The Perfect Brunch

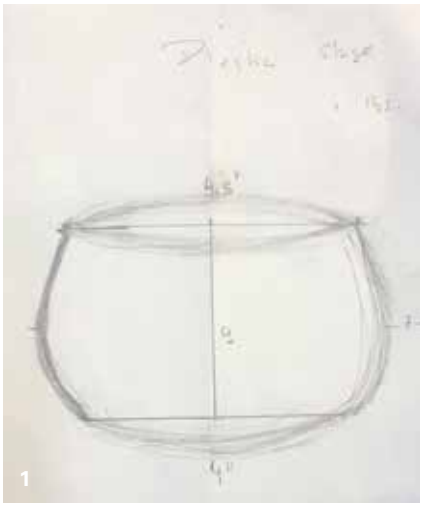
by Dubhe Carreño

I have been intimidated by the idea of baking with ceramics for a long time, which it is kind of silly considering I have no problem firing up a kiln to temperatures over 2000°F. So, 350°F should be a breeze, right? Yes and no. Proper attention should be paid, as fired ceramic can be damaged by thermal shock from drastic changes in temperature. When you use ceramics to bake, don't preheat the oven and then place the vessel or baking dish inside. Instead, preheat the oven and the baking dish together, or as in the recipe shared here, place the ceramic bakeware into a larger pan or container filled with hot water. This will ensure the heat is distributed evenly and gradually.

Making the Ramekins

As a production maker, I sincerely embrace the handmade process, which doesn't adhere to ideals of perfect uniformity found in a factory. However, I like to create pieces that are similar in size and thickness so they are not only aesthetically cohesive, but they also behave similarly throughout the making process. This way I can anticipate issues related to drying, shrinkage, and glaze absorption, as well as how they handle usage in the kitchen after my work in the studio is done.

To create pieces that are similar in size and thickness, I start by creating a two-dimensional sketch of the piece (1). This sketch



1

Draw a sketch of the piece you would like to make with the dimensions and propor-

2

With one pound of clay, make the ramekin and measure the height, the base, opening, and belly of the piece, so they all look as part of a set.

3

Allow the pieces to get to the leatherhard stage.

4

Anchor an already bisque-fired piece to the wheel head with pieces of moist clay

5

Using the moist clay helps protect the lip of the ramekins as you trim them.

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Finished pieces ready to be served with chorizo and eggs.

provides a visual aid and permanent documentation of the weight and dimensions of a particular design in the plastic stage of the process. For the ramekin, I use 1 pound of cone 6 porcelain. I find it helpful to make all parts of a set in one sitting. Meaning if I need 12 ramekins, I wedge that number of 1-pound balls of clay and make them all the same day. This helps to create uniformity.

In order for the ramekins to wishstand baking and general handling in the kitchen, throw them rather thickly. Thicker pieces tend to maintain the heat better than thinner pieces. During the plastic stage, my ramekin is 3 inches in height, 4½ inches in diameter at the opening and about 7½ inches at its widest point. Use a ruler or calipers as you throw to achieve the most uniformity (2). The ramekin could take any shape and size you like to design, so having a two-dimensional sketch is very helpful to create continuity of design (3) as well as more predictable outcome as it relates to technical issues.

Trimming

When the ramekin reaches the leather-hard stage trim them as simply as possible. Even wall thickness is always important for equal heat distribution, so keep this in mind when you throw and trim your ramekin. I find it helpful to center a spare bisque-fired piece on the wheel to use as a chuck (4), so that I can center and place my ramekins inside of it to avoid having to anchor every ramekin I trim (5).

I keep the bottoms of my ramekins completely flat. Any kind of foot can make them catch or sit unevenly on the oven racks when baking (6).

Glazing

I find the glazing process to be one of the most challenging parts of the ceramics process. So much time has been invested in a piece and many calculated, technical, and aesthetic decisions have been made by this point, so ruining it with a glazing mistake is very frustrating. The glazing process is also particularly challenging because there are so many variables—from the density of your glaze batch, to the manner of application, as well as variations in the source of the materials you used to make your glaze

(just to mention a couple things) that can affect your outcome. Rigorous testing, consistency, and note taking are your best ally.

Bisque fire the ramekins when they are bone dry. Wipe the bisqueware clean with a damp sponge before glazing to remove any dust. I like to use a clear food-safe gloss glaze in the interior of the ramekins, so food residue is easy to wash off after every use in the kitchen. If you glaze the pieces one color on the inside and another on the outside, make sure the two glazes you use have the same coefficient of expansion (How did you find a glaze that matches your clay's C.O.E?, which you can only know if you test your glazes before you use them.

Glaze the interior first. Pour clear glaze inside until almost full and immediately pour the excess glaze out in a rotating motion to make sure all of the interior and top lip are coated. Wipe any drips off the exterior but leave the top lip glazed with the clear glaze. Let the interior glaze fully dry. Some clay bodies absorb moisture from the glaze coat within a few minutes, while others can take up to a full day to fully dry. Also, make sure the bottom is glaze free by using wax resist or wiping it clean. Leave an unglazed area on the lower part of the ramekin as well. Test your glazes to determine how much of the side to leave unglazed to account for movement and running during the firing. Glaze the outside with a contrasting glaze by dipping it right-side up in a bucket of glaze, up to the very tip of the rim, then quickly remove. It's very tricky to not allow the exterior glaze to go inside the piece as you dip it to the very top edge, but practice makes perfect.

Fire your ramekins to the clay body's maturing temperature and enjoy the best part of making ceramics… opening the glaze kiln! Don't peek before the temperature is below 200°F (93°C), I know it's tempting!

Dubhe Carreño is originally from Venezuela. She received her MFA from The School of the Art Institute of Chicago, is now a ceramics instructor at Northeastern Illinois University, and founded This Quiet Dust Ceramics in 2013. Dubhe has her home and studio in Northbrook, Illinois. To see more, check out www.thisquietdustceramics.com.

Baked Chorizo and Eggs

Recipe

Ingredients
2 tablespoons olive oil
1 small red onion
3 cloves garlic, minced
1 chopped jalapeno
½ pound? of ground chorizo
2 tablespoons tomato paste
4 cups baby spinach
6 medium eggs
salt and pepper to taste

For Serving:
your favorite salsa
yellow cherry tomatoes
cilantro
cubed avocado
chopped scallions

Preheat oven 350°F (177°C). Lightly grease 4 ramekins with olive oil or butter. In a separate bowl, whip the eggs, adding salt and pepper to taste. Set aside. Heat the olive oil in a large pan over medium-high heat. Sauté onion and garlic for a few minutes, then add the chorizo. Cook for about 8–10 minutes until the chorizo is completely cooked through. Add the tomato paste, stiring until well incorporated. Add a little water as needed to get the paste moving. Remove the pan from the heat and set aside. Add 1 cup of baby spinach to each of the 4 prepared ramekins. Press down and make a nest of spinach leaves. Divide the chorizo mixture among the ramekins on top of the spinach. Top each ramekin with ¼ of the scrambled eggs. Place the ramekins into a large glass baking pan then add enough hot water to the pan to partly submerge the sides of the ramekins. Transfer the baking dish with the ramekins to the middle rack of the oven. The water helps to slowly and evenly heat the ramekins, preventing thermal shock. Bake for 15–25 minutes or until desired consistency.