

Press-Molded Flask

by Amanda Bury

I delight in the intimate, sneaky, old-timeyness of a pocket flask. I think about them as having an individual personality, hiding in a purse or back pocket, and it makes me grin. Designing for function is key to my practice and this form is no exception. A symmetrical, convex flask shape allows for a good fit in most back pockets while storing a generous amount of libation. The cork is connected by a fired-in wire loop on the body, sealed to the handmade hardwood cap with a super-strong, food-safe epoxy. My hope is that it lasts a lifetime.

These flasks are a go-to comfort form in my practice. Each one is made from two halves formed in a press-mold (1). Once the mold is made, they come together fairly quickly and provide a familiar canvas for times when I am rebooting into a fresh

making cycle or feel the need to play and experiment with new surface ideas without a lot of wheel-throwing time investment. What the process lacks in wet-stage work, it makes up for in post-firing details. Fun tweaks and quality upgrades over the years have fleshed out the idea more fully and made these flasks one of my favorite objects to make.

Press Molding the Body

Start by powdering a pre-made plaster mold to keep the clay from sticking. Use a pouch made from a small piece of tight-knit cloth that's filled with cornstarch and tied with a rubber band (1).

Roll out a $\frac{1}{2}$ – $\frac{3}{4}$ inch-thick slab (with the thickness depending on the plasticity properties of the clay) and smooth it with a rib.



Set the plaster mold on a banding wheel, then gently press the slab into the mold. Move around the edge of the slab, lifting the edge with one hand and gently pressing the slab into the mold with the other. Dampen a soft, dense sponge and use it to press firmly into the corners of the mold (2). Moving in one direction and then the other, make sure the slab is securely in the mold. Use a fettling knife to cut away the excess slab. Flip the mold over to release the half of the flask from the mold (3). Repeat this process for the second half of the flask. Set the halves aside to firm up until they reach a soft leather-hard state.

Next, score and slip each half and attach the two halves together. Rib the seam to compress the join (4). If the seal is good, the form should hold air when squeezed. I will often do this squeeze test and then re-compress any bulge that has appeared at the seam to make sure there is a good connection.

Once the body reaches the medium leather-hard stage, begin to further shape the form using a Surform tool (5). Then, use a metal rib to clean up the marks from the Surform and to refine

the edges between each plane. Use a pin tool to poke a small hole where the neck will attach later; this allows the air inside to escape as the clay shrinks.

Throwing the Neck

Wedge and center 1 pound of clay on the wheel. Throw a very narrow cylinder off the hump. The cylinder should fit the widest part of the cork intended to fit into the neck of the flask after firing (6). Cut the cylinder from the hump using a pin tool, then set it aside. Once the thrown cylinder reaches a leather-hard stage, cut a section of it to make the neck of the flask. I typically cut a ½–¾-inch-tall section, which visually matches with the proportions of my wooden caps. Use the section as a guide to trace where to cut the mouth opening on the body. After cutting the hole in the flask body, score, slip, and attach the neck (7). Use a firm brush to compress the join. At the hard leather-hard stage, use the Surform to create a small flat area on one side so that the flask can sit upright (8). Use a metal or rubber rib to smooth the flat area.



1 Start by powdering the mold using a small piece of tight-knit cloth filled with cornstarch and tied with a rubber band.



2 Roll out and rib a ½–¾ inch-thick slab. Gently press it into the mold. Use a damp sponge to press into the corners of the mold.



3 Flip the mold over to release the half. Set it aside to firm up to a soft leather-hard state.



4 Score, slip, and attach the two leather-hard halves and rib the seam to compress the join.



5

Once the body is medium leather hard, begin to further shape the form using a Surform tool, then clean up the marks.



6

Throw a very narrow cylinder off the hump. The cylinder should fit the widest part of the cork intended to fit after firing.



7

After cutting the hole in the flask body, score, slip, and attach the neck. Use a firm brush to compress the join.



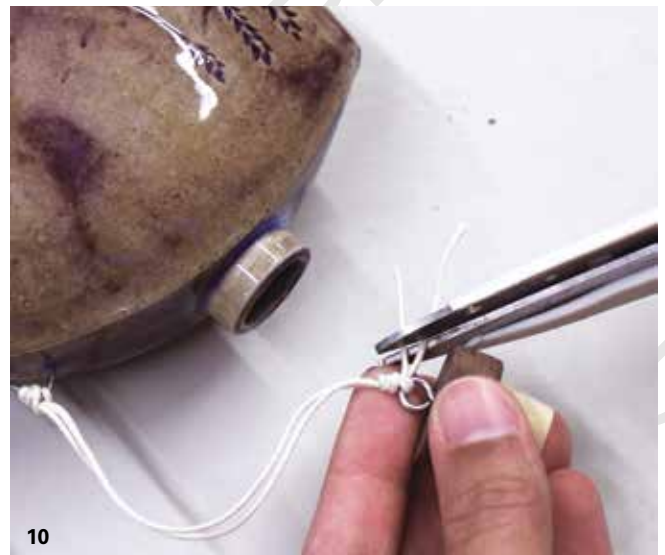
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At the hard leather-hard stage, Surform a small flat area on one side so that the flask can sit upright, then rib smooth.



9

Insert a nichrome wire elbow in the leather-hard clay. After the final firing, this will be used to secure the cork to the body.



10

Insert a small eye screw into a wooden capped cork. Tether the screw to the body of the flask with a cotton cord.

Insert a nichrome wire elbow near the neck (9). After the final firing this will be used to secure the cork to the body.

Post Firing Finishes and uses

Press the cork firmly into the neck of the fired flask and mark it. To ensure the finished cap sits flush on the neck, the depth of the cork from this mark must match the depth of the inside of the wooden cap. Use a food-safe and extremely strong epoxy sealant to affix the cork into the wooden cap. **Note:** I commission a local woodworker to make my caps by hand.

Insert a small screw eye into the top of the wooden cap. Tether the capped cork to the body of the flask with a cotton cord and trim away the excess (10).

I have always been a nerd for food preservation techniques. In our home, fermentation is happening often and in many different ways. Bread, sauerkraut, pickles, and my personal specialty—ginger beer. And, I mean the good kind, the kind that is so ginger spicy you can feel the warmth hit your stomach. Homemade ginger beer is a great foundation for some really simple and really delicious go-to cocktails.

Amanda Bury received a BA in studio art and a BA in anthropology from Central Washington University. She has spent time as an artist in residence at The Morean Center for Clay in St. Petersburg, Florida, and Belger Crane Yard Studios in Kansas City, Missouri. She now works as a full-time studio artist in Winston-Salem, North Carolina. To see more, visit www.aburypottery.com.



Maple Ginger Cooler

Cocktail ingredients:

- 2 oz bourbon
- 1½ tsp maple syrup
- 1 tsp lemon juice
- Spicy ginger beer
- Candied ginger for garnish (optional)

Combine whiskey, maple syrup, lemon juice, and ice in a cocktail shaker; shake vigorously. Serve topped with a locally purchased craft ginger beer or your own homemade ginger beer and garnish with candied ginger.



Moscow Mule

Cocktail ingredients:

- 1½ oz vodka
- ½ oz freshly squeezed lime juice
- ½ cup spicy ginger beer
- Lime wedge for garnish

Pour vodka and lime juice into a mug; add ice cubes and ginger beer. Stir to combine. Drop a lime wedge into the mug for garnish. The classic Moscow Mule is served in a copper mug, but filling your flask with the cold ingredients above will work well too!

There are many Moscow Mule variations. Simply swap out the vodka for a different liquor:
Mexican Mule: substitute tequila
Kentucky Mule: substitute bourbon
Gin Buck: substitute gin
Dark 'n Stormy: substitute dark rum

Clockwise from the top (on the wooden block): Yunomi, 3½ in. (9 cm) in height, stoneware, slip, glaze, 2020. Citrus reamer, 4½ in. (11 cm) in height, stoneware, slip, glaze, 2020. Flask, 4½ in. (11 cm) in height, stoneware, slip, glaze, nichrome wire, cork, wooden cap, metal eye screw, cotton thread, 2020.

Recipe