



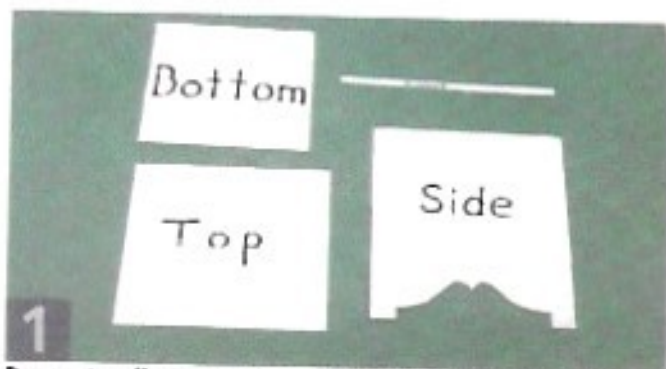
Textured box, 7 inches in height, fired to cone 5 oxidation sculpture clay cone 5.

Ancient clay techniques and designs have become an important influence on my ceramic art ever since I started teaching art history at the local community college fifteen years ago. One technique I've enjoyed is the ancient process of using cylinder seals to create a repeating texture on my work. Within this context, a form that also interests me is the box. The idea of enclosing space is a fundamental purpose of architecture, and building a box has many of the same connotations as building a shelter. The bottom of the box is like the floor, the sides of box are like the walls and the lid the roof. This project shows you how to construct a clay box and how to add texture using a cylinder seal.

Building a Box

The first step in building a box is to make a paper pattern (figure 1). Use a stiff paper and draw one side panel, one top panel, one bottom panel and one support. In the example, the side is 6x7½ inches, the top is 6x6 inches, the bottom is 5½x5½ inches and the support ¼x7 inches. Note that I've added a decorative element to the side pattern.

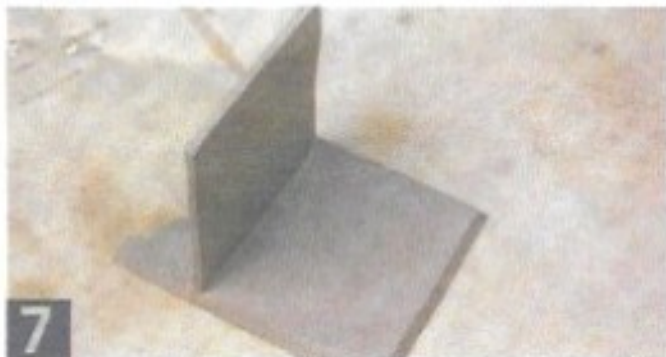
Roll out a slab large enough for the paper patterns, and no thinner than ¼ inch thick. Remember that you'll need four of each of the sides and supports, a top and a bottom. For this box, I'm using raku/sculpture clay but I've used stoneware clay with success as well. I use a slab roller but a rolling pin works just as satisfactorily.



1 Paper stencils. Remember you will need to use the side and the support stencils four times each.



2 Rolling texture into the slab. Remember to leave some of the slab untextured for the bottom (floor) and the supports.



7 Attach the floor to one of the wall pieces. Score and dampen the wall and the edge of the floor where they attach.



8 Attach the second wall and reinforce the joints using coils of clay pressed into the corners and finish smooth. Attach the third and fourth walls and the top.



9 Score the walls to cut the top off.



10 Score around a nickel to make a half circle as a key for the lid.



11 Cut the lid off using a knife held at a slight angle.



12 Attach a coil to the inside of the lid.

Now bevel the edges (figure 6) of the sides and the top of the sides and all four sides of the top to 45° using a 45° corner tool (see tip).

Begin assembly by attaching the bottom to a side (figure 7). Attach the second side to the first by scoring and dampening all edges that will attach. Reinforce the joints with coils of clay (figure 8). Continue with walls three and four, reinforcing each joint as you go. Score the top edge of the walls and the 45° edge of the top and attach it.

To cut the lid free, measure down an inch from the top edge with straightedge and use a needle tool to score a line all around the box (figure 9). In the middle of one side, mark a half circle to make a key so that the lid will always find its correct placement (figure 10). Using a knife held at a slight downward angle, cut along the scored line (figure 11). Remove the top and place a coil

Tip:

I made this simple tool using a piece of wood, a wire and two screws. Note that you can make different degree cutters for boxes with different numbers of sides.



around the inside of the top edge (figure 12). Clean up the coil and any imperfections.

I use SG-7 Clear Bright Gloss Glaze cone 5 from James Chappell's book *The Potter's Complete Book Of Clay and Glazes*. ●

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3

Cut out the sides, top and bottom with a needle tool or a knife using the patterns as a guide.



4

Using a straightedge, draw a line between your marks from side to side as a guide to attach the 1/4-inch supports.



5

Score and dampen above the line you just drew and on one side of the support. Press the support in place and cut off any excess. Repeat this procedure for all four walls.



6

Using a 45° tool, bevel the two sides of the wall and the top of all four walls.

Now the fun part: rolling texture onto the clay. Press the seal into the clay as you roll (figure 2). Leave enough clay untextured so that the bottom piece and the four support pieces can be cut out of untextured clay.

Using the patterns cut out the ten pieces using a thin needle tool or a knife (figure 3). The thin supports can be cut out using the pattern you made or by simply cutting four 1/4x1/4x7 inch strips. Let the clay stiffen up a bit before continuing.

Next, measure 5 inches down from the top on each side and make a line (figure 4). Attach a support along each line (figure 5) and allow it to overhang each side a little.

Texture on a Roll

Before 4000 BCE, the ancient Sumerians made cylinder seals by carving a picture on a piece of stone or animal horn, then rolled the seal over wet clay to leave an impression. These seals began as simple designs and evolved into elaborate illustrations of ancient literature like the *Epic of Gilgamesh*. I make cylinder seals to add abstract textures to my work.

To make a cylinder seal, roll clay into a thick pipe shape. The size of the seal and kind of clay can vary, and I haven't found any bodies that don't work. The important thing is to make a nice round cylinder. Leaving the inside hollow allows for faster drying and less breakage in the kiln. Add texture to your seal by rolling it on a textured surface or by carving into leather-hard clay using various types of tools.

Let the seals dry and bisque fire them to cone 06. The more seals you make the more texture choices you'll have when you build a piece. I try to think of how the texture will work with the aesthetics of each piece. It is a good idea to try out your seals before you apply the texture to the work you are building.



Carve a design into a leather-hard cylinder.



Creating various textures using different cylinder seals.