

## TIPS AND TECHNIQUES

Submitted by Clayfolk members

Remember : If you share studio space with a partner, DON'T offer advise if it's not asked for. Even then ... think strongly about it! (This has probably saved the lives, relationships and marriages of many a potter!)

WD40 is a perfect release for molds and stamps. Brush it on anything you want to use for a mold - plastic, glass, etc.and the clay doesn't stick. And it doesn't hurt the clay at all, even when recycled. All your stamps and textures will benefit. If you don't want to breath the spray from a can, buy a gallon can from the automotive department and pour some in a smaller container. Margarine tubs are good.

Made some mugs and want to put handles on the next day? You want them to get leatherhard, neither too soft or too dry. Plastic covers keep them too wet; no covering lets them dry out. So put several layers of newspaper over the fresh work and it should be just right the next day. Be sure to use enough paper or they will still get too dry.

I sometimes remove a pot from the wheel to let it firm up a bit and then put it back to throw some more. The bat pins on my wheel appear to be placed the same, but not they are not *quite* the same. The pot is not quite centered unless I happen to put it back the same way as I had before. I put red fingernail polish on one of the pins. I use plastic bats that have one round and one oval hole, so I put the round hole on the red bat pin. Now I can replace the bat the same way I had it before.

The website to look at is Ceramics Art Daily. Many of us are signed up to get a daily email. I have learned quite a bit.The video that prompted my hint was one that has allowed me to make much bigger thin pitchers. I throw a mug shape as big as I can thin, about 9 inches tall. When that is leather hard I throw a thick donut. I put the leatherhard base back on the wheel (hasn't been cut) and place the donut on the bat upside down on the base (hasn't been cut off the bat). When I get it positioned I cut the bat off the donut and throw the top. You have to be a really steady thrower to do this.

For those who would like to promote their wares online.

Here is the Main Etsy Site : <http://www.etsy.com/>

Facts on Selling on Etsy : [http://www.etsy.com/how\\_selling\\_works.php](http://www.etsy.com/how_selling_works.php)

Networking Tools

Facebook : <http://www.facebook.com>

Twitter : <http://twitter.com/>

For small slip trailing jobs, the small plastic pipets used in high school science labs work like a charm. The “pipes” are too long so just cut to any desired length, put the end in the glaze or slip, squeeze , and you’re ready to trail.

A grapefruit peeler makes a great tool !

In a hurry to clean your bisque? Pull it out of the kiln still pretty warm and wash immediately in water. The hot pot steams itself dry.

You can paint mobile wax around joined edges (like handles or decorations). The wax slows down drying time and eliminates cracking.

Q-tips and eye shadow sponges work great for smoothing cracks and corners where your fingers won’t fit.

Prior to glazing, blow the dust off the pots with an air compressor.

When trimming pots that have a thin bottoms which could dent, use jar lids to disperse the pressure while trimming. Keep a wide range of jar lid sizes in the studio.

When drying mostly handbuilt pieces, I use bean bags of all sizes as weights. Use rice inside the “bean bags” as it seems to help the drying process.

During handbuilding, I usually bevel the pieces of clay before placing them together. This cut off piece is perfect to use where you need a small coil to join the pieces together. It fits into the “vee” formed by placing two pieces of clay together and can be easily smoothed.

Don’t wax bottoms. Keep a damp, short napped carpet sample on top of your work table. Just wipe the pot on the carpet to remove glaze. Foam can work, too. Rinse carpet or foam when glaze builds up.

If you use drywall between tiles, or for other purposes, frame the drywall pieces with duct tape to keep plaster from getting on your clay.

Save dryer lint for stuffing inside 3-D work. It’s soft, pliable and recyclable.

Are your porcelain pots, large tiles, or other flat bottomed pieces sticking to your kiln shelves? Place powdered aluminum hydrate on your shelves under sensitive pieces. Be careful not to get any aluminum hydrate on your pots or on the shelves below or you will have crusty white blotches on your other pots. You can carefully sweep up and re-use for multiple firings as aluminum hydrate is NOT cheap. If money isn’t an issue, vacuum shelves with a shop vac.

**CORRECTING PIN HOLES AND BUBBLE MARKS :** Before you change your glaze recipes, throw out colors or decide to give up glazing altogether, try this simple tip : Bisque your greenware at a slightly higher temperature. For instance, if you currently bisque at cone 5, bisque at cone 4. The hotter temperature burns off more of the debris and impurities which usually causes pin holing and/or bubble marks.

**SCRATCHING OR SCORING POTTERY :** Hurray! A great little tool is on the market that is ideal for scratching/scoring pottery in preparation for putting two pieces together. You can purchase it from a ceramic supplier, such as Georgies. It looks like a metal stick with five or six thin metal prongs at the end.

**CLEANING UP GREENWARE :** Although flat sand paper works fine, a sand paper BLOCK works even better on fragile greenware. We have cut our breakage in half using a block. If your pottery is still leather hard, try using one of the green plastic scrubbies sold for kitchen use.

**DRILLING HOLES :** Drilling holes in pottery for colanders, candle jars and anything else that needs a hole is fun and simple if you use a small hand-held battery operated drill. The drill bit isn't real fast, so it doesn't get away from you. And it's easily controlled. When your pottery is leatherhard,, use a pin tool to mark where you want the holes to be. Then place the end of the drill bit over the hole and DRILL. Clean-up is quick and easy with a green scrubby.

#### **LANA WILSON'S MAGIC WATER**

1 gallon water

3 Tbsp liquid sodium silicate

1 1/2 tsp soda ash

Use this whenever joining one piece of clay to another, handles or other attachments. Also use as the liquid to make paper clay. It's stronger than slip because the mixture forces the molecules in the separate pieces to realign themselves, creating an interlocking bond.

Each of the three following recipes uses the same ingredients. They are just mixed in different proportions. Add this info to Lana's recipe and I think the proportions are not rocket science. Sodium Silicate is sometimes called "egg keep" or "water glass" and found in drugstores.

#### **STEVE FULMER'S MAGIC WATER**

1 liter water

2 teaspoons sodium silicate

1/4 teaspoon soda ash

#### **CHERI GLASER'S MAGIC WATER**

1 gallon water

3 Tbsp sodium silicate

5 grams soda ash

#### **JOYCE ROGER'S MAGIC WATER**

1/2 gallon water

1 1/2 Tablespoons sodium silicate  
2 1/2 grams soda ash

SPOOZE is similar to Magic Water. It's used to join green ware (unfired) pieces together. Some people report that it can be used on bisqued pieces as well.

#### PEGGY'S SPOOZE

1/3 part dry, finely crushed clay (whatever clay body you are using)  
1/3 part corn syrup  
1/3 part vinegar  
a drop of hydrogen peroxide to keep it from fermenting

#### PAPER CLAY

I saved THE BEST for last. This stuff makes miracles happen. You may fill cracks you thought would never heal, even on bisque and you might be able to repair and reglaze in one step sometimes.

This recipe of a spooze-like material uses paper clay using your own clays. It contains magic water, clay, paper linter which has been shredded and boiled, then stirred in all together. This stuff makes a terrific adhesive when assembling clay parts or patching cracks. Also try making some using calcined clay for patching cracks in bisque. Refrigerated to prevent it from smelling. Or use peroxide or bleach." Start with Lana Wilson's Magic Water. Add sufficient boiled toilet paper or egg cartons and clay to make the clay mass sufficiently thick for your purposes. Sometime quite stiff, other times "gushy". If too "gushy," it can be stiffened with a bit of vinegar. [roxhun@gmail.com](mailto:roxhun@gmail.com)

Another recipe for paper clay repairs : Repair cracks in greenware, or bisqued Or even final fire pieces. Paste a mixture of your own clay as a slip and toilet paper, 2 to 1, blend and push into crack. Refire the piece.

#### SCORE NO MORE

First, make your own repair paste. Pat Horsley's "Score No More" slip and repair paste is nothing short of miraculous. I use it to joining pieces of clay together, handles or other attachments. Here's a recipe to make it from your clay:

1000 grams of your clay body in dry form  
20 grams Custer Feldspar  
20 grams Bentonite  
20 grams Gum Arabic  
1 teaspoon liquid Darvan

It is IMPORTANT to disperse the Gum Arabic. Pour boiling water over and add water up to a slip consistency. A blender really helps, then add Darvan (LIQUID) when it is well mixed. Add a tiny bit of bleach if you will store it to keep odors down.

REFIRING is uncertain because the piece is no longer porous and has had most of the "heat work" required, refire at one cone lower than the original target temperature.

If you fired to ^6, now refire to ^5. Fire more slowly. Heating as fast second time around, will invite trouble. Do think about firing pieces on a thin layer of grog to increase the surrounding heat to allow movement, especially on large flat pieces. I ALWAYS do this, not just re-firing.

REGLAZING is best done with a sponge or spray. Sponging allows the glaze to self-level. To encourage the glaze to attach, warm the piece, use a cheap hair spray or APT II to lend adhesion. I add APT II into the glaze. It really helps!

When joining pieces of clay to the original clay body, use the same clay with similar water content. Then cover tightly. To meld the pieces together and equalize water or moisture content dry slowly by covering with plastic.

## RECYCLING TIPS

If your clay is too hard to work (but not bone dry), put a little water in the plastic bag in which the clay came, with the clay. Seal the bag well and submerge in a bucket of water. Leave overnight. The water in the bag will be pressed into the clay by the pressure of the water in the bucket.

Recycle foil lined plastic zip lock bags, such as Splenda bags. You can use these bags to save scrap bits of clay or trimmings, add a little water, zip close top, and mix.

To rehydrate clay that has been in the bag a little too long, take a dowel (about 1/2" in diameter), six inches longer than a bag of clay and cut it at a 45 degree angle at one end. Push it into the clay in four places without penetrating the bottom. Then fill each hole with water and let stand for a few days.

Use a 2 gallon container with a plastic bag inside (you can use other sizes of containers). Scraps are put into the plastic lined container to dry. When the container is almost full, add water to cover. Leave 2 days and then pour out water that has settled on top of the clay. Dump the clay out of the container onto half of a regular size bath towel. Fold over the other side of the towel and press down on towel to flatten clay to about one inch thick. Turn the towel once daily for 3 to 5 days, checking the clay once a day to test for dryness. When dry enough to wedge, cut the clay into sections, roll up and wedge. It's okay for the clay to still be quite soft. Let the balls of wedged clay stiffen up and then wedge again. Repeat a couple of times. When the wetness/dryness of the clay is what you prefer, bag it up!

Make a slab by throwing the clay in its bag several times down on a cement floor. Then roll it between two equally thick sticks.

Use a printing blanket between your slab of clay and the rollers

Burnishing Clay for Pit fire or.....?

To burnish small beads : Dry beads in an aluminum pie tin, spritz with water and shake. Repeat until sound changes from hollow to solid.

This is a hint for polishing (or burnishing tiles) that are very intricate or have relief designs on them so they are hard polish with a stone. Put a thick piece of soft packing foam or sponge inside of a plastic vegetable bag. The plastic works great and the foam helps to keep your fingernails away from the clay so that they will not gouge your work.

For fast, smooth burnished pots, smooth the newly thrown piece with a metal rib. Do not wire off the bat. When leather hard return to the wheel and smooth again with the metal rib again. Wire off the bat. Let the pot dry. Spray with Terra Sig starting at the top. Keep banding wheel spinning fairly rapidly. As lots of drips form, follow them down the pot with the spray gun. They'll disappear leaving a nice even coat. Dry for awhile and repeat. When dry, rub gently with a rag (one of those meant to dry your car). Your pots will glow!

The best thing I have ever found for burnishing a pot (getting it read for the pit fire , saggur, raku or horsehair) is a flat piece of Teflon. This was given to be my a guy who worked as a mechanic at an Air force base, and I don't know where to get more. It's a flat, 1/8" thick sheet, slightly flexible than can be cut with heavy shears. Maybe furniture sliders made of Teflon would work. Perhaps some kind of kitchen tool with a flat shape. A flat shape doesn't dent the clay like a spoon or stone.

Tiles

Dry tiles on racks so air can circulate. Fire the tiles vertically. (You can get free racks from any appliance store that recycles of freezers, refrigerators, ovens, etc.)

Keep tiles flat while drying. Place tiles on flat, 3/4" plywood with newspapers laid top and bottom. Stack alternate layers of newspaper/tiles at least three high. Then stack additional plywood and/or other weights onto the top layer. After a couple of days, unstuck everything, flip tiles over, replace newspapers, and restack everything. Keep doing this until the tiles are fairly dry. Next, let the tiles air dry unstacked for a day or so until they are completely dry. Bisque.

If you make a lot of pottery with flat bottoms and need to wax them before glazing, the technique below works quickly and neatly. Because the paraffin will smell, we recommend using a face mask. You will need the following supplies:

Paraffin wax (found in the canning section of local grocery stores)

A level

A flat electric griddle

An 8" x 12" rectangle cooking pan

Scraps of cardboard

Lamp oil

Wooden popsicle stick

Small brush

Face mask

Directions :

1. Place the rectangle cooking pan on top of the griddle.
  2. Use the level measure the top of the pan to make sure it's level. We measure all four sides.
  3. Place cardboard scraps under the legs of the griddle to level the pan.
  4. Turn the griddle to 330 (works best on our griddle)
  5. Melt enough paraffin in the pan to reach the desired depth you want the paraffin to cover on your pottery (Use the popsicle stick to measure). Add more paraffin when you notice the depth shrinking.
  6. Slowly place clean BISQUEWARE into the melted paraffin. If the paraffin is the correct temperature, it will turn the bisqueware dark where it's dipped.
  7. Removed bisqueware immediately and place upside down on newspaper (make sure paraffin has dried so it doesn't drip onto the sides of your pottery.
  8. You can thin the paraffin by adding lamp oil to it.
  9. If the paraffin doesn't cover a hole or dip in the bottom of your pottery, use the paint brush to paint the hot paraffin onto the missed area
- This might seem like a lot of set-up, but you can dip a large number of pieces in a very short time and each will come out even and straight. We keep a designated griddle and pan in our studio so we're always set to wax.