

Guild *at a* Glance

South Vancouver Island Potters' Guild meets the 2nd Monday of the month at 4733 West Saanich Road, Victoria

December 12, 2011

www.victoriapotters.ca

Volume 13, Issue 4

November's Meeting – 'Many Moulds'

November the time when rains are plentiful and fungi flourishes -so it only is logical to discuss moulds (aka molds) at our meeting. Volunteers brought in their favourite moulds with lots of input from the audience.

Muriel uses bisqued bowls and plates (without feet) as molds . She uses boxes where the piece is built inside the box using coils or slabs to make a rectangular shape.

Priska uses insulation tubing or backer rod shaped to form a support for the rim of a slab (some potters use rolled newspaper in the same way).

Fern brought in a slip mould dated 1832 for a clay pipe also discussed how to make a face mold.

Penny provided some more ideas for adding details to a face mold.

Judy shared some of her found objects that she has used for press molds. Judy makes molds from thrown pieces by pouring in plaster. Jason demonstrated how to use a plaster mold and coils to make an unique bowl with abstract designs.

Joy showed how mold can be as simple as your elbow and natural as a scooped out squash. Joy uses a balloon or latex glove filled with sand to smooth out the surface and bean bags as weight to keep the clay from warping as it dries.

Ester really emphasized the importance of drying your piece slowly. She brought in a mold that was made from scraps of melanite and particle board.

Rosemary found that retired light fixtures made great molds. She covers them with a stretchy material that is smooth and prevents the clay slab from sticking.

Muriel suggested that epoxy putty can be used to fill in the holes.

Thank you to everyone for sharing.

Submitted by Nancy Alexander

The next Guild Meeting is

MONDAY

January 9th

**7:30 St. Michael's
Anglican Church**

4733 West Saanich Road

***Don't forget
the Raffle !***



Happy Holidays !
Happy Holidays !

“A great big thank you to Guild members”

Guild members who accepted Linda Vigliotti's challenge and made LOTS of bowls for the Souper Bowls event at the Empress November 5th are to be heartily commended! The trunk of my car (plus the cavity under the floor of the trunk) were only part of the huge selection of bowls set out for the crowds that came for lunch and a "free" bowl. The numbers that attended exceeded last year's count and this time we had enough bowls to satisfy everyone and there were lots of complimentary remarks about the fine quality of the bowls this year. As well, other pottery donations were sold at the sales tables and brought in a record of around \$2000.

So, **THANK YOU**, everyone.....
you helped make this event a big success!!
submitted by Betty B.

SOUPER BOWLS OF HOPE



Members' Work Displayed at Juan de Fuca Library

Thanks to Roger, the work of the following Guild members will be on display at the Juan de Fuca Library 'till the end of December:

Nancy Wall
(also, thanks for the text)

Belle Leon

Alice McLean

Pamela Truscott White

Rosemary Neering

Barb Bergstrom

Elaine White

Fern Walker

Roger Champagne



Poem of the Month – Solubles

Solubles dissolve
like sugar they may
and follow the water
into the bisqued clay.

This makes clay weak
and possibly bloat,
which is actually quite
important to note!

Solubles can travel in
the other direction,
erupt into glaze
causing imperfections.

They cause glaze to settle
in the bottom of the bucket.
Sometimes it's so hard
you just want to chuck it!

Insolubles behave
a lot more like sand,
retaining their particles.
Isn't that grand?

No negative effects,
so we like them best.
Choose insolubles when possible,
I'd like to suggest.

Soda ash, pearl ash
and lithium carbonate
are "soluble" alkalis –
which isn't too great.

So get lithia, soda,
and potash too,
from feldspars and frits –
they're less soluble for you.

Boric acid and borax
are very soluble too.
Boron frits are less soluble
and so easy to use.

Whenever you can
choose **insolubles**.
Believe me they're worth
all their weight in gold.

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Outside the Studio

A NEW SERIES by our web-weaver DEB CLAY

The World Wide Web is an incredible medium to work with. It allows you to share your work, be a business, communicate with other potters, artists, teachers, buyers. At the simplest level you can use the web as a brochure/business card for your work by having a website (many different types -we'll get to that later) or by tapping into a system like the guild website which has member pages.

By putting your name, studio name, images and information on the web you are visible and can be found. Being found has potential for sales, gallery connections etc. A web presence can also be a resume - it establishes you as an active working potter /artist.

You can present yourself on the internet with a full website in your name or your studio name. You can be part of a collective (like the guild) , you can blog. The very best thing to do is "all of the above". The more your name is on the internet the more potential connection you have. And then there is social media: Face book, LinkedIn, Twitter, etc. etc.

Overwhelmed? It is a lot to keep up with and you probably want to spend more time in your studio than at your computer. The thing to do is make a balanced plan suited to your lifestyle and business needs.

In the meantime think about this:

- a domain name in your name is a stronger presence than a studio name
- pictures are worth more than words but words help the viewer understand the picture - things like medium, materials/technique, size and the name of the piece (and make sure your photos are of a good size, well balanced and without much background)
- who are you, why do you do what you do? You need to get somewhat close and personal with your viewers/readers, not in terms of personal information but in terms of sharing what moves you to create the way *You* do - this helps potential buyers connect with you.

More tips & information in the next newsletter.

*If you have any questions you would like answered here
please email them to Deb Clay at
design@earthwordcreative.com.*

Did You Know?

This is the third in a series that will present topics of interest to those of us who work with clay which may serve a number of purposes to Guild members – providing new information, reminding us of processes we learned in the past but no longer practice, or even making us feel good because the topic just isn't a problem for us.

If you disagree with the content of these – or if you have experiences of your own – please respond to eartharts@shaw.ca

Your response will be published in the next Guild newsletter.

This month's Focus: Minimizing Cracking and Warping – Part III of III

adapted from a 1997 article by
John Hesselberth

Over the last two months some of the reasons clay warps and cracks as it dries and is fired were presented.

The purpose of John's article is to suggest guidelines that would be helpful in reducing the likelihood of this happening – ways to change our processes so as to mitigate these problems.

#5. Non-uniform Orientation of the Clay Particles – particularly in a thrown piece or in a piece where thrown and hand built sections are combined. Clay particles are often referred to as 'platelets' because they are shaped like tapered discs.

Clay platelets tend to align in a direction perpendicular to an applied force. Measurably different levels of shrinkage during drying will occur depending on the level of platelet orientation in a given direction. Clay particle orientation is a primary source of (the dreaded) S-cracks on pot bottoms. Slip cast tile is another place where non-uniform orientation can be a major problem. If a one piece mold is used, there will be a significant difference in platelet orientation through the thickness of the tile because interaction of the clay with the plaster orients the platelets while the side that is exposed to air gets no orientation. A tile cast in this way is almost certain to warp.

Mitigations

- firmly compress the bottom of a pot with every bit as much force as one uses to throw the side walls
- never let excess water stand in the bottom of a pot after it has been thrown or hand built
- when joining hand built pieces with thrown pieces it is essentially impossible to determine whether or not the platelet orientation of the two pieces is similar. However, in the author's experience, paying attention to forming a good, strong joint (score well, apply water or slip), using pieces that are approximately the same moisture level and drying slowly greatly reduces problems with cracks or warpage at these joints
- use a two sided mold when slip casting tiles.

Conclusion - The key is to systematically examine your work processes and run well controlled experiments until you find a set of conditions that gives you a big enough safety factor that cracking and warping become problems of the past. However, the author states very succinctly an excellent place to start the search for a solution to these problems - SLOW DOWN! Slow down drying and firing by a factor of, say, 2 or more. If that doesn't solve the problems then begin your systematic look at the other factors listed above. **Good luck!**

Further Information:

- Ceramic Faults and Tzheir Remedies by Harry Fraser
- The Potter's Dictionary of Materials and Techniques by Frank and Janet Hamer

Original Source :

Cracking and Warping: The Plague of (Nearly) Every Potter, by John Hesselberth
<http://www.frogpondpottery.com/articles/article.html>

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My Travels – The Potters of Amatenango del Valle

I've been told how standoffish the potters of this village are, and certainly the sellers along the highway hide their faces when they see a camera and lurk at the back in the shade even when a sale is imminent. So I am hesitant as I peep over the fence at a young woman who is shaping one of the huge pots the village is famous for.

But Maria will have none of it. "Come in, come in," she insists, encourages me to sit down on the ground beside her, and hands me a lump of white clay. "Like this, like this," she says in Spanish, and show me how she rapidly forms the clay into its distinctive shape without a wheel to aid her. But the clay is hard to handle and I settle for making a horse—always my fallback—then giggles wildly when I say "Se acabo"—the horse is gone—and crumple the clay back up. A tentative friendship is formed, and I spend another half hour watching her make pots of various shapes and sizes.



One woman turns her back to the camera while others chat in the background at the stalls along the road where the potters lay out their wares.



The small outdoor museum at Amatenango has displays such as this one, which shows the raw clay mixed from sand dug from deep hollows in nearby cliffs, rough mortars and pestles used for grinding small rocks to provide natural colorants with which to decorate the finished piece.

I have already spent time in the local museum of Amatenango del Valle, in Mexico's southern Chiapas state, south of San Cristobal de las Casas, almost on the Guatemala border. The people of each of the neighbouring villages are artisans, some specializing in distinctive types of weaving; those in Amatenango follow the centuries-old Tzeltal Mayan potting tradition. The women dig the sand that forms the basis of the clay from nearby cliffsides; the locations where they can get white sand, or the more unusual black—used for cooking pots—or yellow are passed down from generation to generation. The women mix the clay, then form it into their characteristic pieces—huge jars, metre-long jaguars, tiny birds and animals—either functional for themselves and passersby or ornamental for the tourist trade. Once formed the piece is left to dry for a day or two, then smoothed with metal tools and polished with small river stones.

continued on next page

The Potters of Amatenango del Valle - *continued*

Then the pots are covered with firewood and fired, the length of the firing dependent on the judgement of the woman tending the fire. The pieces are removed with tongs, left to cool, then carefully lowered into a container of water or wetted down with a hose. A second drying, then the women and girls decorate them in intricate patterns. In earlier times, the colorants were made locally and applied with paint brushes made from birds' feathers. Now, the Amatenango women use both natural and commercial colorants.

A year later, I go back to the village but, though the fires are smoking, the women are nowhere visible, perhaps in town, or in the hills, or in their houses: no one to talk to or watch work the clay. And I think how lucky I was to spend time with one of the potters of Amatenango.

submitted by Rosemary N.



An historical photo shows women building a fire around the large pots the village is famous for.

**Have YOU seen ceramic activity
on your travels?
Do YOU have photos?
We'd LOVE to hear from you!**
Email the Editor: eartharts@shaw.ca



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Guild at a Glance

... is the newsletter for the South Vancouver Island Potters Guild.

It is published monthly, September through June, and is available on line at: www.victoriapotters.ca


Articles and items of interest to members are welcome and will be included as space permits. Items for inclusion are best emailed to the editor, Louise P, at: eartharts@shaw.ca

SUBMISSION DEADLINE

The earlier submissions are received, the more likely there will be room to include them. Our meetings are held the second Monday of each month. Be kind to the editor, please send items for inclusion before the **FIRST MONDAY OF EACH MONTH.**

Newsletter Staff

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