

Creating Ceramic Bisque

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The first step in creating your ceramic bisque is to start with nature's own clay. Like a great sculptor needs his wood, stone or ice, the ceramic bisque creator will need clay. Mix your clay with some water and what you are left with is called slip.

The next vital piece of your ceramic bisque puzzle is a plaster mould. The purpose of the mould is to leech away all the unnecessary water. Your slip goes into the mould and, as the water is removed the clay will cling to the walls of your mould. This water is then drained off and what you are left with is a shell, which is still very wet, very fragile.

Ceramic bisque cannot, of course, be wet. Your clay is left in the mould and allowed to dry. As it dries it hardens, once the moisture has been pulled out of the clay you will be free to release it from the mould.

It is always a wonderful experience when the mould is cracked revealing your future piece of ceramic bisque. To the untrained eye it may look like a hollow clay shell but in your visualization you are already seeing your wonderful completed piece of ceramic bisque.

Please keep in mind that by virtue of the fact that your ceramic bisque is coming out of a mould means that there will be seams. These seam lines will need to be removed along with any other imperfections your ceramic bisque may have.

To clean the casting use a cleaning tool and remove the mould seams from the piece. Be careful not to gouge. Then, if the piece is plain, without detail, wipe down gently with a damp sponge to remove scratches and smooth out. If the greenware is detailed, try not to remove it while cleaning. Using a sponge on a detailed area could very well remove the detail, so avoid sponging detail. Use the cleaning tool (finger nail) to put the detail back if removed

The last station on your ceramic bisque creation train is firing. Your ceramic bisque piece will remain in the oven for up to 6 hours at temperatures in excess of 1800° F. This will remove all the remaining moisture and harden your ceramic bisque.

Most decorative ceramic bisque may be fired to an 04/05 cone setting. This is for use with a glaze finish that will not be used for food items. In general the glazes are fired to a cone 06 firing, but you must read the label on the glaze that you use for the proper firing instructions. There are some specialty glazes that require a different cone firing.

All

bisque used for food applications must be glazed with a food safe glaze.

If you are finishing a bisque item that you are not going to glaze, the bisque can be fired to an 05/06 cone firing. Non fired colours such as acrylic stains, chalks and non firing translucents are applied to the bisque and a spray sealer or brush on sealer may be applied to protect the finish.

When removed from the kiln your ceramic bisque is a completed product. All that remains is to finish it in the paint finish that you have chosen. This in itself is an exciting finale to your "masterpiece".

The Author Trevor Kassulke's wife Anne Kaye is an experienced potter This article courtesy of ceramic-ceramics.com is an information resource covering ceramics and pottery, clay, stoneware, raku, bisque, pottery supplies