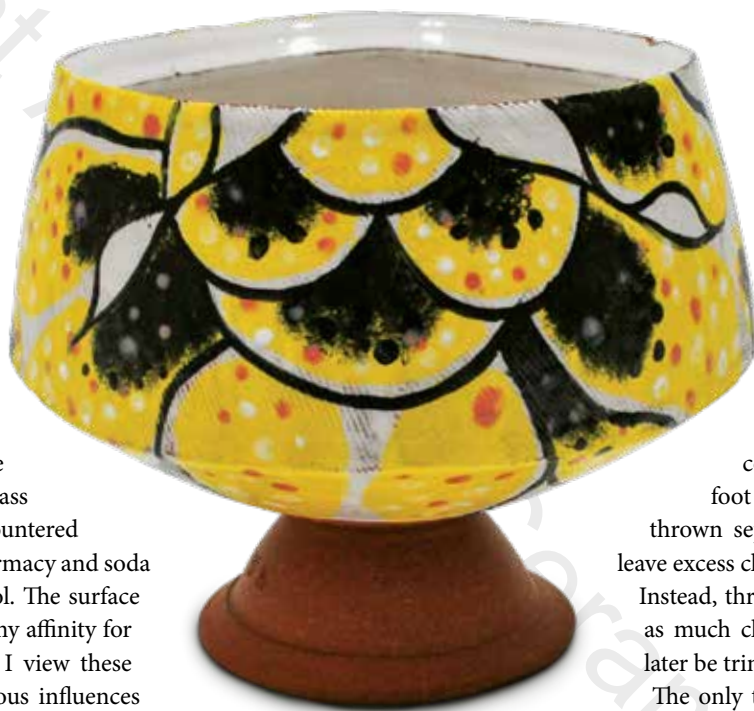


Mid-Century Inspired DESSERT DISHES

by Sam Chumley



My dessert-dish forms are inspired by mid-century glass ice-cream dishes that I encountered when I worked at a retro pharmacy and soda fountain while in high school. The surface decoration is influenced by my affinity for traditional-style tattoos and I view these objects as amalgams of various influences in my personal history.

Forming the Dishes

The dishes are made with three separate pieces thrown on the wheel and assembled at the leather-hard stage. Start by weighing out balls of clay. For each dish, weigh two balls of clay at 12 ounces each. I make five ice cream dishes at a time, so I prepare 10 balls of clay, plus 1 larger ball of clay (around 2 pounds) to throw the foot section for each of the dishes off the hump. The two smaller (12-ounce) balls of clay are used to throw the top and middle sections of each dish.

Start by centering one of the 12-ounce balls of clay on the wheel into a low, wide disk, and open it all the way to the bat. While opening, be sure to keep the clay centered and slowly bring the clay outward into a ring. With a slower wheel speed, pull the ring upward and inward to create a slightly tapered cylinder. After pulling, scrape off the slip and compress well (1). This piece becomes the top of the ice-cream dish. Set it off to the side and center the next 12-ounce ball of clay. This ball of clay becomes the middle section of the dish and is thrown into a narrow-based

conical bowl form. Since the foot for the ice-cream dish is thrown separately, there is no need to leave excess clay at the bottom of this piece. Instead, throw a narrow base, pulling up as much clay as possible. The base will later be trimmed to a round bottom (2).

The only trick to this piece is to make the top wider than the base of the first section that was thrown (see 6). The extra clay allows you to cut the section down to a precise fit when assembling the components. Next, center the 2-pound piece of clay to throw the foot of the dish off the hump. I think of the foot as being a small bowl that will get trimmed and turned upside down during assembly. Throw a couple of feet per dish so you can have a variety to choose from when assembling the pieces (3, 4).

Altering and Trimming

After the first piece has had time to set up, alter it into a non-round form (5). This can be triangular, square, rectangular, or whatever you want. After altering, allow all the pieces to firm up to trimmable consistency. Trim the middle section of your ice cream dish to a continual curve from side to side. Next, trim the foot. This can be tricky, but trim away excess clay, and then trim an opening into the top of the foot that matches the curvature of the corresponding area of the dish's middle section. You want the curves of the joint to match precisely, so there's a solid contact patch for the attachment (see 4). Trim and check

the fit and adjust as necessary (this is why I like to have extra foot rings).

Now that you have the three pieces ready to assemble, start by placing the middle section on a soft piece of foam with the top section centered inside it. Depending on how you altered the top section, you might need to shave down the corners a bit to match the curvature of the bowl portion of the dish (6). Start with using a Surform rasp to take away small amounts of clay at a time and check the fit periodically (7). Once you have a good fit, score and attach the two pieces, leaving excess clay from the middle section overhanging the edges of the top piece. Paddle the attached pieces and reinforce the seam with a tiny coil of clay. Next, cut away the excess clay around the outside of the attachment and shave down the seam totally flush on the outside. Accentuate the angles at this point by shaving clay from the corners you created during the altering process (8).

Refining the Surface

The piece is now rough, so next refine the surface with a fine-tooth rib to work out the marks from the Surform rasp and to stabilize the seams. This is an opportunity for surface decisions to start; sometimes I like leaving the fine-tooth rib marks for a textured surface, and sometimes I smooth them out, but a little texture works well with my underglaze drawings.

After refining the main portion of the body, center it upside down on a banding wheel and then center the foot on top and mark the outline of the foot. Score and attach the foot and double check to make sure you have a solid connection area. This step is crucial because the weight of the main body of the dish all rests at a very narrow point. Score, attach, and compress the attachment with a silicone-tip sculpting tool (9).

At this point the form is complete (10). Give the seams an hour or so to firm up and then dip the dish into a basic white slip, leaving the foot of the dish raw clay. Once all the pieces are dipped in slip, place them in a damp box overnight to allow all of the parts to equalize in moisture content. The next day, pull the pots out of the damp box to dry.

Adding Imagery and Glaze

Living in a humid environment, it takes several days before the dishes reach bone dry. I like to use the drying days to start sketching images in my sketchbook and think about color choices. When the pots are bone dry, sketch images directly onto the surface (11). The bone-dry pieces are delicate, so be very conscious of how you handle them. I like to set the dish on a piece of soft foam while sketching. Also, using a soft touch with your hands and a fat carpenter's pencil will keep the slip from being scraped off the surface. Sketch softly and then examine each dish to make sure you like the image design and layout. If need be, you can wipe the graphite off to redraw the design. You can only do this once before you start losing too much dry slip. Once you like the imagery, start working with underglazes.



Opposite page and above: Ice cream dishes with floral designs, to 3½ in. (9 cm) in height, earthenware, slip, underglaze, fired to cone 2 in oxidation.

Do you like to bring PMI into the studio to reference while trying out new techniques? Then check out the TEAR OUT AND TRY poster on the next page for the perfect wall decoration for your studio!

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Throw a cylinder, then alter the top to prepare it to fit the bowl-shaped middle section.



Throw the middle section of the dish low and wide. Be sure to compress the clay.



The thrown dessert dish components from left to right: top section; middle section; several options of thrown feet.



The middle section trimmed and a foot put in place for checking its fit to see if the interior edge matches the bottom curve.



Alter the top of the dish into a soft square form.



Mark the top section to shave down to fit the curve of the middle section.



Use a Surform to shave down the corners to fit the middle section.

Pottery Making Illustrated | Tear Out and Try



8

The combined form after it's been shaved down to give it flush seams.



9

Use a serrated rib to refine the surface, then compress the foot attachment.



10

Allow the form to firm up before dipping the upper portion in a basic white slip.



11

Sketch a design onto the dried white slip with a soft pencil. Be sure to handle the piece gently.



12

Outline the drawn lines with bold, black lines to further define your design.



13

Brush a couple layers of a base color and allow the layers to dry between coats. Then, add black shades and white highlights.



14

Choose accent colors and add little dots. The dots make for nice visual texture and create a more dynamic surface.



Top and above: Ice cream dishes, to 3½ in. (9 cm) in height, earthenware, slip, underglaze, fired to cone 2 in oxidation.

Since a lot of images I work with are influenced by tattoos, I make a traditional bold, black outline with black underglaze to start most of my drawings (12). Next, paint a couple layers of each base color (in this case, yellow underglaze) and allow the layers to dry between coats. Then, add shades and highlights depending on what the image requires (13). For this style of drawing, work in opaque layers. Once you have the base colors and shadows, take accent colors and make little dots in the image (14). The dots make for nice visual texture and create a more dynamic color palette. Once you have all the colors, shades, and tones finished, make a second pass with a fresh layer of underglaze applied to the black lines just to make them bold and dark.

The more layers of color you build up with underglazes, the nicer the image becomes (in my opinion). The underglazes can sometimes get chalky on the surface and look flat. However, once they're fired, the layers come back through and start to look as intended. It takes a few cycles of drawing and painting with underglazes and then firing the pieces to get a feel for how the colors change from the greenware stage to fully fired, so expect some trial and error.

Now the dishes are ready for bisque firing and then glazing. I use a simple fritted glaze and apply it fairly thin. First, pour glaze inside the bisque-fired dish, roll it around to coat the interior, pour the excess out, then wipe off any glaze that spilled or dripped onto the outside. Let the dishes dry for several hours to prepare for the second coat. Apply the second layer of glaze by quickly dipping the dish into the glaze bucket and immediately pulling it back out, then stopping right at the top of the glaze. Do this in a quick motion so the glaze pops into the interior of the dish, giving it an even coat. This way the interior gets two coats of glaze and the exterior has a single thinner coat, which seals the surface and renders sharp, crisp images. If the exterior glaze is too thick, the imagery tends to get cloudy and muddled. After the pieces are glazed and dried, I fire them up to around cone 2. This temperature range renders a nice dense clay body with a rich reddish-brown color that contrasts well to the more vivid colors I tend to use on my pots.

Sam Chumley received his MFA from Ball State University in 2020 and currently resides in Eastern Tennessee where he works as a studio technician for Arrowmont School of Arts and Crafts. You can see more of his work at www.samchumley.com or follow him on Instagram @xchumleyx.