

Glazing for Success

by Annie Chrietzberg

Glazing, for a lot of people, is the bane of their ceramic lives. While there's no specific glazing system that fits everyone's needs and preferences, the more information you have allows you more options when you get into a glazing corner. My system for glazing evolved with my own body of work, and as the work changes, I draw on various aspects of it to suit the particulars of the pieces in front of me.

For complex forms consisting of thrown and textured elements, I use a combination of pouring, dipping and brushing to get the color where I want it. Dipping is the easiest way to ensure an even application, and pouring, with a little practice, is the next. Brushing takes more practice, time and attention, and I only use it when the first two methods are not options for a tricky place on a pot.

The two troublemakers involved with glaze application are water and gravity. When a bisque pot becomes too saturated with water, it won't accept glaze correctly, so use the least amount of water possible when glazing, including when you

are making corrections. And as for gravity, I doubt there's anyone who hasn't experienced the wayward drip of one glaze flowing toward the earth across the perfect application of the previous glaze.

Tips for Success

Keep bisqueware clean. Lotions, or even the oils from your hands, can create resist spots where glaze adheres unevenly or not at all. Throughout all phases of the glazing process, including loading and unloading the kiln, handle bisqueware with a clean pair of disposable gloves (figure 1). If you think your bisqueware has been compromised—splashed with something, covered with grime, or maybe handled by a visitor—bisque it again rather than risk a crawling glaze.

Remove all dust before glazing including bisque dust, studio dust and even household or street dust. Use an air compressor for foolproof results, but work outside or in a well-ventilated area away from your primary workspace, as bisque dust is extremely abrasive to your lungs (figure 2).

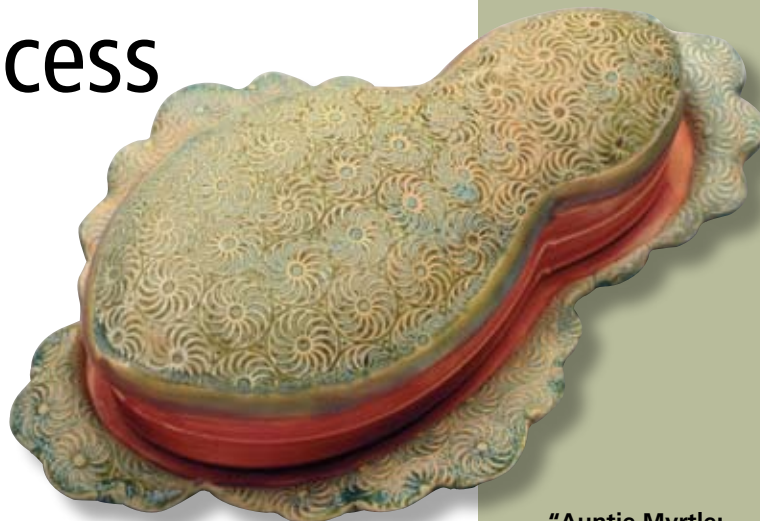


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"Auntie Myrtle: A Covered Dish." Glazing complicated pieces requires pouring, dipping and brushing of glazes. Practicing with various techniques ensures greater success with each piece you complete.



Use silicon carbide paper to remove any rough spots you missed before bisque firing. Place your work on a piece of foam to prevent chipping. After sanding, wipe with a damp sponge to remove all traces of sanding dust (figure 3).

Use a damp sponge instead of rinsing, which should be kept to a minimum. Wring the sponge thoroughly and rotate it so each area is only used once. I tend to use half a dozen or so of those orange round synthetic sponges during any given glazing session (figure 4).

Glazes must be well mixed. I use an electric drill with a Jiffy Mixer

attached (figure 5). If there is dry glaze caked on the sides of the bucket, sieve the glaze, then return it to a clean bucket.

Glaze all the interiors of your pots first by pouring the glaze in, then rolling it around for complete coverage. For complex pieces requiring a number of glazing steps, glaze the insides the day before to give you a drier surface to work with, especially for brushing (figure 6).

When removing unwanted glaze, scrape off as much of it as you can with a dental tool or a similar small metal scraper to keep a sharp line. A damp sponge removes the remaining



glaze with a few strokes, keeping water usage to a minimum (figure 7).

Use a stiff brush to help clean glaze drips out of texture (figure 8).

For dipping glazes, select an appropriately sized container for the work at hand. I have lots of different sizes of shallow bowls that are perfect for dipping the sides of my pieces. Wide shallow bowls allow me to see what I'm doing, so I even use them for smaller things that fit into the glaze bucket (figure 9).

When you can't dip or pour, it's time for brushing. Watch your bisque as you brush—glaze is shiny and wet when first applied, then

becomes matt as the bisque absorbs the water. If you recoat too soon over a damp coat, you'll move the foundation layer rather than imparting a second coat (figure 10).

Consider gravity when brushing and hold the pot both to encourage the glaze to go where you want it to and to keep it from running where you don't want it (figure 11).

If a drip flows onto a previously glazed surface, stop, set the pot down and wait. Resist the urge to wipe the drip with a sponge. Let the drip dry, then carefully scrape it off with a dental tool or metal rib. Use a small compact brush to wipe away glaze in

Brushes

I use sumi brushes, which have long bristles that come to a point, but in the past, I have also used hake and multi-stemmed hake brushes for large areas. Experiment with all the long, springy-bristled brushes. Mop brushes might work for you, but don't buy expensive water-color brushes. Applying glaze is a cruder application than watercolor, and an expensive, fine water-color brush won't work as well for a glaze as a cheap hake from the ceramic supply store.

A brush with long, springy bristles that come to a point is best. Successful brushing not only relies on technique of application, but also the glazes you're using and the temperature you're firing to. Some glazes lend themselves well to brushing, while others are more finicky. Make wide tiles representative of your surfaces and use them to test how well your glazes take to brushing.



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areas you can't reach with a sponge (figure 12).

Don't brush glaze from the big glaze bucket. Pour a small amount into a cup, then briskly stir it occasionally to ensure that it stays properly mixed. Keep a large, damp sponge nearby to keep the brush handle clean. Stray drips often start with a handle full of glaze (figure 13).

If you're glazing pots that don't have a defined foot, push them across a piece of 220-grit silicon carbide sandpaper. The sandpaper removes some of the glaze from the contact areas, indicating where you need to wipe off the remaining glaze.

