

Vince Pitelka

**Faceting Thrown Pots**, by John Baymore

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There are numerous ways to facet pots. I've been doing it for about 30 years and have tried a good many of them. The hardest part for many people is getting past the idea of maybe "screwing up" that piece that they just threw. It helps to have the skills to make basic thrown or handbuilt forms down pretty well first - it makes those cuts come more freely. Cut through the wall . . . oh well . . . just make another one. For doing any type of "thrown and altered" work it really helps when there is no attitude of "preciousness" about the base form you are about to alter. Just "have at it." In my "thrown and altered" course one of my favorite retorts is "whack it with a 2 x 4 and see what happens.....then go from there."

Each method of faceting carries its own qualities into the finished form. If you facet with the clay harder, the nature of the facet reflects this. If you facet with the clay wet, this shows too. Try faceting at different times to learn the differences that tend to be inherent in each.

If you are faceting with work that is pretty firm leather hard, then a cutting blade of some sort works pretty nicely. For me fettling knives are too dull. Find an old rusty kitchen knife that is still sharp. Nice new shiny metal likes to stick to clay, so the rusty surface can help allow the knife to keep from wanting to "bind" as it goes through the wall. Usually it is best to cut down toward the bottom with the piece resting on a firm surface, but like just about everything in ceramics, it depends on the particular situation (and of course, watch out for your various body parts!).

For in-between hardness, a cheese cutter (a wire held in a cutting frame, sometimes with depth guide) seems to work well.

For wet faceting (my main particular "stock in trade") simply using a cut off wire held between the hands works well. Insert it into the clay wall and move the hands downward or upward. Experiment with cutting single long facets and also with making shorter multiple cuts over the same distance.

Experiment with the nature of the wire or blade. Twisted wire leaves a different character from untwisted wire. A serrated knife leaves different marks from a smooth one. And so on. Make shorter wires for faceting use - it saves wrapping excess around your fingers. Immediately throw out wires that have little strands coming loose - the fingers you save may be your own.

Keep in mind that some forms you see that appear faceted are actually paddled into hard edges when slightly less than leather hard.

Then there is the “wear it away” approach of faceting using tools like rasps and Surform blades, where you kind of wear off the clay in layers until it looks the way you want it to. This usually imparts an interesting texture to the “facets.”

You can combine paddling flat faces first and cutting with a knife later to get a different look and also to allow the appearance of deeper facets without having to leave the clay wall so thick to start with.

Also, somehow it seems that people forget that you can facet *handbuilt* forms too. Try cutting facets into coil, slab, and even pinch pots.

One thing that I think is quite important when faceting is what the Japanese call *tsuchi aji* - literally “clay taste.” It means the character of the clay itself. Cutting into a wall of clay reveals all of the character of the raw material, which is often obscured on thrown or handbuilt surfaces by the touch of the fingers packing and smoothing the surface. *Mentori* (the Japanese term for faceting) is a great way to reveal the real nature of the clay. Sometimes for certain wet faceted pieces I have clay that has a substantial quantity of up to ¼” New Hampshire granite chunks in it. The facets reveal these rocks in very interesting ways.

A lot of what I do with facets involves throwing a cylinder, faceting the clay while wet on the wheel, then stretching the form from the inside. I play with capturing the contrast of the two main characteristics of clay - hard and soft - in the resulting forms. The hard edges of the facets are contrasted with soft, succulent rounded smooth clay edges. If the stretching is done with the inside surface wet... the facets just expand into the new form. If the stretching is done with the inside surface and hand dry, the clay being driven at the bottom combined with the drag from the friction of the inside fingers produces torque on the plastic material.... which “shears” a bit and the facet patterns then take on a twisting swirl going around the form. In writing this I noticed that I don't have a lot of the more twisted faceted pieces up on my website. I'll fix that sometime soon.

Doing this “twist” bit for many years with straight plain facets led me to the newer forms that I have been exploring for the past three years - see them at my website. These are wet fluted and then stretched into shape, and there are a few that combine the looks of both twisted wet faceting and wet fluting on the same surfaces.