

paper stencils

by Zygote Blum

Ceramic artists are great adopters of other craft methods in order to enhance their own work. This tip comes from a ceramic artist who is also an accomplished jeweler. Blending his skill sets helps him develop exciting and efficient patterned surfaces.

My process for creating cut paper stencils plays on a fundamental skill found at most jewelry benches, namely using a jeweler's saw to cut shapes out of sheet material.

Using a few basic supplies, a jeweler's saw frame, some blades, a bench pin, and a paper billet (essentially a two-part plastic stencil capping a stack of newsprint), 48 or more duplicate paper stencils can be created at a time. It's a low-tech process that can quickly and economically supply enough cut-paper stencils to freely develop new designs.

The basic limitation of the process is the 4½-inch depth of the saw frame. This makes the maximum size of a manageable billet 4 inches × 4 inches, but when aiming for simplicity and quantity rather than size, this works.

I use ¼-inch-thick high-density polyurethane plastic sheeting to create a stiffened billet of newsprint that is firm enough to handle and cleanly cut.

Materials list:

- 4½-inch-deep jeweler's saw frame
- #1-size jeweler's saw blades
- razor blades
- rubber cutting matt
- ¼-inch, high-density polyurethane plastic sheets
- surgical tape
- fine felt-tip marker
- metal straightedge or ruler
- rubber cement
- bench pin
- recycled newsprint
- paper design

1 Using a marker, trace around the paper cutout onto the plastic sheet. Coat the plastic sheet and paper cutout with rubber cement. Once the rubber cement gets tacky on both surfaces, press the paper template down onto the plastic to secure it.

2 Leaving a ½-inch border around the paper template, cut the plastic sheet around the cutout. The extra space is just enough to account for a taped edge.

3 Cut a second piece of plastic to the same size to make the back half of the billet. **Tip:** Mark both the front and back sheets with registration marks.

4 Starting with three sheets of newspaper, fold in half once along the natural vertical fold, fold again, and cut in half with a sharp razor blade using a steel ruler.

5 Stack the halves along the straight edge of the cut and tape along the same clean edge. Cut in half once more, stack, and tape. Set, align, and tape the top plastic stencil onto the taped edge of the paper billet. Create clean cuts on the other three sides, then tape each one. **Tip:** Don't go crazy with the tape, the plastic back will need to go on after the last side of the billet is cut.

6 Align the back plastic sheet with the top plastic sheet, following your registration marks.

7 Tape over the perimeter to secure the completed billet.

8 Drill pilot holes at intervals around the perimeter of the outline to allow the saw blade to be threaded into various points of the design.

9 Work on a bench pin when cutting out the design. While cutting, turn the billet into the moving blade while taking special attention





to keeping your fingers out of the path of the blade. The momentum of a blade when it snaps can carry it deep into a finger.

10 A finished billet, cut and ready to be used. **Tip:** Stopping to run a strip of tape across the face of the billet can help keep the stack together as it nears the final cuts.

11 An individual stencil, one of 48 copies, separated from the cut billet. The cut billet yields both a positive and a negative set of stencils.

12 Zygote Blum's lidded jar is slipped using several different masking stencils.

To see more of Blum's work or to watch a video of him creating a set of stencils, check out his blog at <http://fetishghost.blogspot.com>.

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