

layers of depth



Ceramics Monthly: How do you combine soda firing, mark making, and glaze accents to create the surfaces on your functional vessels?

Samantha Hostert: A mug across the room catches my eye. I pick it up and it nestles perfectly in my hand. I bring it closer, noticing more detail. Layers of depth reveal themselves before my eyes. I turn it in my hand and the soda-fired surface changes, telling me an intricate story. I want to sip coffee out of it while taking a quiet moment to reflect or talking to a friend. There is nothing more exciting to me than this feeling of joy and intimacy surrounding a pot.

I begin the story on the surfaces of my vessels by creating tension between precise, orderly lines and the chaos of the marks made by the atmosphere of the soda kiln. I meticulously create lines on my pots with an X-Acto knife when the pot is leather hard, only to have them blur, bleed, and sometimes wash away in the firing. After the bisque firing, I paint over the lines with Jet Black Amaco underglaze then sponge it off, leaving inlaid lines. When the soda hits these areas lightly during firing, it leaves a precise line drawing that flashes from one color to another. When the soda hits harder, it causes the black underglaze to bleed and run, like a watercolor painting. And sometimes the soda strikes so intensely that it nearly washes the lines away, drawing you in close to see the remains, like looking for detail through a rainstorm.

I further enhance depth using terra sigillata to create another layer between the glaze and the clay. I apply three layers of

terra sigillata when the pot is bone dry and buff it with my finger when the last layer has almost dried. The refined, thin nature of terra sigillata causes it to sit flush with the surface of the clay, creating visual contrast without physical depth.

The final stage of applied glaze contrasts the surface both in texture and color, creating bold characters in the story. When outlining the glazed areas, I also consider the negative space, where the soda can leave its mark uninterrupted. I draw rectangles that I envision as parents and children, friends leaning on each other, or tree lines and reeds in the sunset. I fill the shapes with an oribe glaze to produce a range of colorful results, from turquoise to deep red, depending on how soda hits the pot during the firing. I glaze the inside of pieces with a quiet and consistent shino, letting the outside of the pot shine in contrast.

CM: What choices do you make when designing and making vessel forms related to the function, firing, and surface?

SH: My surface design is balanced by my elegant yet extremely functional forms, embracing the simple cylinder to create a seamless, complementary canvas. I taper the cylinder at the top so that it hugs in the beverage. I arch the sides to be slightly convex, so the form feels like it has just inhaled and is full of life, ready to provide nourishment. My work has continued to evolve to draw people more deeply into the pot, contemplating the visual story played out on the surface. My hope is to inspire others to slow down, reflect, and have a conversation—with the pot, a friend, or themselves. *Photo: Nick Hostert.*