

Ceramic Arts Daily Lesson Plan

Family Flair: Teapots

by Nancy Zoller

We fill our days with rituals that enhance the richness of life, and as a potter, I find it satisfying to know that the vessels I create become part of someone's daily routine.

Teapots are certainly objects that become part of our small celebrations and rituals alike. While they can be used as an exuberant expression of art conveying a concept other than the ritual of drinking tea, I prefer to think of my teapots as functional vessels: strong, quiet, balanced, and elegant.

Traditionally the most seductive and complex of pottery forms, the parts and pieces that make up a teapot must work in harmony with one another. While it's difficult to master the unity in design and scale of all the parts as a beginning potter, it's worth the effort to make teapots even if you're a novice. Completing a complex form gives a sense of joy and accomplishment; and, with practice, the relationship of all of the parts and the overall form will improve.

Getting Started

When creating teapots, I throw four bodies, five lids and five spouts. Murphy's Law implies that if you make only four spouts and lids something will happen in the process and you'll come up short.

As the clay is centered for the teapot body, make two initial pulls, leaving a thick rim at the top of the cylinder. Form the flange or gallery that will hold the lid securely. To do this, hold a sponge in your hand so you can release water over your fingers as you work. Support the outside of the wall with one hand while pressing down on the top of the clay halfway in from the outer edge with the thumb of your other hand to split the rim and create a strong gallery (*figure 1*). Now, finish pulling up the walls of your form and decide upon the final shape. I use a metal rib in this forming process to give definition to the body, define the neck area and to smooth out the throwing marks, leaving a clean surface for later when adding texture or brushwork. The belly shape can be altered at this stage of forming (*figure 2*).

The spouts and lids are thrown off the hump. The diameter of the spout at the base (widest part)



A Teapot Family of Four. Teapots by Nancy Zoller fired to cone 10 reduction in a Geil gas kiln, each with various glazes fitting their design characteristics. *Photo: Jafe Parsons.*



Process photos: Bill Zoller

1 Throw a cylinder for the body of the teapot, leaving a thickened rim. Split the rim in half to create the gallery.



2 The belly shape can be altered at this stage of forming using pressure from the inside out.

should be almost the same measurement as the diameter of the gallery—about three inches in this case. The pouring section (the narrow end) of the spout is about an inch in diameter, with a bit of a flare at the top. **Note:** A flared bottom edge on the pouring end of the spout is not recommended since it causes liquids to spread out. When you've finished throwing the spout, use a rib to smooth and compress the surface (*figure 3*).

The lid is thrown upside down, like a bowl and cylinder combined. **Note:** One of the key elements found in a successful teapot is a secure, snug-fitting lid. For this reason I like to make a flange or gallery on the main body as well as a flange on the lid. This double flange design creates an extremely utilitarian vessel.

Before throwing the lid, measure both the inside and outside diameters of the gallery on the body (the interior opening and the right angle where the gallery or seat meets the vertical wall). Center clay into a mound that is close to the diameter of the outside measurement of the gallery. Open the center until it is a little narrower than your interior gallery measurement. The next step is to split the opened clay so you can create both the raised, cylinder-like flange that holds the lid in place as you tilt the teapot to pour, and the outer edge of the lid that sits in the gallery. This process is similar to what was done to create the gallery in the pot. Press down on the clay, leaving half of the diameter toward the outer edge, and around half toward the center to create the flange. Throw the flange section first, measuring carefully so that the outer diameter will fit within the interior of the pot. Next, throw the bowl-like outer rim. After a few pulls, remove some of the extra clay from underneath, creating a curve and defining where to cut off the lid from the hump (*figure 4*). Measure carefully so that the diameter matches the outer measurement of your gallery. Otherwise, your lid won't fit down into the pot properly! Use a wire tool to cut off the lid, then set it aside to firm up before trimming the curve on the top and adding the knob design of your choice. Cover all of the parts and allow the moisture content to equalize overnight.

Assembly Day

Once the parts are leather hard, you're ready to trim and assemble. Begin by trimming the teapot body to



3
When you've finished throwing the spout, use a rib to smooth and compress the surface.



4
When forming the lid, split the rim from the flange, then remove extra clay from underneath, making a curve.



5
Add an extra coil onto the bottom and throw it into a tall foot. The diameter of the foot should echo the rim.

remove excess weight and refine the shape. A foot that raises your form off the table adds grace, stability and elegance. For this reason, after initial trimming, I add an extra coil onto the bottom and throw it into a tall foot (*figure 5*). **Note:** To create balance, the foot diameter should be the same measure as the top rim of the body. Once you've finished, allow the foot to set up and reach the leather-hard stage before turning it right side up.

Next, decide which lid fits the most securely in the gallery, as well as which spout proportionally fits with the body. Secure the lid onto the wheel head, trim the excess clay from the top and throw a knob from a small, soft piece of clay. Score and slip the knob as well as the top of the lid, then attach (*figure 6*). By now you should be formulating a plan for the texture or pattern on each teapot. Be sure to create harmony in the piece using the same textures on the lid, body, and handle of the teapot. You can add any texture you like using roulettes, stamps, texture tools, wire mesh, screen, fabric, etc.

Poke a hole in the top of the lid for venting. I use a $\frac{3}{16}$ -inch hole cutter, which is also used to poke strainer holes in the teapot body later on. I add a round ball of clay to the lid with a bit of slip before poking the hole, creating a point of emphasis in the lid (*figure 7*).

Trim off any excess clay from the inside of the wider edge of the thrown spout, making it lighter. Hold the spout onto the body to determine the right angle and placement, and cut a line from one side of the spout to the other (*figure 8*). Next, holding the spout in your hand and still working on the wide end of the spout that will attach to the body, carve the outer edges on each side creating an oval shape. Bevel the inside edges of the spout as thin as possible using a fettling knife. Wet your hands and flare out the edges of the inside of the spout, especially on the top of the inside edge. This step is important, as the curve you create allows the spout to visually flow onto the body gracefully once it's attached. Remember the pouring edge of the spout must rise above the rim of the vessel. Lay a straight edge across the top of your pot when determining the placement of the spout, and be sure the top of the spout touches the straight edge. Mark an outline of the outside edge of the carved spout onto the body with a pin



6 Score and slip the knob as well as the top of the lid then attach them together.



7 Add a round ball of clay to the lid with a bit of slip, then create a vent hole using a hole cutter.



8 Hold the wide end of the spout onto the body and cut a line from one side of the spout to the other.

tool. Inside this outline, poke the strainer holes (figure 9). Score, slip, then attach the spout to the teapot body.

Carving the pouring section of the spout once it's secured to the body is also tricky, but one of my favorite parts of the process. With a fettling knife, cut a straight line on the top edge of the spout (figure 10). Then, begin carving the outer sides of the spout, forming an oval (with the narrow sides at the top and bottom of the spout). If the spout is dry, remoisten before carving. When you finish carving, be sure the pouring edge transition from interior to the exterior of the spout is sharp to prevent the tea from dripping.

Now, you're ready to add the handle. A strong,

pulled handle attached to the back ensures a stable, functional teapot. Use a stick or straight edge to measure from the tip of the spout straight across the body of the pot to determine the handle placement, and create a mark where the top of the handle should attach (figure 11). Slip, score and attach the handle so that it is in line with the spout.

Finale

Each of the four teapots is completed following the steps above. As I work, the teapot family evolves, each with its own character. ■

Nancy Zoller is a professional potter residing in Loveland, Colorado. To see more, go to: www.nancyzollerpottery.com.



9 Create strainer holes within the outline of the wide end of the spout.



10 Cut a straight line across the pouring end of the spout. Then carve the spout opening to create an oval (see below).



11 Lay a straight edge across the teapot extending from the tip of the spout and across the opening to determine the handle placement.



12 Finished greenware pot. Cover the finished piece loosely with plastic and allow the moisture to equalize for a couple of days.