

# GuildSpeak

## ArtsFocus: Making the Perfect Pot by Kai Eichenbaum

Around this time of year, potters' studios are a-buzz with the creation of new work. New techniques learned at spring and summer workshops and courses are used to create that incredible piece for the fall exhibition and, of course, pieces for sale at the annual BAC Christmas Sale.

Much thought goes into creating a pot. The potter must decide what to make, how to make it, make several to see what techniques work best, test glaze recipes and then determine what glaze(s) to use and how to apply the glaze to the piece. Even once the piece(s) are glaze fired, the process is still not finished.

For any guild sale or exhibition, the final hurdle is passing standards. The goal of these standards is not to reject pots; rather, they allow potters to work together to present the best work for sale, showing firsts, not seconds. The Burlington Potters' Guild Standards Committee consists of members appointed by the executive who apply the standards to ensure that pottery submitted for exhibitions and sales is well-crafted and represents original designs.

Each piece of pottery displayed at guild sales goes through a lengthy check:

Clay and glazes must be vitrified (fired to maturity for the function of the object). Raku and smoke-fired work are the only exceptions.

As original work is the goal, use of commercial moulds, commercial bisque or greenware is not acceptable.

Warping is not acceptable.

Glazes cannot contain toxic substances such as lead or cadmium.

Work may not be glued to repair a crack that developed in the making process.

Any post-firing pigmentation is limited to being an accent on non-functional work.

Cracked and chipped work, along with rough or thin rims, are not acceptable, to avoid having customers cutting themselves on the pottery.

The bottoms of all pottery, whether functional or decorative, must be smooth, stable and well made.

Functional work undergoes more checks. Thrown plates should not have thin flanges; pouring spouts should not drip; handles should be held comfortably in order to perform their function, whether it is pouring a liquid or holding a coffee mug. Lids must move freely and fit in all directions unless there are specific markings in the design of the pot. Sharp or rough decoration is not acceptable as it can make the functional piece unsanitary. Glazes on a functional surface must not be dry and rough and must not have any of the following faults:

Pinholes – small eruptions of gases from within the glaze leave “craters” or bare spots on the piece.

Crazing – fine cracks appear in the fired glaze because the glaze does not “fit” the clay body.

Crawling – separation of the glaze from the clay during firing. This is most often caused by dust or oil on bisque ware, too rapid a warm-up in the glaze firing, or because the glaze application was too thick.

Blistering – a bubbled crater-like surface caused by over-firing or by eruption through the glaze of residual gases in the clay body.

Dunting – fired ware has cracked during rapid cooling in the kiln.

Shivering – The clay has shrunk more than the glaze, causing the glaze to separate from the clay and peel or shiver, breaking off in small flakes.

Bloating – Warping, bursting or bubbling of clay fired higher than recommended or caused by working with a clay containing impurities or foreign bodies.

This all goes to show that making that perfect pot requires both artistic talent and skill matching the exacting standards set for guild potters. As you walk through the next Guild Sale, you can admire both and be sure that the piece which you purchase is high-quality pottery that will stand the test of time.

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