

Mica Shift: The Next Generation

by Carissa Nichols



Hello again, clay-o-holics! I hope you have had a chance to try last month's technique. If not, it's archived in [the March 2001 issue under Mica Shift](#). But before we head to this month's technique, I have a little confession to make.

The Boo-Boo

If you were to use the analogy of the computer on my brain, it would probably compare to the old Radio Shack 486 model; good for typing papers and playing Pac Man but not too much else. Occasionally, I need to 'purge' old files in order to make way for new data, and that's exactly what happened during last month's article.

Anyone who has ever written something for publication reads through the article several times looking for typos and bad grammar. Then they look at it again to make sure that the directions make sense and that they have all the facts straight. This is where I schooled the pooch.

Marie Segal actually taught me an **alternative** mica shift technique to the one covered in my last article. It was the very nice lady who sat near her at the retreat (whose name, alas, was on one of those 'purged' files I mentioned earlier) who taught me the grid technique. My apologies go out to both wonderful ladies.

Marie's Technique- So what DID the godmomma of clay show me?

Marie's version of the mica shift uses the same supplies and clay preparation as the grid technique, but instead of using a plastic canvas grid, you would use a WavyBlade. Also known as the Ripple Blade, this little \$2.50 item is actually a potato chip slicer with delusions of grandeur.

With this tool you can obtain a similar grid pattern on the clay by slicing **across** the clay horizontally. After the first pass, turn the square of clay 90 degrees and slice across again. This is easier if the clay is well chilled and your blade is clean and sharp. It also helps if you make the square of clay you are working on **smaller** than the width of the blade.

Again, the end result is a grid, but one that may be a little more freeform since it is cut out by hand. Pass the square of clay through the pasta machine on the medium settings to see the final pattern of positive and negative boxes.

This Month's Technique- Acid Etch

I can't get the credit wrong for this technique because as far as I can tell I created it! Unless and until I start forgetting my name, I am safe!

Supplies:

- Pasta machine
- Gold Premo- two layers of conditioned clay on the thickest setting (refrigerated so the clay is firm)
- Sharp and clean blade
- Some sort of tool with a blunt rounded edge- turkey leg skewer, ball-head pin, etc.
- Wax paper and tape

Place the two layers of clay together and smooth over the entire surface to work out any air bubbles. I normally do the process over the entire sheet of clay and then cut out my shapes.

The Boring Part

If you wish to get the actual 'Acid Etch' look, use a ball-head pin or any tool with a smooth, rounded head. If you are using a pin, glue the sharp point into a handle of polymer for easier use. Dab the ball head into some cornstarch every once in a while so it does not stick to the clay. You can also purchase several dull knitting needles and tape them together into a bundle. A tool like this covers a wider area and may allow the process to go faster.

(Every time I go into the hardware store, the owner gives me the strangest looks. He simply cannot imagine what I could **possibly** be doing with the variety of items I purchase from him. But each wonderful tool I buy from him gives a completely new surface look to the clay.)

Save this part of the technique for when Buffy or ER is on. Make sure you are comfortable because this takes a while. What you are going to do is 'stipple' the **entire** surface of the sheet.

You do not want to tear a hole in the clay by stabbing with the tool. Neither will you just make 10 or 20 marks and call it done. *Those of you with Carpal Tunnel or Repetitive Motion syndrome may want to pay a relative to do this part -- I do.* You must mark the entire surface layer, and do it without punching **through** the clay.

Once you have covered the surface of the clay, let it cool again before you cut it. To help the clay stay still as I am cutting, I firmly pat it down onto the surface of the wax paper. Then I carefully slice across the top layer of clay and run the sheet through the pasta machine on a medium setting.

The surface looks like the Moon: all craters and shadows. It's an especially striking effect if you sand and buff the baked piece.

Some notes on Premo

These mica shift effects work wonderfully on gold Premo, but I have had good luck with the other pearl colors as well. I can also add silver pearl to black clay or white pearl to non-pearl colors and get a good design. The trick is to really process the clay through the pasta machine and get every little speck of mica aligned.

Also keep in mind that many colors will not show a clear design until sanded and buffed. I almost threw away several pins made from red pearl, but I sanded them because I liked their shape. Low and behold, a very pretty design turned up once I finished the pieces.

Some notes on forming beads

If you are forming beads or pouches or putting the texture sheets on boxes, make sure you are starting out with **very chilled clay**. Premo users know that the clay becomes sticky quite rapidly, which can cause smears.

Until next time: Carpe Polyum!

