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Confessions of a Newbie by Lynda Hecht

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I've been working with polymer clay for about five years now. I was introduced to it while watching the Carol Duvall Show. I found this clay fascinating and very versatile. I made all kinds of nifty stuff but, alas, found it didn't hold up for very long. I couldn't figure it out, didn't know what I was doing wrong.

Then I found an Internet group (rec.crafts.polymer-clay) about four months ago, and voila! It all became clear. I plan on making a website, in hopes to further enlighten other newbies.

When I first started looking for how-tos, it seemed all I found was sites for canes, but I don't do canes, which I found not my thing. I just knew I had found my medium for my artistic flow, so I continued doing my art but became discouraged when my awesome pieces didn't hold up over time.

My medium is mostly clay on glass or metal, turning a picture into 3-D art that can be used for other purposes. Bottles grow plants; tins become boxes; flowers enhance a vase that becomes more than just a container for the flowers, etc.

Here are the things I've learned:

Use the right clay for the job.

Sculpey was the first clay I used, but I found that for intricate or thin pieces, Sculpey is **not** the right clay for the job. Even pieces I bought at art fairs fell apart, so I wasn't so discouraged after learning that others had the same problem. Sculpey doesn't have the sturdiness I needed. Now I know to use Premo or Fimo. I haven't tried the others used in Europe (Cernit?)

I used to make items on my bottles then pop them off and glue them back on. I found that sometimes the clay would separate itself from other clay no matter how much I

'welded' it together. Baking in layers or letting clay set for 24 hours before baking solved this problem.

Read the directions on all glues.

An all-purpose glue didn't work for me. E6000 works for clay on clay (read directions, follow directions, be patient), but not on glass. There is a Bond 07 that worked, but what a mess! Super Glue worked, but not on heavier and/or thicker pieces. (Worked for a daisy, but not a bouquet.)

When creating a piece on glass, you need a solid back piece. I thought it would be cool while doing a forest to see the blue of the glass through the 'trees', but everything popped off or disintegrated in a short time. (Still working on this...haven't given up!) So I found I needed a solid piece of clay for the background, then put smaller pieces on top.

Not all containers work.

I found out the hard way that not all containers work. I did read about looking in fishing supplies or craft areas. Warning: at Wal-Mart they sell nifty boxes by Darice. These do **not** work. Neither do the nifty little round stacking containers. They're round, small, and the bottom of one is the lid for the next. They are also found in the medicine aisle. The plasticizer in the raw clay melts into these containers.

Now I use the small individual plastic bags. They are probably mostly used for individual items, but great for clay. I also found that Tupperware 'tuppets' work great! Am looking for 'pocket boxes', but am happy with what I have at this point.

A little bit of knowledge is a wonderful thing.

I used to spend hours with a rolling pin. Get a pasta machine!

Never put back in the kitchen what is taken out and used on clay! YUCK! I convinced hubby to buy me an oven to put in my work area so I don't have to use the kitchen oven. Ha ha ha (tired of cleaning all the time).

When doing glass work, put the object in a cold oven and let it heat up with the oven. **Do not** put thin glass in a heated oven! BOOM!

Check oven temp regularly. Just because it stayed at 275 last time doesn't mean it will this time, but it might the next. I had no idea.

Air bubbles are the biggest pain! :o) Pesky little buggers, they can ruin a whole piece, and most of the time I can't even see them until baking.

Wire, wood, foil forms, or papier maché armatures are a must when working on sculptures of any thickness. Coat with glue first if you want the arms and legs to stay on. In my case, heavier pieces that I want to partially extend away from the glass were the problem.

Not all books are that accurate and informative.

Who knew you could do bake in layers, and re-bake? Okay, everyone but me (so I feel), but awesome lesson learned!

Favorite tools are not necessarily the expensive ones. My favorites are the small screwdriver (9-piece) set we used to give away at computer software shows. I have seen them at school Christmas sales. They even have a small needle tool. I have no idea what this is used for in a mechanic's world, but in my world, it's for clay!

Add 1/8 part of white clay to colored clay before backing to hold its 'wet clay' color. Thank you for this one!

Dawn dishwashing liquid works great at getting clay off hands.

Baby wipes are great for keeping the clay from sticking to fingers on dry days.

Sand paper works. I had no idea I could use it with clay.

[Glass Attic](#) is a must, and for helpful, understanding advice, read the newsgroup [rec.crafts.polymer-clay](#).