

Masterclass

with

Katharina Klug

Katharina Klug takes us step-by-step through the process of making her porcelain vessels, which she then decorates with distinctive bold stripes using wax-resist pastels she makes herself

Images: Layton Thompson



I have been handling clay all my life. I grew up in my mother's pottery in Austria, which was part of a family business, so my path was set from an early age. The family needed my help in the pottery so I suppose it was inevitable that I would get involved with clay in some shape or form. After I finished school, I decided to undertake a college degree in ceramics, which opened my eyes to all you can do with this diverse material.

After a few years of travelling and working in different pottery businesses, I arrived in the UK. I already knew about the rich history of Staffordshire pottery, the traditional techniques of Bernard Leach and his followers and the fabulous ceramic collections at the V&A. England seemed like a great place to learn more about pottery, make my own work and meet fellow potters, so I stayed.

My workshop is based in Cambridge, where I have been making for the last seven years. Changing your environment and workspace can have a huge impact on your practice – coming to the UK and finding a home here has helped my work evolve. The biggest change was that I started focusing on simple linear decoration.

My love of lines manifests clearly in my work – I continually find new aspects to explore. The inspiration for my surface patterns comes from the charcoal and crayon

drawings I enjoyed making as a child. I always preferred these materials to pens or pencils; the lines they produce are thicker, rougher and less controlled. I try to achieve a similar look on ceramics by using a wax resist technique. I intentionally don't aim for perfect straight lines – if I did, I would use a printing process or some other more precise form of decoration. My lines show the process of drawing, which I believe gives my pieces life. Other inspirations include ancient Korean pottery and the linear patterns I see in the world around me: from telephone wires and roads to grasses and architecture.

The strong red glaze I formulate is inspired by the memory of a lacquered box that was given to my family by a Japanese friend. The contrast of the brightly coloured interior to the dark matte exterior stuck in my mind; I later translated it into porcelain. Strong contrasts – whether it is dark and light, colour and monochrome, matte and shine, plain or patterned – is what drives the aesthetic of my work. 

For more information, visit katharina.klug-art.com. Katharina's work will be part of a three person show entitled *Porcelain³* at the Contemporary Ceramic Centre, London, 15 February–10 March; cpaceramics.com

When I design new shapes I look for balance in the proportions. I start with a rough sketch on paper then develop it on the wheel. I need the three-dimensional space to experiment with different heights, diameters, rounder bellies, longer necks, etc.



1 I start by weighing the amount of clay I need – in this case, 600g – then wedge and pat it into a conical shape. I use Audrey Blackman Porcelain.



2 Next I attach the clay ball to a lightly sponged wooden bat. Centering is important, so I cone the clay up to work through the porcelain. I then open the top by pressing my thumb down into the middle. I establish the inside base and go over it a few times as this helps to prevent cracks from forming. Working with my fingers in parallel and with gentle consistent pressure, I create a cylinder by smoothly pulling from the base to the top without stopping. I bring the vessel up to the tallest height I can manage with the amount of clay I'm using. In this instance, 600g of porcelain clay can reach a height of around 15cm. I keep the rim thicker in order to have enough extra material to pull the top part of the pot.



3 I then shape the belly using a throwing stick. This allows me to keep the vase's opening narrower than if I was using my fingers.



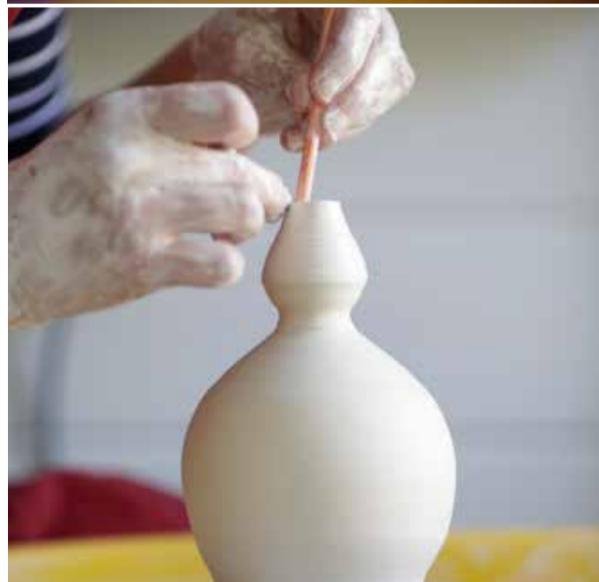
4 Once the belly is complete, I start the top part. It is important you know what shape you want to achieve before you start. I slow down the wheel at this point and work bit by bit to narrow the neck then form the top into a conical shape. (There is a different shape shown in the accompanying video – the double bauble, shown in step 8).



6 I use an old store card to smooth the surface of the whole pot and tidy up the foot by scraping away any excess clay, holding the card at an angle.



7 I cut the pot off in one swift movement using a wire or fishing line. If you stop or slow down while doing this you can get lines on the base that may lead to cracks.



5 I then use a heat gun to remove some of the moisture from the body and gain extra stability, as this gives me more time to work on the head's shape. To throw the top I use modelling tools, a throwing needle and my fingertip.



8 I take the vessel off the wheel and let it dry to a leatherhard state. This can be quick on a hot day or if the kiln is on, but can take as long as two days in cold, wet conditions.



9 I place the pot upside down into one of my chucks – a dry cylinder with a heavy base – to secure it in place while I turn and trim it. I have a selection of chucks in different diameters to fit pots in a range of shapes and sizes. As the chuck is only dried and not fired I can fix it to the wheel temporarily by simply moistening the base. Turning each piece is a key part of my making process – I want each piece to be pleasing no matter which way you see it.



10 I use both European and Asian-style turning tools alongside a couple that I handmade myself from metal binding and string, which I love. I work on the base curve to create a foot ring, which I think helps lift any shape.



11 As the final step, I press my makers mark stamp into the base of each piece. After a week of drying, the pots go into the bisque kiln at 950°C.

See Katharina at work on our video channel at vimeo.com/ceramicreview



12 To make my wax-resist pastels, I mix feldspar, oil or wax and about a third of colourant in a saucepan; I recommend experimenting to develop your own formula. I prepare a piece of wet clay with indentations the shape and thickness of the pastels I want. I then heat the mixture on a hob. Once molten, I pour it into the mould and wait about an hour. The clay mould will peel away easily and the pastels should be set and ready for use.



13 I apply the lines by drawing them freehand onto the pot.



14 I then glaze the pot – the pastel lines repel the glaze fluid. I spray some of my glazes, others I dip, some I need to brush on – it depends on the ingredients of the glaze I've mixed together and how they disperse in the liquid. It takes time to get to know a glaze and how it behaves in application, on your clay and in the kiln with your chosen temperature. I fire between 1260-1275°C, depending on the glaze that I'm using. I fire mostly in an electric or a gas kiln.



TECHNICAL TIPS

- Use as little water as possible while throwing porcelain, particularly if you want to go big or create complex shapes.
- Old store or credit cards are fantastic free tools – plus you can cut them into any shape you need.
- Don't open your kiln until it is below 100°C – you will avoid any temperature shocks causing hairline cracks to the porcelain.
- Wax-resist crayons or pastels will draw more smoothly if you warm the bisque-fired piece first. Try giving it a blast of hot air using a hairdryer before you begin drawing.

