

Clay Cottages

By Artist Michael Harbridge

See this technique in action! Video recording of the live webinar available at www.ceramicarts.com.

Materials List

Clay by Continental Clay
Moist low-fire white

Designer Mats by Mayco

MT001 Flower

MT004 Swirls

MT005 Retro Squares

MT006 Foil

MT008 Spiral

MT009 Scallops

ST127 Crackle

Brushes & Tools by Royal & Langnickel

SG825-4 Stiff Fan Brush

R1250-5 Aqualon Round

RSET-POT1 Basic Pottery Tool Set

Colors of choice

Products like Stroke & Coat, Concepts or
Fun Strokes are recommended

Clear Glaze of choice

Miscellaneous

Low-fire white slip

Rubber Leaf forms from ClayPuzzling.com

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Step 1 Create a basic clay shape as the base for your cottage. It can be done with a clay slab, cast with a mold, thrown on a wheel, hand built, or clay puzzled. The samples shown were clay puzzled. Shapes can range from vases, to pumpkins to cylinders. The round sample house shown utilized the texture of the bark on a real tree or the use of the bark texture pad.

Step 2 If your cottage needs a roof, flatten a slab of clay and press with a texture pad. Place on top and form. Be sure your base shape is firmed up enough to withstand the weight of any parts you add.

Step 3 Use a needle tool or toothpick to gently scratch in outlines for windows and doors. Use the needle tool or knife to cut out windows and open up doors.

Step 4 Use moist clay to create trim around doors, shutters, shadow boxes, stoops, leaves and chimneys. Use the texture pads to add details to clay. Score the clay surfaces where they will attach, add slip and attach. Be sure to attach parts so they are flush with no air traps. Make sure to vent any attachments that will have enclosures that will be sealed so moisture and air can escape. If you are making these as birdhouses, be sure to put some small holes in the bottom so any water that may enter when placed outside can also escape.

Step 5 Be creative! Add decks with leaves, posts with tapered coils you've textured and twisted to look like branches.

Step 6 Allow sufficient drying time before firing to appropriate cone for clay body used. Place the shape on a piece of drywall or several layers of newspaper so the bottom can dry. Do not force dry or you can cause parts to crack. If you need to slow the drying process, place a plastic bag loosely over the shape.



Step 7 Each shape will be finished in a different method. The samples shown above had a thinned coat of black or dark brown glaze applied over the entire shape and wiped back, like an antiquing. Then one to two coats of additional colors were used over the top, allowing the antiquing to show through.

Step 8 Apply one to two coats of clear glaze and fire to appropriate cone for colors and clay body. If these items will be used outdoors, it's best to glaze inside and out.





Creating Bark Textures

Achieve the look of bark with your cottages. Press slabs of clay against the bark of a tree and gently peel it away. Make sure the bark of the tree is not going to flake off into your clay. Small chips will burn away, but you don't want big chunks.

Helpful tips:

- Make your initial slab thick enough, so when you press it against the bark to pick up texture, it won't get thin in areas a rip apart as you try to pull it away.
- Remove slabs slowly so they don't come apart.
- Oak free bark works great because it is strong and has great texture.
- Use the bark textured clay in clay puzzling molds by pulling the slab apart and placing pieces in mold like the solid technique illustrated below. But, don't press hard on the parts or you will lose texture. Gently drag a finger over the joints to attach the parts in the mold.

If you don't have trees with good bark to replicate this look, we sell a reusable bisque texture pad at www.shop.claypuzzling.com.



Would you like see this technique in action? Join the Webinar Club at www.ceramicarts.com and get access to over 200 hours of video techniques and a new webinar each month.

Solid Puzzling Method

Solid puzzling is the basic foundation behind the clay puzzling technique. Follow these basic steps when you want a solid design. You can also leave spaces between chunks of clay for a more open design or combine solid clay with coils or chunky looks explained on the next page. (Free how-to video at ClayPuzzling.com)

Step 1) Flatten chunks of moist clay between your fingers. Generally, about a quarter of an inch in thickness is sufficient. However, thicker clay may be needed on larger items, shapes which will have textures added, or items where parts are adhered.

Step 2) Place the pieces of clay inside one half of the mold, making certain to slightly overlap adjacent chunks. Compress clay with your fingers or a towel periodically. The clay should not pull apart if compressed properly. The harder you press, the less texture will be noticeable on the outside. Go right up to the edge of the mold.

Step 3) Complete Steps 1 and 2 to fill the second half of the mold.

Step 4) Once both halves have been filled with clay, run your fingers over the surface to make certain all of the clay parts are attached well. Make a long coil about a half inch thick and attach it around one half of the mold, just below the edge, not above. This coil will be used to join the two halves. Remove any clay above the edge of the mold.

Step 5) Pick up the other half of the mold and wrap your fingers around the edge to prevent the clay from falling out as you turn it over and place both mold halves together.

Step 6) Band the mold with a Velcro strap and use a PPT2 Press Tool with Light to press the coil from one side of the mold so it attaches to the other. Once the clay is dry enough to stand on its own, carefully remove it from the mold.

Step 7) Once it's removed from the mold, clean up seam lines by using the metal rib and wooden tools from the Royal RSetPot1 Pottery Set. Add clay to fill in any gaps or openings along the seam line. Do not use water to smooth at this point; getting too much water on the item will cause it to collapse. Use water after completely dry.

