

Hand-Building Tips

Hand-building pottery is the very basic form of creating pots, bowls, sculptures etc by hand. There are three simple techniques; Pinching, Coiling and Slab building (*please see our 'Pottery Techniques' guide*). Many pots are in fact a combination of more than one technique and there are just a few things to remember that apply whichever technique you choose.

- **Preparing your clay** – before you start, ensure there are no air bubbles in your clay. THIS IS REALLY IMPORTANT and called wedging. Beware of kneading it like dough, folding over and introducing more air bubbles than you started with! I find it easier (and more satisfying!) to slam the clay down onto your work surface, turn it and slam it again keeping it in a cube shaped block. The reason you are doing this is to prevent your finished item from exploding when you fire it.... No pressure!!
- **Joining your clay** – ALWAYS score both the part you are sticking on, plus the part you are sticking it to. This will make a key to help you make the join stronger. DAB each side with water, press both parts together firmly. Use a blunt tool or the back of your fingernail to smooth the two parts together and the join will disappear. NOTE; if your project is 'leather hard' (ie is starting to dry out), then you may need to use SLIP instead of water. Slip is a mixture of water and clay, mix to a paste and use like a 'glue'.
- **Stopping your clay from sticking** to your work surface – If you are rolling it out, use a linen cloth to roll on. If it sticks to your rolling pin, put another linen cloth on top of the clay. Remove the cloth once you have finished, it absorbs moisture and will dry your project out too quick.
- **Use a wooden board** to build your project on. The board will soak out some of the moisture and help you to handle the project as you build avoiding distortion.
- **Ensure you have NO THICK areas** in your design - these are likely to trap air or water and may lead to your pot exploding. ALWAYS hollow out bodies, heads, handles, tails etc. Ensure air can freely flow around your creation, make sure there is a hole between two parts to let the air through and don't seal everything up without an escape hole!
- **If you have used a form** to wrap your clay around REMOVE as soon as clay has started to firm up (usually just an hour or so). If you leave it too long the clay will shrink and will split.

Hopefully these hints and tips will help you to get the most from hand-building. Once your piece is thoroughly dried it will be ready for firing. This can take anything between 5 and 10 days but depends on room temperature and thickness of clay . DO NOT be tempted to try and dry too quick as the piece may crack.