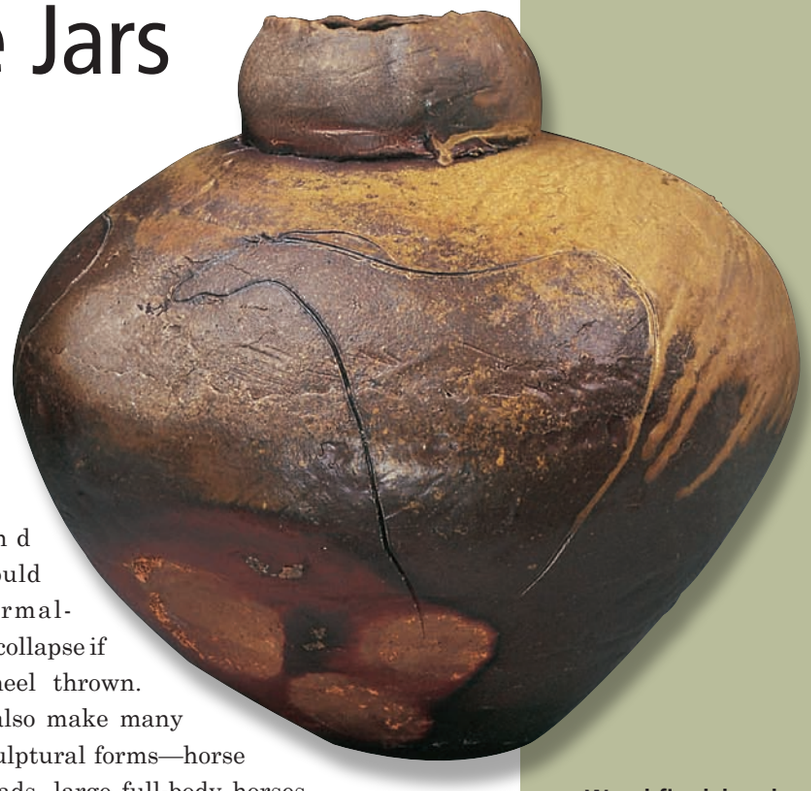
Making Large Jars

by Karen Terpstra



Wood-fired, handbuilt jars by Karen Terpstra. She states, "I try not to predetermine too much of the form when I start but rather let the handbuilding process determine the ultimate result. I am primarily concerned with the structure of the form, and how the shape, drawings and surface relate."

I came rather late to ceramics and my work focused on handbuilding with painterly images of the horse. As my process involved wood firing, I found the need for larger surface areas that would hold an image and be integrated with the flash and ash from the wood-fire process. Handbuilt jars that defy gravity in their form fulfill that need. Horse images with a spontaneous degree of abstraction have gradually developed from mental impressions of historical myths—others are in response to real horses I have known.

Making large jars with flat coils has been done for centuries in many parts of Asia and Southeast Asia. Master potters in Korea made thousands of flat-coiled storage jars—primarily used for kimchi, the national dish of Korea, which is comprised of pickled vegetables seasoned with garlic, red pepper and ginger. Once the basic method is learned, anyone can make large jars (or any size functional or sculptural object) with a flat coil method. I started learning with small jars and teapots, but now I make large jars that defy gravity and would normally collapse if wheel thrown. I also make many sculptural forms—horse heads, large full-body horses, torsos and columns—using this method.

As you can see from the photographs, one big advantage with this method is that you can change directions rather drastically by letting the flat coils become leather hard. Another advantage is the variety of sculptural forms you can make. This method also saves a lot of time by using 2-inch flat coils instead of small round coils.

It's really time saving to work in a series. Build up three to six rows of "coils" on several ware boards at one time. By the time you're finished with the last one, you can start again on the first one.

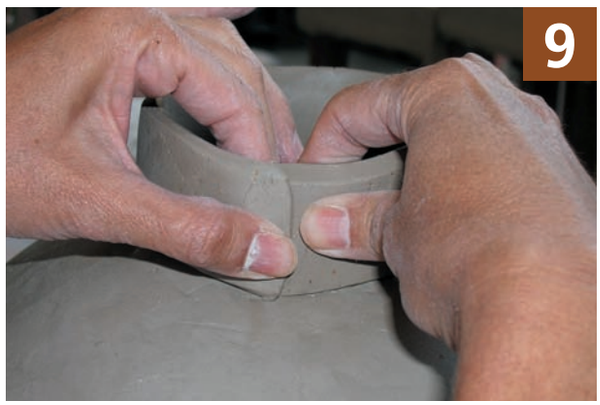
Process

Roll the clay through the slab roller about $^1/_8$ to $^1/_4$ inch larger than your desired wall thickness. The walls

PROCESS PHOTOGRAPHS BY DON ANDERSON.

will be thinner by the time you smooth and paddle the shape. Cut the clay into flat coils about 2 inches wide for a large jar (figure 1).

Slightly dampen the ware board or bat with a sponge for the first flat coil. Attach the flat coil firmly in place then secure another flat coil. Since you will be building the lower section of the jar upside down, place the flat coil to the inside of the previous flat coil. This makes the diameter become smaller with each row (figure 2). Also, put plastic on the inside of the jar to hold in the moisture. Smooth the seams inside and out while building (figure 3). Let the first few rows strengthen to



leather hard so that they will hold the weight of additional coils. Once the lower portion is leather hard, keep it wrapped in plastic, so that it doesn't dry out as you continue to work. Once the lower portion of the jar is completed and leather hard, you need to strengthen the walls. I use a paddle and a rounded piece of wood I call an "anvil," which I hold on the inside of the pot (figure 4). This technique also helps to obtain the desired shape.

Cut out a circle from a slab for the bottom of the jar. Slip, score and attach the bottom (figure 5). Paddle it to reinforce the seam (figure 6). Cover the piece and let it strengthen overnight. This also allows the moisture content to equalize.

The next morning, turn the jar over, and score and slip the edge. Since the form will be very leather hard by this time, add a small round coil to the edge (figure 7). The fresh coil provides an anchor to work off of while adding more flat coils. Now that the jar is right side up, you can add the shoulder (figure 8). Cut out a rim from a slab and attach to the top of the jar. Sometimes I smooth the jar a bit more, or alter the rim by rotating it slowly on the wheel and using a wet sponge or rib (figure 9).

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I've always been interested in horses, probably from owning and raising several of them since early childhood. This interest is directed to finding form in my imagery of them, specifically in sculpture and ceramics.