



# Latest and Greatest

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**O**ur most important job at SMC is listening to our customers. We can make fantastic products all day long—but if they're not what you need, it doesn't matter. Our second most important job is communicating with our customers. Because those great products won't work well if you don't know how to use them. That's why our emphasis is on making our premium products reliable and user-friendly. And that's why we're here—via phone, email, fax and on FaceBook—to offer advice. We are happy to share our expertise. Whether you're buying SMC products directly from us or through one of our fantastic distributors—we want them to work right for you. Every time. When you contact SMC, you're talking to the people making, using and testing the products. Not a sales team, or an administrator who doesn't even use clay. SMC is here when you have questions—and we'll be happy to answer 100 questions for you if it means your pieces will come out beautifully.

## Bloating: An Easily Preventable Problem

Ever pull that perfect pot, made out of a gorgeous dark clay, out of the kiln to discover ugly blisters covering the surface of your piece? These blemishes (bloats) on your clay may show up after the glaze firing—but are actually caused much earlier in the firing process. Bloating, the vast majority of the time, is due to an inadequate bisque.

Bloating typically occurs when gases in the clay are not allowed to fully escape during the bisque-firing process. Since darker and speckled clays have more impurities, bloating will typically be seen in these pieces. Because of heat variation within each kiln, differences in clay thickness and discrepancy in firing times, bloats will often not appear in all of your pieces all of the time. But when it happens—bloating cannot be fixed.

Fortunately, bloating can be prevented with ease. Taking a few simple precautions in your bisque-firing, outlined below, will help ensure that you have blister-free pots:

- ◆ **Always bisque to a cone 04.** Lower temps (05, 06) are risky for darker-colored/speckled clays.
- ◆ **Always use a "Slow Bisque" setting on digital kilns** (if you're not firing a digital kiln, you can download a firing schedule from the SMC website). The slow setting is critical—as most of the impurities burn out of clay when it is under 1000°F.
- ◆ **Do not nest or stack** pieces made from dark red, brown, black or speckled clays.
- ◆ A well-loaded kiln will fire better—the pieces will achieve a more even heat distribution. Try to **fire bisque kilns that are more full** as opposed to sparsely-loaded.
- ◆ When glaze-firing very dark or heavily speckled clays, **do not glaze the entire surface of the piece.** That way, if any additional gas needs to work out during firing, it is able to do so.

Not every instance of bloating is caused by errors in the bisque process. Occasionally bloating can also be caused by poor clay/glaze agreement or over-firing (either in temperature or time). But the prevalent cause is poor bisque-firing, and it's an easily preventable problem when you use the guidelines above.

## SMC Clay Tip:

We all love surface texture. Most of us spend as much time stamping, rolling, carving and altering the surfaces of our pots as we do making the pieces. And while deeper, stronger textures ensure your work will show through your glaze surface-they can also compromise the sturdiness of your clay.

When stamping and carving clay-it's important that you stay aware of the variation in thickness throughout your pieces. Drastic changes between thick/thin can cause inconsistency in drying and lead to cracking before/during the bisque-firing. When using a roller to add a texture (mat, fabric, etc.), be careful not to put too much pressure on the slab of clay. Pressing too hard with a roller when creating a deep texture can also cause cracking/splitting.

In both cases, some clays are better at withstanding stress and variations in thickness and pressure. Clays with more grog and body texture, like our Raku C, Krunch Stoneware, White Sculpture and Stoney Speck Architectural are typically more forgiving for this type of surface treatment. Really smooth clays are not as ideal.

## SMC Glazing Tip:

If it were up to me, I'd have at least three or more glazes on each piece. I love color, and try to have a lot of variation in my pieces. But the logistics of applying that many colors, without ending up with a runny mess, isn't the easiest. When you're set up to spray, you can easily layer multiple glazes in very thin coats. But if you don't have the opportunity to spray...what choice do we have?

My favorite way to achieve a glaze surface with a wide variety of colors that change and break is sponging. Sponging can create an amazing mottled effect-and guarantees that each of your pieces is even more unique than before. While there is not right or wrong with sponging, here are some recommendations from SMC (based on our sponging experience):

- ◆ Applying a thin, even coat of one glaze to the entire surface will ensure that you don't end up with dry or bare spots after firing.
- ◆ Use a dry, natural sponge-one with a more open, coral-like surface. It will give the most varied and random texture, great for creating a look of foliage or sand. If the sponge is large, cut it into smaller pieces that are easy to handle and control.
- ◆ Dip the sponge in the glaze, and dab on a dry paper towel or newspaper. Press the sponge to your piece once and the look will be more dramatic and sharp, dab the sponge on and around the glazed surface for a more blended and subtle look.
- ◆ Allow plenty of drying time between sponging glazes. Otherwise it may result in an uneven coat, poor glaze adhesion and glaze contamination.
- ◆ Once the glaze is dry, take it outside and "finger-sand" thick points. SMC recommends wearing a paper mask when completing this step. Sanding helps eliminate potential running/bubbling problems.

**NEW AT  
SMC...**

Watch your inbox for exciting news about our new smooth white stoneware, and details on our 1st Birthday Sale.

Stay tuned... For up to the minute news, find us on



## FEATURED GLAZE...



In honor of May's birthstone, we've chosen **Emerald** to be this issue's Featured Glaze. A rich, glossy glaze reminiscent of the precious gem, **Emerald (#442)** has been one of our bestsellers since its creation.

A sheer green finish, **Emerald** is the perfect glaze to use when accenting leaf designs and impressions, texture and carvings on your pieces. **Emerald** layers wonderfully over our new RIO Wash as well as many other SMC glazes, including Caramel Corn, Sapphire, Amethyst and Praline Marble.

Now through June 30, enjoy **20% off** the purchase of any pints or 1-gallon size buckets of **Emerald**. Simply mention coupon code "**SMC3442**" and receive the discount.



**Emerald**, like each of SMC's cone 6 glazes, is food-safe when applied and fired properly.

- ◆ Using glazes that are opaque or matte will create a sharper and more defined, blotchy effect. We love using Egg Cream as a base, and using a sponge to add Blue Sage, Mint Chocolate Chip, Vanilla Bean and Butterscotch Spice-creating a rich, speckled look. Opaque glazes blend and work best when sponged over a smooth surface.
- ◆ Using sheer, glossy glazes will result in a watercolor effect. Our favorites: Emerald, Sapphire, Amethyst and Cranberry Juice. Changing which glaze is used as the base will drastically change the overall effect. This combination is ideal to use over heavy texture. Nice when used alone, and when used over our new RIO Wash.