

Vince Pitelka, 2016

Tenn. Tech University, Appalachian Center for Craft

wpitelka@ntech.edu

Teapots: Thrown and Handbuilt - Five-Day Workshop Description and Schedule

Skill Level – Some previous experience in handbuilding and/or throwing required.

Background

The teapot is among the more intriguing of utilitarian vessels. The simplest teapot is still a complex form, and with the articulation of multiple parts is inherently sculptural. Every type of handmade utilitarian vessel features elements of ritual that accompany use. This is an essential concept that differentiates handmade pottery from factory-made wares. With common mass-produced vessels, daily use is a matter of routine rather than ritual – they simply serve their purpose. In contrast, those who frequent galleries or craft shows in search of useful accessories for the home are seeking life-enrichment and enhancement of daily routine. Regular use of handmade items becomes a form of celebratory ritual. Garth Clark says “Fine craft reconnects art and life.” Functional fine craft objects like handmade teapots take art off the wall or pedestal and put it back into the practical realities of everyday life where we celebrate the objects as we handle and use them, transforming routine into ritual.

At mealtime we each have a cup, bowl, and plate, while the serving bowl, cruet set, platter, casserole, and pitcher enhance the shared ritual of gathering with friends or family. The teapot carries this further as the centerpiece of its own ritual. No serious tea drinker would select a teapot solely on utilitarian function, because its use is too important. Even when drinking tea alone, the quality of ritual is inherent in a teapot. In all British countries and former colonies and in many East Asian cultures, the teapot is among the most important fixtures of daily life, and its use involves elements of ritual extending far beyond those of any other common ceramic vessel.

Workshop Description

What are the secrets to making good functional teapots? In this workshop our objective is to create teapots that are well designed aesthetically, ergonomically, and functionally. Unless a teapot is purely sculptural and non-functional (which seems a bit silly), those three concerns are intimately connected because anything we perceive as interfering with utility and ergonomics will also negatively impact our impression of aesthetic design.

Potters and aficionados of fine pots talk about “pots with attitude.” Obvious examples are the wares of Josh DeWeese, Chandra DeBuse, and Ron Meyers. These fully functional pots make bold individual statements. That comes with focus and long, hard work, but every artist/artisan should look towards developing an individual voice. In this case we are particularly concerned about the qualities of “attitude” that attract attention and make people want to pick up and use our pots. The best-designed utilitarian vessels often radiate an excitement and energy. They seem to be waiting for an opportunity to serve their intended function. With these things in mind, we will investigate the interrelationship of body, foot, handle, spout, lid, and gallery with the objective of coordinating all into the design and creation of lively teapots that look good and work well.

Covering both throwing and handbuilding in one workshop is unusual, but I hope you will come to freely incorporate both in your work. When a wheel potter makes a teapot, she/he forms the body, spout, and handle separately, and all subsequently assembly is handbuilding. Why not incorporate slab components or a handbuilt handle or spout? Why not put a pulled handle and/or thrown spot on a slab-built teapot? It is a bold but proven claim that every wheel potter multiplies their technical capability and design sense by becoming capable in handbuilding.

Our focus is designing and making good teapots rather than surface decoration. We may have the option to bisque-fire some of the work to facilitate transportation, but that's always a challenge in a five-day workshop. Plan on taking at least some of your teapots home as greenware. That's not difficult with some cardboard boxes and padding. Always transport greenware in the leather-hard stage. If it is damaged, you can repair it.

Schedule – Teapots Handbuilt and Thrown – Five-Day Workshop

This schedule serves as a general guide, but must remain flexible. Every workshop group is different, and the schedule always evolves to suit the needs and productivity of the participants.

- **First Day Morning** - Introduction to the workshop, general information about the studio and our work schedule. Discussion/demo of basic wheel-thrown and slab-formed teapot shapes including variations of galleries and lids – what to emphasize, what to avoid. Discussion of problems with clay-memory in slabs and thrown components. First half of teapot slideshow.
- **First Day Afternoon** – Discussion/demo of closed forms as the teapot body both wheel-thrown and slab-formed. Work on teapot bodies.
- **Second Day Morning** – Discussion/demo of fitting lids on conventional thrown teapots, fabricating galleries and lids for closed-form teapots. Second half of teapot slideshow.
- **Second Day Afternoon** - Discussion/demo of handles including side handles, overhead handles, and mixed-media handles incorporated after the firing.
- **Third Day Morning** - Discussion/demo of teapot spouts and strainer holes – different types of wheel-thrown and handbuilt spouts. Work on teapots. Second slide show.
- **Third Day Afternoon** – Discussion/demo of special details such as separate strainers and the air hole. Work on teapots.
- **Fourth Day Morning** – Discussion/demo of designing complex slab-built teapots, making and using templates. Work on templates for complex slab-built teapot and begin forming component parts. Load bisque-firings.
- **Fourth Day Afternoon** - Work on complex slab-built teapots, try different handle and spout possibilities. Slide show about Vince's work.
- **Fifth Day Morning** – Finish any final assembly/demo work. Unload bisque firings, clean up studio. Discuss work, outcomes and possibilities.