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November
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A Simple Method For Gradient Color Blending by Melody Steeples November 2003

You will need:

- 2 oz or more white
- 2 oz or more color
- Nublade or tissue blade
- Pasta machine (or rolling pin/dowel coupled with your own strength and precision)
- measuring devise (ruler, tape measure, etc.)

1. Begin with two blocks of clay of the same dimensions, one white, one a color of your choice. They don't have to be pre-conditioned.

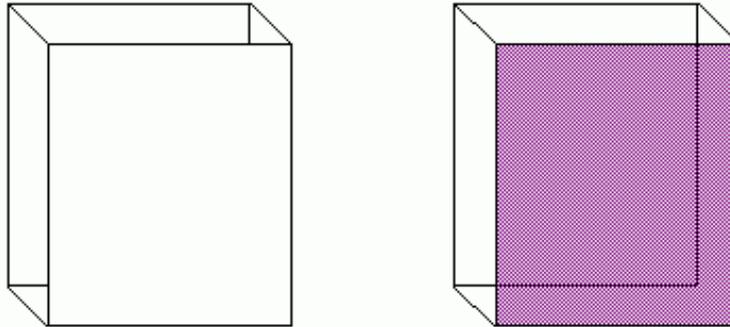


Figure One

2. Next, cut each block in half on the diagonal. If you wish to have the original white and the original color on either end of your stack, then cut them according to figure 3 below.

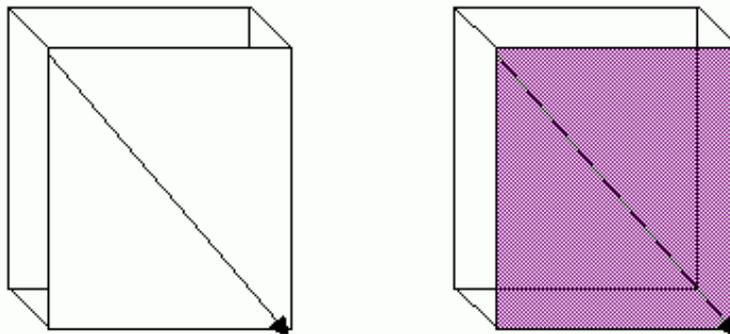


Figure Two: Diagonal Cuts

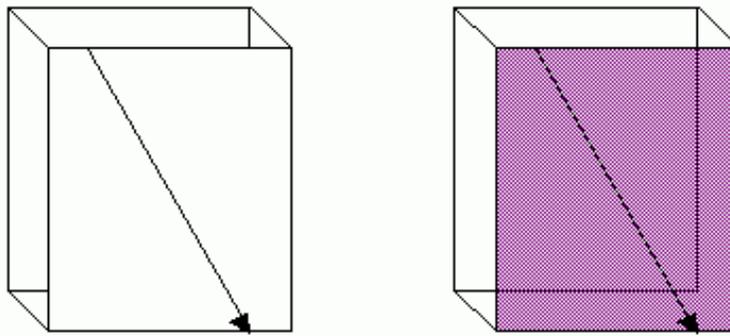


Figure Three: Skinner-style cut

3. Reassemble the blocks with half color, half white so that you achieve two blocks of the original dimensions. You can choose to blend both blocks, or not.

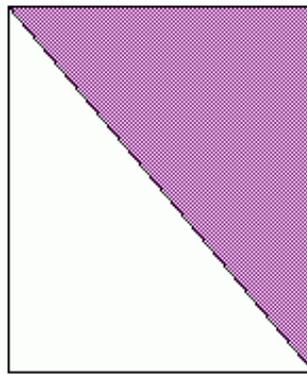


Figure Four

4. Cut the block into eight equal lengths on the long side. I recommend using a measuring device for this part. After you've measured and marked both ends, you can cut up your block. (You can also "eyeball" it, making the first cut down the center.)

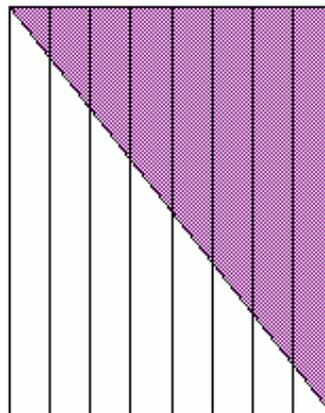


Figure Five

Then, cut this half again, and each of these in half again. Repeat with the other half of the block.) Now you will note that you have eight thin blocks of clay with varying amounts of white and color. (Example: if you started with a block of clay that measured 2" across by 2.5" long, you'll end up with eight narrow blocks of $\frac{1}{4}$ " by 2.5"). Now you can condition each of these blocks separately.

5. To make a gradient stack, roll each color into a sheet, attempting to achieve similar dimensions with each shade. Starting with the darkest color, stack your sheets with successively lighter colors, rolling over each sheet with a brayer, until you have all eight colors in your stack. Roll over the stack with a brayer a final time to remove air pockets. Trim the stack and it's ready to use.

Variations:

- Use a color of your choice and gray or black for blending to get shades rather than tints.
- Use two or more complementary colors (e.g. ultramarine blue and fuchsia) for a different effect.
- Use Premo pearl in place of white (translucent might work – haven't tried this).

Ways To Use Gradient Stacks In Canes

1. McCaw Cane

This is a fascinating technique developed by Sharon McCaw. For this cane, you will need gradient stacks in two colors. a) After creating your gradient stacks, cut the stacks into square loaves as shown below.

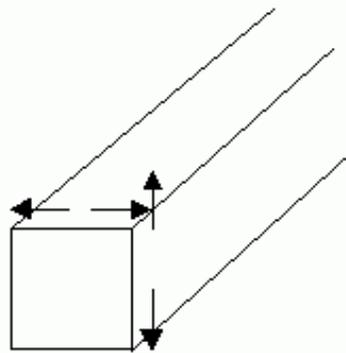


Figure Six

b) Next, you will be cutting off slices of this cane at right angles to the corners from both stacks. You should measure and mark these cuts on both ends of the stacks before beginning to cut.



Figure Seven

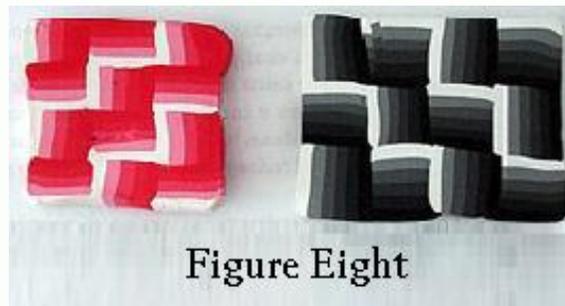
c) Make the first cut from each stack. Flip each of these slices on its end, and replace it on the opposite stack. (Example: you have two gradient stacks, one in turquoise, one in purple. After you've cut the first slice off each stack, place the turquoise slice on the purple stack, lighter side of the turquoise slice to the darker side of the purple stack, recreating the square.)

d) Continue cutting, flipping, and replacing until you have two new square stacks of purple and turquoise slices where the light end of the turquoise slices are matched to the dark end of the purple slices.

e) You can use these canes as they are, or you can continue putting the canes together to create even more complex geometric patterns. You can cut one cane into four equal pieces, and match these up to create one pattern; you can join the two different canes together, cut these in half, and put these back together to make yet a different cane. Experiment putting together slices of the canes until you find something you like.

2. Woven Cane

- Reduce a gradient stack to 12 inches of useable cane.
- Cut this into 12 2-inch lengths.
- Reassemble these pieces in the pattern shown below.



3. Card Trick

Based on a quilt pattern, this cane can be made either with solid blocks of color or gradient colors.

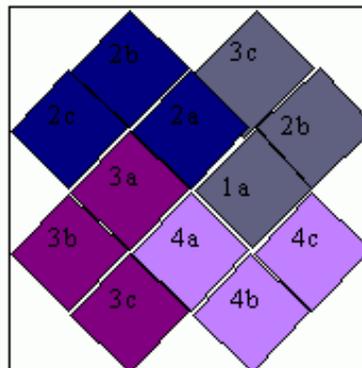


Figure Nine

a) Solid Colors

- If you choose to use solid colors, you can make a small version using the square and triangular disks with your clay extruder, or you can make a larger version by layering sheets of clay and trimming into a square stack.
- You can add another element by separating each square with a very thin sheet of black or gray.

b) Gradient Colors

If you go the gradient color route, you can proceed in one of two fashions.

i. You can cut four different colored square stacks each into three equal lengths. Assemble as shown in the pattern above. Place your squares on a surface and move them around until you achieve a pattern you like. Then abut each surface to the adjoining piece. Fill in the triangular areas with a conditioned background color(s) of your choice.

ii. This variation requires that you create gradations in four colors using the simple diagonal cut (see first page).

After you've completed your color blending, create sheets of the pure colors you started from so that you have nine sheets. In this case, you will need to fold over your sheets so that you have double thicknesses; roll over with a brayer.

Beginning either with the dark or light tint, stack three of these folded sheets in successive tints, and trim to a square loaf. Do the same with the next three tints, and again with the last three tints. Roll stacks with brayer after adding a new sheet.

Again, moving light to dark or vice versa, assemble these loaves as shown in the diagram above, maintaining your pattern. For example, if 1a is the lighter tints, then 2a, 3a, and 4a should be as well. You can also play with this by starting with the lighter tints in 1a and 3a, and darker tints in 2a and 4a. When you've assembled your color stacks, fill in the triangular areas with a conditioned background color(s) of your choice.

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Faux Wood Veneer by Suzanne Ivester November 2003

Here's an easy way to make sheets of clay in colorful, realistic wood-grain patterns. You can use this technique to create inlaid designs and to cover beads, boxes, and frames. Your imagination and the size of your oven are the only limits!

By using the colors suggested here, you'll get a rich, warm mahogany. But be creative and express yourself! Different color combinations will make different wood tones. You may want to make more than one color of wood (a light and a dark) and combine them in inlay patterns. I'll make some suggestions for color variations and projects at the end of the tutorial.

Materials and Tools

- Conditioned clay: alizarin crimson, yellow ochre, silver, copper, black, and translucent
- Pasta machine
- Clay gun with small multi-hole die
- Needle tool
- Sharp, sturdy blade

Step-by-Step Instructions

Step 1: To get started, blend colors as shown from left to right in Figure 1: (a) two parts yellow ochre to one part black, (b) equal parts silver and alizarin crimson, (c) two parts copper to one part black, (d) equal parts alizarin crimson and black, and (e) equal parts yellow ochre and silver. Just set the translucent clay aside for a later step.

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- (d) equal parts alizarin crimson and black
- (e) equal parts yellow ochre and silver

Just set the translucent clay aside for a later step.



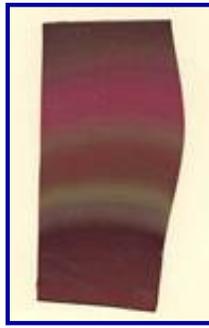
Step 2: Roll each color to the thickest setting on your pasta machine. (I'll refer to my own machine: #1 is the thickest; as the numbers get higher, the clay gets thinner.) Cut the colors into long triangles of uneven widths and press them together side by side (see Figure 2).



Step 3: Fold the slab of triangles across the stripes and run it through your pasta machine, set on #1. Do this several times, always folding and feeding the clay in the same direction until the stripes are blended, similar to Figure 3.



Step 4: Rotate the striped sheet 90 degrees and run it through your pasta machine without folding. Start on the #2 setting; then do the same on #3, #4, and #5. This will blend the stripes a bit more and will give you a longer, thinner sheet (see Figure 4).



Step 5: Combine one part black, one part copper, and six parts translucent (see Figure 5). Load your clay gun with this mixture, using the smallest multi-hole die. (Think angel-hair spaghetti here.)



Step 6: Extrude long strands of the translucent mixture onto your striped sheet. Using your fingers and a needle tool, distribute the strands fairly evenly all over the sheet, but don't worry about getting the strands straight or totally even.

Pat the strands down firmly with your hands, but don't smoosh them flat (see Figure 6).



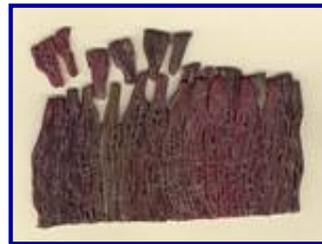
Step 7: Now here's where you'll really start to have fun! Cutting in the same direction as the stripes, cut the spaghetti-covered sheet into narrow strips, about 1/8 inch wide. Let several strips stack up on your blade as you cut, as shown in Figure 7.

Lay these stacks down with the slices standing on edge as close together as possible, forming a slab of slices with cut strings between them. Compress the stacks of slices as much as possible with your hands or with the side of your blade.



Step 8: When you've cut the whole sheet into stacks of strips, and the stacks are all in a slab, you'll notice that the stacks have formed ragged edges with points on both sides of the slab (where your fingers on the blade pinched the slices).

Cut one edge of the slab into an even line and press the points you cut off between the points on the remaining ragged edge (see Figure 8). This will enhance the wood-grain effect and give you a larger usable sheet when you're finished.



Step 9: Again, compress the slab as much as you can and insert the cut edge (the bottom edge in Figure 8) into the pasta machine on setting #1.

Don't fold the clay. Change the setting to #2 and run it through in the same direction--no folding!

Do this again at #3, #4, and #5. Voila! Now you have a nice smooth sheet of wood veneer, as seen in Figure 9.



Suggestions for Imitating Other Types of Wood

For light oak, combine gold, pearl, white, and ecru. Use translucent and yellow ochre for the strings.

For driftwood, combine silver, pearl, gray, ecru, and cobalt blue. Use translucent and black for the strings.

Project Suggestions

Inlaid "Wood" Container: Paint a tin or box with white glue and let it dry. Next, cover the top, bottom, and sides with faux wood veneer.

Create a design on the top of the box by cutting into the clay with small, shaped cutters. Remove the cutout shapes with a needle tool.

Cut the same shapes from veneer of a contrasting color and fit these shapes into the holes you've made on the top of the box. You can further embellish the design with pieces of faux stone, cabochons, or whatever you like. (See Figure 10.)



Eye-Catching "Wood" Pendant: Cut a design out of wood veneer, using a brass embossing stencil and a needle. Use a cookie cutter or template the desired size and shape of your pendant to cut around the design; also cut another piece with the same cutter or template for the back of the pendant.

Bake the wood pieces between two tiles and sand them smooth. Cut a thin sheet of black clay the same size and shape as your pendant pieces and cover it on one side with gold or silver leaf.

Use TLS to sandwich the three layers together. The metallic leaf in the middle will show through the cut-out design. Bake again and drill a hole to attach a jump ring or bale. (See Figure 11.)



About the artist:

Suzanne Ivester studied art at Kansas University and has been working in polymer clay for three years. She's a member of the Blue Ridge Polymer Clay Guild and the Smoky Mountain Polymer Clay Guild as well as the national guild. Suzanne especially enjoys using polymer clay to refurbish and enhance thrift-store finds.

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Faux Porcelain Victorian Tin

Revised

by C. A. Therien

November 2003

(Author's note: This article was first published in the [September 2002 issue](#) of Polymer Clay Polyzine. Since then, I have learned more about both clay and tutorials! So I've revised the article to clarify the instructions and adjust baking issues. ~C. A. T.)

Translucent Liquid Sculpey is the key to creating the creamy luster and depth in this faux technique. Simulating the look of antique china, the combination of white polymer clay and TLS is remarkably deceptive— only the weight of the piece will give it away.

Supplies needed:

- 1 small metal tin
- 2 cotton balls and rubbing alcohol
- Pasta machine
- Aloe vera gel
- 1 oz. (1/2 package) of white polymer clay
- 1 oz. (1/2 package) of translucent polymer clay
- White Glue
- Translucent Liquid Sculpey
- Acid-free Victorian stickers
- X-Acto knife or clay knife
- Craft scissors
- Oven thermometer
- Clay extruder gun with small round hole
- 4" Glazed ceramic tile
- container of ice water
- Automotive Wet-Dry sandpaper in grits 400 - 2000
- A drop of liquid dish soap
- Container of lukewarm water
- An old hand towel
- 2 Paintbrushes (old but good sable ones— you will dedicate one brush to your TLS only)
- Buffing tool or scrap of denim
- Water-based brush-on acrylic sealer

Instructions: Please read all instructions before you begin. You will need to decide on your rim treatment (See Step 5).

Step 1: Prepare the tin.

Empty and thoroughly clean the tin with warm soapy water. Dry with paper towels. Wipe the outside of the tin with a cotton ball soaked in rubbing alcohol to remove any traces of soap. Lay the closed tin onto a clean paper towel on your work surface and allow the tin to air dry while you condition your clay.

Step 2: Condition the clay.

Break the clay into sections along the scored marks. Using one section of clay at a time, squish and roll the clay in your hands until it becomes warm and pliable, about 5 minutes. After you have conditioned a section of clay this way, put it into a plastic baggie or bit of

plastic wrap and put it in your pocket. Your body heat will keep the clay soft. Repeat until all 4 sections of clay are conditioned.

Step 3: Roll the clay into a sheet.

Wipe the rollers with a tiny dab of Aloe. Using one section of each color of conditioned clay, squish them together to mix the colors thoroughly. Roll the mixed clay into a log and flatten with the palm of your hand. Roll the flattened clay through your pasta machine on the widest setting. Using your tin as a guide, fold and re-roll until you have a sheet of clay approximately 1/4" longer than the lid of the tin.

Step 4: Apply the clay to the tin.

Spread a thin layer of glue on the lid of your tin with your finger. Do not use too much; you only want to make the tin tacky. Hold your clay above the tin in a "u" shape, with the fold just above the center of the tin. You do not want to crease the clay. Smooth the clay onto the top and down the sides of the lid, working from the center outward. Work slowly, to prevent air bubbles. If any air bubbles become visible as you smooth the clay, prick them with a pin and smooth the clay over the holes. For tins with corners, you can either smooth the excess clay onto the sides and rim of the tin, or trim the excess clay with scissors and smooth the seams with your fingers until no longer visible.

Step 5: Trim the clay along the rim.*

There are an infinite variety of rim treatments, but I have chosen two of the simplest.

Option 1: A raised edge. Smooth the clay along the sides of the lid so that it ends just atop the metal rim. Following the rim, cut the excess clay from the lid. If you have a hinged tin, carefully cut around hinge holes at the back to allow the hinge to move freely. Instructions for the raised edge are in step 8.

Option 2: Decorative knobs. Completely cover the sides of the lid, including the rim of the tin, smoothing the clay over it. Trim the clay below the rim so that none of the rim is visible. Instructions for the knobs are in step 8.

Lastly, squeeze a small amount of aloe onto your fingers and smooth the surface of the clay until it is free from bumps and bulges, removing as many fingerprints as possible.

Step 6: Bake the tin.

Pre-heat your oven to 275 degrees. Adjust temperature as necessary, according to your oven thermometer. Lay the tin on a tile and bake in the center of your oven for 25 minutes. Prepare ice water in a small bowl a few minutes before the baking time is finished. Immediately after removing the tin from the oven, submerge it into the ice water. Leave the tin in the water until it has completely cooled, approximately 10 minutes.

Step 7: Cover the bottom of the tin.

Repeat steps three through six. (If the bottom of your tin has higher sides than lid, mix all the clay in your baggie, including the scraps left over from covering your lid.) Trim the edges of the clay just below the edge of your lid so that your tin will open and close freely.

Step 8: Rim treatments.

To make the tin easier to open, a variety of rim treatments can be used. Two examples are given here:

1. To put a ridge all around the lid of the tin, use your extra clay scraps in a clay extruder with a round hole disk. Squeeze out a rope approximately 1/2" longer than the perimeter of your tin. Use the glue to attach the rope to the back of the tin. If you have a hinged tin, begin

attaching the rope next to the edge of the hinge. Continue gluing and attaching the rope all the way around. Carefully press the clay along the rim to cover it completely. Trim the ends of the rope so that it is flush and smooth the seam. For hinged tins, cut diagonally at the hinges, allowing for greater freedom of hinge movement. Bake and cool as listed in step 6.

2. To put a couple of raised knobs at the front of the tin: Roll two 1/8" balls of clay from your scraps, and glue one each to the top and bottom center front lids of the tin, kitty-corner from one another. Flatten them slightly, then bake and cool as listed in step 6.

Step 9: Sand the tin.

While the tin is cooling, prepare your sanding area. Fill a bowl half way with lukewarm water. Have your hand towel nearby. Add a drop or two of dish liquid to the water to help cut the surface tension. Cut your sandpaper into workable sizes, approximately 3" to 4" square. Make sure to mark the back of your paper with the grit number in ink. Moisten the 400 grit sandpaper in your bowl for a minute, then begin sanding the clay until the bumps are removed and all the edges are shaped the way you want them. Rinse frequently both the sandpaper and the tin. Repeat the sanding with the 600 grit to make the clay surface as smooth as possible. Dry the tin thoroughly.

Step 10: Decorate the tin.

Thoughtfully plan your design for using the Victorian acid-free stickers. Carefully place the stickers onto the lid, smoothing them down from the center to the sides, trying to avoid wrinkling the paper. Press the stickers on well, ensuring that none of the edges are lifted.

Step 11: Apply the Translucent Liquid Sculpey.

Paint the entire lid of the tin with TLS. Use only enough TLS to cover the top and sides of the lid amply but not thickly. Smooth the TLS as much as possible with your brush. Set aside for 10 minutes for the brush strokes to settle. Raise the temperature on your oven to 290 degrees, then bake for 20 minutes and cool as above. Repeat with the bottom of the tin.

Step 12: Sand the TLS.

Sand lightly and briefly with the 400 grit sandpaper, being careful not to sand through to the stickers. Repeat steps 11 and 12 two more times, or to as many layers of TLS as desired to achieve a diffused appearance on the stickers and provide a 1/8" coating on the tin that can be sanded to a glassy finish without sanding through to the stickers. Continue sanding with all the grits in succession, from 600 to 2000. Wipe the excess TLS off the paintbrush and wrap the bristles in plastic to keep them moist.

Step 13: Buff the tin.

A power buffer is preferred for this step. If you don't have one, a scrap of faded denim can be used by hand. Buff until the tin has a deep, glassy shine to it.

Step 14: Protect the shine.

Reduce oven temperature to 250 degrees. Open the tin and lay flat on a tile, clay side up (if it is a hinged tin, tent the tin by putting a small ball of aluminum foil under the hinges). Lightly brush acrylic liquid onto the tin. Place tile in the center of the oven and bake for 5 minutes. Set aside to cool thoroughly. Additional coats may be added for more depth.

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The Spirit of Ravensdale

By Trina Williams

What is it that draws us to a clay event? The teachers? The classes? The food? The facility? The beds? Or is it the chance to meet and interact with other clayers? AHA! Of course, we go for the teachers and the classes. We don't care about the food or the facilities. Much. But oh, those kindred spirits. And trading!

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Judy Belcher

We, as polymer clay artists, are known to be a sharing group. But something magic happens when you get a bunch of us in the same place. I just finished reading the account of Shrinemont, the NPCG retreat, in the Polymer Café and have to agree with Judy Belcher. "It's the feeling of community."



And the best place to get the sense of community is in the workspace. Open 24 hours it is your home away from home. It's a place to get some work done. Or not. And it's place for impromptu demos. It's also place to meet the teachers in a relaxed setting. The workroom at Trinity Lutheran College where Ravensdale was held was in an auditorium with a stage and a piano. Our own little supper club-without the supper. Although, thanks to the Internet chat groups we had plenty of chocolate. Kellie Robinson of Alaska had the unofficial title of "bringer of the most unusual chocolate". The groups had joked about bringing chocolate for about two weeks before the event. And while most of us went out and bought Hershey's kisses and the like, Kellie brought homemade fudge spiked with espresso! It was a big hit. Dotty McMillan was sure it speeded up her work. Kellie says, " Ravensdale was my first clay retreat of any kind, and it was a bit overwhelming at times. The amount of information I absorbed in such a short time is amazing. This was the most exciting event of my whole life."

Verna Glass, another fellow Californian, was in several of my classes and her enthusiastic comment was "I like everything!"



Libby and Dotty

Libby Mills from Connecticut has been working with clay for three years and is a member of both the PCP (PolymerClayPeople) and PCC (PolymerClayCentral) chat rooms. She had seen pictures of Ravensdale happenings and was anxious to put names with faces of her on-line buddies. "It was a chance to take great classes from people I admire," she added.



Notebook by Jeanette Roberts

I think the favorite activity was trading with everyone, from newbies to instructors. Whether it was loose beads, cane slices, canes or finished jewelry, the TRADE was definitely on. One of the most sought after trades was a small notebook with a pc cover in mica shift or foil by Jeanette Roberts. I don't want to write in mine and mess it up!



Susan Hyde

Susan Hyde managed to smile through a class in which her table collapsed on her knee while she was teaching!



syndee holt

And syndee holt taught us how to photograph our work with a plain old light bulb, a shower curtain and a piece of white paper.



Look ma, no shadows!

The newest newbie had to be Cindy Silas from Virginia who admitted to four months experience. Earlier in the year she was preparing to have some surgery and be off her feet for a while "and I got some clay to experiment with. I called Marie Segal at the Clay Factory and she was very helpful. I like the bright colors and the feel of the clay."



Gwen Gibson

One of the most lonesome clayers had to be Annette Durburg of the Netherlands. She told me that there was no clay in the Netherlands except rather old Fimo and that she orders her clay from Polymer Clay Express and gets it in five days! She has been fortunate to be able to attend Gwen Gibson's retreat in France and was an assistant there this year. She and Gwen keep in touch by e-mail. The most lonesome title used to belong to Sally Haskell of Saudi Arabia but she has been spreading the word in the American community there and this year brought along Evie Lockard.



Margaret, Petra and Julie

And no clay conference would be complete without our friends Petra de Gues of New Zealand, Margaret Regan, Wales and Kazuo (Yamashita) Kono of Japan. Here are Margaret and Petra with Julie Wise.

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Album



Tracy and the Hunks

This year we had about a dozen “Hunks of Clay” as Donna Kato has dubbed the men in polymer clay including instructors Dan Cormier and Jeff Deaver but Stanley Pekarsky had to be the most interesting. As a first timer he even brought his Freedom buffer all the way from Idaho!

When I contacted Stan by email for some more information he responded “I’m just about recovered from Ravensdale in the physical sense; however, I hope I never get over the exhilaration, inspiration and excitement of the experience.”



Stan and his Freedom

Stan, like many, came to polymer clay from rubber stamping. He and his partner, Russell White, are Independent Dream Impressions consultants. Stan started “fooling with polymer clay to enhance my paper craft. Although I still do stamping, polymer clay has become my passion.” He learned about Ravensdale while attending ArtFest in Port Townsend, WA the last two years.

No mention of the spirit of Ravensdale can go without saying LINDA GOFF. Linda, who was the Program chair, passed away shortly before the event. An active teacher and guild member she will be missed. The Ravensdale conference was dedicated to her and a special exhibit of her work was in the Rave.

My own memories of Linda include a class I took from her at my first Ravensdale ('98) and the conga line “break” we took halfway through the class. Laughing definitely gets your creative juices flowing. I was also fortunate to receive one of her Sea horse pins through one of the auctions.

Pier Voulkos and Claire Piper evoked the spirit when they tangoed to an admiring crowd in the foyer at lunchtime. Pier announced her retirement from teaching at Ravensdale and one of her necklaces brought in over \$700 at the auction.

It would take a whole book to describe the great classes and teachers available. The wavy blade demo with Marie Segal and Jody Bishel was filled before I even got my registration in and they graciously scheduled two more to accommodate everyone who wanted to see it.



Author's Watercolors

Among the new classes was one that will surely intrigue everyone. Patti Kimle, of egg fame, trained in watercolor painting, taught us how to apply the technique to clay with Piñata Inks. Look for an article in one of the magazines sometime next year.



The Ravenstore was huge this year. All kinds of supplies and the wonderful work of many artists were on hand. Because this year everything was on computer the helpers only had to keep things neat and answer questions. Howard Segal of the Clay Factory and Don Geer of Puffinalia ran the show under the able direction of Major Jane, Jane Scheveren the Planning Chair. I'm sure Howard was happy. I can remember helping in 2000 and trying to write up credit card slips. I think it took him a week after the event to straighten out our "help".

Not every group has a stand up comedian. But we in the polymer clay community have a good one. Tracy Holmes is not only a talented artist and instructor but she is a very funny lady. She has been the announcer and emcee at every Ravensdale I have been to (three) and has the credentials to prove it.



Every night there were "announcements" in the community room wherein Tracy would intersperse the factual with the farcical. Who knew the laundry problems could be so funny. She even managed to relate the tale of the vole (shrew) in my hair so that everyone in the room was scratching their head!



The final event every year is the auction. All of the instructors donate articles to be sold and the proceeds go to defray the cost of the conference. I'm not sure how much money was raised but several items (including Pier's necklace) went for hundreds of dollars. Tracy was in top form and this year she had a helper, Randy Townsend. Randy is engaged to Karen Mitchell of Mitchell sister's fame and looks like he will fit right in with the group.



The last part of the evening was the distribution of the "magic beans". The story goes that when Linda Goff was deciding to have a go at making a living from her art, her husband bought a 25 pound bag of beans for emergency purposes. They never had to open the beans and Linda's friends and fellow guild members thought it would be a fitting tribute to make beans out of polymer clay. So throughout the week we all made "beans" out of our scraps and collected them in a big bowl. Then as we left that Saturday night in August we took a little bit of Linda's spirit with us.

So if you are longing to get into the spirit of things save June 20-27, 2004 and plan to come to San Diego, CA for the Evolution of Polymer Clay sponsored by the National Polymer Clay Guild.

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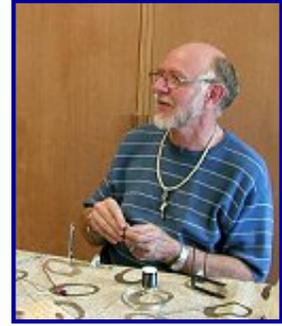
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Butterfly Canes

[Alan Vernal](#)

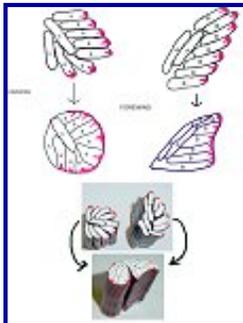
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In my opinion, one of the most beautiful things in nature is the wing of a butterfly. Its delicacy, colour, and sometimes iridescence have always been a fascination to me.

Since I began to use Polymer Clay, I've been trying to portray these spectacular animals. Firstly, I used mica or metallic powders on the cut-out clay, this is good but it's hard to create fine detail. Then I tried photo transfer using printed images and liquid clays. This method is wonderful for the reproduction of the wings, but I feel it's taking too much of a shortcut to create the desired effect.

Some time ago, I decided to design a relatively simple cane which could mimic the complex veining and patterns of the animals' wings. I found all the information I could and from what I read, the task appeared to be a daunting one. Then, I had one of the famous 'eureka-moments'. As butterflies have 4 wings, why not cane the fore and hind wings separately and combine them after reduction of the canes? As the animals are symmetrical, I needed only to make one side and flip a second slice over. I examined many wings' structure and overall shape and found that often, the fore wings are modified triangles and the hind wings are almost circular (at least this is true of most people's idea of a 'standard butterfly')

Often, the edges of the wings are the most patterned areas, so my simplified wing cane can be made from lots of elongated flower petal sub-canes with the decorated edge of the petal placed all around the edges of the wings.



There are two types of cane used. A plain bulls-eye with the basic colour of the wing in the centre and the wing vein colour (usually contrasting) wrapped around it. The other cane is a modified bulls eye of the same colours as the plain one but with an insert in one side. This insert is simply a triangular section of one or more colours which is placed inside the bulls eye by slicing it lengthwise and inserting the triangle then the cane is reassembled - see photo.



The relative sizes of the two canes should be roughly 1/3 for the plain and 2/3 for the modified one. My final wing canes are based on about 3 oz of core colour, so the division is very easy. The quantities can, of course, be multiplied if you wish.



Both canes are reduced by whatever method suits you – rolling is usually fine for these relatively simple ones. Keep reducing until you have roughly 25 cm of the smaller and 80 cm of the larger cane.

Now both canes should be flattened between fingers and thumbs so that their cross section is about 3x12mm.

Discard the scrap ends and cut both canes into 6 cm lengths. You'll need about 5 or 6 lengths of the plain cane and 14 or 15 of the other one. If you wish to, you can include an 'eye' near the tip of the fore wing – this is simply made from another bright coloured bulls eye cane. It's inserted as the fore wing is assembled.



Fore wing.

Take a length of plain cane and attach 6 or 7 modified sections down one side of it in a roughly triangular shape. Then attach another plain section to the non patterned side. See diagram and photo



Hind wing.

Again take a plain section and apply 7 or 8 modified sections down one side and part way up the other. Then attach another plain section. The overall shape should be more rounded than the other wing. See diagram and photo.



Next, both canes must be reduced. During the reduction stage, the overall shape of both canes is modified. The fore wing is shaped into a concave and convex sided triangular section. The hind wing can be gently rolled to reduce it, as its final section will be almost circular.



When the canes are shaped and reduced to about double the original 6 cm, cut them both in half. Reduce one of each of the halves (make sure they're the same orientation) to twice the length again. Now, assemble the large and small wing sets, using the cut ends as a reference and the stripes along their lengths to confirm that no twisting has occurred in the

CUTTING CANES

You'll appreciate that, as the complete wing set canes are such odd shapes, they are very susceptible to distortion when they're sliced. In order to overcome this problem, simply put the canes into the fridge or freezer for a while before slicing – they hold their shape very well after this treatment.

USES OF THE CANES

Naturally, you can make the canes into complete butterflies by using two slices and applying them to a clay body.

I've found that a darkened gold clay wrapped around a length of previously twisted coloured

wire works very well for the bodies. If the butterflies are destined to be brooches, it may be wise to use a piece of sharpened 1 mm brass wire as an armature, the point of the wire will take a standard clutch pin cap (sold by many findings suppliers)

I've been a little adventurous in my uses of the different wings I've made – making

I hope this article has succeeded in explaining that making caned butterfly (or fairy, angel or even dragon) wings is a little easier than some may have thought it to be.

Alan Vernal



See what Alan does with all of these butterflies!



Look for his tutorial in the December 2003 issue of Polyzine

Polyzine would like to thank the British Polymer Clay Guild for permission to publish this article in tandem with the article in their newsletter.