

I've always liked the idea of party favors, but most of the time, they don't serve much of a purpose. They end up in a drawer somewhere or on the back of a shelf collecting dust.

I came up with this nifty idea to celebrate my son's birthday, and to give away pictures that wouldn't get lost in a stack of photos. Everyone I know has liked their commemorative magnets and I see them on their refrigerators every time I visit.

This project will take you through the steps of creating a set of magnets to be used as favors for a birthday party. Take a look at the variations at the end of this article to help you come up with some ideas to make them your own!

Supplies

- Digital picture, or photograph and scanner
- Photo editing software (I use Paint Shop Pro 7)
- InkJet printer (I have an HP)
- T-Shirt transfer paper (I've gotten the best results from HP brand)
- White Premo! Sculpey or other strong clay
- Pasta machine
- Sharp pair of scissors
- Parchment paper
- Bone folder or other burnishing tool
- Sanding paper or emery board
- Sculpey III, one block each of maroon, navy blue & leaf green and three blocks of white
- 3/4" circle cutter
- Liquid Sculpey
- NuFlex blade
- 1/2" magnets
- Super glue
- Future floor polish
- Paint brush
- Sharpie marker

Making the Cane

This cane is a variation of my "signature" Blue Floral cane. It results in a square cane, about 1 1/2" across. The pattern is reminiscent of a piece of floral fabric, and I use slices of it to dress up my holiday ornaments, or cover clay balls that will become pins and pendants.

Feel free to substitute your own colors. I've made this pattern in several colors, and find that the most attractive combinations are ones that start with fairly dark colors, since much white is added to the mix.

In most applications, a single slice will go a long way, particularly if you stretch it to fit using the pasta machine. In this project, we will be using a single slice as a veneer on a magnet background.

Mixing the Colors

Cut each of the blocks of Sculpey III into quarters.

Take one quarter of maroon and split it into thirds. Set aside two of those thirds. Take two quarters of maroon and set it aside along with one quarter of white. Take the remaining quarter of maroon and the leftover third of a quarter, and set it aside with three quarters of white.

Repeat with navy blue and green.



Mix the colors.

Creating the Flower

Take the darkest maroon color and split it into two roughly equal sections. (There is not a lot of precision involved here, so you needn't bother with a ruler. It should be sufficient to eyeball it.)

Split the medium maroon into seven sections, and the light maroon into fifteen.

Repeat with navy blue and leaf green.



Roll a dark maroon section into a 2" log. Roll 6 medium maroon sections into 2" logs and arrange around the dark maroon log as petals in a flower.

Further split a light maroon section into six equal sections. Roll these sections into 2" logs and set in the indentations around the flower petals.



Gently press the logs together to compress, and reduce slightly until the diameter is just under an inch. This is your first of nine flowers.



Repeat the above steps to make eight more flowers in these color combinations:

- #2 – medium navy blue, light navy blue, light maroon
- #3 – dark maroon, light leaf green, light maroon
- #4 – dark navy blue, medium navy blue, light navy blue
- #5 – dark navy blue, light maroon, light navy blue

- #6 – medium leaf green, light leaf green, light navy blue
- #7 – medium maroon, light maroon, light leaf green
- #8 – dark leaf green, medium leaf green, light leaf green
- #9 – dark leaf green, light navy blue, light leaf green



Arrange the flowers into a square by stacking them:

- #1, #2 & #3
- #4, #5 & #6
- #7, #8 & #9

Reducing the Cane

This cane is best reduced from a standing position. It's a fairly simple task, since we are using a nice, soft clay, but you get more control and less waste when you reduce it from above.



Press down on the top, starting at the center of the cane and working your way outward. Turn the cane 90 degrees and press down in the same manner.

As the cane gets longer, stroking it gently with your hands will be enough to elongate and reduce it. You'll need very little pressure. Repeat until the cane is at least a foot long.



Making the Design

Trim off any distorted ends and cut the cane into four equal sections.

Re-assemble the four sections into a new square, being sure to keep them oriented in the same direction.



Reduce as before, until the cane is at least a foot long.

Cut into equal quarters and reassemble.

Reduce this cane as well, but only until the "face" of it has reached about 1 ½ inches in width. This is your finished cane.



Making the Transfer

Choose the image you wish to use as a focal point for the magnets. In this case, I used a black & white picture of my son caught in the midst of his favorite game.

Since this was a printed photograph, I used my scanner to import it into my photo manipulation program.



Add text.

I wanted the occasion to be remembered years from now, so I made sure to include the date, and "Happy Birthday to me," along with a catchy phrase: "Peek-a-Boo, now I'm 2!"

If your photo program doesn't automatically reverse the image when printing on T-Shirt Transfer paper, then you'll need to do it manually before printing.

Make sure your picture is a mirror image of what you actually want, since the process of transferring will reverse what is printed on the paper.

Shrink the image. Set the printable size to around 1.5" in its largest direction. This image is taller than it is wide, so I made it 1.2" tall.

Select T-Shirt transfer paper as your paper type, if possible, and print as many copies of the image as you will need. I made 12 copies, all on a single page.

Cut out each image, leaving a small border, about 1/8" all around. It doesn't have to be perfectly neat, since we'll be trimming the clay itself after the transfer is complete. We can worry about neat edges then. Just be sure that you leave at least as much of a white edge around your picture as you will want to see in the magnet.

Placing the Transfer on Clay

Condition the white Premo and run it through the pasta machine at a #4 setting (my machine has seven settings, #1 being the thickest, and #7 being the thinnest). With the blade, cut the resulting sheet into 12 rectangles, all large enough to fit one of the transfers, but not so large that there is a lot of wasted clay around the image.



Cut a sheet of parchment paper double the size that you'll need for baking. (For my magnets, I baked six at a time and used a piece of paper about a foot square.)

Fold the paper in half and re-open. On the bottom half of the paper, place the rectangles, with an image face down on each one.



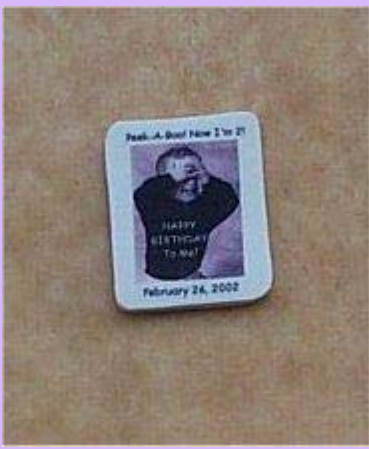
Fold over the top of the parchment paper and use the bone folder to burnish the transfer paper onto the raw clay. Be sure to burnish well, as any part of the paper not in contact with clay will not transfer.

The reason I burnish with a layer of parchment paper in between is that the bone folder moves more easily this way. It doesn't get stuck in the clay and impede movement.

Preheat oven to 275 degrees. Bake the transfers on the parchment paper for 7 minutes.

Remove the transfers and gently peel the paper off of the clay. Do this right away so that none of the transfer paper is left behind. The cooler the clay gets the harder it is to peel away the transfer paper.

You now have a set of nearly-cured pictures for your magnets.



Without waiting for the transfers to cool too much, use the scissors to cut away the waste clay.

You might want to round the corners for a softer look. Use an old emery board to sand the cut sides and corners of the transfers until smooth.

Putting the Favors Together

From this point on, I will describe the process for a single magnet. Repeat these steps for each magnet you need, or do them assembly-line style.

For the background, we will be using an extremely thin slice of the floral cane we just built, veneered onto white Premo. It is important the slice be thin, because Sculpey III is not a strong clay.

If we want to get the benefit of the strong Premo backing, we have to make sure that the Premo remains fairly thick in relation to the Sculpey.



First, run the Premo through the pasta machine at the #1 (thickest) setting. With the blade, cut a very thin slice from your floral cane and place it on the white sheet.

Cut away the excess white.



Run the resulting square through the pasta machine at the #1 setting. Turn the square 90 degrees (1/4 turn) and run through again, this time at #3.

You now have your background.



Find the orientation of the background sheet that is most visually pleasing to you.

With the circle cutter, cut a circle just above the midpoint on your sheet. This is where the magnet is going to go after baking.



Apply small dots of Liquid Sculpey above and below the hole to act as glue between the half-baked transfer and the background.

Place the transfer on top of the background and press gently to adhere.

If any Liquid Sculpey escapes, be sure to wipe it away, as it will definitely be visible after baking and the piece will look glued and messy.



Now trim the background. I was not particularly precise in measuring these cuts, since I find that the asymmetry is attractive against the straight rectangle.

Taking the blade in both hands, curve it gently, and make a cut above the top of the transfer. Make sure that you don't cut too close to the corners of the transfer, since you want the background to be visible all around the magnet.



Turn the sheet 90 degrees and make another curved slice. Continue until all four sides have been cut.

You are now ready to bake your magnet for 30 minutes at 275 degrees.



Finishing

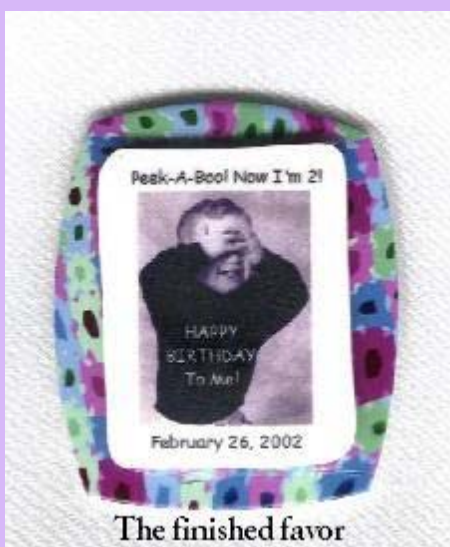
Once your clay piece has been cured and is cool, it's time to add the magnet.

Flip your cured clay over and place a drop of super glue in the hole you cut earlier.

Place the magnet in the hole, and press down for 10 seconds or until secure.

Stick your magnet to the refrigerator or some other magnetic surface to allow for hands-free finishing. Dip the paintbrush lightly into the Future floor polish and apply a thin coat to the entire magnet.

You really don't need much to get a soft, satiny shine. If you apply too much polish, you'll have unattractive drips off of the edge.



Allow ½ hour to dry completely. Flip over the magnet and sign it with a Sharpie marker, if desired.

I put my son's name on the back of my favors, since I had forgotten to put it somewhere on the front!

Variations

Here are three possible variations. (All of these were made recently. I wish I had thought of them when I was getting married and moving!)



For the first magnet, I used a picture of my house, added my address and a striped background to get change of address notices.



The wedding favor uses the same process, but with a few twists. In place of white Premo, I used translucent, and for the veneer, I sandwiched a sheet of silver leaf between the Premo base and the cane slice. I used a translucent cane so that the crackled leaf was visible underneath.



The last magnet features the letterhead from a boardinghouse my great-grandparents used to run. When one of their old letters turned up recently, I scanned in the artwork and turned it into a keepsake more durable than the fragile paper on which it was printed.

There are many more possibilities beyond this. Birth announcements, party invitations, and children's artwork come to mind, and I'm sure you can come up with many more ideas. Have fun!

About the Author:

Lisa Clarke has been addicted to polymer clay ever since her husband bought her a child's clay book for Christmas one year just for "something to do." Six years and countless books later, Lisa is the owner of [Polka Dot Creations](http://PolkaDotCreations.com), an internet-based store where she sells her work, and the very things that got her hooked in the first place: polymer clay books and videos.