takes one cast of a mold per day. He explained that plaster becomes weakened when wet, so he lets each mold dry completely before using it again. He said that if he uses molds that are not completely dry they will start to lose the intricate detail that is intrinsic to his work, and the edges of the mold will begin to deteriorate. He has used fifty different molds to produce fifty pressed tiles in one day. “The key to successful production,” he emphasized, “is not to re-use a mold over and over again without adequate drying time, but to produce enough molds to allow production to proceed while allowing molds to recuperate between castings.”

Like every great demonstrator, Notkin made his method seem easy. It’s important to understand that he’s spent his lifetime working mindfully to distill his processes to these direct and logical steps. We’re lucky he’s also got the heart to share them with us.

Interview

Everyone takes away a different experience from a workshop. I interviewed Paula Romero Schmitt, who attended the workshop, about her experience a few weeks after she got back to her studio to see what impact the workshop had on her.

Annie: How did the exercise make you feel at the time?

Paula Romero Schmitt: At first, I was surprised by the scale of the challenge because lately everyone is telling me to try to make my pieces larger. I have an even greater appreciation for the craftsmanship Richard Notkin is accomplishing because of the many difficulties of working so small.

A: Did it change any perspective you might have about making work?

PRS: Yes, the workshop reminded me of how much I appreciate such craftsmanship and attention to detail. I’m taking a harder look at the work I’ve been making and feel challenged in a very positive direction.

A: Did you think it was a worthwhile exercise? Why or why not?

PRS: I think that the exercise gave me a glimpse at
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how the artist works and challenged me personally. It was really key to doing it before viewing slides and demos of his work; giving me a greater appreciation.

A: Now that you’ve been back to the studio, did the exercise have an effect on your daily studio practice?

PRS: I have been carving a small amount of “sedimentary” clay that Richard Notkin gave to us during the workshop and carefully following rough to smooth techniques that he demonstrated.

A: Anything else you might like to add about that exercise or the workshop in general?

PRS: The workshop inspired me to work every day; whether that is in the studio or sketching. I feel challenged to provide my work my best craftsmanship. Richard Notkin is a master artist and a wonderful human being and the Art Students League is so fortunate to have him here for all of us.

Annie is a studio ceramist maintaining her proper caffeine level in Denver, Colorado. Her hobbies include sculpting the poodle, dreaming crazy schemes, and writing about herself in the third person. You can check in with the spaceling at www.earthtoannie.com.

The Art Students League of Denver is an inclusive and inspiring art school and community where students of all abilities are guided by professional artists to reach their highest potential. Please visit their website for a full listing of ongoing classes and upcoming events, including their summer art market, workshops and children’s summer camps at www.asld.org.
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Mold Making and Slip Casting

BOOK REVIEW

Mold making and slip casting are ubiquitous in industrial ceramics, but potters often tend to think of mold making as cheating. However, anyone who spends long enough working in clay sooner or later will think of a form that requires a mold.

As author Andrew Martin points out in this book, molds are not just a way of replicating a form endlessly—molds are often used to make a form that’s simply too complex to successfully make by hand, and many artists who make molds don’t use them to make identical multiples at all.

While many sculptors make molds, often casting found objects and incorporating them into larger sculptural forms, Martin himself primarily makes very elegant pots. Most of the projects in this book involve making molds for pots, but Martin includes profiles of featured artists as well as many photographs illustrating contemporary examples of both sculptural and functional work.

This book differs from others on the subject because, unlike industry designers, Martin doesn’t make prototypes by creating a plaster model and turning it on a lathe. He has his own system of using templates to create a clay prototype, which is really quite simple, and his explanation of the process is straightforward and easy to follow. The book walks you through projects of increasing complexity, from a one-piece mold for a bowl to multi-piece molds for a teapot (which means making separate prototypes and molds for body, spout, handle and lid).

Perhaps 99% of readers will balk at this last project, and only a few will attempt a lidded piece at all. However, if you want to design a slip-cast form with a lid, Martin’s system works and you’ll be able to follow his step-by-step instructions. For the rest of us, his ideas for one-piece molds are simple and exciting. Even if you do not have a lot of clay experience, you should be able to execute them—indeed, they may enable you to make clay forms you can be quite proud of long before you achieve mastery of wheel throwing and handbuilding.

Mold making is indirect and conceptual, often executed backwards and upside-down. It’s easier to throw a pot than to plan the form out with a template and create a mold. It’s the conceptual nature of making a pot from a mold, as much as unfamiliarity with plaster and casting slip, that makes most potters balk at the idea. But if you start at the beginning of the book and read carefully, Martin’s explanations will help you understand the significance of an undercut, what kind of form can be made with a one-piece mold, and when you need a two-piece mold. If you then follow along with a couple of his projects, you’ll be well-equipped to branch out and come up with ideas of your own.

Forty-nine artists contributed images of their work to the book illustrating just some of the many creative possibilities when using molds.
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