

Let It Snow Designs

By Artist Michael Harbridge

See this technique in action! Video recording of the live webinar available at www.ifiredarts.com.

Materials List

Bisque plates or bowls
Moist clay of choice
Wood snowflake cut outs
Assorted brushes
Slab roller (or rolling pin system)
Sponge
Assorted compatible medium glass frit
Fired gold overglaze
Fired Paladium (silver)
Mother of Pearl
Gold Essence
Brushes for overglazes
Clear glaze
Clear glue (optional)
Drywall or project boards
Basic pottery tool set
Plastic spoon
Red Solo cup

Contact the artist:

Michael Harbridge
P.O. Box 108
Iola, WI 54945
info@claypuzzling.com
www.claypuzzling.com
(715) 281-6450



Creating snowflake designs in slabs is really quick and easy. You could carve out each intricate part of the pattern, or you can follow this method and have snowflake impressions in little time. Some of you may be looking to make items for yourself or as gifts while others may be studio owners. This method is ideal for workshops, camps, or for making unique, custom bisque prepared for your customers. If you have staff sitting around looking for something to do when the studio is slow, creating custom bisque is a profitable use of time, and most staff will love doing it. Keep in mind, designs with glass are not recommended on shapes intended for food.

Rolling slabs by hand

Some artists utilize the same rolling pin used for pie crusts and cookies. If done properly, clay won't hurt the rolling pin so it is a logical option. Small clay rollers or even heavy wooden dowels can also be used. The key to successful hand



rolled slabs is getting uniform thickness. Achieving consistent depth is easy to do when wooden sticks or trim are placed along each side of the clay being rolled. Many artists have issues with clay wanting to stick to the rolling pin. An easy solution to this is to place the clay in a canvas or fabric pocket so the rolling pin never comes in contact with the clay. The image here shows two pieces of craft foam (sold at most craft stores in various sizes) taped together on one end to form a pocket. By rolling over the foam, rather than directly on the clay, the clay cannot stick to the rolling pin, discolor or contaminate. Flatten the piece of clay by hand and place in the pocket. Continue rolling over until the roller rests on the wooden slats. Pull the slats away and you have a uniform piece of clay.

Rolling slabs with a slab roller

Slab rollers come in a variety of shapes and sizes with some being large tables and others being portable units. Portable units can travel with teachers or be stood up in a corner of the studio when not in use. If you do not have a lot of extra room for a table model, a smaller unit is ideal. The larger models usually have a few more features that make them

easier to use and often will generate larger slabs. Before purchasing a slab roller, look at all your options. Small units are usually under \$500 and larger units exceed the \$500 price range. Some slab rollers use boards or shims to adjust the thickness of a slab. They are often placed below the clay pocket with more (or thicker) boards giving smaller slabs. Other units will allow you to adjust the two rolling pins to various heights. Most artists begin with a somewhat flattened piece of clay, place it in the fabric or foam pocket and run it through the slab roller at a greater thickness than they ultimately desire. After rolling through once, they pick up the clay slab and turn in 45 degrees and run it through again after adjusting the depth. This way it stretches the clay out in the other direction, giving a larger slab. It's best to work with one piece of clay rather than placing several parts together when rolling

slabs. Parts can pull away from one another as they go through the rollers, leaving open spaces, and you get a much stronger slab.

Adding Snowflake Patterns

Wood snowflake cutouts can be purchased at most craft stores, in a variety of sizes and styles. Some will have a thicker core than others. Make sure they are not so delicate that they will break when pressure is applied to press it into clay.



Using bisque shapes as forms

Ceramic bisque is a great form for making unique shapes. Plates, bowls and other shapes will absorb the moisture from the clay as it dries. Once the clay slab is rolled, you have two options for ways to cut the clay shape. The first is to place the bisque, face down on the clay slab and use a wood tool to cut around the edge of the bisque. Pull away excess clay around the cut shape and place one hand on the bisque as you reach under the slab mat and flip it over onto the bisque.

If your shape has a drop or recessed area, this second method may be the best option. If you use the first method on a shape with a drop, the clay will “drop” down into the cavity, resulting in a clay shape much smaller than the original shape. Cut the clay slab larger than the outer edge of the shape, turn over in the same manner and gently press down into the form using a soft sponge, eliminating potential finger or nail marks. You can also make your impression with your snowflake in the clay before pressing it into the mold. Cut the desired shape, press in the snowflake using a sponge, and round any edges. Gently press into form, using a dry sponge.

Using the information we’ve covered, follow these steps.

Step 1 Roll out a clay slab around a quarter inch thick.

Step 2 Place the shape to cut on top of the clay slab. Try to place it as close as you can to the edge, so you can fit more than one cut out on the slab. Large open areas can be used to cut out smaller shapes.

Step 3 Remove all the excess clay between the shapes.

Step 4 Peel the clay shapes from the slab mat and place them on boards that will absorb moisture (if you’re not using bisque forms). Project boards or drywall work great. Leave a little space between each shape so texture can be added. Use a damp sponge to smooth the surface and round edges. Don’t use a lot of water. You don’t want to make mud, or the wood snowflakes will not remove easily.

Step 5 Select your snowflake and press it into the clay cut out slab, and gently remove. Make sure the clay is not going over the edges of the drying surface or forms. As most clays dry, they will shrink,



The final sample to the left has Mother of Pearl fired on the surface adding more color and shimmer.



and if they hang over the edge, they could crack.

Step 6 Allow the clay to dry on the absorbent surface.

Step 7 Use a cleaning tool and damp sponge to clean up any sharp edges or imperfections.

Step 8 Fire according to the clay body selected.

Step 9 The samples shown were coated with one coat of blue thinned Stroke & Coat, allowed to dry and wiped back with a damp sponge, leaving color in the recessed areas. Apply appropriate coats of clear glaze and fire to cone 06.

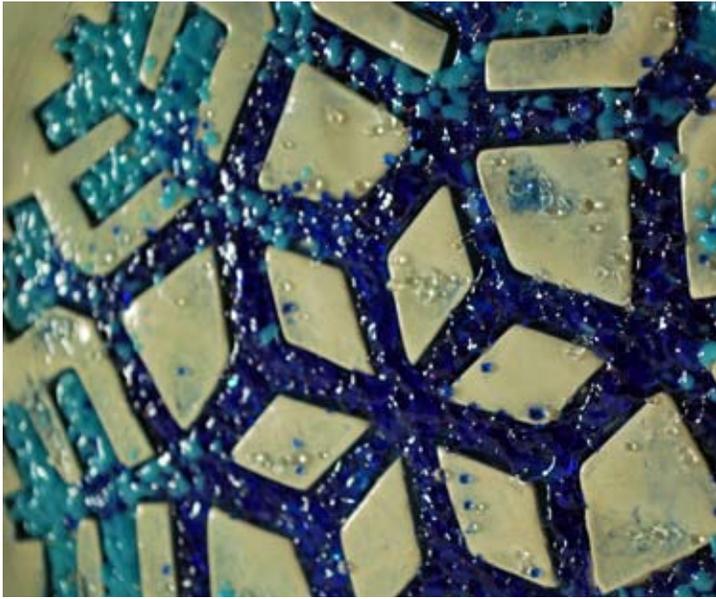
Step 10 Sprinkle glass frit into design using a spoon. I prefer medium frit, rather than fine because fine creates dust, and you should wear a mask if working with fine. Slightly overlap where two colors meet so there is not a defined line. Use a dry brush to push glass outside the pattern into the indentations. If you want sparkles or what looks like drips of water on your items, lightly sprinkle clear medium glass frit over the flat surface.

Step 11 Fire the glass to a range of 018 to 015. Every kiln fires differently, and even within the same kiln, the top to bottom of kiln can fire hotter or cooler. So you need to know your kiln. If you

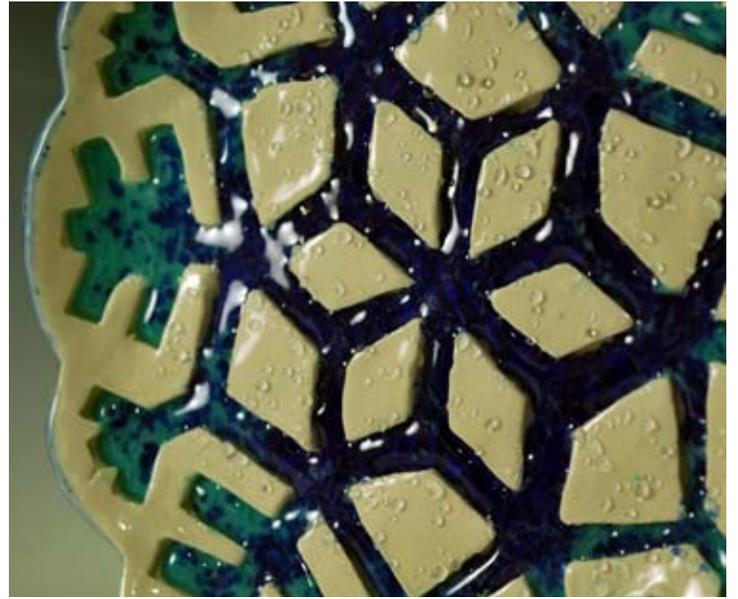
are not sure, start out firing to a cooler cone, and refiring a cone hotter if needed. The hotter you fire, the smoother the glass will be. The cooler, the more texture. But, if you take the glass hotter than needed, the glass can pull back along the edges. You can also follow your favorite glass tack or contour fusing programs.

Step 12 As an option, you can add fired overglazes for added affects. Fired gold, silver and Mother of Pearl were used on some of these items. On the large platter below, fired gold and silver were added to the outer snowflakes. Fired silver was applied around the snowflake on the ornament and Mother of Pearl was used on the medium plate. These overglazes are fired to a cooler temperature than the glass, so it generally won't affect the texture of the glass. All of these products can be used on or over glass and ceramics. Don't allow any of these products to come into contact with one another in the same firing, on the same piece. They can be used together. The gold and silver were used on the snowflakes along the edge of the platter below, but they did not touch so they could be done in the same firing. If I wanted to add Mother of Pearl to that same plate, I could, but in an additional firing. Mother of Pearl over silver and gold gives a luster finish to those colors. Silver was applied around the glass snowflake on the show ball ornament below. Mother of Pearl was applied to the smaller platter, over the top of the glass and ceramic surface. They were all fired to cone 019.





Notice the texture of the glass on this shape above. It was fired cooler to get a more textured finish. The snow ball ornaments below used a red Solo cup as a template for the shape.



The glass on the plate above was fired hotter so it has less texture, but the loose glass on the ceramic surface still beads up to look like moisture or frost.

