

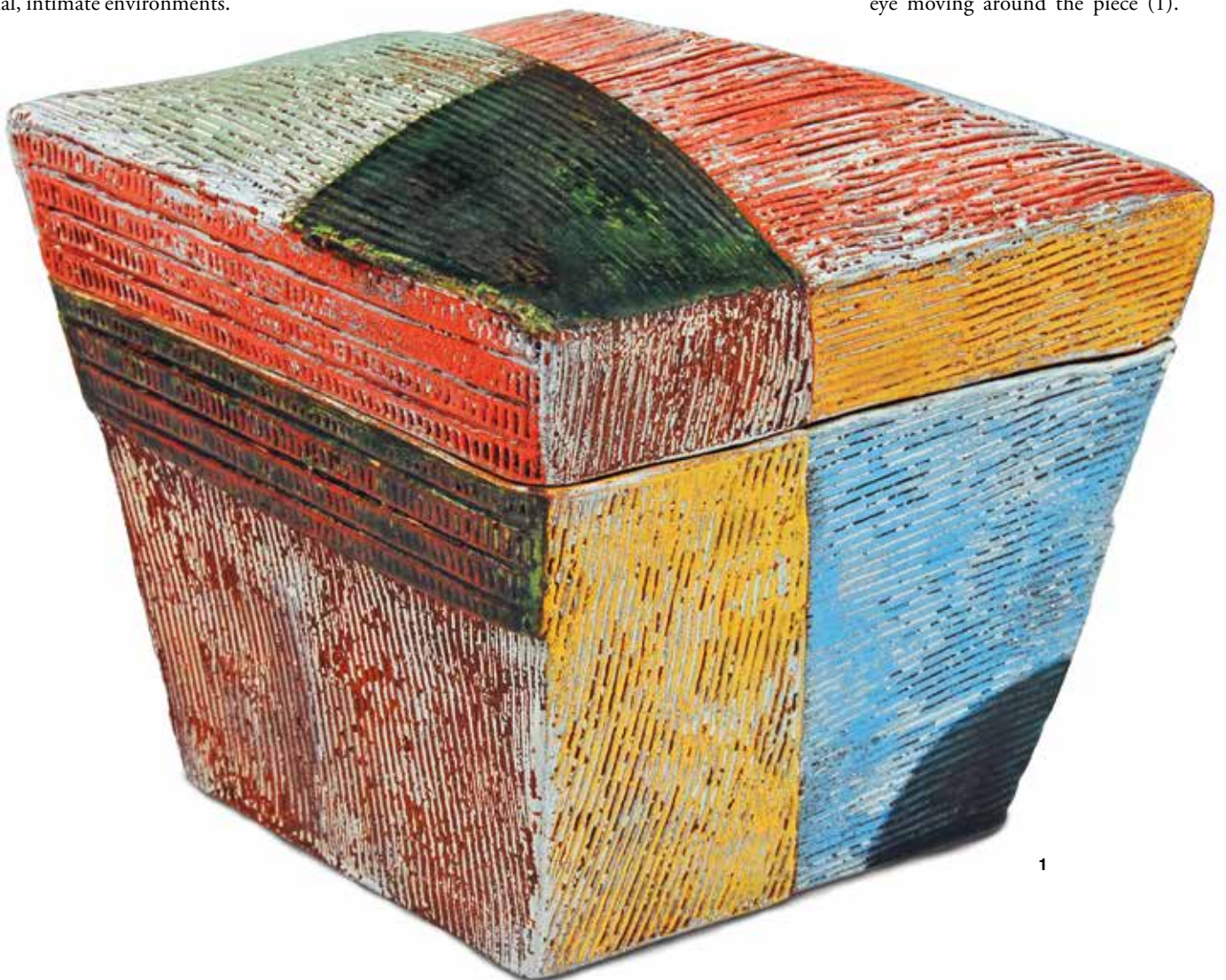
— AESTHETIC IN — ARCHITECTURE

by Andrew Avakian

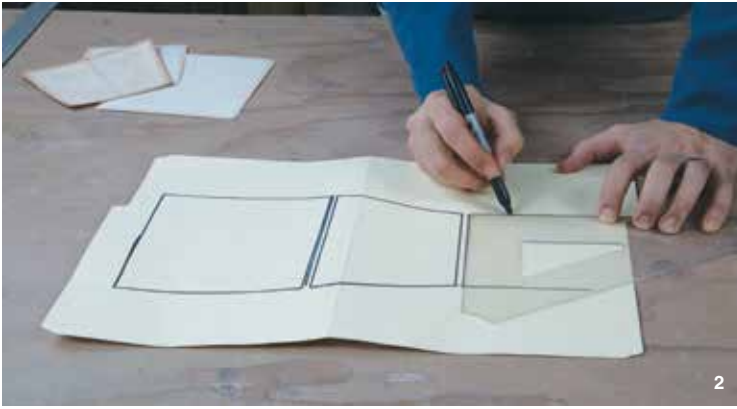
My pots are made from parts that I cut from leather-hard slabs using templates. I started using templates as a way to teach myself how to create new forms out of slabs. I draw the form on tag board or manila folders, cut it out, and assemble the pieces to create a maquette. If (or when!) the template pieces don't fit together the way I thought they would, I make adjustments by trimming one or more of the templates or drawing new pieces to create the desired shape.

My handbuilt terra-cotta vessels bring the richness of public architectural forms into homes and individual, intimate environments.

Architecture, historical ceramics, painting, and color theory are some current ideas driving my work. Many of my vessels result from studying the proportions of historical ceramic works, like a German beer stein or Ming Dynasty vase. Through exploration of the form and numerous series, the result is a unique work often very different from the original vessel. Other works allude to the shape of a building or its architectural components such as arches and windows. I approach the surfaces of my work like three-dimensional paintings. Pattern, color, and geometric abstraction all work to accentuate the form and keep the viewer's eye moving around the piece (1).



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1 Box, 6 in. (15 cm) in height, terra cotta, terra sigillata, underglaze, glaze, fired to cone 04 in oxidation, sandblasted, 2016. 2 Measure and cut thick paper templates. 3 Lightly press the template's edges into the slab. 4 After the templates are marked on the slab, cut out the parts of the box. 5 Score the edges of each cut piece. 6 Add slip to the scored edges, then begin to assemble the box. 7 Use a serrated rib, and press the joints together so they are secure.

Underglaze colors, terra sigillata, glazes, and sandblasting combine to add depth and a sense of passing time, age, and experience.

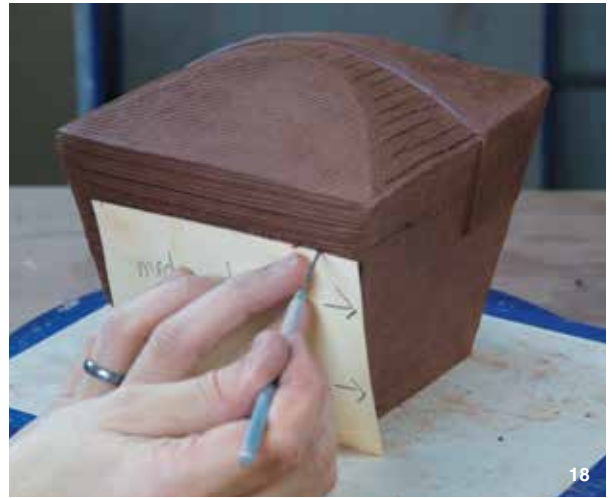
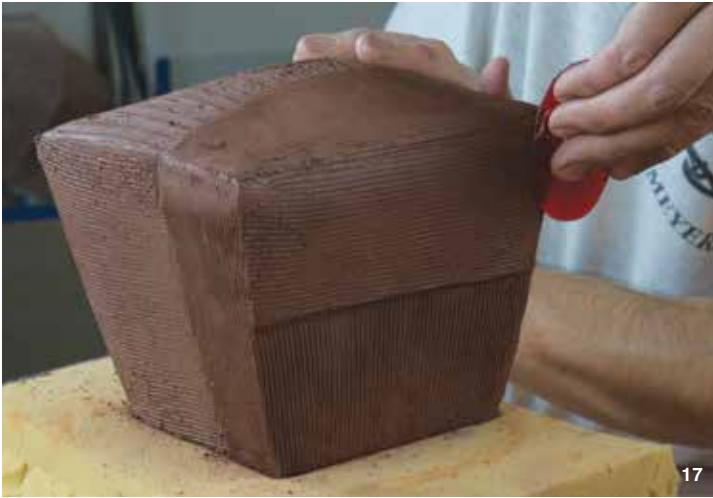
The Process: Slab Prep

The template for a box is relatively simple because the sides have no curvature. I like to make the top of the box larger than the bottom so that the sides gently slope downward at a slight angle. I start

by deciding the proportions (H × W × D) of the top and bottom of the box and draw the template for the sides to match (2). I roll out a slab and allow it to set up flat on a large ware board made from drywall until leather hard. When I plan to carve the surfaces of the box, I use a slab that is $\frac{3}{8}$ – $\frac{1}{2}$ inch thick. For plain-surfaced boxes I use a slab that is $\frac{1}{4}$ inch thick. I transfer the impressions of the templates on to the slab by tracing over the template edges



8 With the main form of the box created, begin to shape the lid. **9** After the lid has slumped slightly in the box and firmed up enough to hold its shape, flip it over and attach it to the box form. **10** To retain a smooth connection between the lid and the box form, add a coil to the seam. **11** Blend the coil into the box. **12** Mark the box in preparation for the final surface design. **13** Next, begin carving the box using a Surform. **14** After carving, refine the edges of the carved areas. **15** Continue to refine and texture the box form. **16** Finally, incise lines and textures across sections of the box's surface.



17 With the carvings and textures added to the box, you will next need to smooth the box's surface. **18** Now that the surface of the box has been created, trace a line for the lid with a template. **19** Take the newly separated lid off of the box and add a coil to the joint inside the lid. **20** Once the box is bone dry, paint underglazes onto the surface. **21** After the underglazes are applied to the surface, brush black terra sigillata over the exterior surface.

with my finger (3), then I use a sharp knife to cut out the pieces, beveling the sides inward at approximately 45° (4). Finally, I smooth the interior surfaces of the slabs with a rib to remove the canvas texture and score the joint ends (5).

Assembling the Form

I assemble the slabs to form the bottom and sides of the box using slip (6), and rib the joints together on the outside of the box using a serrated rib (7). Next, I add coils to the joints on the inside of the box and smooth the coils using my finger and water. I place

the slab that will become the lid onto the walls of the box and rib it into the form, smoothing and rounding it to create a domed lid (8). I allow the lid to set up, wrapped in plastic, overnight or until it holds its convex shape when flipped over (see 9).

Next, I take the lid off the box, lay it on a piece of foam, and score the edges. I flip the lid over and attach it to the top of the walls (9) with slip and rib the sides of the lid to round them into the body of the box. If needed, I add a coil to fill in any gaps between the lid and sides (10). I blend the coil into the surface, then texture the entire surface with a serrated rib (11).



22 Apply a white terra sigillata over the black terra sigillata. **23** Slowly dry, then bisque-fire the box. **24** Sandblast the exterior of the box to muddle the surface and reveal a bit of the color under the terra sigillata. **25** Finally, apply glazes to the exterior of the box before firing it to cone 04.

Designing and Carving the Surface

I let the box set up until it can be carved and textured without altering or warping its shape. After deciding what textures and designs to carve into the box, I use simple items like a flexible ruler or a straight piece of tag board to draw the lines on the box (12). I usually start the idea for my design on the top of the box and continue the lines down into the body of the form, creating lines that will draw the viewer's eye around the form.

I rasp away the excess clay to carve the shape of the design into the form (13), and sharpen the edges of the shapes using a serrated rib or a stiff serrated sculpting tool (14). I like to remove the texture from the rasp with a serrated rib (15), giving the box an overall texture, then add additional textures and directional lines with a fork (16). Lastly, I brush away the small bits of clay created by the serrated rib and smooth the box with a soft rubber rib (17).

Cutting the Lid

Now I can decide on the size of the lid and make a template out of tag board to help draw a straight line around the box. I use a sharp knife to make a 45° incision into the box along the line. Using a banding wheel, and keeping the angle of the knife consistent, I

follow the line until the top is separated from the bottom (18). I flip the lid upside down onto a piece of foam, and roll out a coil to finish the joint inside the lid (19). Next, I use a serrated tool to refine the newly cut edges of the lid and box. I use newspaper to keep the lid and box from sticking together and leave the lid on the box until bone dry.

Adding Color

I apply the underglazes after the piece is bone dry. Laying out a pattern with blocks of color that correspond to the carving on the box (20), I create a visual rhythm that draws the viewer's eye around the form. When deciding on a color scheme, I like to have a combination of complementary and contrasting colors. I also consider how the colors interact and how the same color can appear to change when placed beside other colors of varying values.

Once the surface is dry, I apply six coats of terra sigillata—first three coats of black terra sigillata (21), then three coats of white terra sigillata to completely cover the underglazes (22).

After I bisque the piece to cone 04 (23), I sandblast the piece to remove most of the terra sigillata. This reveals the underglazes and leaves the terra sigillatas inlaid in the textures around the surface of the piece (24).



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26 Vase, 7 in. (18 cm) in height, terra cotta, terra sigillata, underglaze, sandblasted, glaze, fired to cone 04 in oxidation, 2016. **27** Box, 6 in. (15 cm) in height, terra cotta, terra sigillata, underglaze, sandblasted, glaze, fired to cone 04 in oxidation, 2016. **28** Vase, 14 in. (36 cm) in height, terra cotta, terra sigillata, underglaze, sandblasted, glaze, fired to cone 04 in oxidation, 2016.

I wash the piece thoroughly with a bucket of clean water and a sponge and allow it to dry overnight. I then apply glazes much in the same way as the underglazes, creating another layer of pattern that either compliments or contrasts the existing pattern on the piece (25). To finish, I fire the work to cone 04 in oxidation.

The different surface treatments mimic the aesthetic in architecture that employs various materials for contrast and visual effect. The layering of underglazes, terra sigillatas, and glazes, along with the use of the sand blaster, make possible the varied and complex surfaces on my vessels.

the author *Andrew Avakian received his BFA in ceramics from Western Carolina University. He has been a resident artist at the Cub Creek Foundation, Odyssey ClayWorks, and studied for two years as a post baccalaureate at the University of Florida. He exhibits his work nationally and is currently a resident artist at the Clay Studio of Missoula.*