

# Cups Glorious Cups!

Living from Hand to Mouth by Annie Chrietberg



Photos of finished pieces by Adam Holloway

Form, function and surface all work together to make cups the ideal utilitarian object to show off your talents. This collection of slab-built textured cups by Annie Chrietberg embodies an exploration of these qualities.

Cups, cups, cups. Sometimes they are the first pieces an aspiring potter attempts. Often they are the first part of a potter's repertoire to come into focus. Cups are a good way back into a making cycle after a hiatus, and a good warm up for a day of making once on a roll.

Cups are the calling cards we trade with other potters, the tokens of our long days in the studio that we give to our loved ones. I recently attended a slide lecture given by the potter Josh Deweese and something he said stuck with me: "Cups are the potter's most successful form because they are so accessible, and therefore have the ability to truly live in people's lives on a day to day basis. The relationship that develops with

a cup is quite intimate, and is a great way to bring art into people's lives."

Cups are taken to work, carried out into the yard, whisked off for rides in the car. Once broken, a great cup lingers in the memory as "one that got away." The really good mugs migrate to the front of the cupboard, while the mugs with less balance and grace end up dusty, shoved to the back corner.

Cups are small and quickly made in relation to other forms. They're a great venue for trying new ideas and sorting through forms and textures. Right now I choose to make each cup by hand, reinterpreting the shape of a favorite thrown form with my textured slab cups. I aspire to the perfect radial symmetry that the

Yixing potters achieve, though I must admit I'm not quite there. Even so, my cups are exquisite in their almost-perfection, and my customers really appreciate the details and the focus evident in each one.

## The Process

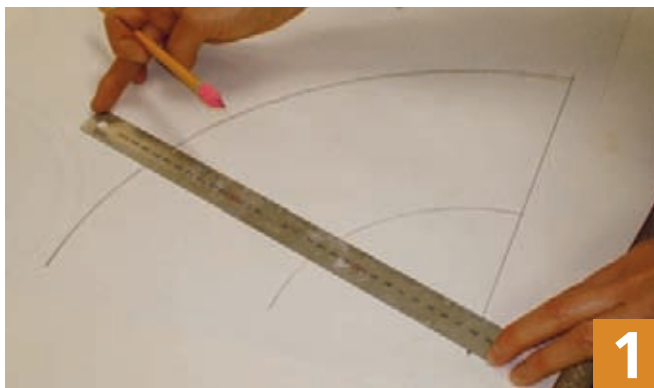
Start by making a truncated cone template with a heavier-weight paper. Once assembled, the cone can be left with a hard line, or manipulated from the inside or outside to create or reduce the volume. If you have a particular size of cup in mind, start by approximating measurements with a measuring tape, remembering to account for the shrinkage of your clay body.

Draw a truncated cone from two arcs of concentric circles. Use the same central point not only to draw the arcs, but also to create the sides of the template, which become the seam of the cup. Keep notes about what you're making on your templates, like which handle template you use with a particular cup template. I have some templates that I use for multiple forms, and so I list the form and its related templates.

Use clay that is well-aged and nice and plastic, but not too wet, allowing you to handle intricate texture without marring it. Roll out a nice even slab, infuse it with a luscious texture, then cut out the cone, using your template. To increase the joining surface, angle the knife tip on the sides of the template, which is to be the seam of the cup. For these two cuts, the knife tip should point to the left.

I use small masonite bats to handle the cups through assembly, keeping contact with the cup itself to the absolute

*"The relationship that develops with a cup is quite intimate, and is a great way to bring art into people's lives."*



A cup pattern begins with a template for a truncated cone. The top arc is the diameter of the rim and the bottom arc is the diameter of the base.



Create an assortment of templates. Keep notes on them as you use them.



Roll out a slab and cut the clay leaving  $\frac{1}{4}$  to  $\frac{1}{2}$  inch around the template.



Place the slab on a textured surface and gently roll it into the texture. Dust the texture with cornstarch for easy release.



"Two Dotted Cups." Cups are small and quickly made in relation to other forms, and are a great venue for trying new ideas and sorting through form and texture.





**5** Place the template back on the slab and cut around it angling the knife 45° on the sides but cutting the top and bottom perpendicular.



**6** Set the piece on a small bat with the lip on the bottom, and use the joining edge to bend the piece around. Handle carefully to preserve the texture.



**7** Score and slip both of the edges and press the seam together across the beveled cut, using a light but firm touch.



**8** Use a tool instead of your finger on the inside applying just enough pressure that you can feel the tool moving across the inside.



**9** To make the bottom, I use a cookie cutter that's just larger than the bottom diameter. The cutter is from a graduated set I found at a kitchen supply store.



**10** Enlarge the base of the cup not by pinching but by flaring out the edge by turning the finger over the thumb until the bottom matches the diameter of the cutter.



**11** Roll out a slab for the bottom, add texture and cut with the cookie cutter. Use a sharp knife to bevel the edge at an angle to remove bulk on the seam.



**12** Score and slip the bottom and place it into the flared rim. Pinch the seam with clean fingers. Use a tool to create a smooth surface.

minimum. When you pick up the cut-out slab from the wareboard, orient the cup so that it is sitting on its lip. Bend the slab into the round, using the seam area and the inside as much as possible to keep your fingers off the texture. Score and slip, then pay particular attention to closing the seam.

When you're working the seam from the inside, run your finger or tool up, overlapping each stroke across the whole diagonal of the seam. Keep your fingers gently on the outside for support. You should be able to just feel the tool moving on the inside of the cup. While the cup is upside down, only work the seam from the middle to the foot.

Use either a circle template or a cookie-cutter to cut a nice circle for the floor of your cup. For reasons of aesthetics as well as balance, I use one size larger than the bottom of the cone, and enlarge the bottom to fit. Don't pinch the bottom to enlarge. Rather, roll your finger over your thumb gently all the way around the foot a few times, until the base of the cup matches the size of the cutter.

Prepare a small slab with your chosen texture, line up the pattern and cut your circle. Remove the clay around the cutter, then gently press the bottom of the cup out of the cutter. Make a small undercut, which will de-bulk the bottom seam, score, slip, and join. Using a banding wheel, apply gentle pressure with either your finger or a tool to remove excess slip and finesse the seam.

Once the bottom is joined and finished from the outside, place another small bat on the bottom of the cup and flip. Now you have to finish working the seam from the middle of the cup up to the lip. If you don't work the seam properly, it will split open when you shape the cup, so don't skimp on this step!

Roll the world's smallest coil, drop it into the bottom of your cup and nudge it into place with an appropriate tool. Press and work the coil smooth, creating a beautiful transition from the wall to the floor of your cup.

Make and apply a handle to your cup if desired and let dry. Once my cup is somewhere from the hard leather stage to bone dry, I use a piece of emery cloth lying



**13** Flip the cup over and nudge a coil into the seam where the bottom is joined to the cup. Smooth the seam with a small brush with springy bristles.



**14** Start shaping the cup using a large throwing stick being careful to overlap each push all the way around.



**15** Add a slab handle (PMI Nov/Dec 2006). Once the cup is bone dry, finish the rim using an emery cloth and a damp sponge.



**"Touchy Trio."** Annie prefers to make cups by hand, reinterpreting the shape of her favorite thrown forms with textured slabs. While aspiring to the perfect radial symmetry of Yixing perfection, she admits she's not quite there.




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flat on my bench to even out the rim. Then I use a sponge to dampen and a scraper to get to that nice thin lip that feels so good to drink from. ●

## Darting the Duck Butt

Once you get the hang of making your own exquisite cups from the truncated cone, try taking a dart or two here and there for a more sculptural effect. I wanted to make a form that referenced a baby duck while still being functional, so I take out what I affectionately call a "duck-butt" dart.



1 Line the center of the dart up with the seam of the cup. A clothespin holds the template in place nicely, freeing your hands to cut.



2 With the knife tip toward the center of the dart, cut each side using the equal and opposite angle.



3 Remove the dart then score and slip the edges.




4 Carefully close the edges together. Press gently so as not to mar the texture.



5 Finish the seam on the inside of the cup.



6 A baby duck sure looks cute floating on a leaf.



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Annie Chrietzberg lives and works in Denver, CO. She can be seen ambling down the streets of her neighborhood in the early mornings with a cup of steaming tea and her poodle pal Gepetto. You can keep up with her work, tall tales and find out about upcoming workshops at [www.earthtoannie.com](http://www.earthtoannie.com). (She's been known to make her templates available as downloads there, as well.)

