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cover: Drop rim platter, 18 in. (46 cm) in diameter, stoneware with shino glazes and wood ash, fired to cone 10 in reduction, by Matthew Hyleck, Baltimore, Maryland; page 34.
from the editor
respond to shall@ceramicsmonthly.org

I’m not sure if it’s obvious to all of you, but there are a lot of things that have happened here at Ceramics Monthly this year—or, more accurately, at the Ceramic Publications Company. Any way you slice it, it’s the same small group of people acquiring and delivering all kinds of content, both in print, online, and in video. The year just seems to have flown by, and for good reason: We redesigned Ceramics Monthly with the March issue (it’s amazing that it seems like old news in some ways); launched the Ceramic Arts Daily Presents DVD series at the beginning of the year, with twelve titles now shipping; and relaunched our annual buyers guide as the Ceramic Arts Yearbook and Annual Buyers Guide (you’ll recall seeing it—and my mentioning it—last month). And after all of that, we had a little staff happy hour to celebrate and blow off some steam, and even then couldn’t resist turning it into an editorial research project (see “Beer in Your Clay” on page 26 to learn more).

It now occurs to me that we should have saved up a little energy, because now we find ourselves heading into the 60th volume year of Ceramics Monthly, wondering what we could do to top 2011. Actually, that’s probably not the way to think about it. We don’t need 2012 to beat 2011; we need to figure out what 2012 is going to be all by itself. We’ll build on what we’ve done so far and continue to explore and expand our coverage of clay in the world and in the studio. And we’d love to hear about what you would like to see.

We’ve had several suggestions already throughout the course of the year, including running a series of articles on the icons of modern ceramics (some well known, some not so much), a look back at some of the archival material “in the vault” of CM, as well as a then-and-now section that points to significant progress, achievements, and advancements in studio ceramics. All good ideas, and I’m sure there are more out there. Please understand that the new additions and improvements we’ve made over the last few years are not going away, and we’re not talking about another redesign of the magazine (I think the staff really would revolt at that prospect), but we know there is always something to add, something to tweak, something to look forward to, so send your ideas to the email address (mine) at the top of this page, and I promise we will seriously consider all of them—we always do.

It’s not a new concept, but making art is not so much about inspiration as it is about working. Has anyone ever said to you, “I’m not artistic; I can’t even draw a straight line,” and you look at them a bit sideways because first of all that’s what rulers are for and second, being artistic is like everything else: effort, sweat, and practice are what produce good results, not talent.

Coasting is just preparation for stopping at some point. So, let’s keep the momentum going, in the studio, in this magazine, in the field in general. We can begin with this very issue, which focuses on eight potters who tell us how they have accomplished various aspects of their work, from concept to forming to surface decoration. No, this does not replace the work you need to do in order to make these processes your own and have them fit your work, but I think you’ll agree that they will provide the fuel for active experimentation in your own studio, a direction to follow, and inspiration for real work and real results. Let’s get to work.

Sherman Hall
Porcelain deteriorates aluminum. That's a fact. It's also a fact that the pH of porcelain is not why an aluminum barrel corrodes (although some manufacturers say that by changing the pH, you will solve the problem). It doesn't. There is only one solution to prevent porcelain from corroding through a pugmill, and that's using stainless steel on both the barrel and auger. The MSV 25 series Mixer/Pugmill is simply the most versatile table top mixer/pugmill ever to be produced. Whether you need to recycle dry scrap, mix a batch, or just pug boxed clay, the MSV is a pleasure to use. The Bailey MSV is also an auto-feed pugmill. The MSV can extrude tiles, tubes and shapes.

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Problems and Solutions

I appreciate the article by Glen Brown bringing the “Ceramic Sprawlscape” artists together [October CM, p. 40] to show what is being created in our field of ceramics reflecting the troubling expansion of suburbia on our planet and our resources. His depth of exploration into how each artist addressed the subject was fascinating and inspiring. However, Brown’s conclusion that the display of conscience “may fall short of activism” is an understatement. For me, each artist’s work seems to shout as loud as the voices of demonstrators on Wall Street. Might they not be illuminating the problem so that solutions may follow?

Joan Powell, LaBarque Creek, Missouri

In the October Letters, we published a letter from Ron Kovatch that directly addressed the work of Michael T. Schmidt in a negative way. Because I did not want to contrive a confrontation in print, I did not alert Mr. Schmidt of the publication of this original letter. The role of CM Letters is to be an open forum, but I do regret not affording Mr. Schmidt the opportunity for rebuttal at the time, and I hope that he and CM readers will forgive this misstep. The response from Mr. Schmidt that follows will hopefully bring some balance to the discussion.—Sherman Hall, Editor

May the Dialog Improve

In the Letters of the October issue of CM, Ron Kovatch, Crafts Program Chair at the University of Illinois at Champaign-Urbana, School of Art and Design, wrote a letter entitled “Is This As Good As It Gets?” Mr. Kovatch’s letter discusses a particular work of mine, which was printed in the May issue of CM (p. 22). He references my work in expressing his disapproval of current trends in the discipline of ceramics and perhaps in the broader art world as well.

Kovatch’s letter is a personal attack on me, my creative work, and the decision by Valdosta State University (VSU) to grant me tenure. He uses my work and experience as an educator as evidence of his concern that “our collective imaginations are bankrupt.” Although I share some concerns about current trends in the field, I do not agree with his opinion of my work or my accomplishments as an artist and an educator. Further, I find it troubling that Mr. Kovatch admits that he does not know me nor had he heard of my work before writing his letter. This raises questions about his own professionalism, as he offered a scathing account of my own career based on a single image in CM or (at best) a cursory Google search of my name. Obviously, Mr. Kovatch is a close friend of Dan Anderson and holds his work in high regard, as do I. Mr. Kovatch is certainly entitled to his opinions; however, I do not think he is entitled to make unfounded and inaccurate assertions that impugn my artistic and professional integrity in an open national forum.

Certainly those who know my work and know me personally understand that my creative work goes far beyond themes of oil/industry, including many conceptual and technical areas both in and out of the discipline of ceramics. My work has been adjudicated into regional, national, and international exhibitions, has been peer reviewed by other professional artists both in my institution and outside of it, has received awards, has been published in juried books and periodicals. I have also taught hundreds and hundreds of students, assisting each one in every way possible, including mentoring them after graduation.

Kovatch quotes Merriam Webster as defining plagiarism as “the practice of taking someone else’s work or ideas, and passing them off as one’s own.” I’ll take it one step further, pointing out that the Latin root means “to kidnap.” In other words, as Harry Nodin in his book Image Grammar has put it, “Plagiarism is duplication.” By the way, definitions are not evidence. My eleven-year career at VSU as a tenured full professor is filled with proof of outstanding teaching, service, and scholarship, which also indicates that I am not a novice nor a hobbyist who saw a Dan Anderson workshop one afternoon and then went back to my garage and began copying his work so I could reap all the benefits of his work and name. Is everyone else wrong about my work? Have I duped the entire art world? My oil/industrial works in clay reference and pay tribute to Dan Anderson’s work and the work of other artists such as Jim Koudelka, Joe Pinz, Ted Neal, Todd Shanafelt, and others. I also routinely present the work of these figures in Powerpoint presentations, lectures, and discussions in and out of the classroom.

I take familiarizing students with the work of other artists seriously and feel professionally obligated to be respectful of the accomplishments of others in the discipline. An artist has an obligation to be aware of important earlier works by other artists—in this case, artists like Dan Anderson, but others as well. Ignorance is not an excuse. Understanding that history and making reference to such work when creating one’s own is part of the process. Ed Ruscha is another artist that I am aware of and dearly admire. His 1963 book Twentysix Gasoline Stations serves as a point of reference for me and other artists as well.

Understanding an artist’s message is extremely important and often cannot be inferred from a single image or small group of works. Mr. Kovatch draws a rigid line concerning plagiarism and uses my work as an example of egregiously crossing that line. Kovatch states, “If Mr. Schmidt’s pots followed as one’s own is part of the process. Ed Ruscha is another artist that I am aware of and dearly admire. His 1963 book Twentysix Gasoline Stations serves as a point of reference for me and other artists as well.

Understanding an artist’s message is extremely important and often cannot be inferred from a single image or small group of works. Mr. Kovatch draws a rigid line concerning plagiarism and uses my work as an example of egregiously crossing that line. Kovatch states, “If Mr. Schmidt’s pots included in the Pewabic exhibition were a moment of science, meaning a formal paper disseminating scholarly research, it would be regarded as plagiarism.” I have received many, many responses via email, phone, and Facebook in response to this letter and that specific line. The curator at Pewabic Pottery had plenty to say as well. A former student of mine, Mathew McConnell, now Visiting Assistant Professor at the University of Arkansas wrote this to me:

“I think about the topic a lot, naturally, and am constantly taking note of the way artists share, commune, and build off of each other’s research practices. It is the way forward—the only way forward. There is no
such thing as pure invention of new form, and we should be encouraging the very type of borrowing you have done from Dan Anderson (and others), not condemning it. I often think of Thomas Kuhn in these matters, who explains that most scientific advance comes from highly convergent thinking. Basically, we can’t invent new ideas until we have exhausted the possibilities in the branch of study we are engaged with. And yes, you share the same branch as Dan Anderson. So what? Obviously it’s a branch that still has the potential to bear fruit for you and many others.”

Colleagues in the hard sciences familiar with Kovatch’s letter pointed out that, in many areas of scholarship and research, accomplishment only comes through shared ideas, borrowed conclusions, and collaborative work.

Ultimately, many artists produce work that is steeped in the ideas and work of other artists, both historic and contemporary. I could write a dissertation on that subject alone, as many of us could. Yes, some of my creative work fits within the industrial genre. I utilize some of the same brands and logos because they are attractive, interesting, and evocative, and they fit with the concepts that I continue to explore. There are a limited number of industrial corporate icons out there to be used. Is the Sinclair dinosaur forever off-limits to other artists?

Further, I work very hard as a professor and a professional. It’s extremely disappointing when another ceramic artist and educator who is familiar with the amount of energy it takes to succeed as an art professional purposely writes something defamatory and inaccurate, potentially undercutting my career. I believe Kovatch could have made his points in a far more effective and informed manner. This letter raised many questions for me and I truly felt stunned (among other things). I’ve tried to craft a response that is thoughtful and informed and not overly defensive. I’ve shared Kovatch’s letter with my students and colleagues, and I’ve seen it spreading throughout the electronic world and appear on discussion forums as well. In the end, I know this exchange has already led to productive discussions and conversations, and I hope it continues.

Perhaps I should have just ignored all this, spending the time throwing a tennis ball to my dog—wait, I don’t have one! I wonder what kind of dog Dan Anderson has?

Michael T. Schmidt, Professor of Art, Valdosta State University, Valdosta, Georgia

Timeliness

Dear Mr. Hall, Mr. Kovatch, and the uncoun ted many who actively participate in the creative process (with and without clay): The letter from Mr. Kovatch in the October issue is timely, pertinent, and over the top. I’m so glad it was written and hope that it re-ignites conversation about how anyone can possibly manage to be an artist in the 21st century.

Oil cans (as trompe l’oeil and also as olive oil dispensers), industrial smoke stacks, towers, and appropriated corporate logos. Um... I can recall many artists who do this sort of thing whom I’ve come across in my 20+ years as an exhibiting ceramicist. There’s a guy who’s been doing Baltimore [American Craft Council show] who makes work like this, and several who use it as a general style. Then there’s Christa Assad with her poetic take on iron, silos, lookouts, etc. There’s Karen Shapiro doing mighty awesome raku incarnations of rusted Penzoil cans. I suppose you’d have to include all the photographers (Bernd and Hilla Becher specifically) and painters who have famously, or invisibly, created stunning images of industrial blight, decay, blast furnaces, machinery, foundry sites, shipyards, etc. The industrialized world is ripe with inspiration for clay and glaze and imagery. Nostalgia plays a key role in this exploration. What about the artists who defy gasoline stations and pumps or oyst ers who sell the real, old pumps at art galleries in places like Santa Barbara and Albuquerque?

I know a little of Dan Anderson’s work. A little of Michael Schmidt’s. I’d say there’s a thematic crossover, but Schmidt’s work is generally more animated, nodding toward whimsical even. His pure industrial shapes seem to have an anthropomorphized feel to them while Anderson’s are more serious and sculptural. I wonder if they know each other, whether one ever studied with the other.

Are all the millions of tons of iron rich wood-fired work smelted into red-brown stony form an outcropping of all this or forethought to it? We use an industrial process; it seems natural to call upon the origins and mutations of industry as we muddle along. Oh, and then there’s the tube/vessel/cylinder/column/pipe issue—a perfect fit to pottery’s spin cycle.

I feel strongly that the topic of original ideas is vital, but to go on a tirade about this particular situation when so much else is weighing on us—yikes. I wish Mr. Kovatch had used the opportunity to discuss the ever-more-difficult task of being creative in a souped-up, time-warp world where the moment an idea comes into consciousness one can search the Internet to find, again and again, how unoriginal it turned out to be. Worse; if we don’t search for it, someone else will.

James Aarons, Mokelumne Hill, California

Corrections

On page 44 of Ceramic Arts 2012: Yearbook and Annual Buyers Guide, which you received with the November issue, we published a glaze tip with some rather cryptic percentages: “Try chrome oxide at x% combined with tin oxide at x% for chrome/tin pink.” No, it’s not algebra, but if you’d like to “solve for x” and mix up some chrome-tin pinks, the correct percentages are chrome oxide at 0.15–0.5% combined with tin oxide up to 7.5%. If you’re like us, those glaze tests will be a lot easier to do than that algebra. For more information on chrome-tin pinks and other reds, see “Techno File: Four Ways to Red” on page 14 of the April 2011 CM.

In the Materials Update section of that same publication, we reported that Laguna Clay had a 5-year supply of Gerstley borate and that the chemical composition varied. According to a company spokesperson, they have a 19–20 year supply, with a consistent boron content of 26.8%. For a current, complete analysis, go to www.lagunaclay.com/support.—Eds.
**TECHNO FILE**

**feldspar**

Except for clay and silica, feldspar is the most common raw material in ceramics. It is also the most common mineral on the face of the earth—making up more than half the earth’s crust. Most feldspar has an almost perfect ratio of flux, alumina, and silica to make a glass at high-fire temperatures.

### Defining the Terms

**Feldspar**—Any of a group of natural crystalline aluminum silicate minerals containing sodium, potassium, calcium or barium. Alkali feldspars (those containing sodium and potassium) are used most in ceramics.

**Albite**—Pure sodium feldspar with the chemical formula Na₂O·Al₂O₃·6SiO₂. Very rare in nature.

**Orthoclase and Microcline**—The two crystalline forms of pure potassium feldspar, both with the chemical formula K₂O·Al₂O₃·6SiO₂. Very rare in nature.

**Frit**—A synthetic source of glaze flux and frequently of alumina and silica, manufactured by melting the ingredients together, cooling the resulting glass, and grinding it to a fine powder.

### A Natural Frit

As a crystalline mineral precipitated from molten rock over geologic time, feldspar is definitely not a designer material. Feldspar is sometimes called a natural frit and is composed entirely of crystals, but a commercial frit is made up of a finely ground glass manufactured with a specific composition. More energy is needed to melt crystals than glass, so to give it time to melt, feldspar requires a somewhat slower firing, most often to higher temperatures. While a frit can be manufactured with any desired ratio of flux, alumina, and silica, with feldspar what you mine is what you get. Thus feldspar is a sort of good-news bad-news story.

The good news is that the natural laws controlling how silicon, aluminum, and oxygen link to form the feldspar crystal ensure that the ratio of silica and alumina in pure feldspar is fixed.* More good news is that the flux elements exist in a fixed ratio to the alumina and silica.

Part of the bad news, however, is that nature permits sodium and potassium to occupy that flux amount in infinitely variable proportions to one another. The amount of either in a given feldspar depends entirely on what was handy when the feldspar precipitated from the molten rock in the earth’s crust. Virtually every alkali feldspar deposit on earth has at least some difference in analysis.

In scientific terms, albite and microcline/orthoclase can form a solid solution. That is, an alkali feldspar can theoretically vary from 100% sodium to 100% potassium as its flux constituent. Soda feldspars actually tend to have at least 30% of their flux as potassium, while potash feldspars usually have at least 15% of their flux as sodium.

The rest of the bad news is that feldspar most commonly occurs as a rock, usually along with mica, quartz, and other minerals. In a feldspar mine, the rock is ground to a powder and sophisticated techniques are used to separate the minerals. How well and how consistently mining companies clean and concentrate the feldspar that artists use has virtually nothing to do with artists and focuses on the folks who buy 100-ton rail-car loads of feldspar to make literally millions of tons of glass per year. Quality control good enough to make beer bottles may not be as good as we would like in the studio, but who is ultimately the bigger end user of feldspar—studio artists or folks molding beer bottles? Feldspar is ultimately an industrial mineral and we have to accept that its quality is controlled by what’s good enough for industry.

* (Note the difference in the ratio of silica and alumina between feldpars, spodumene, and nepheline syenite. There is less silica in the latter two. The crystal structure explains this. This also explains the differences between potash feldspars to nepheline syenite and spodumene.)

### Lifespan of Feldspars

Bernard Leach used Varcoe feldspar in a clay body recipe he published in *A Potter’s Book* in 1940. Have you ever heard of that feldspar? Not likely. Varcoe and Sons was sold to English China Clays, Ltd., and Leach’s feldspar disappeared from the market.


Currently there are five common feldspars available in the US: G200 HP (“HP” for high potassium), Custer, Minspar 200, Nepheline Syenite, and Talison Spodumene (formerly Gwalia). The relatively subtle differences in their chemical compositions are shown to the left.
Making Adjustments in the Glaze Lab

Commercial frits have generally consistent analyses. Naturally occurring feldspars are less consistent and subject to change over time. While all raw materials should be tested before use, this needs to be a requirement before using each new batch of feldspar in the studio.

When feldspar is added to a clay body, it helps to melt very fine quartz into a glass phase that provides strength in the fired body. The amount of feldspar needed in a stoneware body depends entirely upon the flux level of the clays composing the body. For a fixed recipe of clays, various amounts of feldspar are tested to achieve a body with the desired level of vitrification from a given firing cycle.

The difference in silica content between Custer and G-200HP feldspars (see graph on previous page) is enough to change glaze fit. While these two potash feldspars can generally be substituted one-for-one, if one wants precise control of glaze chemistry, then a more accurate substitute for Custer is G-200HP plus 3% silica. When an existing feldspar disappears or a new one enters the market, some substitution such as this is likely to be necessary to achieve consistent results.

Time is also a factor. The landscape varies and as industry excavates from one mine to another the composition of feldspar changes along with it. The feldspar you were using five or ten years ago is most likely not exactly the same as what you are using today, even if it is the same brand name. Fusion button tests of the new and old material will guide you in whether and how to substitute other materials to accommodate the new feldspar’s chemistry. To start:

1 Get a full chemical analysis of the new and old feldspars, if they are available.
2 Fire fusion buttons (a few grams of feldspar pressed into a small mold such as a crucible) of both materials side by side to get a visual indication of the differences in the two materials. Note color changes, melting temperatures, opacity, and surface effects.
3 Adjust recipes as these differences indicate and fire recipe tests to confirm that the adjustments are correct.

Some ceramic artists use chemistry to adjust clay and glaze recipes before testing. Others rely entirely on testing. The method chosen may say something about an artist’s working style, but not the results, both methods work equally well.

Flux Unity of Common Feldspars

- G-200HP currently has the highest source of potassium followed by Custer feldspar.
- To approximate the G-200 we were accustomed to, mix 70% of the HP version with 30% soda spar, advises Imerys.
- Minspar 200 has the most significant source of sodium but with a good bit of potassium and less solubility than nepheline syenite.
- Imerys also stopped producing the popular Kona F-4 feldspar after a damaging fire at the plant. Now the new soda spar of choice is Minspar 200.
- The flux in spodumene is 98%+ lithium.
- Gwalia refers to the deposit in Greenbushes, Western Australia, which is a leading source of spodumene and is now owned by Talison Lithium Limited.
I routinely find myself needing an extra hand while pouring glaze over my pots. I solved the problem by using an automotive drain pan—typically used for changing oil in a car—that I attached to my pottery wheel like a throwing bat. Now I can center and secure various chucks to the interior of the drip pan to hold my pots and I can rotate the wheel as I pour glaze. I can also control how fast or slow I want to spin the pot depending on the decoration I choose for the surface. I also have the added benefit of collecting the glaze in an easy to clean container.

Cut a plastic cutting board into four chunks that are about 2 inches square each. Drill a 3/8-inch hole in one. Drill two overlapping 3/8-inch holes in the second one so that they create an oval. (Look at one of the newer plastic bats to see exactly how this looks.) Put the drilled chunks on your wheelhead bat pins, being careful to center the oval opening on the pin. Place the plain chunks near the outer edge, equidistant from the bat pins. Put silicone on the four chunks of cutting board and carefully lower the drain pan onto the wheel head. Slowly turn the wheel and center the pan. Put a bag of clay in the pan if you need weight to get a good seal. Let it set up overnight. You can also glue the drain pan to a plastic bat. If you decide to glue, be sure to seal the holes in the bat so the silicone won’t glue the bat to the wheel head.

Send your tip and tool ideas, along with plenty of images, to editorial@ceramicsmonthly.org. If we use your idea, you’ll receive a complimentary one-year subscription to CM!

MATERIALS & TOOLS

- Automotive drain pan (The one shown is 16¼ inches in diameter, holds 3½ gallons, and costs about $12 from an auto parts store.)
- Plastic ½-inch-thick cutting board
- Hand saw or table saw
- Drill and ¾-inch drill bit
- Silicone caulk or construction adhesive
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1 Mark Pharis’ teapots, 8 in. (20 cm) in height, earthenware, 2010. Photo: Peter Lee. 2 Paul Eshelman’s large casserole, 11½ in. (29 cm) in length, 2011. 3 Ole Jensen’s colander, manufactured by Royal Copenhagen, 9 in. (23 cm) in length, tin-glazed majolica, 1994. Photo: Jeppe Gudmundsen Holmgreen. 4 Tomoo Hamada’s vase, 10 in. (25 cm) in height, kaki glaze with akae decoration. 5 Rob Sutherland’s jar, 12 in. (30 cm) in height, porcelain, fired to cone 10, 2009. 6 Takeshi Yasuda’s five bottles, 20 in. (51 cm) in height, porcelain. “TableSpace,” at Fosdick-Nelson Gallery, NYSCC at Alfred University (http://fosdicknelson.alfred.edu) in Alfred, New York, through December 1.

Jar lid with monkey and cacao pods, 13 in. (33 cm) in length, from Toniná, Chiapas, Mexico, 250–900 CE. Photo copyright Conaculta-Inah, Jorge Vertiz. “Maya: Secrets of their Ancient World,” at Royal Ontario Museum (www.rom.on.ca) in Toronto, Ontario, Canada, through April 9, 2012.


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Whether it was a couple hundred years ago or over a thousand years ago, deposits of clay and natural resources found by the potters before us determined the most ideal locations for pottery production. Here’s a look at the history of a few of the world’s most well-known pottery-producing cities, what determined their success, and what their current status is today.

**Cornwall, England**

William Cookworthy first discovered kaolin deposits in Cornwall in 1746, and the region’s kaolin soon became regarded as the finest European kaolin of the time. The area’s first porcelain factory was founded in 1768, and many more potteries, including St. Ives, opened during the 19th century as the ceramic industry grew. By 1910, Cornwall exported 75% of Europe and North America’s kaolin. To date, around 120 million tons of kaolin have been extracted from the region, but it is estimated that enough still remains to meet demands for at least the next one hundred years. Today, the region is still supported by industry, with about 80% of the mined kaolin going to use in the paper industry, and only about 12% used in the ceramic industry. Cornwall is still highly regarded due to the pottery at St. Ives founded by Bernard Leach.

**Ohio River Valley, Ohio**

Consisting of parts of Ohio, Pennsylvania, West Virginia, Kentucky, and Indiana, the Ohio River Valley received deposits of flint, feldspars, as well as some kaolins and other clays from glaciers moving over the region during the last ice age. English potter James Bennett discovered a clay in East Liverpool, Ohio that he thought was comparable to those of his home country in 1839. Soon after, hundreds of potteries sprang up in the area to meet the demands for tableware, whiteware, and American Art Pottery. The most notable included Rookwood, Weller, Homer Laughlin, and Hall China, many of which were located in East Liverpool, known as the “Pottery Capital of the World,” and “America’s Crockery City,” as well as the sister city to Stoke-on-Trent, England. At its peak (1840–1930), East Liverpool produced more than half of the US annual ceramics output, primarily marketing through department stores and mail order catalogs. During the 1940s, many companies began to disappear due to the resource shortages of WWII and insufficient quantities of local kaolin, required for whiteware production. Today, only two pottery factories remain in operation in the area: Hall China and Homer Laughlin.

**Höhr-Grenzhausen, Germany**

The Rhine Valley region of Germany contains the largest and purest deposits of ball clay in Europe, formed by the River Rhine. Early ceramic vessels have been found in the region dating as far back as the 5th–7th centuries, with the region’s first stoneware clay body created here in the 13th century. The very first salt-glazing also occurred here, later developing into the typical shiny gray Westerwald salt glaze. Höhr-Grenzhausen, known as the “jug baking town”, and the surrounding region produce a large range of stoneware clay bodies varying in color between red to white. The stoneware produced here was highly regarded during the 17th and 18th centuries, utilizing the River Rhine to transport wares such as jugs, steins, and bake-ware. Today, the region continues to export large amounts of ball clay, as well as prepared ceramic clay bodies.

**Jingdezhen, China**

As a source for pure kaolin, Jingdezhen’s Gaoling Mountain also provided the material with its name—Kao-ling, which later entered the English language as kaolin. Jingdezhen is believed to have been producing porcelain since the Han dynasty (202 BCE–220 CE) and was established as the main production city for China’s Imperial porcelain in 1004 CE. The nearby Chang River
was utilized for transport of raw materials and porcelain products, elevating Jingdezhen’s ceramic industry to a massive scale. Today kaolin is still mined from many of the same quarries in the Gaoling Mountain, porcelain pottery is still being produced using the same techniques as it was centuries ago, and Jingdezhen continues to export commercial wares on a massive scale.

Mata Ortiz, Mexico

As a small village with a population of about 2000 in Chihuahua, Mexico near the US border, Mata Ortiz’s traditional ancient Mesoamerican pottery techniques were lost centuries ago. Due to the efforts of one individual, Juan Quezada, the Mata Ortiz pottery tradition was revived. During the 1960s, Quezada examined local shards and materials, then replicated the ancient style of pottery, and in turn taught the technique to his family and community. Using the rich earthenware clay and pigment deposits extracted from the nearby El Indio mountain and Palanganas River, villagers produce traditional pots in a variety of colors, just as their ancestors did before them. Today Mata Ortiz pottery is considered a legitimate folk art, with more than 400 local artists working in this style4 and many major exhibitions and documentaries on the subject. Recognized for his efforts by the Mexican government, Juan Quezada has raised the economic status of the Mata Ortiz/Chihuahua area.

Meissen, Germany

Arising from the rich kaolin deposits of the Elbe River and nearby mountains in the region, Meissen became known for producing the highest quality porcelain outside of Jingdezhen, China. As part of the ongoing European quest for porcelain, Ehrenfried Walther von Tschirnhaus and Johann Friedrich Böttger, a scientist and an alchemist respectively, were commissioned by Augustus the Strong, Elector of Saxony and King of Poland, and successfully created the first European porcelain in 1708. Two years later, the Meissen factory was established and began producing what would become the world’s most expensive porcelain wares and figurines, with the height of production occurring between 1895–1925. A cavern near Mei- sen remains the smallest and oldest active kaolin mine in Europe,3 and continues to provide kaolin for the Meissen factory. While there is less of a consumer demand today, the factory is still operational, producing fine porcelain ware.

Seville, Spain

Situated in the lower portion of the Iberian Peninsula, in the Guadalquivir basin, the Guadalquivir River’s banks supply Seville with much of the resources needed for its ceramic tile industry. Deposits of illite and red clays allowed Seville, as well as other ceramic-producing cities nearby (Granada, Manises, Talavera de la Reina, and Toledo) to produce brick and roof tile, wall and floor tile, as well as pottery, with decorative wall/floor tile being what the area came to be known for. Many different influences have impacted Spanish ceramics, most notably the Islamic influence of Hispano-Moresque ware of the 14th–15th centuries and the spread of Italian maiolica in the 16th–17th centuries. After reaching a high point in the 16th century, Seville and its ceramic industry headed into somewhat of an economic decline after a plague in the mid 17th century. In the last few decades, Seville’s tile industry has picked back up due to increased demand for tile, especially in places like California, where Spanish tile homes are popular.

Stoke-on-Trent, England

Commonly known as “the Potteries” and often considered as the home of the English pottery industry, Stoke-on-Trent was originally made up of six smaller pottery-producing towns that eventually grew together during the 19th century and formed Stoke-on-Trent in 1910. Ball clay, formed in part by the rivers and geology of earlier time periods, is abundant in the basins of the region. The area was heavily reliant on the coal industry since the 13th century, a resource that greatly benefitted Stoke-on-Trent’s potteries. One of the better known potteries, the Wedgewood factory, was started in 1769 and produced a variety of stoneware products. Wedgewood has experienced some financial and ownership issues, reflective of England’s general decline in manufacturing in the 1980s–1990s, but it continues to produce pottery and Stoke-on-Trent remains the center of the English ceramic industry.

End Notes:
I’ve had many conversations (many over beers) about the use of ceramic vessels and how they relate to the enjoyment of beverages. These conversations take two general directions: why and how clay might be better because of its material properties, or how it might be better because previous generations knew something that we have lost sight of in our rush toward progress and “newer” materials that are preferable for reasons that have more to do with production than utility or enjoyment. After all, the earliest alcoholic beverage dates to 7000 BCE, and was discovered in the pores of a ceramic vessel.

Now, many of us already enamored of clay as a material are likely to give clay a shot at just about anything without thinking too much about it. Well, we thought about it, and then, because I couldn’t come up with a better reason than aesthetics for preferring glass over clay (not that there needs to be a better reason), we tested the most likely chance clay has of proving itself in this role: insulation. If you’re anything like me, that first happy hour beer disappears fast enough that no material would make any appreciable difference in the temperature, but there is something to be said for avoiding warm beer, and so we pursued this goal undaunted.

**Our Methods**

We made vessels out of stoneware (3% absorption), earthenware (8% absorption), and porcelain (1.5% absorption) that were the same dimensions and thickness as a glass pint. We then filled each with exactly one 12-ounce bottle of beer that had been chilled to 38°F for 24 hours. Temperature was measured with submerged thermometers that were equal in temperature reading both immediately prior to submerging and directly after reaching 38°F in the beer. We did not drink these, but let them sit as we enjoyed the same beverages out of similar vessels. The temperature of the beer in each vessel was recorded at 10-minute intervals, rounded to the nearest whole degree.

**Our Hypothesis**

You probably have your own hypothesis by now, but ours was that the material itself would not make that much difference in practice, except perhaps for the earthenware, because of its porous structure. We surmised that clay vessels are, and were, often made with thicker walls than most glassware, and any advantage in insulating properties would have come from that. We also posited that we, as makers of clay vessels, would likely enjoy this activity more than the actual results of our test. On this score, we were confident.

**Our Results**

See hypothesis. Actually, there were some small surprises, like the fact that earthenware jumped in temperature right away, but then held temperature steady better than the others. Glass, porcelain, and stoneware were within 1 degree of one another throughout the testing.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Material</th>
<th>10 min.</th>
<th>20 min.</th>
<th>30 min.</th>
<th>60 min.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Glass</td>
<td>40°F</td>
<td>41°F</td>
<td>43°F</td>
<td>46°F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Porcelain</td>
<td>41°F</td>
<td>42°F</td>
<td>44°F</td>
<td>46°F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stoneware</td>
<td>39°F</td>
<td>41°F</td>
<td>43°F</td>
<td>45°F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Earthenware</td>
<td>43°F</td>
<td>43°F</td>
<td>44°F</td>
<td>46°F</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Conclusion**

Drink out of whatever makes you happy, at the rate that will make your beverage the temperature you prefer.
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Animals on pots, animals as vessels, animal sculptures, they’re ubiquitous in some ways, and have been for many centuries. But why? Apparently we are not only culturally programmed to pay attention to animals, but biologically as well.

Why do so many ceramic artists use animal imagery, either three dimensional or drawn, in their work? It’s a question I’ve heard often, sometimes asked about why this or that particular animal seems to be so popular at the moment. Well, the artist must enjoy creating the imagery, and if they’re selling their work in shops or galleries, there must be an audience who responds to it. I certainly count myself as a part of that admiring crowd. I often wonder why I respond to that kind of work, though. Why do I immediately pay attention when I see the image of an animal? Why do I keep looking at the work, noticing the other details and assessing its qualities, while another piece with a different form or surface decoration passes unnoticed?

I was given a plausible answer to why this happens and how it works one day as I drove home from work. National Public Radio journalist Jon Hamilton was reporting on a recent study published in *Nature Neuroscience* where researchers showed that individual brain cells in the amygdala, the part of our brains that generates emotions, respond to images of animals. Interestingly, these neurons only fired off and sent a signal to the brain when the patients in the study were shown images of animals. They did not respond to images of humans or inanimate objects.

Hamilton interviewed the lead author of the study, Christof Koch, a researcher at Caltech, who explained that it made sense that cells in this part of the brain would respond to animals because it “seems to be specialized in alerting us to things that are emotionally important to us, either positive or because they’re scary.” It’s a survival mechanism, important to our evolutionary development. Koch went on to explain that animals provide food and comfort on the positive side, and can be a threat on the negative side. Separate behavioral studies by other researchers back this up, with people paying far more attention to images of animals (and other people) than anything else, and focusing on each for equal amounts of time.

Today, when we dominate so much of the earth, and animals are very rarely a threat to many of us, at least not on a daily basis—we still have this biologically driven emotional response to them. As artists, we continue to engage with the animals in our environment and imaginations. As subjects in our work, the image of an animal provides a way to engage our audience, to draw them in. So, they’re subjects and part of a communication strategy. Whether we’re trying to evoke a feeling of comfort, joy, grief, fear, or longing, or trying to convey concepts about our relationship to the environment or even human behavior and experiences, employing the image of an animal is one way to achieve this connection with our audience.
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I moved to China in early 2010 to accept the position of educational director at the Pottery Workshop Shanghai. While this 7000 mile move took me away from friends and family, I was excited to experience a culture whose pottery tradition is thousands of years old. From terra cotta roof tiles to porcelain Meiping vases, China’s cultural foundation is built on clay.

The opportunity to manage a studio overseas has been exciting, challenging, and rewarding. Overcoming the language barrier has been a great source of humor for myself and my colleagues. For example, when my name is pronounced by native Mandarin speakers, it is remarkably similar to the word for stupid. This word play has been an easy way to diffuse the tension that cultural differences can create. Through teaching in a multinational studio, I have come to understand that the love of clay is a great unifier. I often see students who do not share a common language laughing with each other as they use hand gestures to explain their ideas.

Not long after my arrival, we moved our studio to a newly remodeled location. Our team of experienced potters designed the perfect studio. Floor drains, movable kiln vent hoods, copious wall sockets, a specialized glaze lab, and an in-house coffee shop are just a few of the features that make our studio exceptional. The most unique aspect of our studio is the character of its location. We are tucked down a quiet nong tang (or alley) in the heart of the French concession, a major area for international commerce since the late 1800s. In a frenetic city of over 20 million residents, we have established a creative oasis for ceramic artists.

The only downside to our urban setting is the lack of storage space. Our solution has been off-site storage in a 1940s bomb shelter that also doubles as a shipping depot for banana distribution. We hand carry raw materials down a flight of steps between the studio and the
storage room. While this is good exercise, it is quite a task considering our in-house trading company supplies tons of raw materials to schools around the country. Our spatial limitations force efficient studio management. As a result we have the cleanest and most well organized studio that I have seen in China.

Being in a community studio has altered the way I work. For the previous seven years I shared semi-private studio space with no more than a handful of people. I currently share my 1000-square-foot studio with 35 students, 6 renters, and up to 100 group-class participants every month. In my old studios, I was able to lay out slab-built forms on large tables. As they dried, I worked on thrown forms. This rhythm of making was very productive for me. I would make pots for a week and then spend a week decorating. In our tightly packed studio, this work pattern is not possible. My work must fit on one roller cart at the end of each day. It now takes twice as long to make the same amount of work. This change of pace has been a blessing in disguise, because I spend more time handling, and therefore thinking about, each individual piece. As a former production potter, my instinct for “bigger, faster, lighter” often leads me to sacrifice creativity for output. My change of studio has shifted my motivation from quantity to quality.

Materials
Relocating to a new continent challenged me to work with new materials. As an earthenware potter, the lack of standardized frits made low-fire pottery a difficult option. The switch from cone 03 to cone 6 provided a new area of ceramic chemistry to explore. In the past I relied on a glaze-calculation program to aid with testing, but Chinese suppliers provide no chemical analysis for their materials. Materials can change radically from one batch to the next so every bag must be tested. My research progressed slowly through trial and error. My dedicated coworkers and I used hundreds of test tiles to develop eight stable glazes. Finding a versatile clay body presents another interesting challenge. In the United States, clays are blended for maximum plasticity and strength. In contrast, clay making in China follows the “what you see is what you get” mentality. Traditionally artisans adapted production processes to the unique characteristics of their clay, developing regional styles that owed much of their aesthetic to the material. Altering the clay to meet my own needs has been surprisingly complicated. For example, in a quest for better throwing clay I added the plasticizer bentonite. Chinese bentonite is not finely milled thus making its properties similar to fine grog, so it actually decreased plasticity in the clay body. This counter-
intuitive outcome forced me to adapt my style to the material. My throwing skills have increased from the need to out maneuver less plastic clay bodies.

Using unfamiliar materials has helped me become more flexible in my studio practice. My first year was spent testing clays, slips, and glazes to find a combination that fit my aesthetic. In the end, I settled on stoneware from Yixing, porcelain slip from Jingdezhen, and commercial underglazes and glazes from the Chrysanthos Company. With a solid group of materials, I am again producing a larger amount of work for exhibitions.

Paying Dues (and Bills)

My ceramic training started in a high school that offered many art courses. My teachers encouraged my interest and gave me a strong foundation in ceramics. In 1998, I enrolled at Appalachian State University to study art education. The proximity of the school to the Penland area helped me tap into the vibrant arts community in western North Carolina. This wellspring of knowledge taught me the ins and outs of daily studio life. After graduating, my studio assistant jobs were a great introduction to running a small business. In 2007, I sought an MFA in ceramics from the University of Florida in Gainesville. The academic setting pushed me conceptually and filled the gaps in my technical knowledge. All of these experiences have been essential in developing my understanding of clay and business.

Although I officially started my ceramic business in 2004, I have supplemented my income with production work or teaching. The majority of my time is now focused on managing the Pottery Workshop Shanghai. I spend around 50 hours a week in the studio. Half of my time is spent on marketing and other administrative duties. The other half is split between teaching and making my own work.

Body

Committing to the ceramic lifestyle at an early age helped me realize studio success is linked to a healthy body. In Shanghai, biking is my primary means of transportation and night running has become one of my favorite pastimes. I balance weight training with rock climbing for overall strength and flexibility. Receiving periodic chiropractic care and practicing meditation are key ways I reduce stress on my body and mind. Preventative methods have kept minor aches from turning into bigger problems. Thankfully, Western and Eastern medicine are affordable in China. If necessary, I could pay out of pocket for most health care expenses. In the case of major accidents or illness, my employer provides catastrophic health insurance.

Mind

Living and traveling outside my own culture opens my eyes creatively. Within China, visits to Jingdezhen, Xi’an, and the Shanghai Museum’s ceramic collection fuel my passion for ceramic history. Recent trips to Vietnam and New Zealand have left me inspired and full of new ideas. The active observation of other cultures leads me to understand my place in the world. It is both humbling and stimulating to be the outsider looking in on the daily lives of others. The variety of food I have experienced has become a great source of inspiration. Along with the eight main Chinese culinary styles, Shanghai’s restaurants specialize in food from around the world. Food presentation has introduced me to a new spectrum of dishes, dipping bowls, and service ware that have changed my understanding of functional pottery.
The friends I have made in Shanghai are the most vital part of my experience in China. I have spent many nights with other artists, swapping tales of our homelands. About three months after moving here I realized that Michael Jackson was the beginning of many young Chinese people’s experience with Western music. As a music fan, I had the joy of explaining the influence that James Brown, Elvis, Motown, and the Beatles had on pop music. This informal style of cultural interchange makes me look deeper into my own culture as I learn about someone else’s. These discussions also remind me that creativity is a human desire that all cultures share.

In addition to my interest in music, I’m an avid movie watcher, and poorly-acted action movies and science fiction are my favorites. The best art film that I watched recently was the Allen Ginsberg biopic HOWL. In the studio, I often listen to narrative radio shows like Fresh Air and This American Life. These entertain me while keeping me current with American cultural trends.

Marketing

The Internet is my lifeline for communication and marketing. Beyond gallery websites, I maintain my own website with a portfolio and additional professional information. Through social media tools like Facebook and Twitter, I keep supporters updated on my current work. The most rewarding tool that I use is my blog, Tales of a Red Clay Rambler, which chronicles my creative life. Building a blog network has connected me with artists from all over the world, easing the sense of isolation that living overseas can create.

In addition to the Internet, I produce print material for marketing purposes. Once a year I produce postcards and business cards to distribute at conferences, workshops, and meetings. Although I no longer mail them, I do hand them directly to interested buyers. Integrating face-to-face contact with the presentation of a card has proven indispensable, especially when communicating with non-English speakers.

My primary role as an educator and my pace of production make retail my best sales option. I periodically ship work to galleries in the US where it is sold or sent to invitational exhibitions. I am fortunate to work with gallery directors who continue to support me through my overseas move. About 70% of my sales are through galleries with an online presence, and the other 30% comes from direct person-to-person sales.

Most Valuable Lesson

I am conscious not to segregate myself into a fixed idea about what art should be. Challenging my understanding welcomes change in my perspective and beliefs. Moving abroad has greatly helped me get out of my ideological comfort zone and into an active state of learning.

One aspect of being open-minded is accepting the advice of more experienced members in our field. My mentors have been gracious in sharing their hardship and success. Learning from their experience has enabled me to explore new directions. Open communication within our community is one of the most attractive features of our profession.
My current pots have evolved from my search for place and the placement of particular objects within a defined landscape environment. The dialog between an object, nature, and its environment is what I look to capture through my functional ceramic work. Natural shapes and symbols find their way into my work and help to inform my choice of pattern and visual rhythm. I am exploring the ways in which the landscape changes through the seasons; specifically how a field is defined by geographic location, refined through cultivation, and constrained by its borders.

My goal is to create utilitarian pots for every day use; simple forms that speak primarily about functionality and the intimacy gained through daily use. The measure of true utility comes when any piece is used, and so I strive to make ware not solely for the shelf but also for the table. I aim to make work that is honest to its intended purpose while telling a simple story or narrative about place; whether that is an object’s place in time, a direct reference to location, or an object’s intended place within the house.

My intention is not unique. I am looking to craft beautiful utilitarian pots that are visually appealing and hopefully invite use. I do not necessarily design the work with a particular food in mind. Rather, I enjoy seeing how different foods enhance the shape, activate the glaze surface, or embellish the form.

**PROCESS**

In the majority of my work, the glaze surface is mapped ahead of time. I sketch patterns in advance and test first on paper before applying them to pots. Most of my current work involves little more than vertical or diagonal lines on the surface, but I do consider where pattern will enhance the shape and guide the eye. These stoneware pots receive an initial application of orange shino to create the base color. Once this initial glaze layer has dried, I measure and mark simple pattern guides using a ruler and pencil on the hardened glaze surface. Wax resist brushwork is then applied freehand, using the pencil marks to guide the brushwork.

The final glaze layer is a carbon-trapping white shino; the specific glaze used may be determined by a desired surface color, glaze crackle, or a firing result due to the glaze combination. The goal is to find a shino that will present opportunity for carbon while creating contrast to the orange shino ground layer and wax pattern over-layer.

Opposite: Pentagon platter, 12 in. (30 cm) in length, stoneware, layered shino glazes, and wood ash, fired to cone 10 in reduction, 2008.
Below: Serving bowl, 9 in. (23 cm) in width, stoneware, layered shino glazes, and wood ash, fired to cone 10 in reduction, 2009.
A first application of shino is applied, and pencil lines are drawn to indicate the sections of the plate and where the resist pattern will go.

A second layer of shino (a different recipe than the first layer) is applied and wood ash is sifted onto the dry glaze surface in localized areas.

Drop rim platter, 18 in. (46 cm) in diameter, stoneware, layered shino glazes, and wood ash, fired to cone 10 in reduction, 2011.

Wax is applied according to the pencil marks and is allowed to dry.

recipes

**CHUCK’S LUSCIOUS**
Cone 10 reduction

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ingredient</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>Spodumene</td>
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<tr>
<td>Goldart</td>
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**ROACH TRAP**
Cone 10 reduction

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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>EPK Kaolin</td>
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<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Add:</strong> Bentonite</td>
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**CASEBEER SHINO**
Cone 10 reduction

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<tr>
<td>OM 4 Ball Clay</td>
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<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
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</table>

**CARBON #2 (BLACK OR WHITE)**
Cone 10 reduction

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<tr>
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<tbody>
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<td>Nepheline Syenite</td>
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<td>EPK Kaolin</td>
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<td>OM 4 Ball Clay</td>
<td>15.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>100.0 %</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Prior to loading, I sift layers of clean wood ash onto the glaze surface using a variety of screens (grease strainer, window screen, flour sifter) to locate ash on specific areas of the pattern. Additionally, I may use paper masking or dry brushing to focus the ash and create a particular direction of melt and subsequent drip. This can also isolate specific areas of a pot to reveal the wax/shino pattern below. The wood ash blurs, shifts, and blends the pattern. These are anticipated results, but the end product is still very much a shifting target. There are many variables at play in the application, and it’s that uncertainty that holds my curiosity and desire to continue the exploration and potential present.

I am mapping my next firing and production cycle immediately upon unloading a kiln, regardless of the measured success or failure of the pots. Success for me is often measured by the unexpected result in the firing; a piece that, despite my cumulative experience and anticipated results, throws a curve ball and provides me with new insight and experience to expand my glaze palette and potential.

the author Matthew Hyleck has served as Education Coordinator, a Resident Artist, and a teacher at Baltimore Clayworks in Baltimore, Maryland, since 2000. For more information and images, see www.matthewhyleck.com.
I enter the studio with the understanding that influences are a significant part of my practice. They are integral to how and why I make pots. Some influences are specific, others a bit vague, and even others intangible. It's like becoming familiar with a landscape; it is slow, measured, and requires exploration and time to develop a sense of where you belong.

The observations I make when looking at various sources or influences have a direct correlation to making work. For instance, architecture has taught me how to perceive shape and line from the volumes of buildings. I've developed a love of color from modernist painters like Richard Diebenkorn and Mark Rothko. The decorative traditions of Islamic and African cultures have had a profound effect on my aesthetic values. Through literature, philosophy, and the works of poets like Wallace Stevens, I have developed a framework of concepts that help to organize these associations. Finally, the history of ceramic art is the umbrella under which all of this finds a context. Utility provides the means of expression; it is poetry in use.

My work informally combines these elements. I depend heavily on an association between the structure of form and the fluidity of surface composition. I use runny, drippy glazes and undulating rims, bodies, and feet to soften the symmetry of wheel-thrown pieces. The surfaces have large amounts of expressive brushwork and dense color. The specific designs on the surface often range between floral abstractions and spontaneous mark making. Clay is left exposed and glazes are allowed to move as they please. These components are incorporated into a functional object designed to express beauty, gesture, and lyricism.

Those traits can be elusive. Technical ability grows naturally with experience, but conceptual rigor needs constant attention and
RESISTING TEMPTATION

When throwing, I use a rib to create an undulating line in the body of the pot. The horizontal contoured line in the center of the pot is mirrored in the rim using a cutting wire (1). Later, this is compressed and rolled over the outside edge. Gently pressing the soft edge of the foot upwards creates an effect similar to the body and lip contours. I attach the handle when the pot is leather hard (2).

The pot’s bottom half is dipped into an iron-rich slip made from a naturally occurring clay (3). Next, I pour white slip into the interior, then dip the exterior into the same slip (4).

Large areas are first painted in shellac to define the area to be decorated and resist any wayward drips or smudges during the process. Next the design is painted on with shellac, which will act as a resist for the underglaze pigments (5). After the shellac has thoroughly dried (approximately 30 minutes), I apply underglaze in several layers over the entire area (6). The shellac resists the pigment and adheres to the slipped surface. Later, any excess is wiped off of the resisted areas and the piece is allowed to dry before bisque firing. After applying a clear glaze or possibly a colored liner glaze, I fire the piece to cone 2 in an electric kiln.

exploration. In functional pottery, the concepts are simultaneously embedded in the idea of utility and its expression. In my case, I use color, pattern, and form to create an object configured for use as well as visual engagement. Color fields and tonal contrasts help to construct the landscape of the surface.

The pattern anchors color and form, giving both a more dramatic way of interacting. Combining these elements produces a utilitarian object defined not by the strictest needs of use, but by the ability to function on multiple levels of interaction with users, producing something you want to use because it performs its ordained task of service, but also introduces a sensibility beyond austerity, perhaps even poetic.

the author Sean O’Connell is a studio potter in Helena, Montana, and is the 2011–2012 Matsutani Fellow at the Archie Bray Foundation. To see more of Sean’s work, visit www.seanoconnellpottery.com.
My exploration of ceramics surfaces began with the desire to incorporate imagery on my pots. I have a background in printmaking, so I found it natural to use processes that merge printmaking with clay, such as stamping and silk screening. Initially, my efforts were focused on methods to print on a three-dimensional form, by printing on slabs and then press molding or by transferring imagery from newsprint.

After gaining comfort with these techniques, I started to layer surfaces on top of each other. Besides creating depth in the surface, this allows me to combine different types of imagery. Recently, I have been using underglaze decals. A year ago, I participated in a semester-long study-abroad program in Jingdezhen, China, through the West Virginia University/Jingdezhen Ceramic Institute. There, I had decals custom made with designs that I provided.
These decals fire to cone 10 and are very effective for layering. Previously, I transferred silk-screened images from newsprint by brushing slip on both the newsprint and the pot to release it from the paper. The layer of slip obscures any existing imagery on the pot. To transfer the Chinese decals, I place them on dry or bisque clay, and then brush water on the back. Because no additional slip is used, they do not interfere with the imagery underneath. I am currently researching methods to produce my own decals.

My approach to design is a combination of intuition and trial-and-error. Because my layers are built up at various stages during the construction of the pot, I am able to respond to the existing imagery on the piece. Two pieces might start the same, but evolve quite differently. The use of transfers and decals allows me to try several different compositions on a pot before committing to one.

Pattern creates a rhythm that can hold together a variety of stray marks, or variations in the glaze. I often combine ornamental designs with patterns that are derived from structures such as windows and fences.

For the mug shown here, I threw the form on the wheel, being careful to not leave obvious throwing marks. When it was leather hard, I carved thin lines with a serrated tool, attached a handle on top of these lines, and left to it dry slowly. When it was bone dry, I brushed a watered-down slip in the incised lines (1), and wiped away the excess with a sponge (2). My slips are all made from one base, with 10% to 20% colorant added. The underglaze decals come next (3), and can be applied when the clay is bone dry, or after the bisque.

**the author** Megan Mitchell is an MFA candidate at Utah State University in Logan, Utah. For information about her trip to China see www.meganmitchellchina.wordpress.com.
In my experience, the home has always been associated with comfort and intimacy. It is a space into which we retreat to relax, entertain friends, and share private moments with family. The objects we choose to fill this domestic landscape have a direct relationship to our identity, our perception of that space, and the emotional ways in which it is used. Through use and daily interactions, the objects themselves come to hold a similar sentimental value assigned to the homes in which we live. The Chaise Lounge Tray (p. 45) utilizes the domestic setting as a point of departure. Its asymmetrical form and exaggerated volumes are an interpretation of the piece of furniture for which it’s named. The interior of the tray is embossed with a low-relief dot pattern that is appropriated from a furniture design by Charles and Ray Eames. The translation of their motifs into low-relief surface decoration calls on our collective cultural awareness of their designs. These patterns reference domestic space and the comfort it provides.

The Chaise Lounge Tray is the product of several intersecting concepts. Its form is suggestive of the comforting nature of childhood/play, physical intimacy, casual interactions within a community, and the domestic landscape. Double-walled construction
creates generous volumes that simultaneously reference stuffed animals and inflatable toys, plush upholstered furniture, and the familiar softness of our own bodies. The forms appear to be captured at the peak of an inhalation, lending an inviting presence of generosity and abundance, enticing the viewer to touch.

Visibly fresh seams allude to building things with Legos or Lincoln Logs, while imparting a casual demeanor to the work. This seemingly loose construction style, combined with the complexity of its parts, allows the work to appear relaxed yet refined. The work's informal character is similar to casual interactions one experiences within a close circle of friends. The personal relationships within these communities are relaxed, comforting, and rewarding.

I feel there is a difference between a functional object and one of utility. Depending on its intended purpose, an object can be functional while not utilitarian. As a maker and designer, my intent is to provide the user an experience that transcends utility. Voluptuous forms make us think about

Right: Vase, 9 in. (23 cm) in height. Below: Bowl set, each 8 in. (20 cm) in width. All are slab-built white stoneware with glazes, fired to cone 6 in oxidation, 2011.
PUFFY POTS

The *Chaise Lounge Tray* is assembled from slabs and utilizes slump molds and paper patterns (1). The body of the tray begins with a rolled slab. A paper stencil is placed on the fresh slab and pressed into the surface with a small rolling pin (2). When removed, the paper stencil leaves an embossed decorative motif, which will be the interior surface design. The embossed slab is then laid into the slump mold. A soft pouncing pad filled with sand is used to achieve the desired contour of the tray’s interior (3). The tray is then set aside until leather hard.

The foot of the tray is constructed using a two-piece slump mold (4). The large piece defines the exterior circumference and the small piece the interior. A slab is laid over both pieces and pressed into the mold with the pouncing pad and allowed to dry (5). Once the foot has dried to leather hard, the mold may be removed (6) and the excess clay cut away (7). Thin slabs are added to the interior edges of the foot to create the pedestal on which the tray will sit (8). The pedestal foot is then attached to the bottom of the tray (9).

The large pillow is constructed using slabs and paper stencils. Two stencils are used to create three shaped slabs that comprise the pillow form (10). The long rectangular pattern wraps around from the back of the tray to the interior, while the smaller pattern is used to create both sides of the pillow (11). Once assembled the pillow is attached to body of the tray (12).

The pillowed edges of the tray that run along the sides and front are also constructed using paper patterns. Once the pieces are cut from soft slabs (13), they are folded and manipulated into shape then attached to the rim of the tray (14).

The final step is to construct the small button accoutrements at the front of the tray (15). The buttons are used to connect the front and side pillow edges. Due to the malleable nature of clay, this attachment is always a little different from piece to piece, therefore a single paper pattern isn’t viable. The result is a trial-and-error assembly, until the correct fit is achieved.

*Chaise Lounge Tray*, 10 in. (25 cm) in length, handbuilt stoneware with glaze, fired to cone 6 in oxidation.

MONTHLY METHODS

what volume represents: the allure of vitality, sensuality, generosity, and abundance. Generosity of form rather than economy of space, allows these vessels to evoke a sense of comfort, fulfillment, and pleasure using colorful, casually constructed forms that suggest a sense of play and ease. An object’s ability to evoke a response is equally as important as its ability to perform a task. The value of these vessels lie in their ability to provide a transformative personal experience through use, rather than to address needs of utility, necessity, or convenience.

the author Chris Pickett received an undergraduate degree from the University of Tennessee, a graduate degree from the University of Florida, and now lives and works in Chattanooga, Tennessee. For more information and images, go to www.chrispickettceramics.com.
I have been intrigued with drinking vessels since I first started working with clay and they still remain one of the most difficult forms to produce well. The formal challenges result from the way a cup functions. It must contain, dispense, be an appropriate size, weight, thickness for its contents, and feel comfortable to the hand as well as the mouth. The intimate physical interaction with a cup is unlike that of any other form, and it’s due to these challenging parameters that I find successfully designing and creating a cup so rewarding.

This particular form is one that I have been revisiting and revising off and on for several years. It developed out of my interest in creating an ergonomic, handleless drinking vessel that contained subtle indentions within a thrown form. As the design has evolved, I now use hand-rolled slabs, bisque molds, and paper templates that allow for a more specific language in the overall design of form and function.

I continue to draw formal inspiration from mass-produced and design objects, along with minimalist works, most notably the paintings of John McLaughlin, with his use of muted colors and crisp, repeated geometric shapes. Although my work is strongly influenced by these sources, I strive to have my identity and hand present within the work.

Because I assemble each piece by hand, the work has personality, energy, and softness—qualities that are negated in industrial mass-production. Constructing each piece individually allows the idiosyncrasies during production to become apparent to the viewer. I continue to try to find the balance between the precision of industrial objects and the subtle nuances of handmade ware.

Some of my favorite childhood memories were formed in the kitchen preparing food with my mom, and around the dinner table with family and friends, eating and engaging in conversation. I hope my work continues this dwindling tradition and serves as a reminder of the importance of these experiences. In a fast-paced culture where communication is overwhelmed by current technology, I suggest we slow down, rediscover personal conversation, and get back to the table.

the author Clay Leonard currently serves as the Ceramics Department Head at Bowling Green State University in Bowling Green, Ohio, while John Balistreri is on sabbatical. See www.reclaimingthetable.com.
GESTURAL COMPLEXITY

I start building my cups by hand rolling slabs about 1⁄8 inch thick, then cutting shapes from them using paper templates designed for the top and bottom of the cup (1). Next, I place the slabs on a bisque mold that corresponds to the paper template. The bisque molds have been fired to cone 04, leaving them porous enough to pull water from the surface of the clay (2). After approximately 10–15 minutes, the piece is pulled off of the bisque mold and left to continue to set up prior to assembly (3). The pieces are then subtly altered in areas to emphasize the existing geometric shapes and volume. Each piece is cut on a 45° angle to fit seamlessly when assembled (4). After slipping and scoring, the piece is completely assembled and the rim is refined with a Surform rasp for consistency and then compressed prior to the addition of the handle (5). Once all of the individual designed components are assembled, they are refined and left to dry (6).
For the past several years, I have been primarily handbuilding both sculptural and functional forms. With my busy administrative work schedule, handbuilding smaller, more functional forms allows me the time to remain more engaged in the making process in my studio.

The idea of a pitcher without a handle evolved from similar small creamers with handles. The saying “form follows function” played a role in the evolution of handle-less pitchers. As a potter, I often struggle with making and attaching handles and in the case of the creamers, I realized the handles were awkward and fragile functionally, but they looked okay, decoratively speaking. I own and use a Mary Barringer handle-less creamer and always enjoy its simplicity of form and function.

In terms of decoration, while I was making the creamers, I was making slab-constructed vase forms using the same technique and pinching, cutting, stretching, and pressing into the slabs as surface treatment/decoration. The “aha” moment of transferring the pinching technique onto the creamers to create indentations for a hand to grasp seemed to work visually and ergonomically.

When people pick up the creamers or the small pitchers, they naturally reach for the indentations and remark on how comfortably they fit the hand. I am fortunate to have several professional potter friends whose opinions I trust and value. After dinner and critique with them one evening, I began to slightly change the forms based on their feedback. The newer forms have become more animated and I am working on “companion sets” presented in trays or staged.

The small pitcher grew out of the creamer form, but I do work with vase forms that are 12 inches tall, so I assume I could move into larger forms. I do see a limitation of scale with this form, as a
the slab is then flipped over so that the incision is facing down. It is rolled up onto a cardboard tube to keep the sides straight and to form a basic cylinder. Shaping and forming begin by closing up the seam at the back of the pitcher, making sure that it is scored and slipped for a tight connection. Using pressure on both the inside and outside of the vessel, the surface is stretched to open the incision, creating volume as well as undulation in the line.

The top edge is finished while it is flat. This allows for better compression of the lip, and prevents the form from becoming distorted. Indentations for the “handle” are placed where a hand would naturally grasp the vessel to lift it and pour. To finish the pitcher, the body is placed on a soft slab and is secured with a wooden tool.

Constructing the small pitcher starts with rolling out a slab, then using a tar paper template to cut the shape of the contour at the top of the pot. The incision (or other decoration) is also applied when the body is flat. This makes it easier to control the depth and position of the cut.

the spout is formed while the pot is still soft enough to be worked and altered without cracking.

much larger pitcher form without a handle would be more weighty and awkward in use.

Fortunately, for me, my position at Arrowmont School of Arts and Crafts provides me individual contact and conversation with many nationally respected ceramic artists and their art. Because of this, my eyes and brain have been exposed to great pottery forms and surfaces. My challenge is to transfer that visual language to the hand and object making.

the author Bill Griffith is Program Director at Arrowmont School of Arts and Crafts in Gatlinburg, Tennessee. For more information, see www.billgriffithclay.com.
Behind the Mask

by David Bolton

Houndstooth jar, 13 in. (33 cm) in height, with sign vinyl resist, sandblasted, underglazed, then fired in a train kiln, 2011.
The creation of my current body of work started with atmospheric firing, in this case wood firing. I fired with salt at the University of Evansville and at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. I had my first taste of wood firing at Central Michigan University, which later led me to push for a wood kiln where I currently teach. I fire my work in a train kiln at the College of Lake County in Grayslake, Illinois, and in Dan Anderson’s Mounds Anagama.

For me, the beauty is in the interaction of the glaze created by the wood kiln and the hard-edge decoration created by masking and sandblasting bisqueware. Some pieces receive a blush of color, and others have their edges blurred. Sometimes areas of the pattern are blurred beyond recognition, only to have the pattern revealed on the other side of the pot. This gives the surface of my pots a sense of wear, a sense of history.

After sandblasting, I apply black underglaze over a digitally created vinyl mask on bare Grolleg porcelain. The result at first is intense black and white that is hard on the eyes. After the wood firing, the resulting flashing and wash of ash softens this contrast.

Textiles and geometry influence my surface decoration. The forms are divided into panels to allow the patterns to run off the edge. I often think of the surface as upholstery covering a form or an altered fabric covering the human body. This logic follows through from lip to foot. The openness of a plate, for example, allows me to further follow this logic from the interior to exterior. This negates some of their function; they are probably the least functional of all my forms, due to their decoration. I find that my cups are the most functional, with the patterns only on the exterior. The patterns are very tactile and entice the user to hold the body of the cup. In this way, the surface and form work together to enhance the functional life of the cup.

The metaphor of the ceramic vessel and the human body resonates strongly with me. My undergraduate teacher, Les Miley, at Evansville, made me well aware of the references of the human body to pottery and made me think of ceramics as a functional art form. His simple and eloquent use of the words foot, lip, shoulder, and belly taught me how to look at a pot. Jim Lawton, my teacher at The School of the Art Institute of Chicago, compared altering his pots with the process of darting clothes. Instead of altering a garment around a human body, the vessel is altered around a conceived

Top and above: Dduk pattern plate, 9 in. (23 cm) in diameter, with sign vinyl resist, sandblasted, underglazed, then fired in a train kiln, 2011.
Vinyl Masking
Draw shapes and patterns on the computer and “print” them out on the digital cutter (1). Peel the vinyl decals and apply them to bisqueware (2). Complete patterns can be applied with transfer tape on flatter pieces such as plates and tiles, but is not possible with most curved surfaces. Rub down the vinyl mask to adhere it to the piece (3). The masking can be cut to fit the intended space after application; simply peel up and remove the excess (4–5). Sandblast the surface (6). Apply underglaze using a fan brush (7). A fan brush covers broad areas without soaking up all your underglaze. Let the underglaze dry and remove the vinyl (8). Wax the rim and apply glaze to the interior, and the cup is ready to be wadded and wood-fired.

Tools and Supplies
• Sign vinyl: I use a medium tack 2.8-mil vinyl that comes in rolls 8 inches wide, 15 inches wide, and even larger. I cut it down to 8½-inch sheets to fit the cutter. www.beacongraphics.com/bgllc/Awesome/itemdesc.asp?ic=4200-0815-003&eq=&Tp=
• Transfer tape: Complete patterns can be applied on flatter surfaces. I use this tape to put patterns on plates, although the curved areas still have to be altered and laid individually by hand. www.cutterpros.com/Vinyl-Application-Transfer-Tape-ProCut-Transfer-Tape.htm
• Inexpensive sign cutter: Graphtec makes this inexpensive cutter, as well as professional sign cutters that cost thousands more. The cutter comes with software that can be used on a PC or Mac. It is also compatible with Adobe Illustrator. www.silhouetteamerica.com/silhouette.aspx
• Incidental tools: tack cloth, X-Acto knife
In my current body of work, I have gone back to these fundamentals. On a personal note, growing up in the ’70s I often felt like a victim of the popular fashions and my mother’s career as a seamstress. I witnessed her tailoring patterned fabrics around various bodies, such as my father’s, my brother’s, and my own. I am sure my mother enjoyed decorating us as much as I enjoy decorating my pots.

**The Author**

David Bolton teaches at the College of Lake County in Grayslake, Illinois. His work available at Schaller Gallery (www.schallergallery.com), and he would like to extend a special thanks to Dan Anderson, Ben Bates, and Ted Neal for furthering his knowledge of wood firing.
The impetus for my *Bot Box* design was a show at Crimson Laurel Gallery, called “Containment II.” The theme was ceramic boxes, and the invited artists were asked to include something inside the box that related directly to its concept. Having never made a box, I used the opportunity to work backwards—to have in mind what would go inside, then build a box based on that. This, in a broader sense, tends to be the way I work on things. I like to set parameters to begin with and then make myself work within them.

![Bot Box, 6 in. (15 cm) in height, stoneware, fired to cone 7 in oxidation.](image)

Here are the parameters I set:

1) The boxes had to be accessible from any angle. How often are we hovering directly over things?
2) The handles needed to be unconventional but still intuitive, and they needed to integrate with the total design.
3) They needed to contain something actually meaningful to me.
4) No feature should compromise functional integrity.
**BOT BOX**

I throw a form with a narrow base, a deep gallery, and a wide, sharp, low belly, and begin to square the top (1). I use a gentle squeezing pressure in each corner, employing the maximum surface area of my hands, being careful not to leave finger marks. I use my thumb to guide the gallery straight, as it will want to fold up or down from the compression (2). After letting the pot dry to almost leather hard, I use a small bowl as a template for cutting the base at an angle (3). I score and slip before adding a slab base (4). The bottom of the lid is formed by pressing a medium-soft slab over, then into, the top. It is left to dry to leather hard along with the rest of the pot (5–6). I score and slip, then press on another, softer slab that will form the handle (7). Once in place, I cut the handle to fit the profile of the pot, and then smooth the edge with my fingers (8).

I add a liner glaze at this stage (I glaze all my pots raw). This one will not be glazed on the outside (it will get terra sigillata instead), so it can sit until bone dry. I spray on several terra sigillatas made from clays I dig and refine myself. I use a lung-powered siphon, because I like the control and variegation I get from it. Safety concerns dictate doing it outside and upwind, and being mindful of how, when, and where to breath in. After that, I spray pure fluxes, including bone ash, very lightly, and in a speckled way. I choose different combinations in relation to the terra sigillatas. Each flux highlights something chemically unique to each clay. After all the spraying, the pot goes into a kiln and is once fired in oxidation to cone 7.

I made three boxes; one for coffee beans, one for spinning tops, and the **Bot Box**. Coffee was obvious, I practically live on the stuff, and I named my business after my favorite coffee. For the other two, I rifled around in (cardboard) boxes of things I kept from childhood, and found a box of my favorite toys, mostly tops and Go-Bots (which were the poor-man’s Transformers when I was a kid). So that’s what I went with. I already had the Star Wars character R2D2 in mind for the Bot Box’s body: the way he angles when he moves. But I wanted some way to make the form more visually balanced. It was ultimately a Go-Bot’s head that informed the solution.

Inspiration aside, the Bot Box is intended to be versatile in terms of contents and location. It’s probably best suited for counters between waist to chest height since the handle likes to be picked up with an upward-facing palm. It works great in kitchens, under cupboards—the angled top lets you get to the contents without much trouble. But I don’t like to dictate how people use my pots. They may come up with something new and tell me about it, and I work from that knowledge in the future.

Whatever parameters I set up for myself, I define them concretely and then give myself free reign to work within them. The point of the Go-Bots, along with the coffee beans and the top, was just to help me set up my parameters.

It’s very much “inside the box” thinking, and to be honest, I think that’s where creativity actually thrives. Boxes are creativity’s catalysts. The best thing you can do is to box yourself in, then figure out what’s actually possible in that space.

**the author** Noah Riedel lives and works in Seattle, Washington, where he is a resident at Pottery Northwest (www.potterynorthwest.org). For more information, see www.biloya.com.
Facilities Highlights

- 16 electric wheels
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- 2 electric kilns (20 cubic feet)
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1 Natasha Hovey’s 02-60564-8 Series, installation view, to 84 in. (2 m) in height, wheel-thrown and altered stoneware, multiple firings to cones 8, 6, and 04, wood.

2 Ginger Lukas’ One Is Never So Close To Change When Life Seems Unbearable Even In The Smallest And Most Everyday Things, 13 in. (33 cm) in height, found materials, 2009.

3 Joshua Hebbert’s An Interlocking System, dimensions variable, porcelain, plaster clay, flagging tape, field marking paint, AstroTurf, found objects, 2011.

4 Walter Brown III’s untitled installation, dimensions variable, 2011.

5 Ryan Lawless’ Red Pet, 10 ft. (3 m) in height, chair, rope, wall, latex paint, 2011.

6 Allison Rose Craver’s Rattle Pair, 18 in. (46 cm) in length, press-molded porcelain and terra cotta with thrown and altered elements, slip trailing, multiple firings to cones 10 and 3, luster fired to cone 019, found object.
Museum exhibitions can be as frustrating as they are engaging: the works on view stir the imagination, while dozens more that are not displayed silently taunt the viewer from the depths of object storage rooms. Such is the case with the exhibition “Ancient Iranian Ceramics” at the Smithsonian Institute’s Arthur M. Sackler Gallery (www.asia.si.edu) in Washington, D.C., which will be on view through July 2012. Consisting of a mere six objects selected from the Sackler’s much larger permanent collection of works from what we now know as Iran, the sheen of burnished surfaces belies 3000 years of age and peculiar forms suggest specific but unknown usage. The visual and cultural links made within this concise curatorial package raise big aesthetic and historical questions about use, production, cultural practice, and exchange in the region, all of which beg for more objects. Still, each piece is a jewel and the impact of the group is ultimately greater than the sum of its parts.
The small exhibition is, in typical Sackler fashion, elegantly installed. Warm gray walls are flooded with ambient light, and low-glare vitrines allow for softened spotlights to highlight forms and accentuate surface details. The cases themselves are simply arranged in the small gallery like the five dots on dice, with one in the center and two each on the front and back walls.

Excavated from various tombs in northern Iran and dated to around 1000 BCE, the ensemble features an exquisite selection of long-spouted, vaguely zoomorphic vessels with burnished surfaces that suggest the interplay of ceramic and metalworking traditions. One of the six pieces, in fact, is an exceptionally beautiful small bronze pouring vessel, with a distinctively bulbous throat attached by large, prominent rivets to a jar form and leading to an elegant, elongated pouring spout, quite similar to those on the ceramic works. As the curatorial notes state, the pronounced rivets serve both a structural and decorative function, and the original surface (now a lovely, crusty copper green) would have been a smooth, warm, golden brown similar to the burnished clay bodies.

Specific correlations are drawn to the beak-spouted vessel in burnished orange earthenware across the room (see page 61). The dominant motif here is that of a bird, reminiscent of the abundant waterfowl in the Caspian Sea region: the compact body, tilted slightly backward on two forward-facing, spade-shaped (perhaps webbed) feet at the front; a raised design on the back of the vessel suggesting tail feathers; and the crooked, bulbous neck of the spout emerging from the chest of the jar and terminating in an elongated, horizontal trough spout that extends both forward (like a beak) and back (suggesting a feather-crested head). While the raised bumps add visual and representational interest to the bird-like form (suggesting eyes, for example) they also reference the pronounced rivets.
on the metal vessel, which shares the oddly bent neck: a sort of secondary collecting pool for fluid that would have poured in a slow, directed stream from the long spout.

Two other vessels are less literally bird-like, omitting the elaborate throat in favor of thin, long, trough-like spouts that emerge directly from the high shoulder of the jars. Both are burnished smooth and unadorned, except for a few subtle, softened geometric relief elements at the rear and a few decorative bands. Yet in the context of the other works, and with their own beak-like spouts, the overall design is avian in character.

The centerpiece of the gallery is a large, heavy-bodied, burnished gray ewer. The color and surface references the metalwork discussed above. Where the other ceramic works are thin walled and fragile, this one seems designed for use. The sturdy handle is pulled directly from a thick lip and firmly welded low on the bulbous body. Three carefully modeled ridges allow for both a firm grip and an attachment point that fans out to a tail feather motif. A band of incised lines forms a horizontal zig-zag pattern on both sides of the vessel, distinctly referencing wings. The spout, not as long or trough-like as the others, emerges from a slight crest at its base and is distinctly beak-like: more of a short, seed-crushing beak than the long beak typical of water birds. Three concentric rings on either side clearly indicate eyes, mimicked on the top of the vessel where a bridge links the spout firmly to the lip.
This is a heavy pitcher, ideal for keeping liquids cool, burned both inside and outside to reduce permeability, with a small mouth, stout handle, and thick, deep spout. Yet the design is clearly devised to suggest a bird motif, as are the less functional vessels with their lack of handles, thin walls, wide mouths and long brittle spouts. So how were these objects used, and in what context? How direct or significant is the bird motif? These were ritual vessels found in tombs, but was their function symbolic, intended for use in the afterlife, or used in the funerary rites themselves?

The final work in the exhibition is a shallow bowl fixed atop a short tripod on a tall, hollow, footed trunk. An incised band winding up the trunk is the only decoration, the surface burnished smooth. The bowl is slightly tilted, giving the whole structure a top-heavy, off-kilter character, yet still elegant in proportion and thin-walled delicacy. According to the didactic, it probably held offerings for the afterlife, and similar objects appear at earlier sites in Mesopotamia, other parts of Iran, and throughout the Caspian Sea region, leading to speculation that common burial rituals—and a shared vocabulary of form, function and style—existed well before the various tribes in the region shared a unified language.

That’s a lot of weight for so few objects to carry, even ones as stunning as these. And the Sackler has more. Ultimately, it comes down to a difficult curatorial choice between the connoisseurship of a few exquisite objects and exploring the historical, archaeological implications of the group. The larger questions have been raised—and partially answered—by careful technical and aesthetic observation of many objects from many sites. This is a dazzling group of distinctive and peculiar artifacts that leaves the viewer wanting to see at least a few more.

**the author** Diana Lyn Roberts is a freelance arts writer, curator, and art historian living in San Antonio, Texas.
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February 15, 2012 entry deadline

March 2, 2012 entry deadline
Kentucky, Louisville “Kentucky Bourbon: By the Bottle, By the Ounce” (November 2, 2012–January 5, 2013) open to bottles and cups. Juried from digital. Fee: $30 for up to 3 bottle entries or sets; $30 for up to 3 shot glass entries or sets; $45 to enter both bottles and shots. Juror: Matt Long. Contact Doltia Dohrmann, Louisville Clay, 1811 Edenside Ave., Louisville, KY 40204; dohrm@insightbb.com; www.louisvilleclay.org; 502-593-0905.

March 13, 2012 entry deadline
Maryland, Gaithersburg “Sugarloaf Crafts Festival in Gaithersburg” (April 13–15, 2012) open to fine craft media. Juried from digital or slides. Fee: $300. Contact Wendy Braender, Sugarloaf Mountain Pottery and US Games, 2829 Evergreen Dr., Cambridge, WI 53523; frogpond@bminet.com; 608-438-1772; www.cambridgepotteryfestival.org.

March 1, 2012 entry deadline

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Maryland, Timonium “Sugarloaf Crafts Festival in Timonium” (April 6–9, 2012) open to fine craft media. Juried from digital or slides. Fee: $20. Contact Lorrie Staley, Sugarloaf Mountain Works, 19807 Executive Park Cir., Germantown, MD 20874; apply@sugarloaffest.com; www.sugarloafcrafts.com/becomeexhibit.html; 800-210-9900.

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Dirk Romijn:
As a child, I dreamt away looking at flowers at eye-level. I was just tall enough to also look up into the cabinet in the hall where our vases were displayed, admiring all the different shapes. I’ve always been a vase freak and flower freak. Before getting into ceramics, I was already experimenting with vase shapes, from various bottles and containers to the chemical glassware (both of my parents were chemists) from our attic. Later I collected vases, but I kept having vases on my mind that I couldn’t find anywhere, so finally I started to make them and discovered an exciting craft.

Soon, I started to put flowers into vases at an angle and found that tulips react in an exciting and elegant way, so my love for tulips (when one is Dutch, it’s almost impossible not to love tulips) became greater.

When cut tulips have been deprived of water for a little while, the stems are flexible and can be curved into different shapes (as seen in the Lying vase). They can even be manipulated to curve a specific way by grasping the bunch with one hand at the bottom and the other hand right below the flowers and twisting the stems 180° a few times.

Designing the Ideal Marriage, I had tulips on my mind. After thinking about my sculptural work in response to your question, I realized that differently colored tulips in each vase gives a different and interesting meaning. Even different kinds of flowers in each one is a possibility, so the owner can make a sculpture of his or her own.

I consider Revalidation to be my best example so far of a tulip vase that is also sculpture. The growth of the tulips (I prefer yellow ones, they seem to grow the most) is exploited in the best way, with time a crucial factor, and some tulips getting stuck as they grow. The color of the flowers contrasts with the coal-colored glaze, and is the sunniest happy color I can imagine. The idea for it came after my partner had a stroke. He was mostly confined to a wheelchair and needed a walker when he was up on his feet. His world became small; he was in a cage. But he still had a good spirit and fought his way forward, exercising and amazing everyone. He was, with professional help, revalidating himself, so he grew out of his confining cage.
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