

# Tassajara Studio Guidelines

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## Basic Rules

### Studio Hours

The studio is only open during official class times. Currently class times are Mondays from 12 noon to 3 PM, and from 7 to 9:30, and Wednesdays from 7 to 9:30. This is subject to change.

### Keep It Clean

Every student is expected to leave the studio in a *clean as you found it* condition (or a little better). The studio should be ready for the next group that uses the facility. That means cleaning up all the items and areas you've used that day including tools, boards, table surfaces, equipment, wedging surfaces, etc. The janitorial staff only cleans the floors, empties the trash cans, and maintains the restrooms—we do the rest!

### Labeling and Storing Work

Please keep all ongoing work moving along in a timely manner:

- Store work in the correct place (ask your instructor for specifics).
- Label all work by scratching or marking your name and date on the bottom.
- Unlabelled work will be thrown out by instructors. Pieces that have been left for longer than three months are cleared from the shelf space and discarded.

### Glazing and Decorating

The glazing or decorating process requires specific care, and those parts of the studio have more stringent rules. Thus, no student should work with any glazes until they have been cleared by their instructor on the use and handling of glazing materials and equipment.

### Be Considerate

Please be respectful and considerate of others around you when in the studio. Space is limited, storage is at a premium, and many people use the studio communally. Therefore, we are very much a shared space. Choose a work space and try to keep your tools and projects together.

The wedging area and slap roller are not work stations. So, please move away when you are finished so others can use them. And please, clean up your tools and surfaces at you move through the studio (don't leave a trail of tools or clay).

The instructors help to guide your work through the long process of making pieces, drying and firing them, and then decorating and refiring them again so your work is finished and ready to take home. Firing happens on an organic schedule—sometimes faster, sometimes more slowly.

### Production Pottery Is Not Permitted

A moderate amount of work can be accommodated in our two electric kilns. The studio is not equipped for those doing production type work or those hoping to use Tassajara facilities as a kiln firing center.

### Do Not Handle Other Student's Work

This is how accidents happen. Ask the instructor or the owner if something needs to be moved.

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## Detailed Guidelines

The City of El Cerrito Tassajara Pottery Studio is a recreational community studio available to both city residents and non-residents. Participation in the studio comes with the expectation that every student will respect and comply with these guidelines. Please read these guidelines. If you have any questions about them, please feel free to discuss them with the instructors.

### Registration

Registration for each pottery session must be completed and paid for online at least a few hours before the session begins.

### Studio Work Areas and Flow

In order to improve the use of physical space for everyone in the studio, to maintain a clean, safe space and improve the flow of work through the process of making, firing, and removing finished work, the following policies are in place:

1. Wet pieces and work in progress should be stored in the damp room or in the main studio for large pieces—please label your pieces with your name and date. All work in progress must be covered in plastic if you wish to continue to work on the piece. Finished work can be uncovered and left to dry. Work that is bone dry and left for more than 4 weeks will be recycled.
2. Please remove pots from bats at the end of class—or as soon as possible so other classes may use them. Dry pots that were left on bats in the damp room will be removed from the bats and placed on shelves by the instructors if bats are needed.
3. Fired work in the kiln room left over 4 weeks will be removed. This will help to keep the limited shelf space available and encourage students to finish their pieces.
4. Tools are available for everyone to use, please be respectful of these community tools, make sure they are cleaned after each use and placed back in the correct storage space.
5. Sinks: Use only the sink inside the studio. While this sink has been built with a special clay trap in the pipe, please use the slip buckets for scraps and slip before cleaning your tools.
6. Floor: If excessive clay or water is dropped or splattered on the floor please wipe up with a sponge, rag, or mop.

### Clay

1. Clay is available for purchase at the studio. We encourage you to use only the clay that we sell at the studio. Only advanced students can bring in outside clay and must first clear it with the instructor. Clay is sold by an honor's system. We do not accept IOUs. The price for the various clay bodies is marked on the box. And, you can pay by cash, check, or Venmo.
2. Recycled clay is available for free for all current participants to use. It will need to be wedged.

### Clean-up

Clean up is everyone's responsibility. Use the golden rule: leave the studio cleaner than when you arrived. Everyone will appreciate your efforts to make a clean, orderly workspace for each other.

Always clean up clay with a damp sponge or mop. Sweeping or brushing of clay makes particles airborne and this is unhealthy for the lungs. Do not allow dropped clay to remain on the floor. Once dry, it gets crushed by walking and ends up on our lungs.

Please do a reasonable clean-up as you go. If you dirty an area (like the wedging table or 3 glazing area), clean it when you are finished so that others can use it. Please break 15 to 25 minutes before the end of class to clean your space, tools, and put everything away in time for closing. Always leave the space cleaner than when you came and volunteer for a little extra cleanup to support the studio. There is no designated cleaning staff in this communal studio (aside from weekly mopping of the floors).

*Note: Always use a damp sponge or mop to clean rather than a brush or broom. Clay dust is hard on the lungs when airborne and comes up better with water. And, when cleaning the wedging table, wring out your sponge as much as possible so the plaster under the fabric absorbs little water.*

### **Glazes**

1. Before glazing pieces at the studio, it is required that you ask the instructor for a glazing demo to learn how to properly glaze your piece.
2. Please inform an instructor if a glaze appears to be too thick. The instructors will thin the glazes.
3. Please apply glazes no closer than 1/4-inch from the bottom of a piece. Wipe the bottom before putting your piece on the glaze shelf. This will prevent your piece from sticking to the shelf and destroying both your piece and the kiln shelf.
4. If you are combining glazes on one piece, please put the piece on a cookie (a ceramic disc or tile) to protect the kiln shelf.
5. When putting a piece on a shelf in the glaze room, please put either a *high fire* or *low fire* label in your piece and put it on the appropriate shelf.
6. Rinse glaze brushes, stirrers, and other glazing tools in the labeled containers first before rinsing them in the sink. This will prevent chemicals from the glazes from going down the drain. Do not rinse glazing tools in the slip bucket.

### **Kiln**

We only fire pieces made at the studio. This studio space does not support work made for re-sale including large-scale or production or business. Please talk to your instructor if you have questions.

### **Production Work**

Artists whose skill, production, or business goals have grown beyond the capacity of the community studio have many options to fire work that is made at home or other locations. Please contact The Pottery Studio at 510-528-3286 in Berkeley or Clay People at 510-236-1492 in Richmond for more information.

**THANKS** to all students, instructors, interested community, and the staff at the City of el Cerrito for supporting our efforts and keeping us active!!!

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## A GLOSSARY OF PRACTICAL TERMS

### **BAT**

A circular, removable base, either made of plaster, wood, masonite, or plastic that is used when throwing pots on the potters wheel. The bat is affixed to the wheel head by sticking with slip or keying with guide holes.

### **BISQUEWARE**

Is once-fired pottery pieces. Bisqueware is hard enough for handling but is not vitrified. The surface is porous and ready to receive glaze.

### **BONE DRY**

The point in drying greenware (unfired clay) where all the moisture has left the clay body and it is ready to be bisque fired. This is the point when the clay is the most brittle, fragile, and easiest to break. Bone dry pieces should be put on the low fire shelf in the kiln room to be bisqued.

### **CHUCK**

A flared cylinder that is usually open at both ends. It is made of fired clay and used to hold and steady pieces (like bottle forms etc) when they are being trimmed on the wheel.

### **CLAY BODY**

Is composed of various ingredients that make up our basic, essential material that we refer to as clay. Clay bodies are formulated with quantities of special ingredients that effect qualities like the temperature a piece can be fired to, its color, degree of plasticity, smoothness or grittiness, etc. Here at Tassajara we usually stock several different clay bodies. We also offer our re-mixed recycled clay for general use.

### **CONE**

Slender pyramids that are manufactured to bend at a very specific temperature. We talk about firing to cone 05 (low fire) or cone 5 (mid-range fire) in our studio. And, even though we use an electronic temperature gauge on our kiln, we still refer to cones as the standard unit of measure for ceramic firing temperature.

### **DAMP ROOM**

Any area (i.e. a room or a cupboard) that is kept closed and covered to protect a piece from heat, drafts, etc. for the purpose of storing clay work in process and keeping it from drying out. Here at Tassajara our damp room is the south room, and the door should always be kept closed. Work that is in process (unfinished) should always be covered in plastic tightly until it is completed and ready to dry out.

### **EARTHENWARE**

Low-fire clay like terracotta that matures at a lower temperature (below 2,000°F°).

### **ENGOBE (or UNDERGLAZE)**

Materials that are used in the decorating process. Engobes are basically liquid colorant mixtures. At Tassajara, they are found in various jars and containers on the shelf on the north wall. They differ from glazes primarily because they don't have any or much flux (glass) in them. So, they don't leave a shiny finish. Engobes can provide colors on the surfaces of pottery and

are usually applied by brushing or painting to unfired or bisqued pieces. A coat of clear glaze can be applied over them to finish the piece for functional pottery. They are made commercially, or we also mix various coloring oxides to make our own (i.e. iron oxide, cobalt carbonate, rutile, copper carbonate, etc.)

## FIRING

The process we use to bake the clay to transform it into ceramic material.

1. **Low Fire:** At Tassajara we have two choices of firing temperatures, Low Fire and Mid-Range (sometimes we refer to this as high-fire). Our low fire is generally at cone 05 (about 1850° F), and we have a set of glazes specifically for that temperature.
2. **Bisque Firing:** we also refer to the low fire as bisque firing. The bisque is the first firing, and these pieces can be decorated with either low fire or mid-range glazes to be put in the second firing to make a finished product.
3. **Mid Range:** A general term used to designate the higher temperatures we use at Tassajara. Our glazes here are mostly fired to cone 5/6 (about 2120° F). All of the clay bodies we use are designated for mid-range firing.

## FIRING DEFECTS

- **Cracking and separating** across the bottom of a piece. This is caused due to an overly-thick base or bottom on a thrown form, or from throwing with an excess of water that accumulates in the bottom of a piece.
- **Dunting** or warping of the clay itself.
- **Exploding** of a piece into many broken shards is usually caused by firing a solid piece or one with overly thick walls.

## GLAZE, GLAZING

The materials we put on bisque pottery to decorate and finish the piece. Glaze is usually applied as a liquid to the surface of the pottery via brushing, dipping, pouring over, spraying, or other such methods. Glaze both “seals” the pottery to make it usable for putting liquids into it, and also provides color and glossiness because of the glass component of glaze that melts over the surfaces of the fired pottery.

Here at Tassajara we provide two types of glazes.

1. Commercial glazes are designed to be painted on the pottery surfaces with paint brushes.
2. Studio-formulated dipping glazes are meant to have pieces dunked or dipped into the buckets and/or have glaze poured onto the pottery.

**NOTE:** All participants in Tassajara programs are required to be cleared for glazing by their instructor. You cannot use any of the glazing materials or access the glazes before talking to your receiving direct instructions.

**GLAZE DEFECTS:** A glaze is supposed to melt evenly over the surface of a piece; certain defects can occur in the firing. Typical defects are:

- **Crawling**, where the glaze separates and gets broken up into patches.
- **Crazing and Crackling**, where there are cracks within the glaze surface, making the piece unhygienic for usage
- **Shivering** where blobs of glaze literally jump off the piece and on to the kiln shelf

## **GREENWARE**

Unfired pottery pieces—anything that has not been fired in the kiln yet is considered green even if it seems hard. Unfired clay is fragile and can be broken easily. It can also easily be recycled.

**GROG:** clay that has been fired and ground up into a powdery gritty material. It is used as an additive to any clay body for the purpose of making it more durable, less plastic, or more sturdy against cracking and heat shock. grog is often used when building larger sculptural forms in clay.

## **HAND BUILDING**

Any of the techniques of making things of clay that are not made on the potters wheel. Hand building includes coil, slab, mold forming, slip casting, modeling, pinching, and any other methods of forming the clay without wheel work.

## **KILN**

The oven used for firing (cooking) clay/pottery. Here at Tassajara we have a kiln room that has 3 electric kilns. They are loaded and fired on a regular ongoing schedule by the instructors.

## **KILNWASH**

A material (a mix of silica and kaolin) we use to protect the kiln shelves and other surfaces inside the kilns. Kilnwash is usually painted onto the shelves (if glaze runs or jumps off the pottery it can ruin the pieces in the kiln as well as destroy the kiln shelving). Thus, we try to cover them with this coating.

## **LEATHER HARD**

A state of the green, unfired clay where it is neither wet nor malleable, but also not totally bone dry (see above) and ready for firing. Thus, it is somewhat handleable and if not too hard, a correct consistency for trimming, finishing, and attaching pieces like handles.

## **RECYCLED / RECLAIMED CLAY**

We have a selection of recycled clay available for free at the studio for those willing to put the energy into working it. Plus, any unfired clay can be recycled simply by covering it with water so that it slakes down, evaporating the water until the clay is the right consistency, and reconstituting via wedging into workable clay again. Once fired, clay cannot be reclaimed / recycled.

## **SLAB**

A slab of clay is any rolled-out even piece of clay prepared that way for building purposes. slab building is one of the main hand building techniques. At Tassajara we have a slab roller, a machine that rolls chunks of clay out in an even form (see your instructor before using this). Slabs can also be rolled out effectively by hand on our wedging table.

## **SLIP**

A slurry or mix of clay and water, in other words liquified clay that is used as a connecting glue in attaching one clay element to another, for instance a handle to a cup or pitcher.

## **STAINS**

A formulation of chemicals that give a particular color. Stains are often found in powdered or

liquid form. Some are ready to be used by brushing; others need some type of processing or blending before use. Stains can be made for most colors and are the essential ingredients in the engobes and underglazes we use.

### **STONEWARE**

Clay which matures at a relative high temperature (about 2300° F). Our mid-range, cone 5 firing is close to that temperature.

### **TRIMMING**

Literally carving/shaving away a portion of the base of a wheel thrown pot to give it a defined foot and a finished look. Trimming can be done on any part of a ceramic form to refine or alter the shape; a foot is trimmed on a wheel thrown pot because a piece made on a potters wheel tends to be very bottom-heavy and making a foot makes the piece lighter, aesthetically pleasing, and less likely to crack in the firing process.

### **VITRIFICATION**

In ceramics, the amount of heating of the clay to produce a glassified, non-porous structure. This is also termed *firing to maturity*. Every clay body and every glaze has a vitrification temperature. We aim to get as close to that temperature as is practical so that a functional piece can hold liquids and be as impervious to leeching as is possible. If clays or glazes are not fired to maturity liquid can leak through the glaze, causing staining of surfaces they sit on and leeching chemicals into our bodies. *This is one reason we ask that students do not bring in materials from other studios or situations to use at Tassajara.*

### **WAX RESIST**

A liquid form of wax that is used in the glazing process, both to repel glaze from the foot of a pot and occasionally as a decorative technique of applying layers of glaze with wax design between the colors.

### **WEDGING**

Another term for kneading or blending and conditioning the clay before use. We push the clay around to get it homogenized and well-mixed and to work out air bubbles that can cause problems later. Wedging makes a clay body softer and more plastic. At Tassajara we have several wedging table areas—table tops or slabs of plaster that are dedicated worksites for this conditioning of the clay.