

for the classroom

Colorful Bird Condos



Objectives

- Create clay shapes utilizing slabs
- Texture clay with various methods
- Work with high- and low-fire finishes



By Michael Harbridge

These condos were created using stoneware clay for a variety of reasons, but low-fire clay could also be used. Stoneware clay is much more durable than low-fire bodies, and it is preferred for outdoor use, especially in areas where temperatures can go to extremes. If stoneware is fired properly, it becomes vitrified and will not absorb moisture. That's important because if moisture gets into the clay and it freezes, the moisture expands and can cause low-fire clay to flake and break apart. Moisture-filled clay can also cause glaze finishes to craze.

Most stoneware clay contains either sand or grog. Those components give stability when hand-building shapes, especially of this size. If a smooth low-fire clay were used on a large slab shape like this, it would need a great deal of support to keep it from collapsing.

One additional benefit is that it will not absorb odors and will clean up easily. If your intention is to use this with real birds, you do not want to glaze the interior, as that would create a very slippery surface for the birds. Since stoneware becomes vitrified, it will not absorb like porous, low-fire clay.

If this is being created for decorative purposes, you can use low-fire clay that contains sand or grog. It will often be referred to as a coarse clay. Many low-fire raku bodies will work as well. But remember, stick with appropriate finishes designed for cooler firing temperatures. High-fire glazes are not going to mature at the lower temps.

Step 1: Roll out a slab of moist clay large enough for the condo you plan to build. Make the slab about 1/2 inch thick, because you will be pressing it against bark or a texture pad which will make deep impressions.

Step 2: Press the slab against the bark of a tree or over the Bark texture pad. Gently pull the clay away. Pulling quickly could cause it to rip.

Step 3: Stand the clay slab upright on an absorbent board like dry-wall or a project board. Bend it into a cylinder shape. Score the edges of the slab where they overlap, add slip, and press together. Reach inside and mash the clay together from the inside.

Step 4: If you plan to add a bottom, use a slab of the same thickness as the walls. Place the cylinder on top, cut out the needed size, score, add slip, and attach. Place a coil of clay along the joint inside and mash it into the bottom and side.



Step 5: Use a needle tool to cut the door opening on three sides. Cut out holes for “window” openings.

Step 6: Roll out a long coil of clay to make the branch coming up the side of the condo. Taper it so it gets narrower as it reaches the top. Use a wooden sculpting tool to add in texture. Twist the coil several times. Score, slip and attach to the condo where the cylinder slab overlapped to cover the join. Make additional small coils of varying lengths with tapered ends for twigs coming off the main branch. Texture and twist the same as the main part. Poke openings in the main stem where the twigs will be added. Taper the ends of the twigs where they will insert into the main stem. Add slip and attach. In many cases, the small twigs will serve as perches to the openings. Add small perches where needed.

Materials

Moist tableware stoneware clay by
Continental Clay (or clay body of choice)
Mini Slab roller by Shimpo
MT03 Brick Designer Mat by Mayco

Supplies by ClayPuzzling.com

RSET-POT1 basic pottery tool set
BTP-1 Bark texture pad
PB3 project board
LP111 Large Catalpa rubber leaf form
LP105 Dahlia rubber leaf form
LP102 Oak Leaves set
PS02 mini extruder

Colors by Amaco

HF-36 Textured Amber Brown
PC-25 Textured Turquoise
PC-55 Chun Plum
WA-44 Manganese Wash

Brushes by Royal & Langnickel

SG250-10 Soft-Grip round
R2845-6 Aqualon glaze

Miscellaneous

Toothpicks





Step 7: Make protective coverings for each opening. Some are made with small bark-textured slabs, while others are constructed with clay leaves. Use real leaves or rubber leaf forms to texture the clay shapes. Place two to three wooden toothpicks into each addition, with half of the toothpick sticking out. Score, slip, and attach by pressing the toothpicks into the clay cylinder. Place a small coil under each add-on for additional support. The toothpicks give support while the clay dries, but will burn away in firing.

Step 8: Create a deck with leaves or bark-textured clay the same way the top coverings were made. Additional branches can be added for support and to create a railing. Notice how the branches were cut and made to appear to grow through the leaves or slabs. Additional branches can be added around the entrance, as well.

Step 9: Create shutters for any openings with leaves or bark slabs. Score, slip, and attach as desired. Window boxes can also be made in the same manner.

Step 10: Use a large leaf or leaf form with a slab of clay to make the roof. This can be scored, slipped, and attached or left as a separate piece.

Step 11: Use a clay slab and the brick texture pad to make the chimney. You can also make flower boxes along the base.

Step 12: Use a small clay extruder to make fine coils to simulate moss and foliage and attach where desired using slip.

Step 13: Allow the greenware to dry completely before firing to cone 04.

Step 14: Apply three coats of Textured Amber Brown to all bark areas. Apply three coats of Textured Turquoise to all leaves and foliage. Apply three coats of Chun Plum to all tree branches. Apply one coat of Manganese Wash to all the brick areas and wipe back with a damp sponge. Wipe away any glaze from the bottom of the ware. If you used a low-fire clay body, be sure to use appropriate low-fire colors instead of the ones listed here. Let the color dry completely.

Step 16: Fire to cone 6.





Advanced Methods

Layer high-fire colors to achieve different effects and varied wood tones. Look for other natural materials to add unique textures to clay.

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Sources

Amaco: www.amaco.com
 Clay Puzzling: www.claypuzzling.com
 Continental Clay: www.continentalclay.com
 Royal & Langnickel: www.royalbrush.com
 Shimpo: www.shimpo.com



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Toyo Tools and Artist Leslie Perlis

San Diego artist and author Leslie Perlis combines fused glass, mosaic and plenty of imagination in her life-size art. Her favorite glass cutter is the **Toyo TC-21 Custom-grip Supercutter®** with Toyo's Tap-Wheel® Technology—adding a micro vibration as the wheel rotates, driving scores deeper with less pressure. For more information about Leslie and Toyo cutters, visit: glassaccessories.com/leslie

