

Student Project 6.1: JAPANESE TEA BOWL

DIRECTIONS

A tea bowl is a shallow bowl without a handle that can comfortably be held in the palms of your hands. They are normally small, three to four inches high, as there are other, more efficient methods for forming larger vessels. They may be straight-sided, flared at the top, or even slightly irregular.

1. Wedge the clay either by kneading it on the table with your palms or by slapping it firmly between your palms or against a canvas-covered surface as you keep turning it around. Check for air bubbles by cutting it open with a wire or knife. The bubbles will be visible irregularities. Shape it into a ball.
2. Place the ball into the palm of your left hand, and use the thumb of your right (or dominant) hand to poke a hole in the middle, leaving at least 1/4 inch of clay at the bottom.
3. Keep the thumb and fingers of the right hand on the outside of the bowl to keep the walls' thickness even. Keep turning the bowl in your left hand, using the fingers and palm to maintain the shape. Use the thumb to pull clay toward the top of the bowl. Try to keep the sides almost vertical, since clay tends to flare out at the top. Avoid making the walls too thin, or the clay will sag. You may paddle the sides with a flat wooden stick to make them smooth. The paddling will also drive out air bubbles remaining in the clay.
4. If the pot becomes too large for the hand, place it on a decorating wheel or on a paper towel so it can be easily lifted off. If the walls are not high enough, add coils to build to the height you want.
5. When you are satisfied with the shape, allow the bowl to harden enough to support its own weight, and turn it over to apply the foot to the bottom.
6. Make the foot on the bottom of the bowl by rolling a piece of clay. Score (roughen) the bottom of the bowl where the foot will be applied, and score the roll of clay. Use slip (equal amounts of clay and water mixed until smooth) to attach the foot to the bowl. Use your finger to smooth it on.
7. When the bowl is leather hard (usually a day later), it may be burnished with the back of a spoon, a large smooth stone, or scraped with a metal scraper. The foot may be trimmed with a knife, scraper, or loop, until smooth and even. The outside of the bowl could also be scraped with a kidney-shaped tool.
8. It isn't necessary to smooth the bowl all over. Reinforce the rim by supporting the inside and outside of the bowl while you smooth it. If the rim is terribly uneven, cut it with scissors held horizontally in your right hand, keeping your elbow at the same level, and turning the bowl slowly with the left hand while cutting.
9. Possibilities for finishing are: Leave the bowl crude and simple; give it a sophisticated design based on nature, applied with a needle tool; make a geometric pattern or organic form such as a branch; press straw or the head of a screw to make an indentation in the surface.
10. Glazing is usually fairly natural for tea bowls. The inside and rim should be glazed, but the lower outside and foot are often left unglazed.