

SELECTED WORKS BY
JOYCE MICHAUD

Upper left: *Impressions*.
5" x 2"; 4" x 2"; 4½" x 3".
Wood-fired porcelain.

Upper right: *Inner
Volume*. 6" x 8". Wood-
fired stoneware.

Lower right: *Platter*. 19".
Wood-fired stoneware.

Lower left: *Pinch Pot*. 6".
Wood-fired porcelain.



A Different Approach to Wheel Throwing

BY NEIL GLASGOW

WEDGE while you THROW by affecting the core of the wall with every move

(a major concept Joyce Michaud teaches
for structural strength during throwing)

- a) keep the clay evenly lubricated, inside & out
- b) alternate between outside and inside contact with walls
- c) when adding moisture, apply only what's necessary, then remove it to prevent sagging
- d) seal the clay in its new position with a wooden rib

When I entered the clay studio where Joyce Michaud was conducting her four-day "Masters Throwing Workshop," I encountered a room filled with tall, freshly-thrown cylinders formed by participants. These large cylinders, products of various workshop exercises, had been made by people I personally knew—yet they were actually three to five inches taller than anything these individuals

had thrown before! It was clear that Michaud's workshop, which focuses on the mechanics of throwing and physical properties of clay in relation to throwing techniques, had a definite impact on the pot-making skills of workshop participants.

Michaud first shared her unique insights on the characteristics of clay and its relationship to throwing while earning her MFA in ceramics at George

Washington University, Washington, DC. Her thesis research, entitled "Structural Strength in the Wheel-thrown Form," presented an in-depth look at the way clay moves and the potter's ability to harness the forces affecting the movement of clay: from the initial mixing and wedging, through the molten stage at the height of firing, to the permanent, finished form. After graduating

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A Different Approach to Throwing continued from page 27

Below: Joyce Michaud marks the "true base" (where side wall angle begins to rise from interior floor) to indicate where foot should begin. **Upper right:** True base is marked on pot exterior. **Lower right:** Trimming progresses from outside to inside to prevent accidental slips from ruining foot.



and teaching ceramics at George Washington University for seven years, Michaud founded the ceramic art program at Hood College in Frederick, Maryland, where she teaches studio ceramics and hosts most of her masters series workshops. She also travels to present the workshop series upon request.

The masters series provides participants with practical techniques to guide and inspire them long after the intense, four-day program has ended. Designed for potters who already have some range of experience with clay and throwing skills, the class provides suggestions and simple exercises for participants to answer their own creative direction and design questions. Instead of external solutions, students are given tools to begin to learn more about themselves, the nature of their originality, and the act of creation.

Before the workshop begins, students are asked to bring their goals, a desire to learn, and 150 pounds of the clay they routinely use to the first class. As they begin various throwing exercises, Michaud becomes personally

aware of each student's ability and his or her range of skills and individual aspirations.

Michaud teaches students how to "read" the clay through an understanding of its movement and the forces that affect its structural strength (the ability of the clay to withstand the stresses inherent in the throwing process). While discussing the basic variety of wheel-thrown forms, participants are introduced to a conceptual language and vocabulary that allows them to translate into words the purpose and effect of each physical action performed on the clay. This helps them understand the laws of physics as they relate to the movement of clay. This method of instruction integrates fine art, clay science, and craftsmanship to produce, maintain, and expand the student's skill and freedom of expression.

For many of the more experienced potters, less effective techniques are replaced with new technical tools. Guided activities and practice strategies reduce the need for power in

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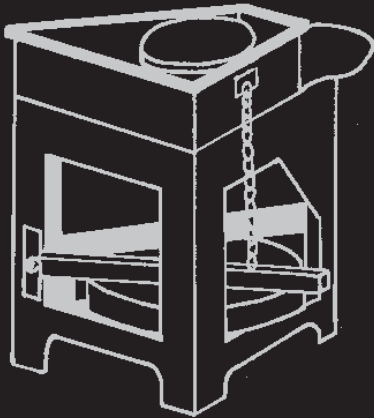


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Throwing continued from page 28

throwing by replacing the power moves with finesse moves.

Students are instructed to get the most out of the clay itself by using specific clay-strengthening techniques throughout the entire throwing process. These basic concepts include: a) wedging during throwing; b) producing and controlling high points; and c) sealing the clay in place.

The second and third days of the workshop continue a survey of how various major wheel-thrown forms are created. The study of each basic form begins a gradual or sometimes radical re-learning of technique as old, less effective movements are replaced with new strategies.

Class participants are taught that physical strength is not necessary to make large pots. Wheel-throwing exercises are designed to produce a more instinctive response to the movement of the clay, utilizing new techniques to guide pressure, release pressure or change the angle of the pressure exerted by the potter's touch.

This technical approach to teaching and learning instills kinetic tools to be used by the potter. Once learned, these tools can be used to enhance artistic expression. At the same time, structural strength can be enhanced and maintained throughout the entire creative process from clay preparation, throwing and trimming to drying and ultimately firing. Michaud emphasizes that each aspect of the throwing experience overlaps and relates to some degree.

On the final day of the workshop, the throwing focus continues as new moves are added and earlier techniques are reinforced. Intense coaching continues as individual progress is



Joyce Michaud smooths out the surface area where a foot has been cut.

acknowledged and praised. Finally, Michaud caps off the day with a presentation dealing with design and aesthetic issues.

Michaud's masters series workshop provides a model that sets a high standard from both teaching and student perspectives. The system works based on the tried-and-true experience she brings to the pottery studio and her students. Provided is the "kick in the butt" we all need from time to time to get past personal plateaus and keep a creative life exciting. Participants take home new confidence, new techniques, and new throwing experiences. They also take with them a new vocabulary and ability to look at clay, forms, creativity, expression, their own work and the work of others with a renewed sense of vision. ■

For information about the masters series workshop and/or the Hood College ceramics program, contact Joyce Michaud at (301) 696-3526 or write her at Hood College, 401 Rosemont Avenue, Frederick, MD 21701. Her e-mail address is: jmichaud@hood.edu.

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