

Gay Smith *The*
FUNCTION
OF Storage



Print bowls, 4½ in. (11 cm) in width, thrown porcelain with stamped decoration, dented, raw glazed, fired to cone 10 in a soda kiln.

I'm always trying to pull my pots back toward function. My infatuation with tactile appeal, edges, drawing the thrown line between foot and rim, and altering usually tends to trump functional concerns. What interests me functionally, particularly with these bowls, is their ability to stack. Their size must be appealing for morning cereals or special desserts, like homemade ice cream, and it's important that they be sturdy enough to withstand daily handling: going in and out of the sink and dish rack or dishwasher, stacking easily without chipping feet or rims.

The Function of Storage

The desire to create pots that could stack was inspired by my need as an avid pottery collector to find space for new pots. They stack up tall and compactly, requiring minimal horizontal space in your cabinet. The bowls are squared for structure because this gives the stack greater stability.

The main functional concern with making pots to stack is that the diameter of the foot will slip easily into the diameter of the rim of the piece below it, and that the foot will not rest on the interior floor of the piece below it. Rims are measured with calipers as I throw them so that when they're squared, I know that hip will meet lip. This way, when making a stack, each pot will rest upon the one beneath it without rocking or keeling over.

How and where each pot touches the one above and below it is both an important structural consideration in how they stack, as well as an important visual decision. The stack is a series of individual pots piled one on top of the other, but just as importantly, the stack is a unit, one piece, a kind of interactive sculpture.

Through use, bowls will layer differently every time they are put away in a stack. Depending upon the configuration, color and pattern can be either intentionally or randomly reordered. The squared hip or belly of the bowl has more visual impact for presenting a "flat" face in the sense that the stack might be read as a two dimensional image. Thus the stack is less able to be directly interpreted as round. I imagine the



Wooden textile-printing blocks are wetted to prevent them from sticking to the clay. They are pressed into the surface while the form, thrown slightly thicker than normal so it can stand up to the stamping, is supported from the inside.



After the bowl form has dried to soft leather hard, the rim is marked in equal sections and darts are cut at those points.



The darts are brought together in order to change the shape of the form from round to square (which tends to be the most efficient shape in terms of cupboard space).



After the darted joints are reinforced with a coil of clay on the inside, the pots are covered and allowed to dry slowly until they are stiff leather hard. They are then dipped in slip and/or glaze and dried completely before being fired in a soda kiln.

face of the stack as a constantly changing painting made by the user. Each bowl is intentionally different from its neighbor. The user will perhaps develop favorites, or choose to use one over the other depending upon mood. I imagine bringing a sense of fun and celebration into the use of these bowls.

Surface Texture

I texture the surfaces by rhythmically impressing carved wooden blocks into the clay as I throw each bowl. The blocks were acquired from a fellow Penland teacher in 2005. I was told they were from India and were used to print fabric by hand. Their carving is extremely intricate. So, the surface texture is a collaboration with unknown, highly skilled craftsmen. The beauty of the patterns they create is a gift from these unsung artisans. I am grateful to them.

The exterior surface of the bowl is lightly ribbed to provide a smooth canvas for the marks, and the blocks are dipped in water prior to each impression, which actually prevents their sticking to the pot wall. The pot wall must not be too thin for impressing, an advantage when stacking as it means rims will not chip. I am looking to create an interesting tactile surface with a repeating visual

and tactile pattern around the exterior hip or belly of the bowl. The texture finds its way to the interior of the bowl with soft finger marks from resisting the exterior pressure of the pattern-making.

The textured surface means the pieces are easier to handle when hot or cold, keeping fingers dancing about with something to grip. But I'm actually more interested in the textured patterning to provide engaging, tactile pleasure or experience. And the indentations provide me with places to inlay glazes or slips. After darting and trimming, I raw glaze the pieces by dipping the textured portion of each bowl in a glaze or slip. The liquid settles in the indentations and I use a soft rubber rib to wipe away excess while it is still wet. Then another glaze (or not) is layered over this when the pot has set up enough to take the next dip. This layering gives the rich colors to the surfaces that I am seeking, and emphasizes the shapes and patterns in the textures. They are abstracted and impressionistic.

Form

When the rim of the bowl is still flexible but the overall consistency is a soft leather hard, I mark the rim into four even sections. Then, I take four triangular darts out to alter the rim of the bowl from

Tumblers, each 5 in. (13 cm) in height, thrown porcelain with stamped decoration, raw glazed, fired to cone 10 in a soda kiln.





Teapot, 6 in. (15 cm) in height, thrown porcelain with stamped decoration, raw glazed, fired to cone 10 in a soda kiln.

a circle into a soft square. After reinforcing each seam with a coil, the bowls dry slowly under plastic until they are ready for trimming. A round pedestal foot is trimmed under each pot. I make sure that the foot is not too high so that the foot does not touch the floor of the bowl under it when stacked.

Marketing

I hope the ability of these bowls to be stacked increases their marketability; perhaps the minimal space requirement gives a collector a means to justify a purchase. Often, because they are squared, folks who are not familiar with altered or handmade pots

will ask what they are for, or they'll ask if they are vases. I always answer "yes!" to the latter question. Any vessel can be used as a vase, and a positive response to any inquiry is much more likely to spark a good conversation. I can then suggest that they might also be used for dessert and that they can go into the dishwasher and microwave too. One of my jobs is to educate as many people as possible about using pots every day.

Gay Smith makes pots in Bakersville, North Carolina. See more of Gay's work at www.gertrudegrahamsmith.com. Her printed bowls were included in "Table Manners" at Lark & Key gallery, (www.larkandkey.com) in Charlotte, North Carolina.