

Five Great Handbuilding Techniques and Tools



variations on classic techniques
for making contemporary
handbuilt pottery

Five Great Handbuilding Techniques and Tools: Variations on Classic Techniques for Making Contemporary Handbuilt Pottery

When you put a ball of clay in your hands, you just want to start making something—it's so natural it's uncanny. And while equipment is used to make a lot of the pottery in the world, using just your hands or a simple paddle and rolling pin can produce awesome results! Discover how to make pottery using three simple techniques, but with a twist. Make a pinch pot really big, make coil pottery from flat coils, save a step and make leather hard hump molds instead of ceramic bisque molds, use a paper plate as a press mold, or make square slab pots with great textures. All you need is a ball of clay in your hands. It's all here in a free download – *Five Great Handbuilding Techniques and Tools: Variations on Classic Techniques for Making Contemporary Handbuilt Pottery*.

How to Make Molded Plates Using a Paper Plate as a Press Mold

by Amanda Wilton-Green

Chinet® plates make excellent press molds that provide great surfaces.



How to Make a Slab Bowl Using a Leatherhard Clay Mold

by Lauren Sandler

Try an alternative to ceramic bisque molds using a leatherhard form.



Three Element Plates

by Birdie Boone

Birdie Boone uses Bristol board templates and hump molds to make her plates.



A Quintessential Handbuilt Vase

by Brenda Quinn

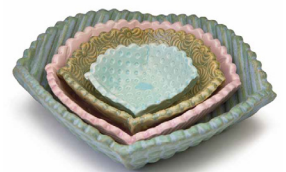
How to handbuild pottery using molded sections.



Using Textured Slabs to Create Square Nesting Bowls

by Annie Chrietberg

There are a lot of tools and gadgets in the kitchen you can use for your handbuilt pottery.



How to Make Molded Plates

Using a Paper Plate as a Press Mold

by Amanda Wilton-Green



Making slab plates is a great way to develop basic slab techniques, and using Chinnet® plates for forms makes this an easy project. They also make perfect surfaces for exploring decorating techniques.

Making a set of ceramic plates can be fun for the beginner, but is also easily adapted for the more-experienced student. This project presents a direct and fresh slab-forming approach resulting in plates that become great canvases for surface decoration. Materials are simple, inexpensive, and readily available.

After only a few hours of work, you can learn how to roll out a good, even slab, and can experience different stages of plastic clay and what the clay is capable of at each stage. You become familiar with simple slump molds and start to consider the form and function of your work. Most importantly, you learn how to handle clay in a direct and intentional way.

These plates become a wonderful surface for finishing, embellishing, and glazing. I have expanded

this project to include experiments with paper stencils and slip decoration, but that's just the beginning. Try underglaze design work and glazing methods with this project as well. When the project is completed, you'll have a set of plates to use in your home or to give as gifts.

Forming Plates

Roll out a slab to a desired thickness of $\frac{1}{4}$ to $\frac{1}{2}$ inch. When rolling out a slab, start by throwing it across the table in different directions until it is somewhere close to 3-inches thick. Roll the clay with the rolling pin, taking care not to roll over the edges. Roll two or three times on one side. If you're working on canvas, you'll notice that the clay stops stretching after the first few times because the clay holds onto the texture of the canvas. Carefully lift the slab creat-



1 Using a Chinet® plate as a template to cut circles.



2 Remove excess clay from the rim.



3 Flip the slab over and place it in the plate.



4 Press and form the clay using another plate.



5 Decorate using any method such as this stencil technique.

ing as much surface area with your hand as possible, and leave the slab to stiffen to a soft leather-hard stage. The clay needs to be able to bend without cracking, but you don't want fingerprints to show as you manipulate your clay.

Choose the size of your plate. Chinet® brand has dinner, salad, and dessert-sized plates as well as an oval platter. Place the plate upside down to use as a template for cutting the slab (*figure 1*). As you cut, keep your needle tool or fettling knife perpendicular to your work surface to create a square rim.

Remove excess clay and smooth out the rims. Slide your finger across the edge of the rim with firm and consistent pressure (*figure 2*).

The sharp corner of the rim softens without flattening the edge. A damp sponge, chamois or a small piece of a produce bag also works. Stamp or sign the underside.

Flip the clay slab, smooth the top edge, then place it into the paper plate, lining up the edges (*figure 3*). Experiment with pressing the clay into the paper plate with your hands or sandwiching your clay between two plates (*figure 4*). The clay will have a different character depending on your chosen method.

Allow the plates to dry to a firm leather-hard stage in the bottom paper plate. Remove the clay from the mold to check to see if the plates stack nicely and sit on a flat surface without rocking. Take a moment to look closely at the rim



Equipment and Tools

- Large rolling pin
- Cut-off wire
- Sponge
- 25 lbs of clay with sand or grog to reduce warping
- Fettling knife or needle tool
- Chinet® paper plates.

Note: Chinet® plates do not have a plastic coating and absorb moisture from the clay. Avoid coated and plastic plates.



Interesting Texture Materials

Texture Ideas

Gently roll the following into your plate with a rolling pin:

- Corrugated Cardboard
- Bubble wrap
- Lace remnants
- Mesh produce bags

Stamping Ideas

The following items can be pressed like stamps into the clay but don't do well under a rolling pin:

- Small plastic toys such as animals
- Beaded necklaces (I like the bathtub drain chain, but be careful not to go too deep with this or it can act like a perforation and give your plate a long crack.)

of each plate to do any final shaping they might need.

Decorating Plates

These plates are adaptable to all sorts of decorative techniques at the leather-hard, greenware, and bisque stages. The flat surface lends itself to painterly and expressive underglaze or glaze work. These slab plates are simple enough for very young students and satisfying for the adult student as well.

Slip decoration gives dimension to the plates and students draw on their own creative design ideas for the work. Textured dessert plates with slip inlay use found and inexpensive materials to create a design and a slip in contrasting color to further highlight the design. Paper stencils used with decorative slip can make bold, graphic borders or motifs for your set of plates (*figure 5*). With a little experimentation and practice, you'll come up with wonderful results.



Making Sets

When you handbuild a set of plates, every artist approaches each plate with a slightly different perspective. The experience of making the first plate, bowl, mug or tile influences the next, as do things as simple as body position and energy levels. We're thoughtful and inconsistent creatures and we can use these characteristics to great benefit when done so with intention. A set of plates can be tied together with a theme, color, position of image, size or concept. Because we're used to seeing sets coming from a factory, the default definition in our minds can be limited to identical objects.

Textured Dessert Plates

Roll out $\frac{1}{4}$ to $\frac{1}{2}$ -inch-thick slabs. Before cutting out the plate, place textured material along one side of the clay slab and gently roll into the clay. Once the material is flush with the top of the clay, peel it away. Clay is great for picking up the most delicate details and is quite beautiful at this stage.

With texture along one side of the slab, place the paper plate templates so that the location of the design will be pleasing on a plate. Remove excess clay and smooth the rims of the plates, working on the top edge and then flipping the clay to finish the bottom edge of the rim. Sandwich the clay between

two paper plates and press the clay into the bottom corners of the lower plate. Remove the top plate and paint a generous amount of contrasting slip over the textured area. Leave the clay in the bottom paper plate and let dry until it is a very stiff leather hard. The amount of time varies depending on climate inside the studio. At this stage, use a metal rib to scrape away the top layer of colored slip leaving behind only what is inlaid into the textured areas.

Paper Stencils

Use paper stencils on leather hard clay after clay is placed into the paper plate mold. Each paper stencil can easily be used twice, and with care, up to four times. Keep a copy of the original design. I recommend you prepare by cutting as many stencils as required before beginning the slip work. Trim stencils so that there is about 2 inches of paper around the design. Soak the paper stencils in water until wet but not soggy and then set onto paper towel to remove excess moisture. Position stencils and press down with a damp sponge. Paint slip over the design then remove the paper stencil. If the stencil is too dry to adhere to the next plate, repeat soaking. Sometimes the stencil can be directly transferred to the next plate and pressed with the sponge.

How to Make a Slab Bowl

Using a Leatherhard Clay Mold

by Lauren Sandler



Bowl forms are particularly interesting for decorating because they provide an expansive landscape to explore. A generous open object when functioning, a bowl acts as an offering yet also as an object of containment—a reservoir of reverie and reflection. It's this paradox of offering and containment that I find most alluring and attempt to expand upon with my surface work.

Making the Mold

Begin by making a clay mold that will be used to drape a slab over. The mold will be used to make the bottom quarter of the final bowl form that will then be built up to the finished shape and height with

coils. The mold is made upside down and solid—later it will be turned upright and hollowed out. I start by drawing a boundary line to follow by first cutting out a paper pattern for what will be the top of the mold (when upright) and outlining that on the bat (*figure 1*). I begin the mold with a large thick slab, cut around the drawn line then add and remove clay as needed to create the desired form (*figure 2*). Take your time in shaping the mold; even out and smooth the surface with a Surform tool or rasp, then refine the shape and the surface with metal and rubber ribs. Place a bat and a torpedo level on top of the form and make any adjustments needed until it is level (*figure 3*).

Once the mold has set up to a firm leather hard (wet enough to hollow out, but firm enough to hold its shape when handled) turn it upright and examine it. Check the shape to assure that the shape is what you're looking for and add or remove clay as needed. At this point you can hollow out the form leaving ½-inch thick walls (*figure 4*). Once finished, let the mold dry for a few days. The mold doesn't have to be bone dry before using—just dry enough so the slab won't stick to it.

For a longer lasting mold, you may want to make a plaster one; although I have been using some of the same bone-dry clay molds for a couple of years—that includes many moves. The edges will often chip, but I usually cut the bottom part of the slab off above the chipped parts so it doesn't interfere with the form.

Using the Mold

Roll out a 1/8–¼-inch thick slab that's large enough to drape over the mold (*figure 5*). I usually make a slab large enough to get two to three pieces out of it. Don't let the slab get too dry before using it or it will crack when draped over the mold. I prefer my slabs on the wet side—just dry enough so they won't stick to the mold—I let them do most of their drying on the mold. Place the slab over the mold and shape it to the mold. Once the slab has stiffened enough to hold its shape, cut off the excess clay from the bottom using an X-Acto knife (*figure 6*).

Swiftly lift the slab up, loosening it from all four corners and stand it upright. Even the rim using a Surform and bevel the inside of the rim to prepare it for a coil (*figure*

7). Check the level of the pot again here. You may have to gently tap the pot on its foot to make sure it's level. Wrap the rim with a damp paper towel and plastic to prepare for adding coils. Leave the bottom unwrapped to stiffen in order to support the weight of added coils.

Because of the setting up time needed in coil building, I work on many pieces at once, putting another slab on the mold right after I take one off. I can build this form in one day, but time varies depending on the size and complexity.

Preparing and Adding Coils

Roll out a large coil the length of the circumference of the pot's rim. I use a thread to measure the rim and coil. Slightly flatten the coil with your hand and bevel the edge that attaches to the interior beveled edge of the pot with your hand or small rolling pin. Add the coil, overlap the ends a bit and cut through both. Bevel both ends and attach (*figure 8*). You don't need to slip and score since the clay is wet enough to be blended together easily. Blend the coil to the interior of the pot first, then Surform the exterior where the coil and the wall meet to smooth it out and add and blend a small coil around the exterior (*figure 9*). Repeat these steps until you get the desired size.

Finishing the Rim

Once you have the desired height and volume, even out the rim with a Surform, then measure and mark the four corners of the rim using a string and ruler. Decide how much of a curve you would like and mark the lowest point on two opposite sides of the rim. Use the Surform



1
Using a paper pattern, trace the outline of the top of the mold.



2
Add clay to the mold, taking care to remain inside your outline.



3
Smooth the surface, then level the bottom of the mold.



4
Hollow out the leather-hard mold, leaving ½-inch thick walls.



5
Drape a soft slab over the mold, completely covering it.



6
Fit the slab to the mold, then trim excess clay with an X-Acto knife.

to cut the clay away moving from one side to the other (*figure 10*) to maintain the same amount of pressure. Once you have the curve defined, smooth the rim using your fingers or a rib. (*figure 11*).

Finishing the Pot

My current surface work comes from the desire to use my pots as a space to abstractly render elements of my life, observations, and reflections. I'm interested in breaking up the surface of the form and creating spaces within and upon the object. The division of space through line and color provide symbolic opportunities to explore paradoxical states of interior and

exterior, expansiveness and constriction, possibility and unattainability, connections and misconceptions. Essentially the surface of a pot is a place where the inward and the outward meet, a means of finding connections through our shared interior worlds.

I prefer terra sigillata to glaze for its soft and non-reflective surface. I want to keep the surface in a raw state—as close as possible in appearance to unfired clay—that's when the clay is most vibrant and most resembles skin and our bodies.

Before brushing on the sigillata I decide the design and general layout of the surface, how it



7

Bevel the interior edge to prepare it for an added coil.



8

Add a large, slightly flattened coil to the rim and blend the interior seam.



9

Add a thin coil to outside wall where the larger coil and the pot meet.



10

Remove clay down to marks and create a gradual curve to the rim.



11

Smooth out and finish the curve and soften the rim.



12

Apply the base coat of terra sigillata using a soft brush.

will be divided, what colors I will use, where I want the red glaze to be, and how I want the dots and drips of red glaze to connect or disconnect. Although I make a lot of decisions as I am working, I do think about the relationship of the red dots and the corresponding line work, that being the central part of the surface design, and that which the rest revolves around. I will consider the condition and position of the red dots—is there a tension between them? How will the lines move over the form? Will they connect on one side and disconnect on another? Will it be an isolated dot? Or a cluster?

I view the different sides of a form as passages of time, or spaces of transition, using color and line to establish the division or movement. Often a line may move in various directions throughout the surface, having to navigate in and around the different blocks of color. The change of color with incised lines along the borders conveys a shift between interior and exterior, creating channels for lines and dots to move through, come out of, or reside in.

My color choices vary, sometimes it is more of an aesthetic decision, which color is most pleasing or intriguing with the other, and other times it is based on contrast and I



13

Apply final layers of terra sig, incise lines, add glaze details.

Recipes

Cushing's White Terra Sigillata

Water	14 cups
OM4 Ball Clay	1500 grams
Deflocculant	0.1-0.3 %

Colors: In same sequence of the cups. All oxide/stain measurements are with one cup of terra sigillata

Yellow

Mason Stain 6464 Zirconium Yellow	½ tsp
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Red

Red Iron Oxide	½ tsp
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Blue/Green

Mason Stain 6464 Zirconium Yellow	½ tsp
Mason Stain 6305 Teal Blue	½ tsp

White

Titanium dioxide	1 tsp
Chrome Green	
Chrome oxide	1/8 tsp

I don't use a ball mill when making terra sig. I mix up the batch, let it sit for a few days then siphon off the top layer of water then I siphon off the sigillata and put it in a glass container. When I use it, I mix one cup sigillata with the specific oxides. Be sure to wear gloves and a mask when handling oxides and stains.

I add about ½ to 1 teaspoon of gerstley borate to each cup of sigillata to lower the flux rate. I find this helps with sealing the surface. It may affect the smoothness of the fired surface, in which case I use a 220-grit sandpaper over the pots after firing.

Red Glaze: Unfortunately I recently found out that the red glaze I have been using is no longer being made. I have yet to start using another—still watering down the bits of dried red glaze left, but in the past I've used Duncan 1206-Neon Red.

Clear Glaze: Spectrum 700 Clear

Clay: Archie Bray Foundation Earthenware

think more in terms of light and dark most often to make clear distinctions of surface.

Once I decide the general layout, I begin by applying the base coat. I wait until the clay is bone dry before applying the sigillata—if done earlier, the clay won't absorb the sigillata and it will take a long time in between coats to dry. I use a hake brush because it holds a lot of liquid, moves well on the surface and doesn't leave brush marks (*figure 12*). I apply two to four coats of sigillata, depending on thickness; if it is too thick, the sigillata will peel off the fired surface. Let each coat dry before applying the next. After the final coat (of base color), but before the sigillata has completely dried—darker in color, cold to the touch, but not leaving any finger marks on the surface, I rub it using a small piece of foam until I get a shine to the surface. I prefer foam to plastic because it moves more easily across the surface.

The second color is brushed over the first, I start by using a thin brush to paint the outline then I fill in the spaces with a wider brush, usually two light coats and taking care not to apply it too thick, in order to avoid it chipping off after firing. This is followed by the incised line work using a pin tool and the application of the red glaze (*figure 13*). A clear glaze is applied to the interior of the pot after the bisque firing then fired to cone 03.



The finished earthenware bowl, fired to cone 03.

Three Element Plates

by Birdie Boone

For several years I've been making variations of this plate. It's a set of 3 elements: the plate face, the girdle, and the foot. The plate size and shape are easy to vary. For this wide and only somewhat flat, heavy-ish plate, elevated on a small-ish foot that's easily more aesthetic than stable, gravity's effects are unavoidable. Many flawed attempts have led me to solve for a higher rate of success. Timing, I found, makes all (well, most of) the difference. From wet clay slab to dry greenware plate, each step is best executed at a recommended firmness and this will be noted as needed. I'll also highlight certain details that need a little extra care and explain why.

Tools

- Template paper—I use Bristol board, which is heavier than paper, but still easy to manipulate.
- Round or oval plaster or bisque hump mold with a 20–30° curve, large enough to fit a plate on
- Use a handbuilding-friendly clay that's plastic and has a little tooth from either added grog or fine sand.

Templates

You needn't make your template to my exact specifications, but these are the dimensions I'm working with (1, 2).

Plate Face (includes outer plate ring and center circle):

A 12 in. long axis

B 8¾ in. short axis

C 5¾ in. center long axis

D 3⅝ in. center short axis

Girdle:

E 8⅜ in. long axis

F 6⅛ in. short axis

G 4½ in. center long axis

H 3¼ in. center short axis

Cut the Plate Face

Roll out a ¼-inch-thick slab. I have a large drywall table top I use to pull moisture from the clay slab slowly and evenly. Using a needle tool, cut out the plate face, using your paper template as a guide. Remove the outer clay scraps, but leave the plate face and center circle intact on the board. Let it firm up to pre-leather hard before moving it to prevent distortion (3).

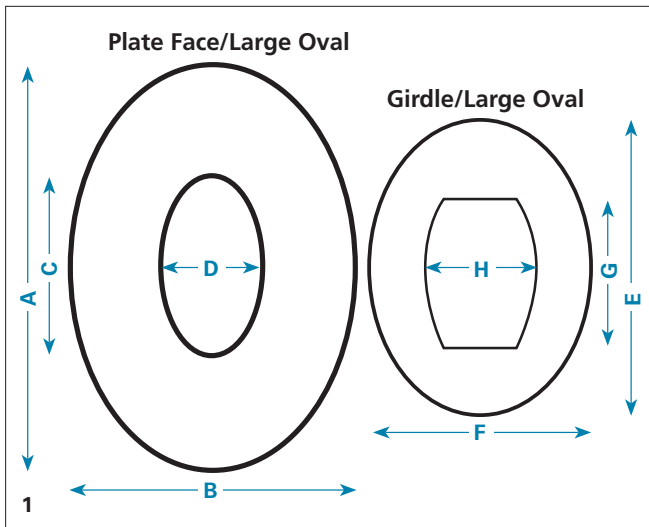
Roll out another small ¼-inch-thick (or slightly thinner) slab for the girdle and place it on a separate smaller drywall board. Leave it intact, and let it firm up to pre-leather hard.



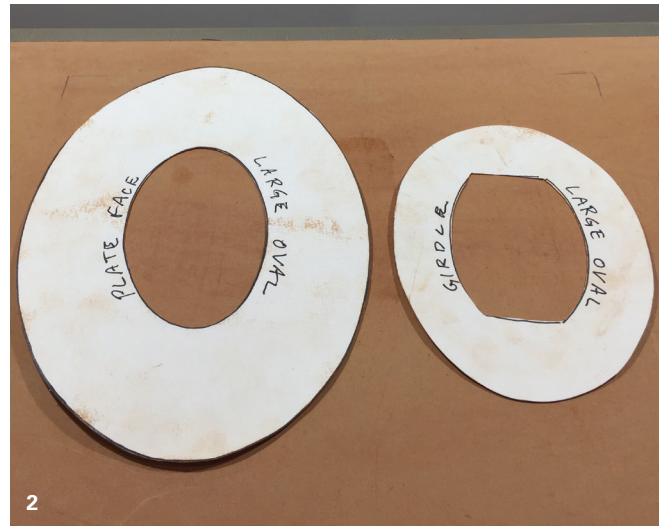
Using the flat end of a pony roller, slightly thin out and widen the ring to ¼ wider all around. Bevel the new outer edge all the way around. This increase in size will accommodate the bevel on the seam edge of the plate face when the center is reattached. Set this piece aside for later use.

Cut a seam through one or both sides of the ring. **Note:** This is an aesthetic step, to bring visual interest to the plate. Consider that this seam could be on the long or short axis or two cuts could mirror each other. Bevel the edges of the cut (4). Brush the seam edges with magic water, then join and compress the ends together with a pony roller (5). This too is an aesthetic step: I prefer to leave the little tips, which result from the pressure of the pony roller, sticking out on the seam ends (see 8). These extra details provide visual interest around the pot.

Using the pony roller's curved end, bevel the inner edge of the ring. Score and slip this edge really well. Add a bit of slip to the beveled edge of the center piece (set aside earlier), then invert it and place it back into the center. **Tip:** Don't be shy when slipping and scoring. The clay is nearing leather hard at this stage, so you want to make sure you have a strong join. Using the palm of your hand, gently tack down the center piece. Use the pony roller to compress the seam (6). Flip the plate face over (upright) to inspect the seams (7). If the seam looks tenuous, lay it face down and use your finger to compress right up along the edge near the seam. You want to make sure the seam is secure, but still visible, since the purpose



1 Create templates using a material that will hold up to multiple uses on a damp material.



2 Label your templates with an indelible marker and store them in a flat, dry place so you can use them multiple times.



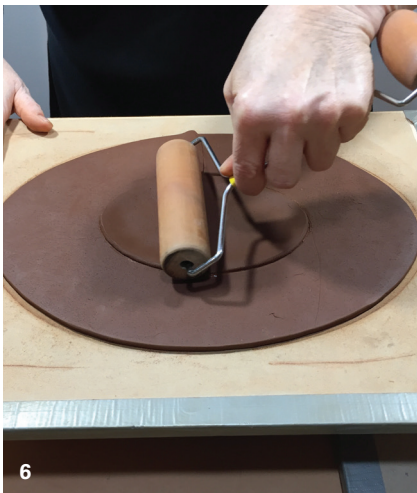
3 Cut the plate face from a rolled slab that has been compressed on both sides.



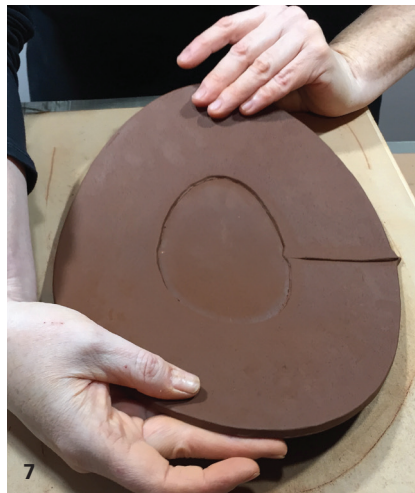
4 Cut a seam through one of the long sides and bevel the edges with a pony roller.



5 Join the cut but leave a visible seam line for a nice aesthetic touch.



6 Add the center piece of the plate face and attach it with the pony roller.



7 Check the front of the plate face to make sure the seam is fully attached.



8 Compress the plate face onto the mold to help eliminate warping during the firing.



Remove excess clay on the center seam using a Surform. Leave the seam intact.



Mark the area for the girdle, then slip and score the marked area.



Place and compress the girdle to the back of the plate face.



Add lugs to the girdle to even out the height before creating a foot.



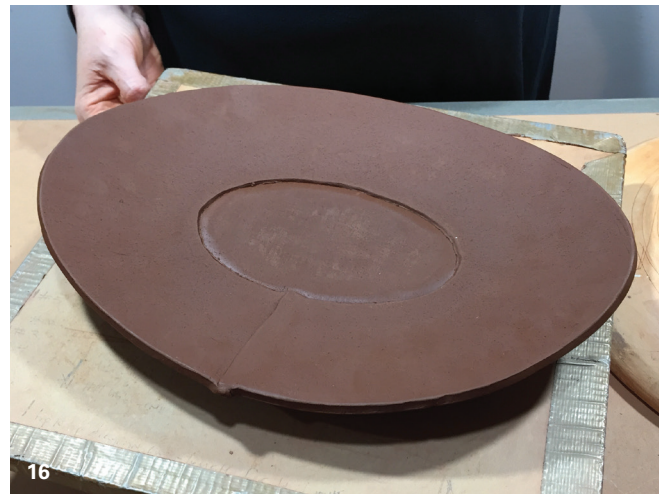
Paddle the foot coil down to secure it to the girdle.



Shape and level the foot coil using the pony roller.



Make a channel beneath the outer edge of the foot, then insert the rib into the channel on the short end and lift it to level the foot.



Remove the plate from mold. Leave the plate on the board until it's firm enough to lift without any distortion.



Birdie Boone's oval plate, 10½ in. (27 cm) in length, dark stoneware, bisque slip, glaze, fired to cone 6, 2015. Photo: Northern Clay Center.

of the two plate face pieces is to create visual interest. If it's not secure enough, it may separate during firing.

At this point, let the plate face set up to leather hard. You want it soft enough to work with, but firm enough so that once all the steps on the hump mold are finished, the plate is firm enough to be removed from the mold and hold its shape without slumping.

Assemble the Plate

Place your hump mold on a banding wheel. **Tip:** To avoid a very flat or uneven floppy plate, use a mold that has a considerable curve. This type of plate will flatten out a bit at several stages in the process and a more acute curve helps to counterbalance this. Place the plate onto the mold face down. Once centered, gently pat the form to fit the plate to the mold. Use a firm but flexible rubber rib to compress the outer ring of the plate, making several passes (8). It's very important to compress, compress, compress to help alleviate warping and cracking.

Using a Surform, remove the excess clay at the seam between the plate face and the center piece (9). The variations from thin to thick cause drying stress, which in turn can lead to cracking.

Adding the Girdle

Center the girdle piece on the plate face (still facing down on the mold) and mark the outline with the tip of your needle tool. Remove the girdle, lay it flat, score it with a serrated metal rib, then add slip. Slip and score in the outlined area on the plate face (10). Tack down the girdle, then use firmer pressure with a rib to seal the connection (11). **Tip:** Listen for squishy noises when you compress, it signifies a good join. If the girdle slides around, there may be too much slip. If so, let it sit for a few minutes so the two pieces can absorb the excess water, then compress the parts again.

Adding the Foot

Using the small end of the pony roller, bevel the inner edge of the girdle piece on the long sides only (see 12). Notice that because the plate is oval, parts of the foot won't sit flat. To elevate the short sides, score and add two small lugs of clay (12). Shape the coils so that the transition area is more or less level.

For the foot, you'll need a ½-inch diameter coil. It should be firm but malleable. Size the coil for the foot by laying it on the inner beveled edge of the girdle. Cut it to the appropriate length, remove it, and join the two ends together. Slip and score the beveled edge of the girdle. Tack the coil down and fit it to the girdle's shape as you move around the form. Let it sit for a minute, then paddle the coil to flatten its bottom edge (13). Remember, if there's too much slip, the coil may slide around. Once the coil is flattened, roll the inner edge of the foot downward and toward the center of the plate with the pony roller (14). Roll the outer edge of the coil flat, then roll the inner edge downward again. Do this a couple of times until you're satisfied with the shape. Don't flatten the foot coil down too far; a higher foot allows for an inner foot ring that's safe to glaze.

Use a firm-tipped clay shaper to make a channel beneath the outer edge of the foot all the way around, then insert the rubber rib into the channel on the short end of the foot and lever it up in the last effort to level the foot (15).

Cleanup Details

Use a wood tool to compress the seam edge between the girdle and the plate face, making sure the seam is well sealed. Smooth the edge of girdle with your finger to soften it. Use a rib to rub out any Surform or other tool marks.

Place a small board over the foot and press down gently but firmly in the center. Look between the inverted foot and the board. If there are any spaces through which you see light, re-address the foot before removing the plate from the mold. If no light is showing, flip the mold and the board back over. Remove the top board and lift the hump mold straight up off of the plate (16). Leave the plate on the board until it's leather hard to lift without any distortion.

Place bath towels both under and over plates to slow down and even out the drying. For the first couple of days, particularly if it's dry or hot in your studio, use plastic over the towels when away from the studio and remove the plastic when you can keep an eye on them. At this point, as a general rule, I try to forget about the plates for several days. During this early stage of the drying process, check the plate for warping and any separation at the joins. If the foot is warping, slow the drying down further. If any seams look suspect, compress with a wood or metal cleanup tool, then continue to slowly dry.

Once the plate is bone dry, if the foot is just a little wobbly, the glaze firing will likely level it out. If the dried foot has a significant wobble, gently slide it across a piece of sandpaper to level it out. A slow bisque is recommended for handbuilt plates.

A Quintessential Vase



by Brenda Quinn

Developing forms that have a utilitarian function and a dynamic design is like trying to solve an evolving equation with an elusive answer. For me, this equation becomes more complicated with the addition of an ever-expanding range of functions, techniques, and glazes to my working vocabulary. The chase for a solution is engaging; so much so that I'm often interjecting more variables into my process in order to keep the chase going. This is why I love learning new techniques and processes. It's like building an inventory of possibilities in my mind. I appreciate how making the same form using different techniques yields distinctly different results.

The designs for my work come out of a number of practices. I begin with sketches of forms and patterns, and often pull ideas from various historical sources. My current body of work started with an assignment I had given to my students, challenging them to combine handbuilding and wheel throwing with consideration for the unique visual qualities each of those techniques carry with them. This idea evolved as I began incorporating a slumping process into my work using an octagonal mold to create a vase. The mold was originally used to make a platter. After creating the platter, it was easy to see the potential in the form to become other vessels.

process | A Quintessential Vase | Brenda Quinn



1 Cut out an octagonal template. With the template supported, drape a slab onto the mold.



2 Cut away excess clay, leaving only an inch of overlap. Tap the clay, mold, and support on the table causing the clay to slump.



3 Using the mold board as a support, flip the leather-hard slab over and remove mold board.



4 Trim the clay to the line left by the board. Draw and cut a line across the middle of the piece.



5 Use a rasp to create a 45° bevel on the edges of the two pieces. Score and slip the edges of the piece.



6 Attach a 2-inch-wide slab to the piece while it's supported by foam. Pinch the slab to shape and refine the form.



7 Score and slip the pinched slab and connect the other half of the slumped slab.



8 Flip the piece so that the opened side is facing down. Add a coil to the base to create a foot.

All photos: Keith Renner



9
Turn the piece over and add coils to the rim of the opening. Pinch to combine the coils and add texture.



10
Cut the rim into a scalloped edge or desired pattern, and pinch the edges to refine them.



11
Create and attach four small handles and four small petal forms. Attach two to each side by scoring and slipping.



12
Use your finger or a brush to dab underglaze to the sides. Glaze the sides, let dry, and wax the glazed area.



13
Draw a pattern onto the glaze with a pencil. Brush wax over the glaze then remove excess glaze from other parts of the piece.



14
Pour glaze over the belly and let dry. Continue the pattern onto the belly. Brush wax over the glaze and drawing and let dry.



15
Carve away the wax and glaze on the drawn lines. Use a brush to remove wax burrs and glaze dust, then clean with a sponge.



16
Brush diluted underglaze into the carved lines. Use a sponge to lift off excess underglaze, let the piece fully dry, and fire it.

Start with Slumping

To create this slab- and coil-built vase, you first need to cut an octagon out of paper to use as a slump-mold template. A variety of rigid materials can be used to make the mold, including cardboard, foam board, or wood. I often make molds out of cardboard and if I want to repeat a form numerous times, I use foam core, which is sturdier and holds up longer to the clay and multiple uses. When choosing what material to use for your mold, take into consideration the size of the cutout—the larger the cutout is, the sturdier the material should be. The forms I'm making are no bigger than twelve inches, and I often retire a shape after a few uses, making it unnecessary to use a more permanent material.

Next, trace the paper template onto your mold board, and allow at least an extra two inches of board around the cutout to provide support during the slumping process. Using a sharp knife, cut the shape out and mark the side of the board that you cut from—ensuring you use the side providing you with a more accurate shape. Find a bucket or box with an opening slightly larger than the size of your cutout, to support the edge of the mold as you work.

Make a slab that is at least five inches larger than the cutout.

Tip: At this point you can texture your slab or to make it smooth. Carefully lift the slab and place it with the finished side facing down in the mold (*figure 1*). Trim away some of the excess clay, but leave an even ledge of clay about one inch wide around the edge of the cutout. This even lip helps the clay to slump evenly in the mold. If you leave too narrow a strip of clay, the clay may shift and fall into the opening during the next step.

Firmly grab the mold, slab, and support under it, lift them up, and tap it onto the table to force the clay further into the mold.

Since we want an even, symmetrical, concave curve, tap it a few more times, then rotate the mold and tap it again. Repeat rotating and tapping until you reach a desired depth. The thickness of the slab you use, the plasticity of the clay, and the shape of the cutout determines the depth (*figure 2*).

Once the slumped slab reaches leather hard, put a bat on top of it and flip it over (*figure 3*). Cut away the extra clay and draw a line to use as a guide to cut the piece in half (*figure 4*).

Adding Handbuilt and Pinched Elements

Use a rasp to make 45° angles on the edges of the forms (*figure 5*). Score and slip along the edge of the pieces, lay one of the pieces with the concave side facing up on a piece of foam to support it and add a two-inch-wide slab of clay to the entire slipped and scored edge, except the longest edge. Pinching the slab ensures a strong connection and creates texture to contrast the smooth surfaces of the slumped slab or you can make a seamless connection and a smooth surface if desired. Use your fingers to form a corner at each of the octagon's points (*figure 6*). Score, slip, and lay the other half of the octagon on top of the slab and repeat this same process (*figure 7*). Allow the entire form to stiffen under plastic. This helps to even out the moisture content and prevent the joints from cracking apart.

Next, turn the piece so it sits with the open side down. Score, slip, and add a coil to build the foot (*figure 8*). Make sure the foot is sturdy enough to physically and aesthetically support the weight of the piece.

After the foot stiffens, flip the vase over. Score and slip around the rim and add a thick coil. Pinch the coil to connect it to the base and to thin it out, moving the clay up. Continue adding coils and pinching until the piece reaches the desired height (*figure 9*).



Brenda Quinn's slump-molded and handbuilt vase, porcelain, underglaze and glaze, fired in oxidation to cone 6.



Brenda Quinn's slump-molded and handbuilt vase, porcelain, underglaze and glaze, fired in oxidation to cone 6.

Consider the Details From Start to Finish

Using a ruler, level out the top. Finish the top edge in a number of ways, such as the scalloped edge shown here (*figure 10*). I often consider the two-dimensional design on the surface when making choices about the three-dimensional aspects of a form. Knowing that I'll be drawing a pattern that has a leaf image with a ruffled edge led me to choose a more organic edge for the top. Looking for ways to tie three-dimensional and two-dimensional aspects of a piece together can help bring unity to a piece.

Lastly, make and attach four small handles to the sides of the piece. Using small pieces of clay, I model four petals that are attached to the bases of each handle (*figure 11*). I like the way appendages add visual movement to a piece and also provide a place for an accent color when glazing. After these pieces are attached, allow the vase to dry slowly under plastic then bisque fire it.

Surface Enhancements

After cleaning the bisque-fired surface with a clean damp sponge, use your fingertip or a brush to dab on dots of a light-colored underglaze, covering the ends of the piece (*figure 12*). Pour a colored transparent glaze over the dotted sides. Once the glaze is dry, cover the glaze with wax to protect it from any additional glaze layers. Remove any excess glaze from the surrounding areas by scraping it off and then sponging it clean.

Next, dab on more dots of a light-colored underglaze to the top portion of the vase, both inside and out. **Tip:** Hold the vase at a slight angle so the dots pool to one side, creating an interesting effect and bringing depth to the finished glaze surface. Pour a clear

or light-colored liner glaze into the vase and over the outside of the top portion. Remove excess glaze on the slab area of the vase.

Using a pencil, draw the pattern you want on the glaze surface, then protect the area with wax (*figure 13*). Repeat these steps on the belly of the vase, drawing a pattern after glazing with a semi-matte, darker glaze (*figure 14*), then covering it with wax. The glaze and wax need to dry for at least an hour—the longer it's allowed to dry, the less fragile the wax will be. Use a mini-ribbon tool to carve away the wax and the glaze over the drawn lines (*figure 15*). This creates dust so wear a mask. Use a stiff-bristle brush to gently knock away wax burrs and glaze dust in the carved lines, and a damp sponge to blot the piece and pick up excess dust.

Water down a darker underglaze and inlay it with a brush into the carved lines (*figure 16*). Use a damp sponge to blot away excess underglaze. I choose not to put glaze on top of the underglaze as this leaves the underglaze somewhat raised and a little rough, creating a nice contrast to the smooth glazes.

This multi-technique process can be used to create an endless number of forms. A great way to expand on your own designs is to make numerous slump molds of various shapes and use those parts as building blocks for new forms. By taking a slumped slab, looking at it from all angles, and thinking of cutting it into smaller pieces or adding coiled sections, you will be able to visualize how versatile these pieces can be.

Brenda Quinn teaches ceramics and visual arts at The Fieldston School in the Bronx, New York. Her work has been exhibited both nationally and internationally. She currently maintains a studio in her home in Mt. Vernon, New York with her husband, two daughters, three cats, and two guinea pigs. You can see more of her work at www.brendaquinn.com.

How to Make a Slab Pot

Using Textured Slabs to Create Square Nesting Bowls

by Annie Chrietberg



Nesting bowls provide an opportunity for using a variety of textures and glazes.

I know I'm not the only overly-involved-with-clay-person out there who brings more things home from a kitchen store for the studio than for the kitchen. So, as I was browsing through a kitchen store, I came across tart tins with scalloped edges and removable bottoms (*figure 1*), and knew I'd found something that would be fun and easy to use. I bought four of them in graduated sizes thinking: nesting bowls!

To get a square-ish form from a round slab requires removing darts of clay. After experimenting with different dart ratios, I settled on somewhere between a $\frac{1}{3}$ and a $\frac{1}{2}$ of the radius. To make the darts template, I traced around the scallops on the cutting edge of the tart tin (*figure 2*). Ignoring the low points of the scallops, I cut out a circle and folded it along two per-

pendicular diameters, so that the folds made a perfect cross. I then found a point somewhere between $\frac{1}{3}$ and a $\frac{1}{2}$ way along the radius to cut the darts to. I folded the template in half and cut out a wedge, then used that wedge to cut identical darts all the way around (*figure 3*). Explore the possibilities of different sized darts different numbers of darts, and different placement of darts. As long as you keep ratios similar from one template to the next, the bowls should nest.

Bevel the darts by pointing the knife tip towards the center on each side so you'll be switching the angle of the knife for each side of the dart. As always with slab work, score, then slip, then score again to create an interface so the seam stays together. You may also want to add a small coil along the seams, since you're changing the orientation of the slab. Use sponges or small



1

Tart tins with removable bottoms make excellent studio tools!

pieces of foam to keep the sides of the bowl just where you want them while you work on the join.

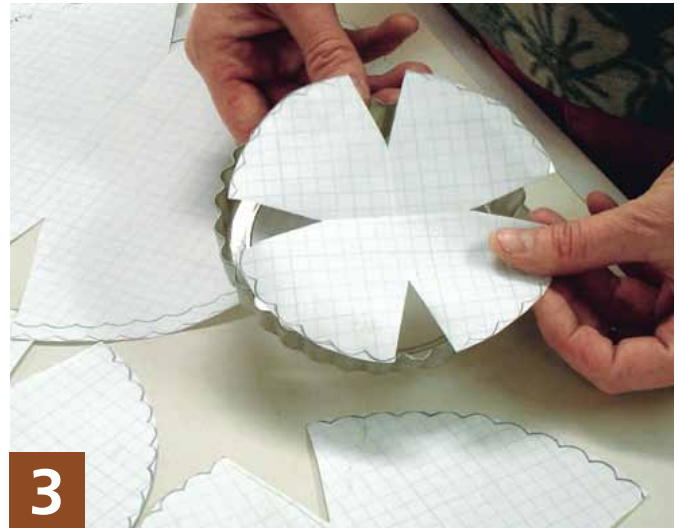
After all four corners are well joined, turn the piece over. Anytime you need to turn a piece over, find foam if needed, and wareboards or bats, and find a way to flip the piece without touching it. Run a finger or a well-wrung-out sponge over the backside of the seam, eliminating any sharpness and sealing it. Repeat these directions with every size tart tin and template that you have, and you will have a lovely little set of nesting bowls.

With four nesting bowls, you'll want to explore the potential using eight different textures—match textures from the top of one bowl to the bottom of the next, let the textures cycle through the set—there are so many possibilities!



2

Create a darts template by tracing around the edge. Ignore the scallops when cutting the circle.



3

To make sure your bowls nest, use the same dart proportions on each template.



4

Clean texture tools before using to avoid getting those little crumbs of clay that can mar the texture, then dust clean texture tools with cornstarch so that they will release easily.



5

Before applying texture, check your slab for size. Leaving an inch or so leeway gives you some room to maneuver if there are flaws in the texture. Smooth the slab with a soft rib.



6

Place the slab onto the first texture tool, gently roll from the center towards the edge in a radial pattern, pushing down just enough to press the clay into the texture, but not so hard that you move the clay and thin the slab.



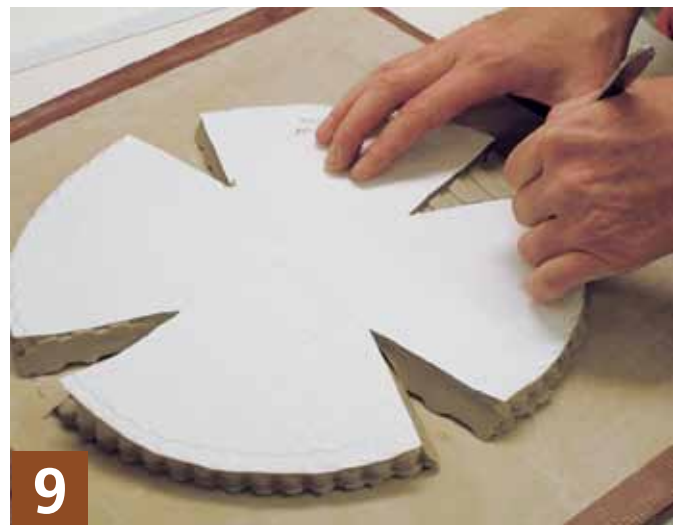
7

Flatten the surface with a big rolling pin then carefully place a prepared texture tool on top of the slab and roll using just enough pressure to transfer the texture, but not so much that you thin or move the slab.



8

Move to a wareboard and remove the texture tools, then flip the slab so the interior face of the bowl is facing up. Use the tart tin to cut through the slab.



9

Slip your hand underneath the rim and place your fingertips at the edge of the slab, gently press the slab free of the cutter. Align the darts and then cut the darts with the tip of the knife angled toward the center on both sides.



10

Score and slip the cut edges of darts. Carefully lift slab to join both sides of the dart cuts. Use small foam bolsters to support the sides and keep the corners joined.



11

Remove the rough edges with a damp sponge, then lay a small coil in the corner. Blend the coil following the texture, if possible.

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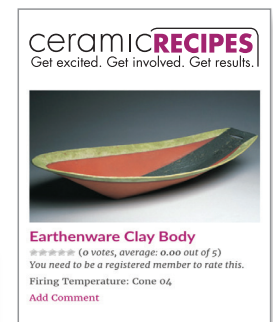
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