

A Bowl of Soup

by Dubhe Carreño

Mmmm, mmmm soup! To comfort, to heal, to warm up, and strangely enough, to cool you down during scorching summer days. In Venezuela, where I grew up, in the heat of the day, my grandmother would cook delicious hot soup, full of vegetables and amazing flavors. Sure enough, I would sweat while eating the soup and then cool off when done. Our body's cooling system makes you sweat as you eat or drink a hot item and ultimately lose body heat, whereas consuming colder foods or liquids causes you to produce less sweat, evaporate less, and ultimately retain more body heat. So, by the time you've finished your soup, you're as cool as a cucumber.

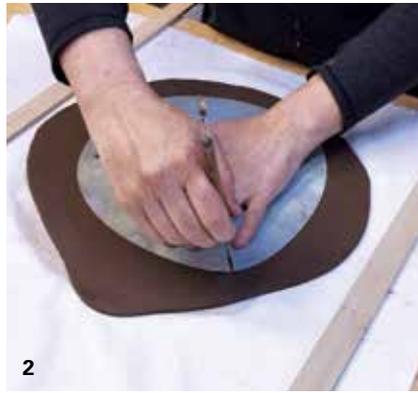
My experiences with food and cooking have influenced my studio work. One cannot dedicate one's life to functional ceramics and not be interested in cooking, serving, sharing, and playfully experimenting with the natural beauty of food. To a functional ceramic artist, food's rich colors and endless combinations of textures and flavors are as complex and enthralling as the process of making ceramics.

In my ceramic work, I pay close attention to the relationships between forms. A functional ceramic piece is rarely alone. It's always surrounded by other forms and these should have a harmony based on a balanced contrast between colors, shapes, and textures. My soup bowl and saucer set is a good example.

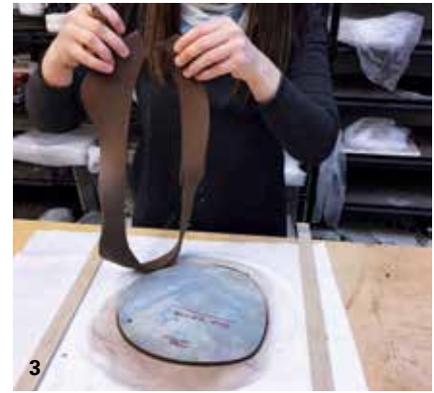




1 Use two wooden slats of the same thickness and a rolling pin to roll out a slab that's no thicker than ¼ inch.



2 Use an old plastic place mat to create a template, then place it on top of the slab and cut out the shape for the saucer.



3 After cutting out the saucer shape, remove the extra clay and transfer it to a piece of drywall.



4 Use a rubber rib to smooth and compress the slab.



5 Use 1 pound of a contrasting clay body to throw a bowl on the potter's wheel.



6 While the bowl is still wet, use your finger to pull and alter the bowl's rim.

The bowl has a saucer companion. The saucer indent is off-centered, which allows space for a piece of toasted and buttered sourdough bread or some crackers to accompany your soup. The bowl is slightly altered by pulling the clay during its plastic stage with a finger in only one spot (or three spots for a triangular shape) to make a resting nook for a spoon.

In my recent work I have been exploring combining and contrasting different clay bodies—not without a lot of challenges. Previous to my current body of work, I had been working exclusively with porcelain. Introducing a dark stoneware to the mix has affected the way I use my tools and organize my studio. It has been important to keep separate sets of tools such as ware boards, fabric for rolling slabs, rolling pins, wedging tables, bats, and a splash pan (just to mention a few). Having a separate set of tools and separate areas for working in porcelain and stoneware is a huge inconvenience; however, having finished pieces that are free of the blemishes associated with light and dark clays contaminating one another makes it worth the effort.

Contrasting Clay Bodies and Glazes

The saucer is handbuilt with the slab construction method and the bowl is made on the potter's wheel. To create contrast

between the bowl and the saucer, I use different colored clay bodies or I use glazes that offer different textures or colors. In figures 1–12, I used a very rich, cone 6 dark stoneware for the saucer, and a cone 6 porcelain for the bowl of one set, and for the sets shown on pages 29 and 32, I used a porcelain clay body with contrasting glazes to show both possibilities.

Handbuilding the Saucer

Start by rolling a slab of your favorite clay body using two slats of wood to gauge the thickness and a sheet of fabric to create an even and consistent slab without having to use a slab roller (1). Start with 1½ pounds of clay to create a slab that's approximately 10×10 inches. The thickness of your slab will be determined by the thickness of the slats, so choose a set no thicker than ¼ inch. If you want to repeat the form multiple times, create a template made of flexible plastic. I create durable templates using my kids' old plastic place mats (whether it's Ninja Turtles or Power Rangers, it doesn't matter!). If your shape is asymmetrical, mark one side as the top in order for multiple finished pieces to line up correctly when stacked. Place the template on top of the slab and cut it using a needle tool when the clay is still soft (2). Remove the extra clay (3), then transfer your



7 Center the bowl on a chuck that is attached to the wheel head. The chuck is important to maintain the altered rim.



8 Smooth the bottom with a rib. Measure the diameter of the bowl's foot to match it to the indent that will be made in the saucer.



9 Once the saucer is leather hard, soften the edges with a sponge on both sides, then slightly taper the edge with a rib.



10 Anchor the leather-hard saucer to the wheel head and trim an indent for the bowl. I trim my indents off center.



11 Test fit the bowl and saucer to make sure the indent in the saucer works for the size of the bowl's foot.



12 Dubhe Carreno's finished bowl and saucer set ready for use. See page 32 for a great soup recipe to eat out of the set.

slab onto a piece of drywall. Smooth and compress it with a soft rubber rib (4), then allow it to dry to a soft leather-hard consistency.

Throwing the Bowl

Using 1 pound of a different clay body (to achieve contrast), throw a simple bowl on the potter's wheel (5). As soon as you finish throwing the bowl, alter the edge of the bowl's rim by pulling any side with one finger (6). You can do this alteration on one spot of the edge or multiple spots to achieve different shapes.

Allow the bowl to dry to a leather-hard consistency. Use any preferred method of trimming to shave the bottom of the bowl. Center the uneven rimmed bowl on a chuck placed on the wheel head and secure it in place (7). I always create what I like to call my "flip-flop trimming look" on these bowls, which is opposite to what I call the "high-heel trimming look." The difference between the two is that the bases of pieces trimmed to my flip-flop look are completely flat, except for a beveled edge (8), whereas pieces trimmed to the high-heel look have an elegant, tall foot that elevates the bottom of the bowl off the table. Measure the diameter of the foot of your bowl to match it to the indented foot well that will be made on the saucer.

Finishing the Saucer

Once your saucer is leather hard, soften the edges with a sponge on both sides, then slightly taper the edge using a rubber rib. Lift the rim of the saucer by wetting your fingers, then lifting and applying a rotating motion (9). You can use a banding wheel to facilitate this process. Allow your saucer to dry to a stiffer leather-hard consistency, anchor it in place on the wheel head with chunks of soft clay, then trim an indented foot well using the potter's wheel. I like to trim the indent off center (10). The diameter of the indent should be slightly larger than the measurement you took of the foot of the bowl. Make sure the bowl fits comfortably on the saucer indent (11), before you take the saucer off the wheel. After trimming, allow the saucer to dry slowly on a drywall board, covered with a sheet of plastic.

Final Steps

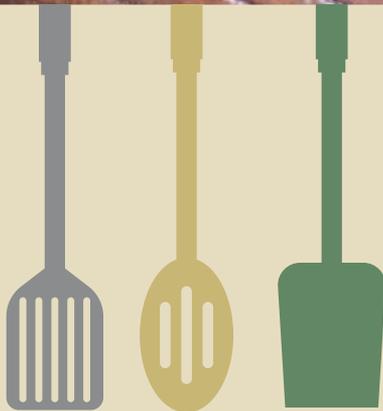
Bisque fire your work and glaze it with contrasting glazes or use a clear glaze if your clay bodies are contrasting in color. Finally, fire your glazed work to its proper maturing temperature (12).

See Dubhe's Parsnip and Cilantro Soup recipe, which is a perfect fill for a completed bowl and saucer set, on page 32.

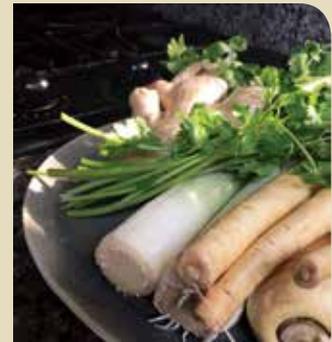


Left: Sedimentary Collection, bowl and saucer set, to 8 in. (20 cm) in length, porcelain, fired to cone 6 oxidation, 2018.

Dubhe Carreño is an artist living in Chicago, Illinois, where she runs her studio, This Quiet Dust. To see more of her work, visit www.thisquietdustceramics.com.



Dubhe's Parsnip & Cilantro Soup



Ingredients

- 2 tablespoons of butter
- 1 medium onion, chopped
- 1 clove of garlic, finely chopped
- ½ cup of fresh cilantro, chopped
- 2 leeks, sliced
- 4 cups of boiling water
- 2 cups of chicken broth
- 1 pound of parsnips, sliced
- 1-inch cube of fresh ginger root
- ½ cup heavy cream
- salt and pepper to taste

This soup has the most fragrant qualities and it almost tastes like flowers. I added ginger root to my recipe, which increases its aromatic properties. Not only is this a delicious soup, but it's also very healthy. It's high in vitamin C and can help boost the health of your eyes. Overall, parsnips are such a mystery to me. They look like pale carrots, but the flavor brings me back to my childhood. This soup tastes just like the Venezuelan apio (not the Colombian apio, which is just celery.) Venezuelan apio looks more like a potato, but tastes just like a parsnip!

Instructions

Melt the butter in a large saucepan over medium heat. Fry the onion and garlic in butter until soft, about 5 minutes. Add the cilantro and leeks, and fry for a couple of minutes to release the flavors and set aside.

In a separate pot, boil the water, add the chicken broth, parsnips, ginger cube, and add the buttery mixture of onions, garlic, cilantro, and leeks to the boiling water.

Simmer for about 15 minutes until parsnips are soft and easy to break with a fork. Remove from the heat, and take out the

cube of ginger root. Blend with a hand mixer or blender. Stir in the cream, and slowly heat it. Do not boil. Season with salt and pepper to taste, and garnish with cilantro leaves.

I am delighted to be able to share not only my process of working with clay, but also my playful approach to food, which celebrates the reason I make functional ceramics. To share, to enjoy, and to enhance the simple things in life—such as the experience of cooking, eating, and recognizing the beauty of the everyday—is what keeps my passion alive.

Buen Provecho!