

Pottery Making

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Illustrated

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Pouring Vessels

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Thrown Extrusions

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Liquor Service, 12 in. (30 cm) in length, porcelain and earthenware, porcelain bisque fired to cone 06 and glaze fired to cone 9/10 in reduction, earthenware single fired to cone 04.

Sipping Service

by Mike Jabbur

Making a set is always a complicated, challenging task. You must consider the relationships among various elements of a single pot, relationships between pots, the finished presentation, and the processes and materials that best convey the idea of the set. I enjoy this task; it allows me to orchestrate function and consider my pots in a sculptural sense. While every pot has a sculptural presence, working with multiple components challenges me in a unique way that often leads to less obvious compositional solutions.

Throwing the Pourer

When centering clay on the wheel, I always cone the clay to allow for even water distribution and a more centered ball of clay—centering throughout the entire ball of clay, rather than just centering the outside of the clay. Pots that will have a trimmed foot are always opened with a bowl-shaped bottom, creating an inverted arch that provides support for the finished piece during the firing process. After opening the clay, push the thick wall and rim into a cone shape, preemptively countering the centrifu-

gal force that occurs when throwing on the wheel. With each pull, raise the clay, straightening the walls. Because I stretch my forms from the inside, I prefer making the basic shape (prior to altering) more of a cooling tower form rather than a straight-walled cylinder.

After pulling the cylinder, rib the wall, first with a wooden rib, then with two different ribs. I do one pass with a rubber rib on the inside and a flexible steel rib on the outside, and then one or two more passes with one rubber rib on the inside and one on the outside. This process allows me to compress any throwing rings and to create a tight, skin-like surface on the outside of the form, a surface that I find ideal for dramatic stretching.

Once you have a smooth surface, create a band at the bottom of the form, then use a soft rib to make a severe spiral that will gradually become subtler through the stretching process (*figure 1*). I find that throwing lines and rib marks on the same piece often compete with one another, and I generally prefer one or the other (and in the case of my work, I prefer the mark of the rib). As you stretch from the inside, follow the pattern of the rib mark while remaining

Potters must consider the relationships among the various elements of a single pot, relationships from pot to pot, the finished presentation, and the processes and materials that will best convey the idea of the vessel.

pottery vessel process



1
Compress and smooth the cylinder then make a spiral on the bottom half.



2
Stretch the form from the inside until it is near the point of collapse.



3
Cut the rim with an up-and-down motion using a cheese slicer.



4
Small trimming tools help create crisp, clean lines and transitions.



5
Score the inside of the pot, attach a coil of clay to create a flange.



6
Stretch a slab top into a shallow bowl shape and add it to the flange.



7 Attach one end of the handle to the top, pull and attach the other end.



8 Stretch the back of the spout using a blunt tool.



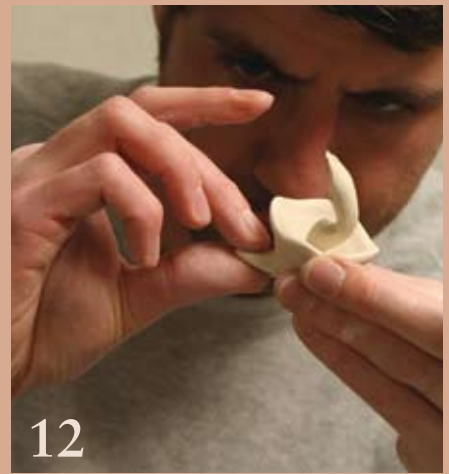
9 Cut the spout from the hump at an angle with a wire tool.



10 Score the clay and carefully attach the spout to the pourer.



11 Score the knob and the inside bottom of the stopper then attach.



12 Add a small lug to the back of the stopper to lock it in place during use.



13 Notch the back of the hole to accommodate the lug.



14 Apply two slip dots to visually key the pourer and stopper together.

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aware of the overall composition and gesture of the form (*figure 2*). For this pourer, cut the rim with a cheese slicer to create a dramatic, meandering line (*figure 3*), then soften and round the cut with a sponge and chamois.

Trimming and Assembling

Trim the pot once it's leather hard (*figure 4*). I trim nearly every pot I make on a bisque-fired chuck with a leather-hard coil of clay on the top rim. After centering and securing the chuck and pot, apply downward pressure while trimming to keep the pot sealed to the chuck. Because I always leave a section of the pot unglazed, I create clean lines when trimming, which gives me crisp edges to follow when waxing and glazing.

After articulating the foot ring and matching the curve of the inside of the foot ring to the outside wall to assure even wall thickness, I cut three pieces from the foot to echo the gesture and movement of the rest of the pot. The three cuts create a tripod of sorts, providing movement at the bottom of the pot while maintaining stability. Flatten the foot slightly with the edge of a fettling knife, then polish with a soft rib.

Next, I compress and blend a coil to the inside of the clay wall, (*figure 5*). This addition allows me to add a bowl-shaped slab top, creating an enclosed form (*figure 6*).

Tip: Good scoring and a little bit of Magic Water (3 grams soda ash, 9½ grams sodium silicate, 1 gallon water), applied with a dropper, are ideal for making all attachments with porcelain.

Use a slightly moist sponge to compress and blend the seam between the slab top and the pourer. Excess water at this point encourages cracking as the pot dries.

I usually pull handles directly from the pot (*figure 7*). With this technique, I can visualize the proportions better than when pulling the handle first, then attaching it. Score the top and bottom points of attachment to make sure there is a strong connection that will resist separation due to the porcelain's high shrinkage rate.

Next, throw and attach the spout. I like to attach spouts when they are still fairly wet so I can shape them to match the contour of the pot. Use a rib to shape and compress, then make a small dent with the edge of a wooden rib and stretch from the inside with a blunt tool on the opposing side to create a gesture in the spout that relates to the rest of the pot (*figure 8*). Push the spout back in the middle (on the dented side). Then, supporting the middle, push the top of the spout forward to create an S-curve that you find both visually and functionally successful. Use a make-up type sponge to remove fingerprints and to shape the clay without otherwise denting or distorting it.

After cutting a hole in the pot for the liquid to pass through, wire the spout off at an angle (*figure 9*) and remove extra clay from the inside. Clean the cut edge with a fettling knife and then use a soft rib to roll and smooth the edge. Hold the spout up to the pourer, trace the edge with a needle

tool, and cut away excess clay from the hole to about ¼ inch inside the traced line. After scoring both surfaces and applying some Magic Water, attach the spout (*figure 10*).

To make the stopper, throw a small, steep-sided bowl shape off the hump. Cut the rim then smooth it in the same manner as the rim of the pourer. Shape the outside with a soft rib before cutting the stopper off the hump using a needle tool.

Alter a coil for the knob using the edge of your thumb, and cut the top at an angle with a sharp knife. Score the end of the knob and the interior of the stopper then attach them together (*figure 11*). Bend the knob into an S-curve. Add a small lug of clay to the back of the stopper to prevent it from falling out when pouring (*figure 12*). Cut a hole in the top of pourer to accept the stopper, soften the edge using a little water, and cut a notch from the back of the hole to make room for the lug (*figure 13*). Apply a couple of strategically placed slip dots to visually key the two parts together (*figure 14*).

When throwing the shot glasses for this set, I always use small, individual balls of clay rather than throwing off the hump, to prevent S cracks,.

Firing the Vessels

I bisque fire my porcelain to cone 06 and glaze fire to a flattened cone 9/soft cone 10 in a reduction atmosphere. I leave some surfaces—such as the spout, knob, and handle—unglazed. I sand these unglazed surfaces at the bisque stage with drywall and fine-grit sandpaper, then again after the glaze firing with wet/dry sandpaper.

Designing the Display

Presentation is important and I create customized displays for my porcelain sets out of a contrasting earthenware. I begin by making a poster-board full-scale model of the pedestal, or cabinet for the pouring set, using the already high-fired porcelain pieces for my measurements. A flexible curve helps create graceful and perfect mirror image curves (*figure 15*). The poster board templates are carefully cut out, as they will later be traced onto clay slabs. Since I build the pedestal using earthenware, I find that I don't really have to account for shrinkage (but I build just a little larger than my measurements to be safe and to ensure a comfortable fit). The maquette is useful for visualizing the finished piece (*figure 16*), and once I disassemble it, the parts are used as the templates for the earthenware slabs (*figure 17*).

Roll out a large slab from groggy earthenware, and trace templates onto the slab with a sharp knife. As I trace, I score halfway through the slab, then tear the rest of the way through the clay to create a ragged edge that contrasts the smooth, refined edges of the porcelain pieces. Center the slab for the base of the cabinet on a drywall board before cutting it out. From this point, the base is not moved until the finished piece is leather hard. For the other parts, lifting the cut slabs and poster board templates from the drywall together reduces stretching and distortion of the

slab. Assembling this cabinet on drywall helps with the drying of the piece; the absorption of the drywall aids in even drying from top to bottom (*figure 18*).

Having already made the maquette to scale, I simply reassemble the original design using clay slabs (*figure 19*). Slabs are put into place, traced, removed, then scored for attachment. Using a ruler helps maintain even spacing—a slight error in spacing can become a major problem later. The slabs are still very soft at this point, so it helps to build the form in a sequence that supports the vertical walls. The attachment of all slabs is done with a slight back-and-forth motion to work the scored areas together. The top front edges of the cabinet are stretched upward so the cups fit in and out easier, as well as to break up the static horizontal line. The back column becomes a closed form. A small hole

pierced into the bottom once the piece reaches a stiff leather hard to allow air to escape during the firing.

Finally, the porcelain pieces are put in their places as a last chance to make sure everything fits correctly. Dry the cabinet slowly over several days. Cracking is less of a concern with a groggy earthenware body, however slow drying is still important and helps dramatically with any warping issues that often occur with flat-slabbed pieces.

After the cabinet is single fired to cone 04, the set is ready for presentation. ■

Mike Jabbur received his BA in graphic design from Virginia Tech University, was a resident artist at Red Star Studios in Kansas City, Missouri, and received his MFA in ceramics from Ohio University. He is currently the Studio Director at Santa Fe Clay in Santa Fe, New Mexico. To see more of his work, visit www.mikejabburceramics.com.

Display Piece Process



15 Measure and lay out the templates for the cabinet using already high-fired pieces and a flexible curve.



16 Construct a maquette from the templates to help visualize the finished clay piece, then disassemble it.



17 Cut all the pieces for building the cabinet using the templates before assembly begins.



18 The top slabs should be stiff enough not to slump into the empty spaces, but soft enough to manipulate later.



19 Add a small dome to the top of the column. Cut a hole to prevent trapping air between the two slabs.