

for the classroom

Make ceramic picture frames



This butterfly had thinned yellow, jade, and purple dabbed over the surface with a fan brush. Thinned jade was splattered with a stiff fan brush. Clear glaze was applied before the shape was fired to cone 06.



One coat of sky blue was applied and wiped back with a damp sponge before the frame was clear glazed and fired to cone 06.

By Michael Harbridge

Objectives

- Roll out even clay slabs
- Add texture to clay
- Fuse glass to clay

Creating picture frames from clay slabs is quick and easy. They can be created in any shape and size to hold as many or as few images as you desire. Some of you may be looking to make items for yourself or to give as gifts, while others may be studio owners or teachers looking for lesson plans for

students. This method is ideal for workshops, camps, or for making unique, custom bisque prepared for your customers. If you have staff sitting around looking for something to do when the studio is slow, creating custom bisque is a profitable use of time, and most staff members will love doing it.

Materials

Low-fire white clay from Continental Clay or clay body of choice
Assorted brushes by Royal & Langnickel
RSET-POT1 Basic pottery tool set by Royal & Langnickel
Slab roller (or rolling pin system)
Sponge
COE-compatible medium glass frit in assorted colors
Clear glaze
Clear glue (optional)
Drywall or project boards
Stroke & Coat, Concepts, or Fun Stroke glazes in colors of choice
RG650 Jade Gloss raku glaze by ClayPuzzling.com

Miscellaneous
Plastic spoon
Oval and square cookie cutters
Wood cut-outs



Rolling Slabs By Hand

Some artists use the same rolling pin they keep in the kitchen for pie crusts and cookies. Done properly, clay won't hurt the rolling pin, so it's a logical option. Small clay rollers or even heavy wooden dowels can also be used. The key to successful hand-rolled slabs is getting uniform thickness. Achieving consistent depth is easy when you place wooden sticks or trim on each side of the clay and run the roller along the wood.

To prevent clay from sticking to the rolling pin, place the clay in a canvas or fabric pocket so that the rolling pin never comes in contact with the clay. One easy solution is to tape two pieces of craft foam (available in various sizes at most craft store) together at one end. Flatten the clay a bit by hand, and then place it in the foam pocket. Roll over the foam instead of directly on the clay, continuing until the roller rests on the wooden slats on either side. Pull the slats away, and you have a uniform piece of clay. And since the clay didn't touch the roller, you don't have to worry about a rolling pin getting discolored or contaminated.



Using a Slab Roller

Slab rollers come in a variety of shapes and sizes, from large tables to portable units. Some allow you to adjust the space between the unit's rollers to control slab thickness. Others use boards or shims placed below the pocket holding the clay. Most artists begin with a somewhat flattened piece of clay, place it in the fabric or foam pocket, and run it through the slab roller at a greater thickness than they ultimately desire. After rolling through once, they pick up the clay slab, turn it 45 degrees, and run it through again at a smaller thickness setting. This stretches the clay out in the other direction, giving a larger slab. It's best to work with one piece of clay rather than placing several parts together when rolling slabs. Not only will you get a stronger slab from a single piece of clay, different pieces can pull away from one another as they go through the rollers, leaving open spaces in the slab.

Make an Impression

Take a close look at items with texture you have sitting around. Could they be used to make impressions in clay? I saw some intricate wooden picture-frame templates (used on some of the frames in this project) at a Michael's store and I've seen similar products at other chains. The words were cut wood designs I've found in many craft-store chains. They were ideal for making impressions where glass could be added. If you read my article in the January 2015 issue of *Fired Arts & Crafts*, you'll see some crossover with texture patterns last month. While this month's focus is on picture frames, last month was crosses and snowflake designs.

The inner frame cut-outs can be done by hand, but I found cookie cutters in oval and square shapes gave me uniform shapes. Think about making holiday frames using tree or bell cut-outs. Flower, heart, and bunny cutters are also great for capturing moments. The wood butterfly cut-out was a great template for making a frame.

Creating Clay Frames



Step 1: Roll out a clay slab about ¼ inch thick to the desired size.



Step 2: Place the item(s) you want to make an impression with on the slab. Press the wood shapes in first with your fingers, trying not to press the clay outside the shape. Follow that by pressing with a dry sponge to remove any imperfections. Make sure

the clay is nearly level with the top of the wood cut out. Use a needle tool to cut the clay about an inch or half-inch outside of the wood impressions. Cut out the picture-frame section on the larger frames about an inch to half-inch away from the inner edge.

Step 3: Remove all the excess clay.



Step 4: Peel the clay shapes from the slab mat and place them on boards that will absorb moisture. Project boards or drywall work great. Leave a little space between each shape. Use a dry sponge to press and round the edges of the clay. Don't use water — you don't want to make mud, or the wood cut-outs will not remove easily.



Step 5: Use a needle tool to lift the wood template from the clay. Try to lift straight up so you don't distort any of the texture or pattern. Avoid designs with lots of small openings — clay can get caught up in those openings. If this happens, try to let the clay slab firm up a little bit before pressing in the template. Lightly pat the clay design with a dry sponge to remove any sharp edges.



Thinned pink glaze was applied and then wiped back with a damp sponge. Dark blue was splattered, followed by a clear glaze coating and firing to cone 06.





Step 6: If you need to add further cutouts for photos within the frame (such as in the butterfly shown in the photos), use cookie cutters or a needle tool to make the cutouts, removing the excess clay. Allow the clay frames to dry on the absorbent surface.

Step 7: Use a cleaning tool and damp sponge to clean up any sharp edges or imperfections on the greenware.



Step 8: Fire to the cone appropriate to the clay body selected.

Step 9: Decorate the bisque surface with fired colors. Be sure to coat the interior of the impressed designs if you plan to add glass for the final design. Once the colors have dried completely, fire to the appropriate cone for the products you used.

Step 10: Sprinkle glass frit into the impressed areas of each design using a spoon. I prefer medium frit rather than fine, because fine creates glass dust which is harmful if inhaled. Always wear a safety mask if working with fine frit or powdered glass! If using multiple colors in an area, let two colors overlap slightly where they meet so there isn't a defined line. Use a dry brush to push glass that lands outside the pattern into the indentations.



This frame was glazed with three coats of lime green and fired to cone 06.



Thinned yellow and jade were dabbed with a soft fan brush and a stiff fan was used to splatter thinned dark blue. Clear glaze was applied before firing to cone 06.



Step 11: Fire the glass to a range of cone 018 to cone 015. Every kiln fires differently, and even within the same kiln, different areas from the top to the bottom of the kiln may fire hotter or cooler, so you need to know your kiln. If you're not sure, start out firing to a cooler cone, and refire to a cone hotter if needed. The hotter you fire, the smoother the glass will be, but if you take the glass hotter than is needed, the glass may pull back along the edges. With a cooler firing, the glass will be more textured. You can also follow your favorite glass tack or contour fusing programs. Be sure to let the kiln cool to room temperature before opening it, to avoid thermal shock to the glass.

Step 12: Attach frame backs or pictures, and your new frames are ready to display!

Advanced Methods

You can also add fired overglazes such as gold, silver, and mother of pearl for added affect. These overglazes are fired to a cooler temperature than the glass, so it generally won't affect the texture of the glass. All of these products can be used on or over glass and ceramics.

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Sources

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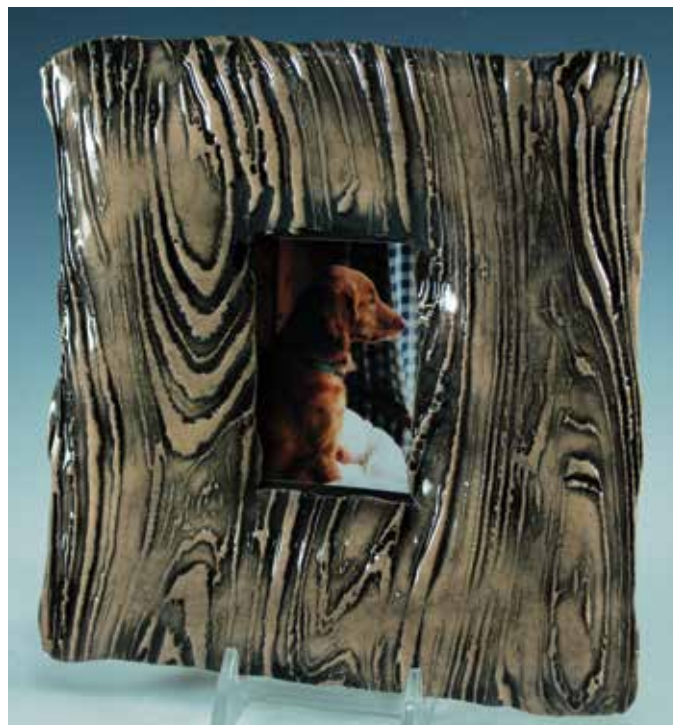
Real leaves or rubber leaves can be used to make impressions in this style of frame. This one had a wash of black glaze applied before being wiped back with a damp sponge. Three colors of green glaze were blended on the leaves before firing to cone 06.



This frame was textured with a floral-pattern table runner before the bisque firing. It was glazed with three coats of Jade Glass raku glaze and then raku fired.



Mayco rubber texture pads were used to form the design on this frame. One coat of Jade Gloss raku glaze was applied to the bisque and wiped back with a damp sponge, leaving color mainly in the crevices. It was then raku fired.



Rubber texture pads from Mayco were used to texture the clay. A wash of black glaze was applied to the bisque and then wiped back. Then the frame was clear glazed and fired.

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