



On the Wheel

Throwing and trimming closed forms

By Karen Wise

Objectives

- Learn to throw a closed form on a pottery wheel

Throwing

Step 1: Center and pull up a cylinder. The cylinder should be about 1 inch to 1 ½ inches taller than you think you may need. The rim should also be thinner than usual — when closing the top, the rim's clay will condense and become thicker.

Step 2: Start to round out the form near the bottom of the piece, giving it shape.

Materials

- Pottery wheel
- A few 1-pound balls of clay
- Needle tool
- Sponge
- Wooden rib
- Cut-off wire
- Water dish

Review basic throwing techniques in our June and July 2012 issues. You can access our digital archives at www.firedartsandcrafts.com.

Closed forms are great to learn how to throw in the creation of many objects. They can be used to make jars without having to throw a separate lid, for planters, rattles, bells, and many other objects. Throwing a completely closed form also helps you learn how to narrow down the neck of a vase or bottle, or even throw a seed pot type of form.





Step 3: Working on the top, use both thumbs and pointer fingers while pushing in to close the rim. You may need to go back and re-pull and stretch the clay up as it condenses together. Close the rim until it is completely sealed and the clay forms a bubble.

Step 4: Now use a rib to smooth out the top of the bubble. Also, cut off any excess clay from the bottom. You can form the bubble tall or short with ease, since the air trapped inside helps to maintain the form.

Step 5: When your form is decided upon and you are finished with the piece, use a needle tool to poke a hole all the way through the wall of clay. Since there is air trapped in the clay and clay shrinks as it dries, if there's no way for the air to escape, your piece will crack into pieces.

Step 6: Allow the form to dry to leather hard for trimming.



Trimming

Step 7: Center and open a ball of clay double the weight of the closed form you threw, making a donut shape — this is called a “wet chuck.” Make sure the chuck has a flat, even, thick wet rim

Step 8: Place your piece centered and upside down resting in the wet chuck.

Step 9: The leather-hard piece should stick to the wet chuck. If you find that the opening of the chuck is too wide, then close it a bit. If it's too small, then open it a bit.

Step 10: Make sure your piece is centered. If it's not, just peel it from the chuck, re-center it, re-wet the chuck, re-stick the piece, and check it again.

Step 11: Once your piece is centered and secure, you may begin to trim.

Step 12: Your closed form is now complete and ready to be turned into any one of a variety of different objects.

Advanced Methods

Practice making closed forms until you can reliably throw and trim matching pieces. In upcoming issues, we'll look at various pieces that can be made with closed forms.

About the Artist: Karen Wise has a bachelor's degree from Northeastern Illinois University, where she majored in art and secondary education, with an emphasis on studio ceramics. She currently works for Shimpo Ceramics, travels the United States giving pottery demonstrations and presentations on historical and contemporary artists and techniques, and teaches at Brickton Art Center in Park Ridge, Ill. She also creates her own Native American-influenced ceramics in a contemporary style. Contact her at karwise@gmail.com.

A wet chuck can be easily changed to accommodate many shapes and sizes of leather-hard pieces for trimming. It's the most effective way to trim closed forms.

