

Rolling Stamps

by William Shinn



The early Greek potters used small rolls of clay that had been carved on the surfaces to produce repeated patterns on their freshly thrown forms. However, little more has been done with this technique by subsequent potters. This is understandable, since larger rolling stamps would, of course, distort a freshly thrown piece. With the increased interest in handbuilt, press-molded and extruded forms, the possibilities for texturing flat surfaces with rolling stamps on a larger scale can be more thoroughly explored.

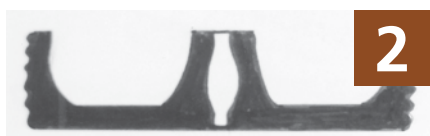
The simplest method of creating rolling stamps is to roll a clay slab around a tubular shape, such as a cardboard tube, wooden dowel or plastic pipe. These produce a rigid backing when applying a texture to the slabs. A piece of newspaper placed between the form and the clay will prevent sticking when removing the support. Removal should be performed as soon as possible before any shrinkage takes place.

Process

Stamps also can be made by throwing a cylindrical or conical form (figure 1). The thrown stamps are created like miniature steamer caseroles. The center spout is pulled up and compressed to an opening the size of the dowel (with allowance for shrinkage). The outer wall is then raised to form the working surface of the stamp, which will be carved at the proper stage of drying. Make sure that the outer surface is perpendicular to the wheel head (figure 2).

The use of an extruder can also produce tubular shapes for rolling stamps. The ends can be filled in, leaving small holes in the center to

Rolling stamps give you a practical way to create repeating designs. Combining stamps provides even more design opportunities.





allow dowels to be used as handles. Bisqued clay produces an ideal stamp with its combination of porosity, strength and permanence. Make the walls as thick as possible because a thin wall can't withstand the heavy pressure and becomes quickly saturated, losing its resistance to sticking. Use a hair dryer to solve this problem.

After creating and firing the stamps, their use is quite simple. The cylinders are rolled over the surface of the clay with the palm of the hand while varying the pressure to correspond to the width of the stamp. For small stamps, I prefer throwing the forms and using them

with dowels for handles—much like rolling pins. They are more easily guided in a straight or curved line than the wider and heavier cylindrical stamps.

The rolling stamp is ideal for quickly decorating a platter rim. The stamp, held rigidly in a fixed position, quickly prints out the repeated pattern as the wheel spins. Lifting at the right moment can be tricky. A little practice is recommended when starting this project (figure 3).

Besides carving, the surface pattern can be created a variety of ways—utilizing simple stamps (repeated or varied), rolling the clay over natural or manmade surfaces,



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stretching the clay pattern while flat before wrapping around a cylinder, etc. The possibilities are endless. You also may notice that the impressed negative design on the clay can be quite different from the positive design of the stamp.

Very effective surfaces can be obtained by cutting the cylinders into sections and reassembling the parts into different positions. This can be done when the stamps are leather hard and then glued back together after bisque firing. Such a rolling stamp can produce a variety of results (figure 4 and 5). Other tools can add further interest to the surface (figure 6).

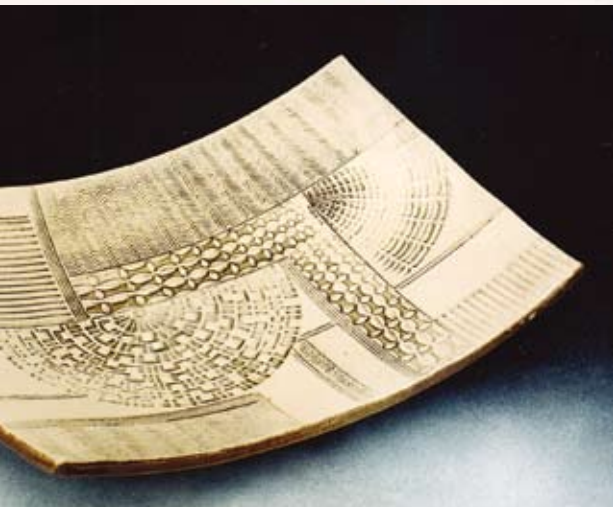
For producing an overall surface, or for creating unconventionally shaped tiles, design a cylinder with matched outer edges. This creates a repeated pattern that fits within itself and create a continuous surface when rolled side by side (figure 7).

A conical thrown form can be used to produce a round design (figure 8). The conical stamp can be combined with the handled stamp to increase the complexity of the design.

Unlike a thrown form, an extruded shape possessing flat surfaces is an excellent form for stamping when supported from the inside. Newspaper or cloth can be used to prevent sticking (figure 9).

Simply wrapping clay around a wooden or cardboard shape presents an ideal backing for applying a stamp design. The imprinted design has an advantage over a raised pattern because you can gently rotate the work face down for support with little distortion of the design. An attached handle inside the mold helps facilitate its removal (figure 10).

When glazing the work, the imprinted design is ideal for inlaying color. After applying the first glaze, the surface is brushed off, resulting in a neatly inlaid color. Another contrasting glaze can be added over the entire surface. You can also stain the textured areas and glaze other sections of the pot. The possible variations in glazing are as numerous as the variations in stamping the ware.



Clockwise from top left:

Saddle form, 18 inches in height, slab built using conical and rolling stamps.

Rectangular platter, 21 inches in width, slab built using a combination of conical and rolling stamps.

Vase, 19 inches in height, slab built using a stamp with matched outer edges.