

## Making a Cup

### Pattern printing information

**Before printing the pattern check your printer settings** (you may need to change the default settings). Set the printer to 'scale' the image to 100%. (Some printers may have the option to print 'actual size'). Do not choose 'fit to page' or 'scale to fit'. Once the page has printed check that the measurements match those written on the printed Pattern.

Please Note To fit on the page, the Rib#1 pattern has been halved. To make the whole Pattern, first cut out the half Pattern. Fold a piece of paper (A4 or larger) in half. Place the edge of the half Pattern along the folded edge of the paper – Use a pen/pencil to trace around the half Pattern shape and cut out. When the paper is unfolded this will create the whole Pattern for the cup.

### Tools needed



*From L to R :*

*3mm thick wooden guides (for rolling the slab), rubber and metal kidneys, sponge, paintbrushes (for adding slip and cleaning up seams), rubber tipped tool, knife, wooden paddle, ruler, rolling pin.*

Slab building requires you to be constantly assessing how wet or dry the clay slab is. This becomes intuitive as you develop your hand building skills.

When I begin to make an object, I assess how soft (wet) the clay is and the temperature and humidity levels in my studio. These are all factors in how I then work with the clay slab. It is important to work WITH the clay – taking all these factors into account.

A very soft slab, which has a high moisture content, is perfect for embossing but cannot be used to build with until slightly firmer. How wet (floppy) the slab is to begin with and how quickly it is drying out as you're working must be monitored throughout the making process. At every stage there is an optimal moisture content level (softness/firmness) and through practice you will learn to know when the clay feels just right for what needs to be done. Every bag of clay or batch of reclaimed clay will be slightly different and the temperature/humidity levels in your studio will also influence the speed of drying.

After I have embossed my clay slab, I assess the firmness of the slab. (The embossing tile will remove moisture from the slab). If it still too wet/floppy I allow it to firm up slightly before beginning to make my object.

I can do this in different ways. Either I will allow the slab to dry slightly on an absorbent surface, or I may also choose to work directly onto the form (not cover it with cling wrap) because being dry raw clay, the Form is very absorbent and will help to dry out the clay.

When working directly onto the Form (not covering it with cling wrap) the Form will absorb water from the cup as it is being made so always be aware how quickly the cup is drying out as you're making it. (The temperature in your studio can also affect how fast the object under construction is drying).

It is a nuanced process and requires constant monitoring to ensure that the clay has the right level of moisture for each stage.

Sometimes I do not cover the Form with cling wrap to begin with but may do so later on, if I feel the cup is becoming too dry.

Fiber cement sheeting can be used to dry out slabs if they are too soft/wet but ensure they do not dry it out too much, especially if the slab will need to be bent or shaped in any way during making.

I often place the base disks and (once I've made them) the handles and foot-rings on an absorbent surface (fibre cement sheet) to dry out so that they are leather hard when it is time to attach them.

### **Cling wrap**

Cling wrap has many uses in this process. It is not only used to prevent the Form from absorbing too much moisture from the object being made but can also prevent the object/cup sticking onto the Form (this is more problematic with some shapes) and it can also be used to protect the Form from being damaged when scoring or adding slip.

### **Clay**

I use Keanes midfire 33 clay (available in Australia) but any clay that you are familiar with should work well. Make slip from the clay body you are using by adding some dry clay to water, allow to slake for a while and then mix to a 'paintable' consistency. Sieve if necessary.

### **Clay Slabs**

Clay slabs can be made using either a slab roller or a rolling pin and guides (approx. 3mm/0.1inch thickness).

I flip the slab over a few times while rolling and roll from different directions until it reaches the required thickness. Compress the slab with a rubber kidney before using.

If embossing the clay slab, it is first cut out using the Pattern and then recut to the correct shape after embossing, again using the Pattern. This is necessary as the shape is altered during the embossing process.

Other surface treatments such as screen printing, painting or nerikomi may not require this step.

Always thin the edges of the cut-out slab while it is still flat - this will give the illusion of a finer, more elegant, object and it is much easier to do when flat.

The two side edges can be thinned by pinching with fingers. This gives a uniform thickness to the join when these two edges are overlapped during the making process.

The bottom edge is either bevelled (at roughly 45 degrees) with a knife or left as it is depending on the style/base of the object.

- An object with a flat base – the bottom edge of the object and the base disk are left untouched.
- An object with a curved base – both the bottom edge of the cut-out slab and the edge of the base disk are bevelled – this gives a greater surface area for joining and keeps the clay a uniform thickness where the join is.

The top edge (or rim) is softened by running a finger (dipped in water) along the edge. The rim will need further refinement after making so don't spend too much time on this.

Handles and footrings can be made in many ways and are an opportunity to add your own personality to the piece you're making. Play and have fun with these elements.

When slab-building, working on more than one item at a time can be beneficial. It creates a better workflow allowing items to firm up instead of trying to perform tasks when the clay is too soft. But always be vigilant about the dryness of all the objects being made – if an object dries out too much this will make it difficult to complete the build successfully.

If an object becomes too dry it is difficult to make it moist again. Spraying with water is not recommended. Generally, this will result in cracking. If an object becomes too dry it can sometimes be 'saved' by wrapping in a slightly damp cloth, covering with plastic and allowing to sit for a while but this is not a full proof method.

## **Drying**

Never leave your completed object to dry on the form as it will crack. This happens because the clay shrinks as it dries. Once made move the object to a larger form (could be a terracotta flowerpot or a purpose made form) to sit for a while, loosely covered, underneath and on top, with plastic. This

keeps the rim circular as the object begins to dry but it must not be left to dry out completely in this way as it will crack as the clay dries and shrinks.

The rim and attachments such as handles dry more quickly than the rest of the object and may crack. For this reason, I dry objects upside down inside a large plastic bag once leather hard. If it's very hot/dry I wrap the handle with cling wrap (if I'm still working on a piece) to slow the rate of drying.

It is best to allow slab-built work to dry very slowly under plastic. This can prevent both cracking and warping.