

## The Process

by Hilda Merom

Saggar firing provides many ways to utilize different materials, and is wide open to individual interpretation according to the potter's personality. Here is my technique.

Decisions as to clay, organic matter, minerals in use, etc., are made according to the desired result for each piece. If I'm looking for a rough surface, I mix my stoneware with olive pulp, peat moss and sawdust. While working on the wheel, I apply slip mixed with more of the same or with sand, coffee grounds or seaweed, separately or together, working them into the surface of the pot. On a flat surface, I apply those materials freely, but always conscious of the chemical reactions of the various materials. For example, the salt contained in the seaweed acts as a flux on the calcium from eggshells or seashells, resulting in bright areas on the piece.

The main oxide I use is copper carbonate, which I apply in different ways. Sometimes, before I use some of the organic matter mentioned above, I soak the pieces in a solution of copper carbonate. Other times, I sprinkle the work with dry oxide.

When the piece is bone dry, I once again encircle it with more organic matter for color reaction, and sometimes I add pieces of wire and metal. I wrap my work in aluminum foil so that the added materials can stay attached to the work during firing (see Figure 1).

## Firing

I prefer to single fire most of my pieces to 2100°F (1150°C, about Cone 1) in a reduction atmosphere in a gas kiln. The works are placed in a large saggar I build inside the kiln from soft bricks, leaving some spaces between the bricks to help in creating a reduction atmosphere (see Figure 2).

Pieces are placed one on top of the other, with vermiculite between them to prevent breakage while the organic matter burns away. I found that the vermiculite absorbs organic matter and in this way it is most helpful to the reduction.

I start with a heavy reduction at Cone 06 for twenty minutes, moving to a low reduction until the end of the firing. I found that results are more dramatic with a very slow firing.

**WARNING:** Free ash accumulates in the kiln, especially on the vermiculite, which can be used repeatedly. Always wear a mask while loading or unloading.

## Finishing

I wash the work with running water and scrub it well to reveal the beautiful colors. I then dip it into a solution of household wax (Johnson's), which I dilute 10:1 with water.



Figure 1. Merom wraps her pieces in aluminum foil to hold organic materials against the pot's surface during firing.

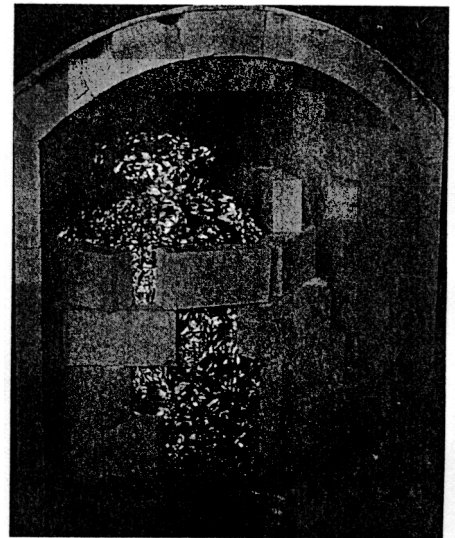


Figure 2. Work is stacked in a softbrick saggar where layers of reusable vermiculite provide support.



Figure 3. After firing, care is taken to avoid breathing ash deposits.

*Hilda Merom works as a potter in her home in Kfar Veradim (Rose Village), a village hidden in the green hills of Galilee in Israel.*