

Pinch Pots

Throwing without a wheel



Pinch pots don't take a lot of resources. They can easily be done on a tv tray covered with a trash bag. You don't need a lot of tools; some sort of knife (a butter knife will do), a modeling tool or a popcycle stick, a fork or needle tool to crosshatch with, a brush for water, a small board for a paddle stick, a small container for water. That's about it.

This is not a lesson for beginners. If it were we would have to cover a lot more really basic techniques that we are not going to cover here.

Use terra cotta for this project. The clay is very forgiving and will make the decoration and firing easy. It will be assumed that you know some basic things, such as how and why to crosshatch and wet, and that you can figure out how to do some simple things. This enables fewer illustrations and keeps the file size smaller. It's a good idea to read through the whole lesson before you start. It will be easier if you know where you're headed.



Start with a piece of clay the size of an egg. We want to start small and scale up as we develop skill. If you have problems with the first one go half that size when you try again. Wedge the clay a bit to make sure the moisture content is uniform.



Pat the clay into a ball.



Slap it against the table and roll it on the edges until you get



a hockey puck, or a tuna fish can. Spend a little time on it if you want the finished result to be very regular. The shape you start with will determine the result you get. If this shape is a bit irregular, the bowl will have a bit more of a gesture. You will need to decide what you like over time. You can also create other shapes by starting with a different shape here (ovals, squares, hearts, etc.) but that's a subject for a future lesson.



Start with your thumb in the center of the shape and pinch in toward your thumb. This will compress the clay and cause the clay to take the shape of your hand, which will eventually give you a bowl shape. Turn the shape a little and pinch again. Repeat the process until you have worked your way all the way around.



This will start the bowl shape. Try to concentrate on pinching the same amount each time to keep the surface uniform. It is possible to learn to pinch fairly smoothly with a little practice.



Repeat the process working around and up from the bottom to the rim. As the bowl gets larger, you may have to go around two, three, or more times to work from the bottom to the top. It will take any number of passes to get the bowl to an acceptable thickness. Take your time, feel your way through. If you are getting cracks on the outside it is because you are pinching out toward your finger instead of in toward your thumb. That is not compressing the clay, it is stretching the clay. You must compress the clay into shape. In toward the thumb. In toward the thumb. In toward the thumb.



Concentrate on the bottom at first. New students tend to over thin the rim and leave the bottom to thick. The finished bowl should be uniform in thickness. Thin the bottom first. It won't matter on this little one but on a large pot you can get to a point where you can't reach the bottom any more. You can always get at the rim.



Keep working in toward your thumb and in toward the center. This will keep it a bowl instead of a plate. Extra clay at the rim is easy to deal with. You just pinch it in toward the center and get a more rounded form.



Work your way up to the rim as you get the wall thinned.



When you have gone through enough times the bowl will start to feel and look more finished



If you get stretch marks in the rim, smooth them over periodically with your finger so they don't turn into cracks.



. You should try to get the wall about $\frac{1}{4}$ of an inch thick or a little less for a bowl this size.



If you need to, you can use your thumb to smooth the inside but be sure you are always working into the palm of your other hand so you don't tear the wall.



As you work your way toward the rim, move the pot in your off hand so you are always working into the palm of your hand. Smooth the inside first. This will move any lumps you might have to the outside of the pot where you can scrape them off later. At this point the pot needs to set up a bit before you do the additional steps.



You can accomplish this by putting the bowl in a bag overnight. It can be stored on a board if you have one or wrap a paper plate or piece of cardboard in saran wrap.



It can then be put in a grocery bag with a twist tie for a day or two until it sets up enough to hold its shape as you work on it.



If you're in a hurry, you can put it under an incandescent light for a while. This will set it up pretty fast (minutes not hours) so keep an eye on it.



We're now going to smooth the inside. Smooth the inside first so the lumps move to the outside where they can be scraped off. If you have a rib, that works fine or you can use a plastic pot scraper. The clear one that is hard to see is cut from a plastic cookie package.



With the bowl in the palm of your hand, draw the tool across the bottom several times, turn and repeat a couple of times until smooth. Be sure you are working into the palm of your hand. If the clay isn't supported, it can tear but don't press so hard you over thin the bottom. Push just enough and enough times to remove the bumps and dents.



Turn the bowl so the sidewall is in the palm of your hand and smooth the side but don't work onto the unsupported side but rather turn the bowl as you go until you have smoothed the whole way around. Be careful not to tear the rim. It's a good idea to re smooth one more time lightly with your thumb to give the surface some tooth so it will take the glaze properly. If you over burnish a surface with a tool, it can get so hard it will reject the glaze.



There should be no bumps or dents when you're done.



You're now going to smooth the outside. You will need to support the clay with your fingers from the inside. This is a little harder to do so be careful. Use the straight edge of the tool on the outside. You can scrape a little to remove lumps. Scraping is a technique used by native American potters and is a very effective way to smooth. After scraping you can lay the tool down a little flatter to smooth. You will have to

turn the bowl and work down the side the same as you did on the inside. You should smooth lightly with your thumb when you're done with the tool.



Use a round reference to prepare for the foot. Center it by eye at first.



Measure to check center. Change it if needed to get it as centered as you can.



Roll a coil a little thicker than the thickness of the bowls wall. Wrap it in a circle for the foot using your reference mark as a guide. Don't let the diameter of the foot get so large the curved bottom of the bowl will touch when right side up or the pot will wobble. A smaller diameter will raise the pot visually and make it more graceful.



Cut through the coil where it overlaps to establish the diameter of the foot.



Crosshatch and wet the ends of the coil, work the ends together, and smooth the seam over.



Center the foot using the reference as a guide. Mark the position of the foot inside and out.



Use the marks to crosshatch and wet where the foot will set and the part of the foot that will set there. With terra cotta you don't need to use slip to stick the parts

together. If you work the crosshatched area a little with a wet brush you will generate enough slip to stick the parts together unless the clay is very dry.



Place the foot and work it into place until it sticks.



Use a tool to fuse the inside of the foot to the body of the pot.



Use a tool to fuse the outside of the coil. You can fuse smoothly or fuse in a regular pattern leaving the tool marks as a decoration.



You can leave irregularities in the rim for a bit of gesture or you can turn the bowl against a compass to create a more regular line that can be used to trim a more even rim.



Use the line as a reference to trim.



Roll out a coil the same thickness as the foot, lay it on the rim, and cut through where it overlaps to establish the length of the lip. Adding the lip is much like adding the foot. Crosshatch and wet the ends of the coil, work them together, and fuse the seam over.



You will then need to crosshatch and wet the lip and coil where they come together and work them into place until they stick.



You will probably need to push the coil in against the rim a bit to get the seam to start to close.



Fuse the inside first so the extra coil thickness will roll to the outside. Fuse sideways to blend the bowl and lip together without a line. A line on the inside will make the bowl harder to clean. If the line doesn't want to close, push the coil in toward the wall of the bowl until it swells a little and then fuse again.



When fusing the lip, be sure your fingers are not touching the coil. If they do you will flatten the coil.



The coil should remain round on the outside to strengthen the bowl visually and structurally.



If the coil has flattened out in some places, push it in toward the wall until it rounds back up.



Fuse the outside of the rim. If you used marks, try to make them as much like the marks in the foot as possible.



Repeated marks will create unity in the design.



If the marks have printed to the inside, smooth them out.



If you like you can draw designs lightly in the pot to direct your painting.



Do any painting you intend to do at this point. These will be bisque fired, dipped in clear glaze, and glaze fired to get them ready to be picked up.



These can be done fairly quickly to develop skill through practice.



As you develop skill, you can increase the size of the ball of clay to get bigger bowls. If you bend the sides of the hockey puck up before you start the thinning passes, you can create more rounded shapes. If you leave the foot off, you can get more native American shapes.

When you are done you will need to bring the work to the center on a drop off date so it can be fired.