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Hey, Hey, We've Got New Clay by Trina Williams

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What if somebody developed a clay that had all the good points of the other clays on the market and none of the bad ones? By this time many of you know that Donna Kato has created just such a clay. Sometime in the month of March **Kato Polyclay** will be available for purchase at a store or web site near you.



It was just a few days before the Hobby Industry Association trade show that word began to circulate about a new clay on the horizon. Eighty-five beta testers who had signed non-disclosure forms had been released from silence. Information began to filter through the internet newsgroups. Kato Polyclay had arrived!

Among the properties we heard about were ease of conditioning, handling without becoming sticky, consistent strength and color stability. (What you see in the uncured state is what you see when it is cured.)

Julie Wise of [WiseCrafts](#) (home of the Raspberry Kid beads) was one of the beta testers. "I absolutely love it!!!" she told me. "I have nothing I can say bad about it either. It conditions easily, canes beautifully, you don't have to wait to take slices from a freshly made cane (cane slices don't drag or smooch) it has a nice sheen and reducing is a breeze." Her only concern was how it holds up time wise. So far she says her canes are still quite workable.



I was fortunate to be able to meet with Donna at the HIA show where her small booth always had big crowds around it. Kathy Davis and I were there on set-up day and received several sample slices made from the clay. I asked Donna what kind of a slicer she used for such uniform pieces. "No slicer", said Donna, "just my blade."

The very thin flexible butterfly wings intrigued Kathy, who is a doll maker and has been doing some experiments on fairy wings. Kathy is well known in our guild for not being a caner. "With this clay, I might just take up caning," she said.

On one of the show days, Karen Lewis (Klew) was demonstrating in the Van Aken booth. She told me that she was one of the first to sign up to retail the clay in California. Another satisfied beta tester.

So how did this new clay come about? "From the inception to the creation of Kato Polyclay took one year", Donna told me." We began in January of 2001. By August, letters to our beta testers went out." I was interested in the beta testing process and how testers were chosen. Donna had a list of individuals she had met over the years and other lists from conferences. "I tried to select people who were not strongly affiliated with a company in order to avoid creating any crisis of conscience!" She also wanted a variety of interest i.e. jewelry and sculpture, newbies and long time clayers.



And what brought Donna to this momentous decision? "My contract was coming to an end with Faber and I was faced the prospect of having to get a "real" job." She and her husband, Vernon, discussed making a clay but, in the absence of a partner, knew it was an impossibility. But, she thought, why not? For thirty years, there were mainly two choices. "Can you imagine only having two brands of shampoo?" Donna said.

They presented the concept to Amaco and Van Aken simultaneously. "Our original concept was Van Aken as manufacturer (they are best known for their Claytoon animation clay-California Raisens and Wallace and Grommet), Amaco handling the distribution, and my name and Vernon and me to handle the promotion. Amaco passed. "I don't think they thought we were serious."

Robert Auger, Van Aken's president, did take Donna and Vernon seriously. "I had known Robert for years, having met him at a trade show. I knew he was uncompromising in his dedication to creating a quality product. His formulator, Tony Aquino, has many years of experience in creating clays and paints."

What Donna didn't know was that Van Aken had the advance technology to enhance, improve and stabilize the clay. Van Aken had a vacuum extruder, which removes air from the clay, making it denser and eliminating air pockets. No more big holes in the block of clay!



I was impressed with the mica shift abilities of the metallics. I wondered just how much sanding and buffing was involved. Imagine my surprise when Donna told me she used just 400 grit and buffing! One thing is different in that it is recommended dishwashing soap be added to the water used in wet sanding.

Surface appearances can be altered, also. Kato Polyclay exhibits a soft sheen after curing. Application of cornstarch to raw clay before curing mattes the sheen. To achieve the appearance of frosted glass the surface can be scraped lightly with the tip of a metal file.

Another innovation is warm repositioning. Kato Polyclay is not as fragile as other brands when warm. Donna says, "When I make small box vessels covering a clay form I can actually twist the interior form to loosen the box walls without the walls breaking." The clay also allows for the repositioning of elements when warm -- the clay maintains its new position without breaking.

Kato Polyclay cures at 275 degrees F. Pieces should be cured for at least ½ hour. Larger pieces may be cured hours with no change in color.



I am especially intrigued with the ease of color mixing. I don't do color formulas well. The Kato line has been designed for intuitive mixing.

The Spectral Colors have been formulated so that they are of the same relative strength. If arranged on the color wheel you will find they are evenly spaced. The colors are clear, not muddy. And, yes, Virginia, there is a translucent.

Packaging is in 3 and 12.5 oz blocks. Retail price will be \$2.29 for the small block and \$8.59 for the large. Metallic colors will be slightly more: \$2.99 and \$10.99 respectively.

Donna has a Pay for Publication Program in place for projects using Kato Polyclay in print and on the Internet as well as videos and TV programs.

I commented to Donna how great it was that none of the testers "spilled the beans." She replied, " I don't think that the non-disclosure clause was the only reason. I think you are absolutely right, most polymer clay people are extremely ethical. Certainly our beta testers are!"

When asked what she considered the hardest part of the process, Donna replied, "What was on my shoulders. Robert Auger footed the bills for the research and development. I



knew the clay and the program would be great; I just didn't know whether his faith in me was justified. The rest was enjoyable!"

And now the whole polymer clay community plus kids and crafters everywhere are going to get to enjoy Kato Polyclay.

To find out more about this exciting new material contact Donna at dkato@pcisys or visit the following web sites: [Kato Polyclay](#) , [Van Aken](#), or [Donna Kato.com](#). The clay is also for sale at [Prairie Craft](#).