

**A** favorite tool is a beautiful thing. A few years ago my father made me a paddle for handbuilding, shaped to my specifications and made of osage orange, the ubiquitous trash-tree of the place in which I grew up. It's hard to say whether it is the tool's beauty, its perfect fitness, or its sentimental associations, but using this paddle is deeply satisfying, both pleasurable and mysteriously empowering. Almost every maker has experienced the forward rush of discovering the perfect tool: more than easing the task, it greases the rails of one's idea-tracks.

Nowadays the "tools" many people use most often are the ones on their computers (my personal favorite, as a reluctant writer, is the "word count"). Although using the language of handwork, our culture seems to be trying to blot out any direct awareness of the tools and technologies that make our lives go; speed, convenience, and of course profit considerations have placed the workings of everything from cars to meals at a further and further remove from our consciousness. Does that put makers hopelessly out of step with contemporary culture, or are we privileged still to have, in our working days, an experience lost to many?

Tools are personal, while technology, the larger arena in which we operate, is always bigger than a single practitioner and can never belong to one individual. More than many undertakings, ceramics is firmly and literally grounded in technology (as the list of things needed to establish a pottery or ceramics program at a university underscores), and ceramic ideas demand mastery of – or at least engagement with – materials and processes. We love to talk shop, and potters have long relied on our community's openness and experience to solve problems and expand possibilities. Technology, the enormous "how" of ceramics, turns the key in our engines. But its dark side can include overdependence upon a kiln that, inconveniently, requires ownership of buildable land and cords of wood, or the fetishization of the technical at the expense of other artistic considerations. These remind us that although ceramic technology is a body of knowledge, a body without a head cannot function or make meaning. The articles that follow refuse to allow a separation between the means and the maker, and insist upon the organic interplay between ourselves and our tools.

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STUDIO POTTER is a non-profit organization which publishes journals, produces educational programs, and provides services to the international community of ceramic artists and craftspeople.

A professional journal, *THE STUDIO POTTER* is published twice a year and focuses on critical issues of aesthetics, technology, history and personal development. It is aimed at a discerning readership of ceramists, educators, and others committed to supporting work and dialogue. By fostering innovation and creativity as well as respect for tradition, the organization endeavors to improve the quality of life and work for studio potters.

STUDIO POTTER welcomes hearing from potters, artists, scholars and educators with special interests in writing and reporting on topics and events in ceramics.

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