

Creating Workshops

By Michael Harbridge

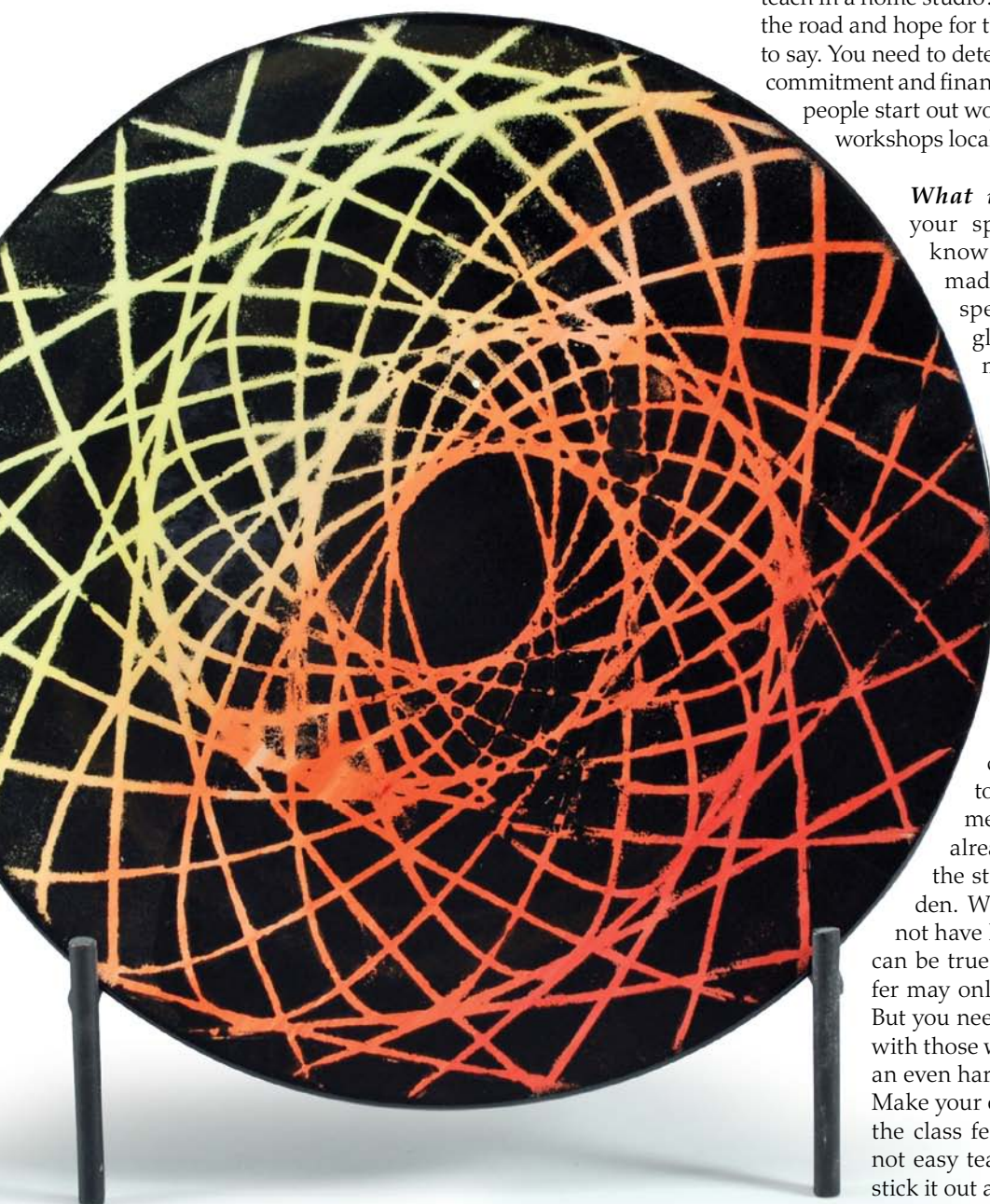
Teaching is a wonderful way to spread the joy of fired arts and help grow the industry. The more people we can show new things, the bigger the increase in interest and potential for artists to continue to invest in the art form and try fresh concepts. Creating and conducting a successful workshop is one way to work towards this goal.

I've taught workshops all over the country at various venues and at my studios. Years ago I had a couple of traditional retail and wholesale stores with cast ware, bisque, and supplies. Today I have a home studio designed specifically for doing specialty workshops. I've learned different things from each perspective. I also do a considerable amount of travel teaching. Not all workshops are taught the same and understanding how to price workshops is imperative.

So what's the best way to approach teaching — is it best to teach in a home studio? Should you open a storefront or just hit the road and hope for the best? Having done them all, it's hard to say. You need to determine what's best for you, based on the commitment and financial investment you want to make. Many people start out working from their homes and conducting workshops locally or within a certain geographic range.

What is your specialty? First determine your specialty or specialties. Most people know me for my clay work, but I've also made a name for myself with raku and specialty firing methods. I drifted into glass for a short time but decided it was more challenging to teach on the road because much of the firing needed to be done outside of class, and it was difficult to control. What are you good at? What makes you unique or makes you stand out from other teachers? Don't necessarily limit yourself to one area. Keep an open mind and keep up with new methods. But if you look at successful teachers over the years, most were known for something special.

Make a Commitment. Once you've decided on your approach, you need to determine your level of commitment. If you're a studio owner, you've already made the commitment of owning the studio. That can be a huge risk and burden. When you opened your doors, you may not have had people rushing to get in. The same can be true with workshops. The first few you offer may only have attract a few interested people. But you need to stick with it, making the best of it with those who do attend. If you cancel, you'll have an even harder time filling the spots the next time. Make your event so darn special that the people in the class feel compelled to tell everyone else. It's not easy teaching a workshop for one or two, but stick it out and it will grow.





Create awesome samples. If you want to sell something, people need to see, feel, and touch what they are buying. Seeing a picture is great, but an actual sample sells even better. I can't tell you how many times people have told me, "Oh, I would have signed up if I knew it looked like *that!*" Some shapes are easier to photograph than others. But if you're relying on selling through an image, make sure the image is spectacular. And that means shooting on a plain or graduated background with good lighting. Don't use the flash on the camera with clutter in the background. This is art — show it off!

If you're in a studio setting, set the samples or images somewhere they will get noticed. Do you have room near your checkout? Can you display the finished pieces along with products used to create the samples? Let people know what products they will learn to use. Make the display nice and inviting, with clear signage everyone knows the class title, teacher name, date, location, cost, and description. Design and print it out from a computer, so it looks professional — don't just scribble out a sign.

Comfortable work space. If you plan to teach in your home or studio, make sure the work space is clean, bright, and comfortable. People are paying money to come to you, and they should feel good about spending hard-earned cash. The lower level of our home is a part-time family room that easily converts into a large classroom. The furniture is stacked in another room to make room for tables and chairs. A large monitor is mounted on one wall to show images, ideas, and other projects. It's also set up with Internet access to show websites and other resources, along with videos. It's an investment, but it's all figured into the cost of doing business.

Determine the price. Figure out your cost for materials first — start making a list. List everything, right down to toothpicks, paper towels, and water bowls. Here are some other things to consider and include if they pertain:

- **Travel** — Will you be flying or driving?
- **Hotel** — Where are you staying? Include nights before and after the workshop if required.
- **Rental car** — Go online to look up the cost and book a rental car. Rates are based on supply and demand, and can vary greatly by location.

- **Food** — Do you plan to eat? Are you providing lunch or snacks to attendees?
- **Parking** — If you fly, will you have to pay for parking at the airport? Does the hotel offer free parking or is there an additional fee?
- **Mileage** — If you're driving, figure out the round-trip mileage. If you're flying, figure the mileage to and from the airport.
- **Space Rental** — When I teach at educational events or shows, there is normally some form of rental or cost associated.
- **Shipping** — Do you have to ship materials to the location where you're teaching? Will you need to ship anything home?
- **Paid Help** — In some cases, you may need to hire help for the workshop, or, since you'll be teaching, you may need to hire additional help to run your business or do the job you would normally be doing.
- **Miscellaneous** — What are you forgetting? Think everything through.

In addition to all these obvious expenses, you have to come up with a value for your time. What are you worth an hour? Keep in mind that this hourly rate should cover all the time it takes to create the samples, technique sheets, pack everything, ship or load materials, prepare ware, travel time, and everything else involved. This can be the hardest part to determine; most people will undersell themselves.

Once you've determined all those costs, add them up — that's what you need to make. Hosting classes in your home, studio, or other local venue can be much less expensive than traveling, since you avoid the expenses of car rental, hotel, and airfare. One way to spread out the cost of travel workshops is to teach multiple days at one location or teach at several locations on a trip. It may require some extra driving, but your highest costs are now spread between several classes rather than one.

Next, determine how many people you can reasonably expect to attend — talk with the owner of the studio or other venue where you plan to teach, or try to work it out if you're conducting it locally. You may find out a particular location has never gotten more than 20 people in a special class and normally averages around 15. Don't go by how many they can seat — if they never fill all the seats, don't count on it for your class. Divide the total cost by the number you and the venue owner determine. This is what you need to charge per person for the day. If your total costs are \$2,000 and your workshop is being held in a studio that averages 15 attendees for classes and special events, then you'd need to charge \$134 per person.

This is where you can look at reducing the cost per day by teaching more people over multiple days. An extra day or two of hotel, car rental, and food will likely average the cost out so your fee is around \$100 per day, which is reasonable. That's only \$50 for a half-day workshop. If you're teaching at a studio, they will likely tack on a fee for hosting, and they are entitled to do so.

Set your minimum number of students and determine a cutoff date. If you're traveling and likely to incur great expense, set the cutoff date far enough in advance so that you'll still have time to purchase airfare. If you are teaching locally or in your studio, you can obviously be more lenient. And, as I mentioned earlier, avoid canceling a workshop whenever you can. I'm not saying you should take a huge loss when traveling, but if you've done a good job calculating your expenses, you'll know your break-even point.

Collect a deposit. Always collect a deposit! Don't count on people if they are not willing to put money down. Develop a refund policy and set a cutoff date. There is nothing worse than showing up for a class to discover that only half or fewer of those who registered actually showed up.

Sell to make money. What can you sell in workshops? I joke that in my workshops, *everything* is for sale. Another teacher told me I was the only person he knew who could sell used trash cans (I sell my raku-firing trash cans at most workshops). I always tell the class everything is for sale because I don't want to have to pack it up and ship it back, so if you don't see a price on an item, just ask! Most people will impulse buy when they're excited about a product and when they can get a deal. I always have a new price and a used price. If it was used in class, you get a deal. Sometimes the revenue I get from product sales is higher than the class fees. While profit margins may not be as high because you're discounting, it's offset by less time and expense spent on packing and shipping.





When I'm teaching at someone else's studio, I usually run all the sales through them and give them a percentage of the sales. That way I can focus on teaching and less on selling. Some teachers make it all about selling, and that can be a turnoff for those paying to take a class.

Give value. Always make sure you add value to your classes. If people walk away feeling good and thinking they got great value, they're more likely to sign up the next time.

Marketing. Properly marketing a workshop is important to its success. Post it on your website, create an attractive flyer, and send out email blasts. All of these things cost little or nothing, other than your time — which you are figuring into your class costs.

I'm a studio owner — why would I hire a teacher to come to my studio? Many studio owners prefer hiring outside teachers to come into their store to teach. Sometimes it's because they don't have the confidence or knowledge to teach something more advanced. Much of the time, though, it's about mixing it up and offering something different from a special person. Outside teachers can sell more product because they are not viewed as the studio owner trying to sell more product. This is a teacher recommending items or products. This excitement can give a shot in the arm to those who may be looking for something different and exciting.

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Objectives

- Create a colorful wash background with fired colors
- Use stencils with fired color to create patterns over washes



Materials

Ware

132 Ming Vase mold by HK Enterprises
MB-1353 Clay Canvas bisque by Mayco
Other plain shapes

Colors by Mayco

SC-74 Hot Tamale
SC-75 Orange-A-Peel
SC-6 Sunkissed
Clear glaze of choice

Colors by Duncan

EZ012 Cobalt Black

Stencils by The Crafters Workshop

TCW235 Spirographica
TCW331 Solace
TCW 252 Aspen Trees

Brushes & Tools by Royal & Langnickel

R2845-6 Aqualon Ultimate glaze brush
R2855-3/4 Aqualon Wisp fan
RD60 sponge stippler
R2005 synthetic sponge

Miscellaneous

Small plastic cups
Tile or palette

Stencil Silhouettes

In the October issue of *Fired Arts & Crafts*, I talked about some of my favorite tools and told you it the story would continue. Well, this month I'm going to focus on one of my favorite new and easy ways to paint with stencils. Stencils are nothing new, but some of these modern designs really have me excited! I've taught workshops with young and old using the methods shown here, and they love the results. You'll notice I'm working with primarily flat surfaces. Rounded shapes will work with some designs, but try to find flat. The new clay canvases by Mayco are really quick and easy!



You can present this method as a workshop in your studio or on the road. It's fun, quick, and easy for students of any age. And at the end, you can sell the stencils, brushes, colors, and more bisque shapes so they can take them home to make more!

Step 1: Wipe bisque with a damp sponge to remove any dust and prepare the surface for color application.

Step 2: Pour a few tablespoons of each color into individual cups, add an equal amount of water, and mix.

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Step 3: It works best to have separate glaze fan brushes for each color since you will be working back and forth quickly to blend the colors. Apply two coats of Sunkissed to the bottom halves of the flat sides of a vase or the other shape, such as a plate or clay canvas, keeping your brushstrokes horizontal. As soon as you've applied the second coat, quickly apply Orange-A-Peel from the top of your shape's flat areas down to about the halfway point. Load the Sunkissed brush with water and apply a good coat where the two colors meet, then immediately brush more Orange-A-Peel on the top half, overlapping into the Sunkissed area, always working the brush horizontally. Work quickly to blend where the colors meet. Go back with more Sunkissed if needed.

Step 4: Apply another coat of Orange-A-Peel to the top quarter of your shape's flat areas. Immediately add Hot Tamale to the top edge, blending the color into the Orange-A-Peel.

Step 5: Allow all color to dry completely.

Step 6: Place the stencil over one side of the vase or other shape and use a loaded sponge stippler to dab Cobalt Black underglaze over the surface while holding the stencil with your other hand to prevent it from slipping. Always have a spot on your tile or palette to dab out excess color from the stippler before sponging over the stencil. Once the color on one side dries, repeat this step on another side (if your shape is multi-sided). If color has bled through on the underside of the stencil, wash and dry it before continuing to the next side. Sponge Cobalt Black over the top are and inside rim of the vase.

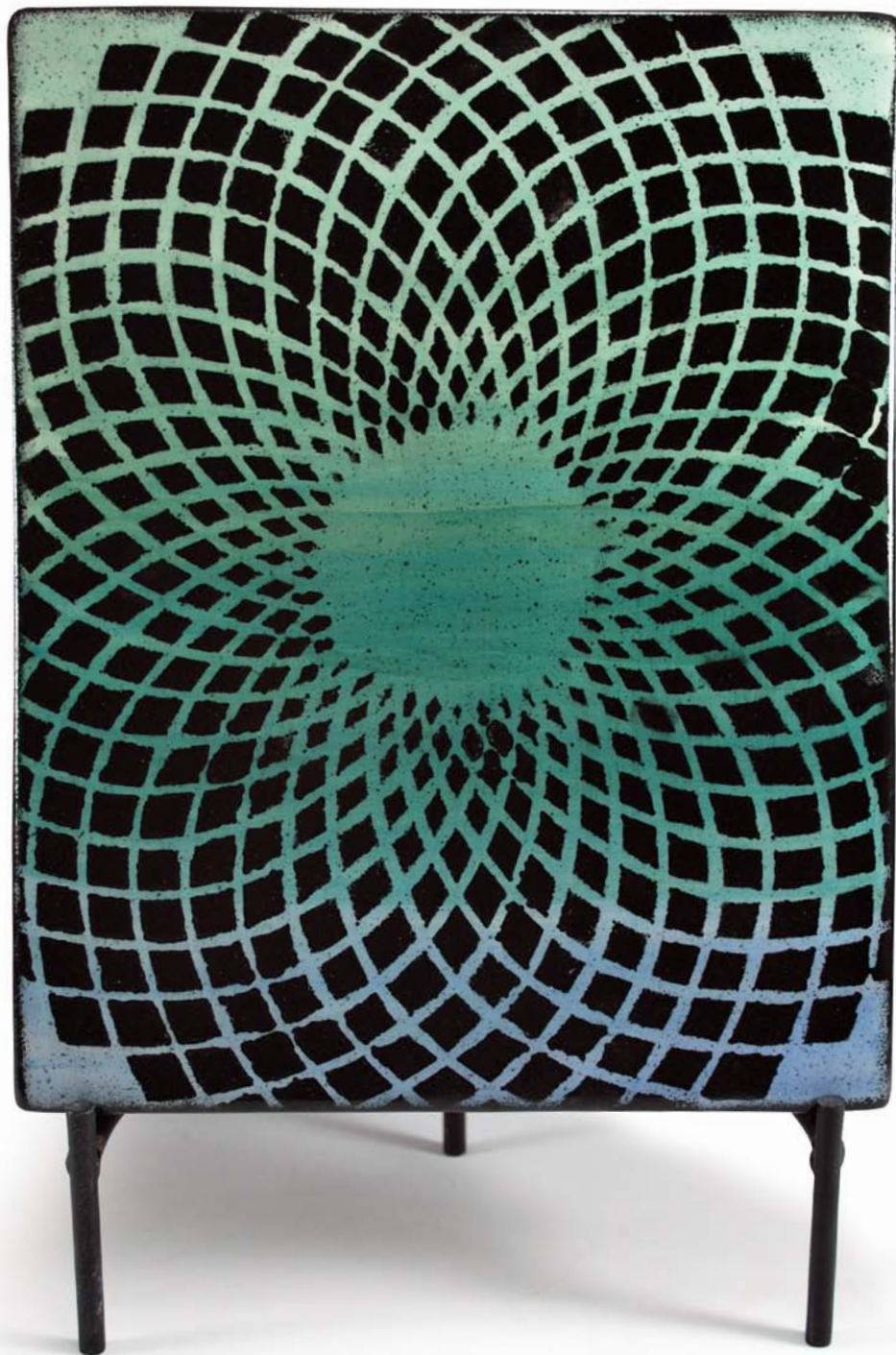
Step 6: (optional) Load the tips of the wisp fan with thinned Cobalt Black and flick the bristles to apply a light splatter over the surface if desired.

Step 7: Allow all color to dry completely. Then gently apply clear glaze to your shape. Use caution to avoid softening and smearing the colors.

Step 8: Fire shapes to cone 06.

Advanced Methods

Experiment with different colors for backgrounds or mix it up in different directions. Add some dimension to the design by adding French Dimensions or Designer Liner after removing the stencil.



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