



Making Mega-Pots

with Mark Hewitt

BY WENDY SUMMERS

To say Mark Hewitt is greatly influenced by folk tradition is an understatement. This potter looks to the folk art of England, Southeast Asia, Western Africa, and America for inspiration because no single tradition can hold his interest.

Hewitt, of Pittsboro, North Carolina, was this year's demonstrator at the annual potter's gathering held at Cedar Lakes Conference Center in Ripley, West Virginia.

In Hewitt's view, clay—the foundation of the work—is not to be taken for granted. Most modern potters opt to use clay that is highly refined—a procedure that also removes much of the organic materials, and with them, a lot of the more vibrant characteristics of clay. Processed clay is much like white bread, which loses much of its nutritional usefulness through refinement. For Hewitt, using local, hand-dug clay enlivens his pots with a strength going beyond form and function right to the very matrix of the material from where the breath begins.

Famous for his monster-sized pots, Hewitt demonstrated three methods for making large pots. He utilized the first method to create his tall umbrella stand jars. Two separate cylinders are thrown and allowed to stiffen. They are then joined with slip. The joint is compressed, worked, and the overall shape is refined with a metal rib.

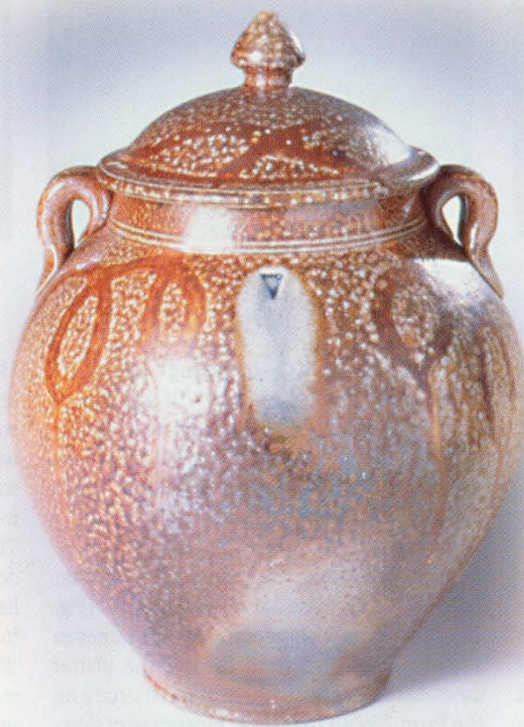
The second method, Hewitt says, is "the easiest way to make tall pots." Begin with an ovoid shape as large as you can throw. Allow that shape to stiffen. Then throw a separate collar on another bat. Slip the rim and place the collar onto the ovoid shape. Cut the collar off the bat. The pot is finished by throwing and shaping the collar. (See sidebar for the third method.)

For Hewitt, a handle must combine ease and comfort of use with visual strength. He pulls a thick strip of clay and attaches it to the pot. He works the lower portion of the handle first, working his way up to where the pot and handle meet. After rounding off the tail, the lower part is attached, the clay is smoothed, and the traditional North Carolina finger dent is impressed onto the clay. Hewitt always orients

the dent sideways (perhaps referencing his place within that tradition). He suggests putting a few drops of water inside the wall opposite the handle or knob to help even out the moisture content of the clay and to lessen the potential of cracking.

"The whole of throwing is really centering," Hewitt notes. "The secret to throwing thinner is a faster wheel, stiffer clay, and a stiff rib." Hewitt's utilitarian wares are affectionately known as "floaters." They are light pots that float away. His pots really do!

Decorating is a carefree process. Bands, swirls, swags, and dots of slip are applied in a lighthearted manner. Blue glass is impressed into the clay and left to run down the side of the pot in the fire. Hewitt's pots are once fired in a groundhog-style kiln that holds about 1,200 pieces, and takes about a week to load. Preheating is a two-day process that allows him to clean up and rest. Hewitt brings the front of the kiln up to cone 10 on the third day. Salting is done once the entire kiln has reached temperature.



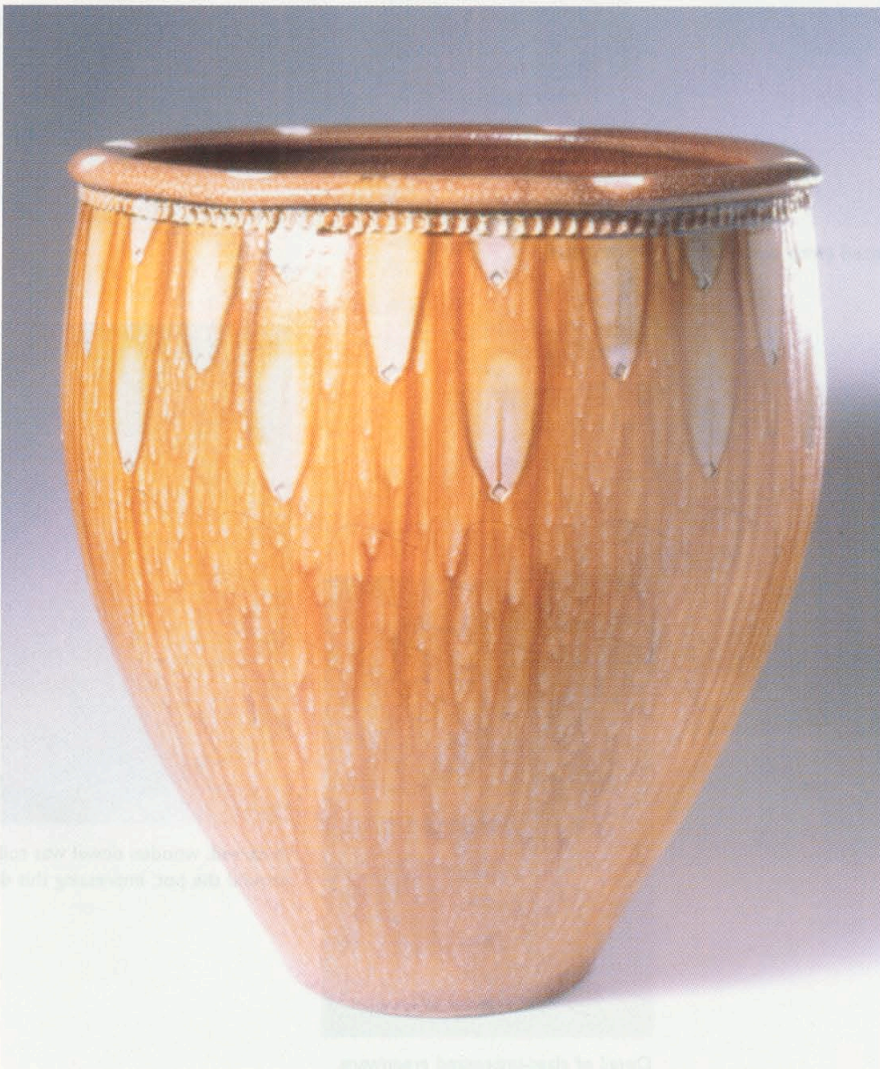
Covered Jar. 14" x 9". Salt glazed with blue glass and kaolin slip swags; wood fired.

Hewitt is a candid presenter who is generous with his knowledge and experience. Undaunted by the chaos surrounding the typical workshop atmosphere, he demonstrates his technique with ease and confidence. "North Carolina potters are straightforward and unpretentious," Hewitt remarked. The same can be said of him.



Above: Detail, *Very Large Umbrella Pot* (full-size photo appears on cover). 28" x 14". Wood fired and salt glazed; ash glaze with glass runs.

Upper left: *Iced Tea Ceremony Vessel*. 8" tall. Salt glaze with kaolin slip, serpentine line, and blue glass run.



Lower left: *Large Planter*. 30" x 24". Wood fired and salt glazed; ash glaze with glass runs.

Mark Hewitt's Clay Body

cone 10 reduction/wood fire

Hawthorne Bonding Clay	15.0%
Foundry Hill Cream Clay	20.0
Local Clay #1	10.0
Local Clay #2	40.0
Potash Feldspar	7.5
Grog	<u>7.5</u>
TOTAL	100.0%

Mark Hewitt's Dark Slip

cone 10 reduction/wood fire

Potash Feldspar	25.0%
Local Red Clay	<u>75.0</u>
TOTAL	100.0%



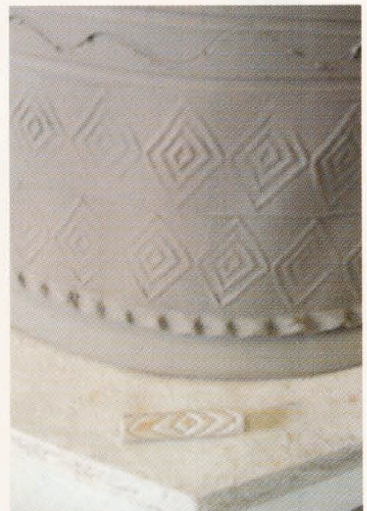
Iced Tea Ceremony Vessels. 8" tall. All wood fired and salt glazed (with various slips and ash glazes).



Pots in progress.



Detail of glass-impressed greenware.



A carved, wooden dowel was rolled around the pot, impressing this design.



Close-up view of fired glass decoration.

How to Make a Monster Pot

Mark Hewitt is well-known for his very large "monster pots." The making of these pots has been influenced by his travels in Southeast Asia and Western Africa. In his studio, Hewitt generally works on 40 monster pots at a time.

Step 1: He wedges extra grog into the clay. Then, beginning with about 30 lbs. of clay, the bottom section is shaped into a wide bowl-like form. After the bottom section has stiffened, he slips the edge and adds a thick coil of clay that is slightly smaller than the circumference of the pot. As it is joined with the base, the coil is stretched and the seam is sealed, both inside and out. To help prevent sagging, Hewitt puts four wads of clay at the base of the pot to buttress the base while he is working.

Step 2: The inside and outside are smoothed with the edge of his knuckle.

Step 3: With the left hand supporting the clay from the inside, the heel of the right hand compresses and works the clay upward, thinning and flattening the coil.

Step 4: A flexible rib is used to smooth the inside, outside, and top edge.

Step 5: With the wheel rotating, the coil is dampened and thrown. The ragged rim is wired off and the clay is once again left to set up. Before the next coil is put on, a wooden paddle and anvil are used to further compress the joint. It is once again smoothed with a stiff rib. The next coil is then added, and the process continues until the desired size and shape is achieved. Hewitt stresses that keeping the pot true and centered is the most important key to throwing larger forms.

Step 6: The very large (30") planter is finished and decorated. It contains three sections total. 📐



Hewitt assembles an umbrella pot by joining two pots together.



Hewitt enlarges the form by compressing and working the clay upward, as described in Step 3 at left.