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The following in the introduction excerpted from my book, **Clay: A Studio Handbook**, American Ceramic Society, 2016

## **Introduction**

We who work in clay are fortunate. Ours is the most flexible and giving of art media, and the rewards of familiarity are great. In pursuing the path towards fluency in clay and setting up and running a studio we encounter a thousand hurdles. There are few shortcuts other than ready access to needed information. Without it, our momentum slows, while with it, we move gracefully through the challenges towards accomplishment and mastery. There are abundant texts available covering every specialization in ceramics written by skilled and knowledgeable artist-authors, but there has always been a dearth of truly comprehensive studio handbooks specifically designed for studio artists, students of ceramics, and educators. The first edition of this book sought to fill that need, and I have been busy gathering and reevaluating information through the decade-plus since its publication, with the objective of making this second edition even more comprehensive.

Through forty years experience as a studio potter, sculptor, welder, fabricator, mechanic, ceramics technician, university educator, and writer, I have compulsively collected, organized, and disseminated information about ceramics with an eye on accuracy and usefulness. This volume represents a compilation of information I feel most valuable to anyone learning or teaching ceramics or operating a studio, regardless of individual direction or focus in their work. This book will guide you through the most important steps in skill development and studio operation. It is my intent to offer answers and stimulate ideas. The following pages address a broad range of methods, equipment, and situations encountered by those so fortunate as to find themselves immersed in the clay studio.

All parts of this text take into consideration safe and efficient operation of the ceramics studio. Diligent attention to safety practices should become a matter of habit and will make things flow smoothly and productively for you and all others in your studio. Over the years you will likely work in a variety of studio situations, and each will be different, with thousands of possible variations in equipment, setup, lighting, and ventilation. Always be on the lookout for what is unique in each studio situation, above all in terms of safety, but also with an eye towards efficiency and aesthetic possibility.

This text includes a general glossary of terms (Appendix I) and a glossary of ceramic raw materials (Appendix II). Use them well, because mastery of terminology and materials will greatly facilitate your ability to process and utilize ceramics information from this text and other sources and to communicate with others in the field. Be proactive in gathering information and ideas, always on the lookout for visual details that excite you, not just in ceramics, but in architecture, plants, people, animals, appliances, cars, clouds, and rock formations. Try to speak in your own voice through your work, because that is what will draw attention and allow appreciation of other qualities. In the words of master Jazz trumpeter Clark Terry, "Imitate, assimilate, innovate." Approach the world around you with open eyes and an open mind, record things that grab your attention, but don't just reproduce them except as a learning experience. Reorganize the best features in your mind and your sketchbook and then synthesize new, original work.