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Pincus' 12-Step Process

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Many, Few, and Far Between, 2015, colored porcelain, 18 x 33 x 5 in.

[Peter Pincus](#)

After years of experimentation, [Peter Pincus](#) has devised the following recipe for patterned porcelain vessels. Essentially, it's as if he brushes layers and layers of

paint on a canvas, and when the paint is dry, peels away the canvas, leaving a freestanding painting.

He offers these instructions freely – but with a warning: Each step (based on a typical urn) entails a plethora of substages, tools, and materials. “Every stage is tedious and laborious and long,” Pincus says. “It’s a beast.” And not a lucrative beast, either, as you can see by the time required (and the perhour profit, revealed at the end).

1. Templating / 3 hours

Sketch vessel shapes until the perfect “icon” emerges. Translate the form into separate segments (for example, foot, body, and finial). Examine, tweak, and convert into cardboard cutouts.

2. Moldmaking / 30-50 hours

Begin by throwing a stoneware vessel on the wheel, pausing often to measure the form against the cardboard template. Put a collar of aluminum flashing around the clay piece, sealing it to the wheel with a thick gusset of plaster. Mix up more plaster, and pour it into the void as the wheel spins.

When the plaster is hardened, peel the stoneware clay out of the new mold and smooth its interior. Mark angled cuts, then slice the mold into pieces with a band saw, discarding portions to create a narrower, enhanced form. Smooth the remaining plaster pieces against a block of sandblasted glass until they fit perfectly together. Cast top and bottom plates out of plaster to finish the mold. Repeat for the other segments.

3. Drying / 1 to 3 days

To ensure the mold pieces are dry so they can absorb moisture from the slip,

arrange on a table between blasting fans.

4. Color work / 10 hours

Prepare the color palette by mixing powdered mason's stains with porcelain slip. Take a piece of the mold, and pour or brush on the first color.

When the slip has dried to the texture of skin, scrape off the excess from the sides and back of the mold section. Using an X-Acto knife, cut through the slip to designate the color's edge. Peel off the excess slip, sponge the mold surface, and apply the next color. Repeat until you have the desired layers and patterns.

When the colored slip is all dry, fit the mold sections together and secure them with straps. Fill the mold with more porcelain slip, and let it sit for 20 minutes, so the plaster absorbs moisture and a layer of porcelain fuses to the skin of tinted slip.

Pour out that final slip, and let what remains dry. Unband the mold, and carefully remove it for future use. Trim and smooth the form.

5. Bisque firing / 16 hours

Fire the forms at 1,888° F.

6. Wet sanding / 3 hours

When the pieces are cool, smooth any rough spots with wet sandpaper.

7. Glazing / 30 minutes

Apply a coat of clear glaze to the interiors (and any exterior surfaces that will have luster).

8. Firing / 9 hours

Fire the pieces again, this time at 2,250 degrees F.

9. Lustering / 4 hours

When the pieces are cool, brush the designated sections with syrup-like gold glaze. Fire them – one last time – at approximately 1,300 degrees.

10. Sanding / 30 minutes

Smooth any rough surfaces using wet sandpaper.

11. Gluing / 2 hours

Fasten the urn's segments together with marine-grade epoxy. After the glue cures for a day, sand the junctures, tape them off, and rub in a coat of tinted epoxy – as if applying caulk – to ease the transition between the glued parts.

12. Finishing / 1 to 2 hours

Once again, sand and sand.

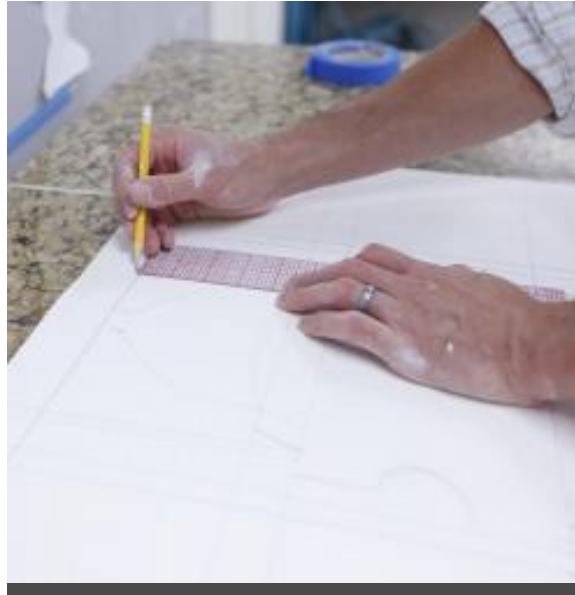
Pincus figures that – after accounting for expenses, from materials and employee salaries to shipping and gallery commissions – he earns between \$15 and \$20 an hour. Asked why he doesn't patent his process, he replies, "You would have to be crazy to choose to do this for a living."

Image Gallery

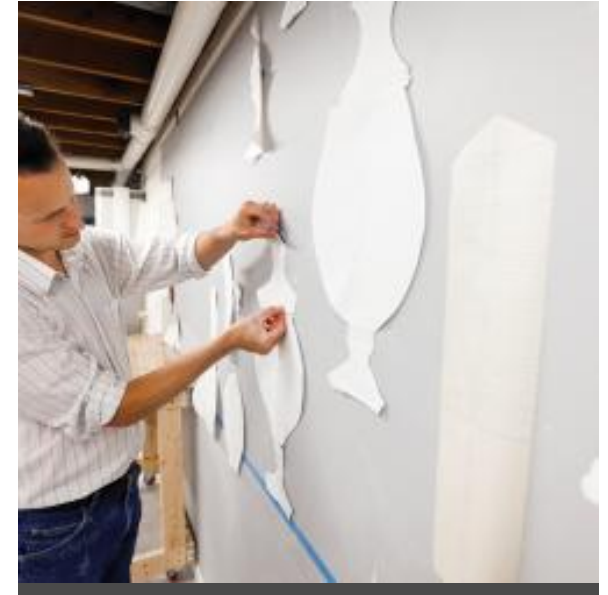


Many, Few, and Far Between, 2015, colored porcelain, 18 x 33 x 5 in.

Peter Pincus



Before he touches clay, Pincus spends a lot of time developing and tweaking the vessel form.



Before Pincus starts constructing an urn, he homes in on its form. He develops (and ultimately constructs) it in parts, segmented along horizontal lines. Photo: Matt Wittmeyer



Here, Peter has already thrown stoneware, cast it in plaster to create a mold, and has cut the mold apart with a bandsaw. Now, he is applying the first color of tinted porcelain slip to a piece of the mold.



*Pincus applies the first color of porcelain slip (liquefied clay) to a piece of his plaster mold. (He must repeat this whole color application process for each mold piece, before banding them together and casting the object.)
Photo: Matt Wittmeyer*



Two quadrants of the mold are set aside as the slip dries to a skin-like consistency.



Now that the slip is dry, Pincus is slicing through it with a knife, to create a clearly defined edge for the color.



Pincus has cut through the gray slip and is peeling away the excess. What's left is a neatly defined edge, ready for the next color. Photo: Matt Wittmeyer



Pincus has added a second color of slip. The ridge where the first color of slip ends is faintly visible underneath the blue.



After applying the next tinted slip – this one a powder blue – Pincus cuts its edge. Faintly visible in the wash of blue is the ridge where the gray slip ends. Photo: Matt Wittmeyer



The slip-casting is finished, and Pincus cleans up the edges of the vessel to prepare for unmolding.

After a few more applications, Pincus pulls the slip, almost like a skin, away from the mold to give us a peek. If this were a real piece, he'd leave it in place, getting his first look only after casting is complete. Photo: Matt Wittmeyer



After the color work is done, Pincus bands together the mold, fills it with untinted slip, lets some fuse to the tinted slip skin, and pours out the rest. Here, he gently pulls the mold off a completed vessel. Photo: Matt Wittmeyer

Once all of the color work is done, Pincus bands together the mold, securing it with straps (shown here), and slip-casts the vessel.



One segment of the mold is removed. All of the crisply cut lines and different colors of slip are now visible.



This vessel is out of the mold, but it still has a long way to go. Pincus will repeatedly sand it and smooth it, fire it (at least twice), and apply glaze and perhaps luster before it is done.



The interior layer of untinted slip thickens the walls of the pot.
Photo: Matt Wittmeyer



Some vessels await their first firing, as Pincus works on more.



Fired vessels with their brilliant, embedded color.

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