

DUNCAN HOOSON & ANTHONY QUINN

THE WORKSHOP
GUIDE TO
Ceramics



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Strata casting Fettling Sponging Split mold Press molding Jigger and jolley Extrusion
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There are two main methods of slab building, which are dependent on the condition of the clay before forming. The sheets of clay may be either fresh and soft (soft slabs) or partially dry (leather-hard slabs). Soft slabs will allow you to manipulate and alter them by bending, folding, pressing and stretching as you build. Hard slabs allow you to construct complex, angular, sharp-edged forms as though using sheets of wood.

HAND BUILDING: SLAB BUILDING

Slabs are used to create a variety of forms for both function and sculpture. You can make exquisite small boxes that are beautifully carved; simple cylindrical tubes; create monumental-scale forms that stand tall, or tiles that cover vast areas of walls and roofs. All of these are open to the possibility of varying textural surface qualities.

Leather-hard slabs

Slab building using leather-hard slabs is one of the few techniques that enables you to design and make your form completely in card before you touch the clay. You can then use these card templates in the same way a pattern cutter would, to cut out the individual elements before

assembly. This gives you the opportunity to see, assess and make adjustments to the final form before spending any time making. It will also enable you to decide the type of clay best suited to the scale of work you wish to make.

Soft slabs

Soft slabs are used either to create undulating forms or in conjunction with a range of semihard or hard supporting objects and materials to create a wide variety of forms for both function and sculpture. Smooth, fine clay can be folded and pleated almost like cloth. If you do this, make sure you have not trapped air in sealed pockets. You can always push a pin into areas



RIBBED SCULPTURES

BY FENELLA ELMS

This pair of skeletal slab forms demonstrates the extraordinary flexibility of working with soft sheets of clay. The making and drying of forms can be assisted by resting on their sides on foam and insulating paper fibres.



SLAB-BUILT SCULPTURE

BY PETRA WOLF

When working with slabs you can explore balance and tension. This sculpture emphasizes the stress of where its weight has produced surface cracks during the making process.

you are not sure about to release air and keep the form from bursting during firing. Surface decoration and texture may be left until the form is completed or can be an integral part of the making of the slab.

Appropriate clays

The use of paper clay has changed some of the rules regarding slab working, because you can dry these slabs of clay and then assemble them with slurry. This has eliminated many of the drying, cracking and warping problems inherent in the use of other clays.

Other additives to clay have been used for many years – think of building walls with wattle and daub. Makers have more recently used nylon fibres, fibreglass, cloth and sawdust to build very large slabbed forms. This means the clay shrinks and warps less and helps with bonding the clay particles during the drying process.

Architectural clay bodies are available from clay suppliers. These clays have been blended with very high contents of grog and have minimal shrinkage between making and finishing. Crank and raku clay bodies are similar in blend, feel and texture, creating what's known as an 'open body'. Take care when using these clays; the more textured the clay body, the more the clay will start to open out and crack as you manipulate it. This characteristic is often used to highlight and create textured cracked surfaces. These bodies have very good mechanical greenware strength (bone-dry stage) and are ideal for medium- to large-scale working. Fine clays like porcelain offer the maker different challenges, but in time you'll be able to use them just as successfully, and they offer their own qualities, such as translucency. The more you use a type of clay, the more you will learn about its particular handling characteristics.

FOLDED SLABS

BY ANN VAN HOEY

These finely made slab forms have been cut and folded like paper while being supported during the making and drying period in plaster moulds.

