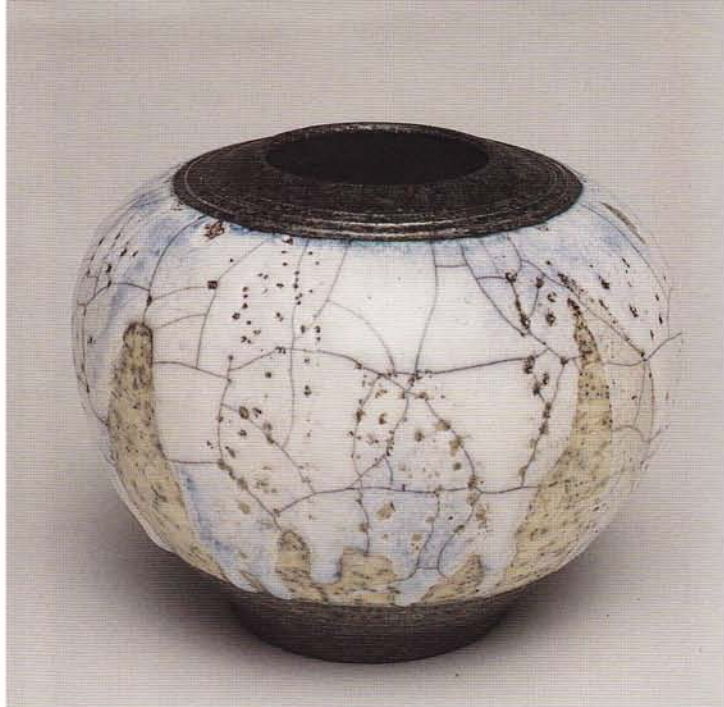


Raku Magic

WORKSHOP – ROSALIE DODDS recalls her early experiments with firing raku.

PHOTOGRAPHY – MICHAEL FEAREY



Since my first experience of raku firing on a holiday course at Douglas Philips pottery, this method of firing pots has had an enduring fascination. Like many potters, for me the experience of rapid firing in the kiln followed by the post-firing processes of flaming and smoking was a revelation. Around this time I saw exhibitions of fine raku by David Roberts and John Dunn and I was impressed by the finesse and scale of their work. It was an inspiration.

My first attempts may have been happy accidents, but the surfaces that could be achieved coincided with my preference for natural surfaces on such things as stones. Increasingly I

was drawn into the raku process. Glaze effects rather than brush decoration had always interested me and I enjoyed the dramatic melt of the glaze and the smoky surfaces. In this respect raku firing seemed to be a productive way of working. In the first years I tried to do impossible things like making pots with wide flaring rims that would invariably crack. By trial and error I began to use more grog in my work but eventually decided to accept what the process would give and work in a more pragmatic way. I decided to make my shapes more rounded – these generally being much stronger.

Most of my work is thrown but the bowl forms are started in a mould, then and coils are added before throwing. Generally I use white firing clays which seem to give better glaze colour. I have used St Thomas White clay and porcelain clay, wedging molochite into the clay when making larger pots. At present I am using a half and half mixture of white raku clay and birch white stoneware clay.

Quite early on I found that I liked the contrast of black smoked surfaces with the crackled glazed surfaces. It took quite a while to resolve the problem of defining glazed and unglazed areas. I had begun to use a black glaze



1 Lines are incised at leatherhard stage – round pot



2 Lines are incised at leatherhard stage – bowl



3 Work left to dry for biscuit firing to 1000°C



6 Pouring glaze – bowl



7 Building up glaze layers



8 Pot withdrawn at 850°C and placed in container



lightly sprayed on the unglazed area and after working for some time unsuccessfully trying wax resist, I found that by incising a line on the pot at leatherhard stage it provided me with the definition I wanted. I could then wipe off the glaze from the surfaces to be smoked, mask off the glazed area and spray the unglazed area, enlivening and adding some sparkle to the black areas. Further incised lines could be added for decorative effect.

Pouring and dipping are my preferred ways of glazing but for larger pieces glaze application has posed a problem. Eventually I began to use the glaze more freely, deciding to go with

the bubbly pitted effects that sometimes resulted from pouring the glaze in layers over the pot surface. Care has to be taken in the firing of pots loaded heavily with glaze as the tendency is for the glaze to run off the pot if fired too quickly. By using a lead bisilicate glaze underneath a mainly alkaline frit glaze I found that I achieved some contrast within the surface. Coloured slip applied at leatherhard stage gives rise to even more variation.

The work is fired in an electric top-loading kiln in my workshop or a small top hat gas kiln in the garden. Larger work is fired singly but I fire up to four small pots together in one

firing. The kiln is fired to a temperature of approximately 910-930°C. I soak for approximately ten minutes, then check the glaze by eye before allowing the kiln to cool down. At 850°C I withdraw the work and place it into wood shavings – which I find work better for me than sawdust – for twenty minutes before taking it out and allowing it to cool. The pot is then ready to be scoured and cleaned. **CR**

Work by Rosalie Dodds can be seen in the *Brighton Festival* in May as part of Artists' Open Houses.

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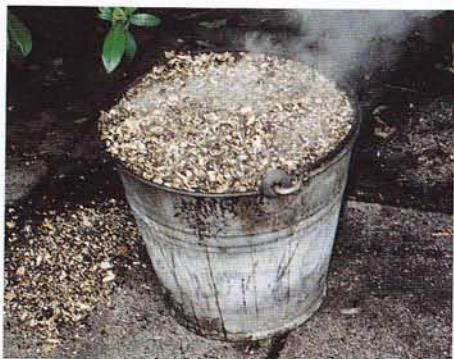
4 Pouring glaze – pot



5 Building up glaze layers



9 Covered with wood shavings



10 Left to cool down for twenty minutes

Technical Notes

GLAZE

Cream Glaze	
Lead bisilicate	95
China clay	5

White Crackle Glaze

High alkaline frit	60
Borax frit	35
China clay	5
Tin oxide	5

Black Glaze

Lead bisilicate	60
High alkaline frit	35
China clay	5
Red iron oxide	4
Copper oxide	3
Cobalt oxide	2

TOP ROW FROM LEFT: Pot, H12cm ■ Bowl, Ø28cm ■ Pot, H20cm.