

Pursuing an *Honest Pot*

BY JACKIE FRILOUD

“A good honest pot.” What does that mean? I imagine it to mean unembellished, straightforward, and functional. I also like to think it means thoughtful and designed with care and the wisdom of experience.

At first hearing it connotes a typical Leach-style piece—traditional, hardworking, and useful. But then I think of the porcelain teacups of Betty Woodman, lively and colorful, warped and flouting tradition, and they seem as honest as a Leach jug.

Upon reflection, I believe honest pots come from the artist as part of a trajectory of working and thinking, the essence of the path taken, not derivative but imbued with various influences and evidence of a process of experimenting, learning and stepping back to think critically about the work produced.

An honest pot is one that expresses an artist’s unique sensibility and aesthetic evolution. It’s beautiful to recognize the hand of the maker in their craft.





Opposite: Large and small lidded soup bowls, to 10 in. (25 cm) in diameter, stoneware, fired in a salt kiln to cone 10, 2016. **1** Throwing a soup bowl with a thicker rim, then splitting the rim to create a lid gallery. **2** Volume is added to the bowl while maintaining the gallery until the walls are an even thickness and the form is refined. **3** Measuring the gallery diameter using calipers after cutting the bowl off of the bat. **4** Throwing the lid upside down as a shallow bowl. A small semicircle of thicker clay left in the center accommodates a finger hold and a wire handle later. **5** Smoothing and compressing the exterior after trimming away the excess clay.

My lidded soup bowl is a good example of the work I'm currently making in my pursuit of an honest pot. I love soup—it's my favorite lunch and I often make a big pot to last a few days.

Throwing the Soup Bowl

I start with 1½ pounds of clay for the bowl, a combination of Laguna B-mix with sand, and some red clay added for extra richness of color. I open up the centered clay, leaving about ⅜-¹/₈-inch thickness in the bottom. After the second pull, I split the rim down far enough to leave a generous platform for the lid gallery (1). At this point, I compress the bottom with a rubber rib.

Then I refine the shape, adding volume and maintaining the gallery until the walls are an even thickness. Using my stainless-steel rib, I define a line about halfway up the side, keeping the bottom half round and full, and straightening the upper half to a slight outward angle (2).

I trim the excess clay off the bottom, clean up the rim and gallery and smooth the outside walls with my rib, keeping the defined, sharp line in the middle.

I cut the bowl free from the bat using a wire tool, then I use calipers to measure the opening for the lid (3). The bowl is set aside while still on the bat and left to firm up to soft leather hard.

Making a Fitting Lid

Using about 1 pound of clay, I make the lid (upside down). I throw a shallow plate shape, leaving a hump in the middle about 1½ inches in diameter to accommodate the recessed semicircle that will be trimmed into the other side later and to fit a wire handle (4). I usually make the lid a little bigger than my caliper measurement—it never fails to shrink more than the bowl. I compress the inside thoroughly with a rib, smooth the rim with my chamois, and trim the excess clay off the bat.



6 Trimming the top of the lid to create a recessed semicircle to accommodate gripping a wire handle after firing. 7 Inserting an 11-gauge nichrome wire handle into the decorative band trimmed around the recessed center right after trimming. Moving the wire to expand the holes slightly leaves room for the clay to shrink around the wire during drying and firing. 8 Cutting semicircular handles for the sides of the soup bowl using a round cookie cutter and fettling knife. 9 Cutting an ellipse out of the handles using a larger circular cutter creates a curve on the inside that better fits the contour of the soup bowl, ensuring a stronger joint that's less likely to crack. 10 After scoring and adding slip to the attachment points, the two slab handles are secured to opposite sides of the bowl. 11 Placing a strip of thin plastic between the finished bowl and lid during the drying process prevents them from sticking together. **Opposite:** Large and small lidded soup bowls, to 10 in. (25 cm) in diameter, stoneware, fired in a salt kiln to cone 10, 2016.

When the bowl is leather hard, I dampen my trimming bat and place the bowl upside down on it. I don't use wads of clay to fasten the bowl to the bat—I find that they distort the rim. I sometimes trim a foot ring and other times opt for a flat bottom, smoothed with a rib (5), and pressed gently to make it a bit concave. I trim the bottom half of the pot, then trim the vertical edge of the foot to give a bit of lift to the shape, smoothing and rounding the edge with a fingertip.

Before trimming the lid, I check the fit and place it back on the wheel upside down to trim any excess off the rim. Turning it over, I trim the top, creating a concave semicircle that extends into the hump. The wire handle will span the recessed area (6).

With my trimming tool, I define a decorative band around the edge of the lid and around the concave middle. Again, I compress the clay well in the center handle area. It is a spot that is prone to cracking in the glaze firing. I make sure to keep the lid thick enough that it won't warp when it sits on balls of wadding in the glaze firing.

Right after trimming, I insert the wire lid handle. I find that this is the best time to avoid hairline cracks at the entry points. I cut a piece of 11-gauge nichrome wire to fit and bend it over a dowel. I insert the wire into the decorative band, wiggling it in and out and back and forth slightly to leave room for the clay to shrink around it through the drying and the bisque and glaze firings (7). This also helps to avoid cracking.

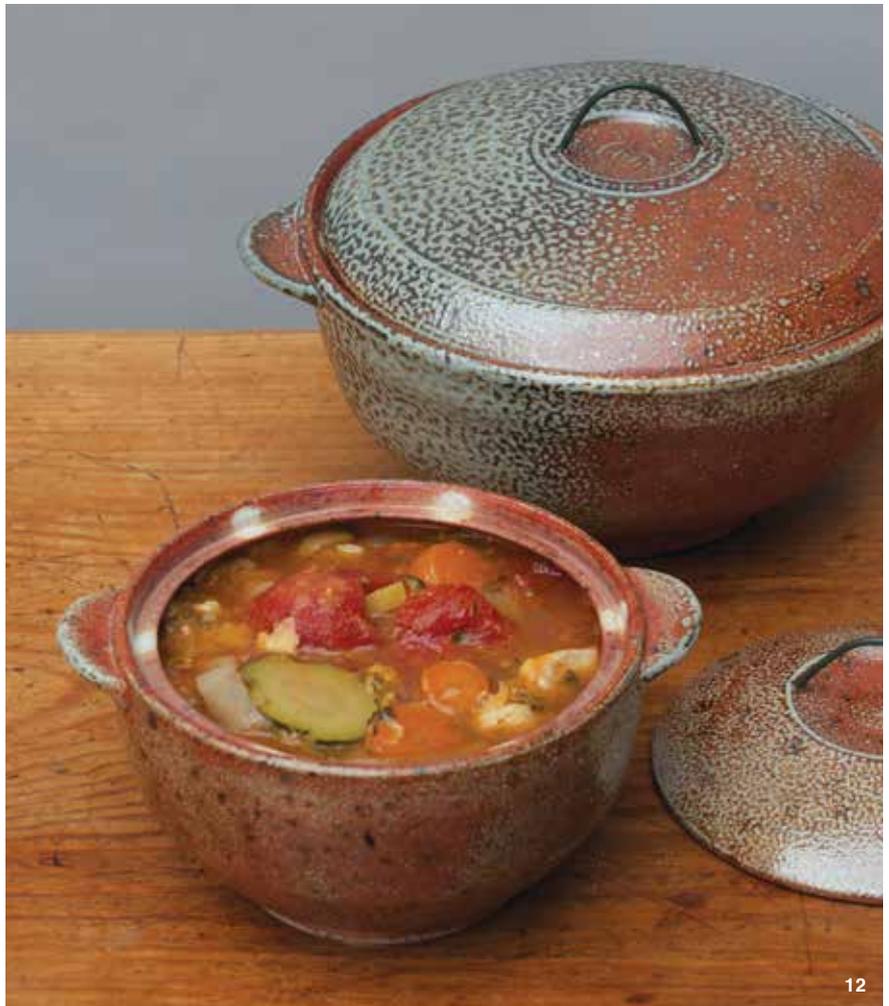
I make the side handles on the bowl with a $\frac{3}{16}$ -inch thick slab of clay. I use a round cookie cutter to make a circle, and then cut it in half (8). Using a larger cutter, I cut an ellipse out of the half circles (9) so the attachment area matches the bowl's curve. I pinch or roll the outside edges to taper them and then form the handles to the side of the bowl before adding slip, scoring the contact areas, and attaching them (10).

Putting the lid on the bowl with a strip of plastic between the two prevents sticking (11). I let it sit overnight, covered loosely with plastic film. The next day I score around the attachment area of the handles. I find with salt-firing that hairline cracks form in these spots and scoring the line with a crochet hook, or similar tool, prevents this.

When the bowl is bone dry, I spray or dip it in slip. In this case, I used an orange, kaolin-based slip. I bisque fire to cone 06, then glaze the inside with a shino glaze.

Before loading the bowl into the salt kiln, I wad between the lid and the gallery with six wads made of equal parts kaolin, alumina hydrate, and grog. I use white glue to attach them. I also wad the bottom.

I fire my work to cone 10 in reduction in a natural-gas, hard-brick kiln, 8–10 times per year. I add salt when cone 9 is down and cone 10 is soft. Usually I use 6 pounds of a combination of road salt and coarse cooking salt. I add salt three times, for 10–15



minutes each, and wait about 10 minutes between saltings. At the end, I keep the kiln in light reduction for one hour, and then shut off the gas, keeping the damper fairly tight. Keeping the kiln in light reduction for the last hour while the salt dissipates up the chimney and the kiln reaches its full temperature works best for my slip colors. The kiln is hard brick, so the cooling is slow, and after shutting it down, I close the dampen almost fully to further slow the cooling, again to maintain the colors that I'm looking for. I find that any oxidation at the end causes the richness of my reds to disappear and the gray body can become more cream-colored which is not what I'm after. The reds in particular need good reduction, and I prefer them to be lightly salted in order to keep the color.

After two days of cooling, the kiln is ready to be unloaded. I like to take my time, noting which pieces were successful and why, and thinking about what I could do differently the next time. And then it's time for some soup in a good, honest pot.

the author Jackie Frioud earned a BFA from the University of British Columbia in sculpture and printmaking. After starting to work in clay she studied salt glazing with Sam Kwan at Capilano University. In 2006, she built her own kiln at her home in Horseshoe Bay, British Columbia, Canada, where she now works full-time as a potter. To see more of her work, visit www.jackiefrioud.com.