

## Japanese Tea Bowl Project

### Goals Checklist:

1. \_\_\_ Inside is at least 3" (7.5cm) across at the rim and holds one cup. Walls are less than 1/4" (6mm) thick.
2. \_\_\_ Rim is smooth, not square and sharp-edged, and feels good against lips.
3. \_\_\_ Cup is balanced; has pedestal foot that holds it steady and is around 1/3 as wide as the cup.
4. \_\_\_ Has no carved-in lines, especially inside or on/right below rim.

### Directions using the pinch method:

Cup your hands. The inside of your cup at the top should be about this dimension; the cup should seem a little large in your hands when you make it. (The cup will shrink 11-15% as it dries and is fired.)

Wedge out one to two pounds of moist clay and form it into a ball. Stick your thumb about two-thirds of the way through the clay ball (leave 1/2 inch or so of thickness at the bottom), then begin pinching the hole wider between your thumb and fingers, rotating the ball in your hand constantly and evenly as you work. **Do not set your bowl on the table as you work on it, or work on one spot at a time**, or you will end up with a lumpy uneven ashtray (that I will not fire). As you pinch, also stroke the clay upward with your fingers to make the form deeper, or sideways to make it wider. Leave the rim alone and a little thick for now.

Work steadily and evenly, concentrating on getting the inside smooth and the size and shape that you want it (remember, it will shrink). Leave the walls a little thick. Do not worry about what the outside looks like yet. Many Oriental potters believe one finds the soul in the inside of a tea bowl, while the outside is mainly cosmetic. A little depression in the bottom, made by the fingers or carved away later, will collect the last residue of tea and be reminiscent of small pools found in the woods.

The heat of your hands will dry the clay as you work. If the clay begins to crack, hold it upside down and dip it at an angle into a container of water so that water gets on the inside as well as the outside. Pull the cup out of the water immediately and continue to hold it upside down, shaking any drops off the rim. **Wait** until the clay absorbs the water and goes from being glossy wet to a matte surface again before returning to work, or you will just make your piece a mess. If the clay is once again good to work with, smooth and compress out the cracks and continue; if not, repeat the dipping process.



After you get the inside right, let your cup get soft leather hard. When it is ready, if your rim has any waviness or unevenness that you want to remove, set your cup on a banding wheel so that it does not look tilted when you look straight down into it. Spin the banding wheel and mark a level line at the lowest point of the rim using a needle tool, then cut the rim level along the line. Next flip the bowl over on the banding wheel, center it, and in the same way level the foot of the cup. If there is not enough clay thickness to carve a foot out of, score and slip on a small doughnut of clay, making sure to do a good job of blending the join into the cup body. Remember to re-moisten the bowl if it is drier than the foot ring.

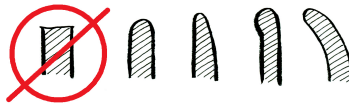
When the rim and foot are level and the bowl is soft leather hard, begin carving away excess clay from the outside.

### Carving tips:

- If clay is sticking to the carving tool, the clay is too wet to carve well.
- If you want to smooth a bumpy surface, carve away the high points first by carving them lengthwise. If you drag your cutting tool over the bumpy surface, it will be like driving down a bumpy dirt road: your tool will get bounced up and down and not really smooth the surface out.
- Use a Surform plane to remove large amounts of material. If you use a plane to carve/smooth your piece, realize it only cuts in one direction, either pushing or pulling depending upon how you hold it.
- Use a loop or ribbon tool to refine the surface. Scrape along the surface at a shallow angle to smooth. Use care when cutting at a steeper angle, as these tools can really dig in.
- Always cut toward yourself when using loop/ribbon tools.
- Always have a hand inside the piece supporting the wall from behind as you carve.
- Hold the piece in a comfortable position as you work – on your leg or in your lap for example.

Make the walls an even thickness of less than 1/4 inch (6mm). Let some toolmarks and the making process show if you desire. A nick or ding can even add to the rustic and natural feel. Make the texture suggestive of natural things – wind, water, stone, bark, and so on.

Carve the foot into a ring – you can center the bowl upside down on a banding wheel and draw an inside and outside ring line to guide you, or carve as you turn the wheel. **The foot should look like it grows out of the cup, rather than looking like a poorly attached smashed coil of clay.**



**The cup rim or “lip” is the finishing touch. Make sure the lip is smooth and has rounded edges, not sharp or square edges. Do not cut the edge level and then just leave it – the cup will look ugly, unfinished, and be uncomfortable to use. Seriously: toilet bowls have better rims. You’re going to be putting this to your lips.**

#### Types of teabowls:

- Yuonomi – used for everyday tea drinking. Often made in pairs, for male and female, with the male bowl slightly larger than the female. Usually taller than they are wide, somewhat barrel shaped, and have a deeply cut foot. (Source: Robin Hopper, Functional Pottery.)
- Chawan – bowls for Japanese tea ceremony:
  - A & B - Summer tea bowl – shallower, more open form.
  - C & D - Winter tea bowl – deeper and more closed form.

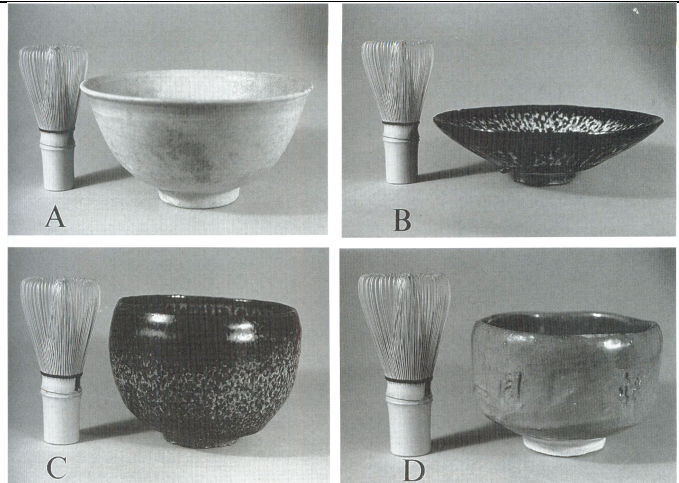


Fig. 11.3 Bowls for the Japanese tea ceremony, Cha-no-yu: A. Korean summer bowl; B. Japanese summer bowl; C. Japanese winter bowl; D. Japanese red raku winter bowl.

#### Wabi-sabi Aesthetic:

**Wabi-sabi is a beauty of things imperfect, impermanent, and incomplete. It is the beauty of things modest and humble. It is the beauty of things unconventional.**

Nothing lasts.  
Nothing is perfect.  
Nothing is finished.

All things are impermanent.  
All things are imperfect.  
All things are incomplete.

#### Wabi

Objects with wabi:

- Show suggestions of natural process
  - earthly elegance
  - understated elegance
  - rustic simplicity
- Are irregular
  - intimate
  - unpretentious
- earthy
- Relate to the natural world
  - An object with wabi seems to be growing from or decaying back into nature.
  - It is artistically quiet, not harsh or jarring.
  - It is peaceful and unimposing.
  - It is subtle: the longer you contemplate the object, the more nuances you will discover.

**Sabi** – etymological connection to Japanese word sabi, to rust.

Sabi is the beauty or serenity that comes from age or history.

Sabi can be an irregularity or flaw such as a chip, crack or discoloration caused by age or use.

Objects with sabi are evocative of:

- serenity
- melancholy
- loneliness