Hand-Built Vases with Air-Dry Clay with Cindy Willingham

Chapter 1 - Hand-Built Vases with Air-Dry Clay

Overview

- Let your creativity take shape as we build a vase in three ways. I'm Cindy Willingham, a painter and a potter, and many things in between based in Texas. In this course, I will walk you through hand building a foundational vessel from air dry clay that you'll be able to decorate in various ways. I will teach you to build from a slab form and attach a handle, as well as add a few quirky design details. We're going to be building a basic vase, a face vase, and a pitcher. This project was born from my love of botanicals, as well as upcycling. Air dry clay has come a long way. Some of my favorite brands emulate kiln fired clay. While it's not food safe, we can work with it and protect it to make it water resistant, to hold our favorite utensils and plants. We're not looking for perfection, we're looking for personality. These skills are building blocks that you can use to add color and attitude to your projects.

Materials

- These are the materials for this class. You're going to need air dry clay. My favorite brand is Trinity Ceramics, but Laguna Clay is more readily available, a little pricier, but still worth it. You're gonna need a work surface. This one is my favorite. It's a bamboo cutting board with a lip that keeps it from moving around the table. But you can also use these slab mats that are perfect for this kind of work. It keeps the clay from sticking. We're gonna need a rolling pin. I use a dowel. We're gonna use these guides. These are paint stir sticks. Two of them taped together, are the perfect thickness, and I love using this wooden spoon for tapping the clay for a better join, as well as thinning out the clay when necessary. We're using this bench scraper to keep our work surface clean. I love this project because it uses these recyclable items, which will hold the water in our vases. We're gonna need Saran wrap to wrap our project in case we need it to stay moist. We have a vessel of water and a rounded sponge. This is our sealer, our Maker's Magic. It's glossy, and I have three pottery ribs here, a silicone, a metal, and a wooden version. You don't have to have all three, but I like to have them on hand. We've got paint brushes to be used for the sealing, as well as painting and smoothing. We've got a carving tool and a sharp edge for cutting our clay. I'm using acrylic paint. You can also use crafters paint. I need a color for the interior and exterior. I'm also using these paint markers for facial features. A quilters ruler, it's clear it helps me cut the clay better. I have a measuring tape for measuring my recyclable vessel, and I always like to have a paper towel handy for any cleanup.

Prepare clay and make a slab

- Air dry clay is not food safe and will never be waterproof, we can make it water resistant, but we can add these recyclable containers in our vase to hold water. We're gonna measure our vessel to see how big we need to roll our slab out. You wanna measure at the widest point of the container you're going to be using. This is nine inches. We need to add about 20% to allow for the shrinkage of the clay because we're going to be inserting this into the vase and we wanna make sure that it still fits. So I'm gonna add two inches to this just to be on the safe side. Now I'm gonna measure the height of this jar. It comes out to about three and a half inches, so I'm just gonna push it to four. Grab your clay. You're gonna need about three pounds of clay to roll this slab out. Let's condition our clay. If you're working with fresh clay, it should have been pugged from the mill compressed on

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its own and won't have any air bubbles in it. I'm generally reclaiming clay or adding clay that I've already worked with, so I like to knead it out. Kneading clay is a different process than kneading bread dough. You wanna roll it out and roll it up on to itself to compress and get rid of any air bubbles that may be there. And you can change directions as well. You'll know you're doing it right when you see the little duck face, which some potters call the ram's head. It takes some muscle to knead this much clay. So take your clay and all the wrinkles that you see. Just use your thumb to run it up against itself to get rid of any air pockets that might be in there. I'm gonna clean up some of this clay that has stuck to the board and you can apply it to your clay or just set it to the side. I don't like to waste anything though. Now I'm gonna be slamming this clay on this board and that's gonna help compress it together and get rid of any air bubbles that might still be in there. It also helps to shape it so you can roll it out into a slab easier. Our goal is a log shape. It just gets the process of shaping started so you're not starting from a blob or a ball. So let's take our roller. I love this dowel 'cause it's handleless, but you can use a rolling pin and with almost every pass, you wanna flip your clay over so that it doesn't stick to the board. And sometimes I flip it horizontally just to get the width of that going. I'm rolling it thinner to get closer to the width of my guides. And if it gets too big for your surface, just feel free to trim it. And if you do happen to get any air bubbles at all, just pop it and keep rolling. Let's see. Let's get our guides in there. - I see one - My slab is now the perfect thickness and consistency throughout. So now I'm gonna cut it: 11 by 4. Just that's why these clear rulers are the best. You can see everything. You wanna create a straight edge, 90 degrees on the side and the bottom. Just follow your guides. Now I'm gonna cut it to 11 inches by four inches. And there where we have our slab already, we're gonna let this stiffen up for about 30 minutes. Save those scraps. We're also gonna be using this for the base. Keep your hands washed, air dry clay dries on your hands and can flake off onto your project.

Make the vase base

- My slabs been sitting to firm up and it's a little drier than I would like. Clay can be finicky depending on the humidity or time of year, so I'm just gonna add a little moisture and sometimes you can tell if you can see some wrinkles or it starts to crack when you pick it up. We're just gonna add some moisture but not too much and moisten it evenly. That looks perfect. Let's get this slab out of the way so we can work. I'm gonna take this slab and move it over here and we're gonna score the edges where we're going to put them together. We can take our straight edge. We're gonna simply make some cross hatch marks going down. You wanna create texture in your clay. It's kind of like Velcro. It helps the clay adhere to itself. And now we're gonna do the opposite side 'cause that's where it will be attaching. And this side looks like it could use some moisture, but we can do that in a second. Let's add some moisture to this side and place the two pieces together. So you gently want to smush the clay together to create that seal. Use as much moisture as needed, can moisten the edges, so you're gonna move the clay onto itself to close that seam. And you can use your fingers or the rib, whichever feels more comfortable. But my favorite tools are my fingers. Try the metal one and we're just joining the clay, bringing it onto itself and just work slowly. You'll get there and do the same to the interior as well. Just making sure you're keeping it in that cylinder shape And you can clean your rib off if needed. You're just slowly bringing the clay together, creating a seamless cylinder. Let's flip it over. Keep doing this until it's seamless. Now we're gonna work on the base. Let's just place our cylinder on top of the base. And let's cut around just a little bit wider than your cylinder. There we go, we can place that to the side. Now we're gonna score where we're going to join them, and this is where you can decide which end you want to be the top, the

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prettier one. Let's make those crosshatching marks so that our clay can have a better joint and attach to itself. Add a little moisture to that. We can also use our brush for moistening our clay. We're also making the crosshatch marks on the base. Don't worry about getting messy. It'll be hidden when we put it all together. You'd rather have too many cross hatch marks than not enough. Get it nice and moist. I'm moistening this one more time. Let's join those two pieces. You can wiggle it around to open that clay up and grab onto itself. And this is also where that wooden spoon comes in handy and just like do a little tapping, creating a little pressure for the clay to attach to itself. And this also helps in shaping the base of your vase. And it's fun. I am gonna turn it over. You can also take your paintbrush moisten the inside joint where the two pieces meet. So we're gonna use our metal rib and we can clean it off a bit. We're going to smooth the base over the cylinder with our metal rib and gently support the inside of your vase with your other hand. So I'm scraping the clay up, but towards me and rotate it as necessary. Oh, that was too much. Use as much moisture as you need, but as little as you can. We don't wanna re-wet our project. You can use the sponge to remove any water from your work surface. Make sure that you're not just taking the clay away, but that it is covering the seam. Make sure that your cylinder is keeping its shape, and that's also a good time to use your wooden rib. Just placing it inside and rotating it as you go around and depending how long you're working, you wanna keep the edges moist so that you can carve away while you're fiddling with the shape, you can use your sponge to moisten the inner walls of your vase. Now that we have it structurally sound, we can flip it over and start to carve it, just cleaning up the edges. I love this silicone rib because it not only takes some of the clay off, but it smooths it as well. I think this is a great stopping point to stop and wash my hands. I can tell that the clay is starting to flake off and I don't want it to get on my vase. Continue to smooth the walls. Moving your rib from bottom to top. Moistening your vessel as you go along, if necessary. It's looking good over here. And keep gently supporting it with your other hand and rotating it as you go around. And you'll know when it needs to be moistened if you see any cracks or if you're having a hard time smoothing it out with your rib. You can also use your brush for smoothing. That sponge was kind of leaving a little residue. Let's moist in our rim, and I just love to smooth the clay with the crevice of my finger. Let's clean off our rib and you can experiment and see which rib that you prefer and just trim the vase just a little bit at a at a time. You can always take clay off, but it's hard to put it back on. Let's try a carving tool. We've got a little bit of a bulge right here. Oh, I'm seeing it take shape. Your piece is already structurally sound, so we're just going to carve a little more until we're happy with the aesthetics of it, making sure the rim is rounded. Now it's to my liking. I love how rounded the rim is. I've trimmed it just how I like it. And just remember, it's gonna get a little bit thinner with shrinkage. We have a couple of options here. You could let this dry and decorate it as is. It'd be a great vessel or I have two more vase styles to show you. So we need to keep this moist because it's the foundation for both of them.

Make pitcher

- We're gonna transform this vessel into a pitcher with a spout and a handle. But just remember, it's not food safe. We're gonna seal it and it'll be water resistant, but that's why we measured the jar because that's what's going to be holding the water. Remember to keep your work surface clean. We don't need any dried bits sticking to the clay. So we're gonna make our spout. You wanna make sure that your vessel is nice and moist on the top. Let's take our water and moisten the rim, just making sure it's going to be nice and pliable for us to shape. It really makes no difference where you want to place the spout. Just whatever feels right to you. I'm selecting this side to put my spout on

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because it seems to be a little taller than the rest of the rim. I moisten up my fingers so that they glide across the clay, and I like to use these two fingers and this finger to pull out. So these fingers are going to support. And this finger is gonna pull the clay out slightly and it's almost a pinching motion with these two fingers. As you support, you're pulling them in slightly as you pull the spout out. See, there it is already forming. That's a great shape. Oh, got a little nail divot in there, but that is easily cleaned up and we're gonna be cleaning up with our rib as well. So don't worry about perfection, just get the shape right now and you want to make sure it's as symmetrical as you can get it. I just love how easily this comes together and adds such an amazing detail. And it doesn't have to be perfect. You don't have to worry about it pouring perfectly because like I said earlier, it's not going to be holding water. And we are gonna clean it up after we put the handle on. I'm pretty happy with that. Now we're gonna form the handle. Let's grab some clay. I've got just the right size scrap for this. So we're gonna take our clay and we're gonna start forming it into a log. And you wanna make sure that this is the same moisture content as your pitcher is. You can moisten with water if needed to smooth out any cracks and folds. And we're just gonna lightly roll it out, keeping it nice, and even you don't want any thin spots, just slowly spreading it out. So I'm gently rolling, not too much pressure, but I'm also gently moving my hands out and that helps elongate the clay. If you start getting any cracks, just use your water to moisten. I like to make the handle longer than I'm gonna need so I can cut it down. It's easy to take clay away, but it's harder to put it on. As you're moistening with water, you can also be pushing it out and that helps elongate it as well. I'm just gently pinching, slightly pinching, low pressure, so it stays nice and even. It's important not to go too thin because it could get brittle and not be able to withstand being held by the handle. And remember, it will shrink as it dries. I think this looks great. Okay, let's clean up one side. We can use our rib or your straight edge tool. Just cut a little off, making sure that it's longer than your vase. So now we're just gonna test out the length of the handle. And some handles are small and tight, some are wider, just depends on what look you're going for. If there's a thicker side, I like to put that at the bottom just for aesthetics. This is just what I had in mind. Now we're going to gently put it up against our vase and I think about where we want it. That looks about right, a little under the lip and a little above the edge of the bottom. So now we're going to take our straight edge and we're gonna score both sides of the handle. And this is going to help the clay adhere to itself, like little teeth that grab onto each other. Don't go too deep, but make sure you're making adequate texture. Then I love to dip the handles into my water, both ends, and then put it on the pitcher of where you want it to place it. And this is going to mark so that I can then score the pitcher just to make sure that it's parallel with the spout and that the top and the bottom are even. So here we have our wet marks and that's where we're going to score. So place your scored marks on top of each other and you're gonna gently wiggle the clay together, and that is gonna help it join to itself. Do the same to the bottom. If you need to remoisten your scoring marks, go ahead and do that. Support the inside while you're pressing into the pitcher, just wiggling. So that not only helps the clay grab onto each other, but it's also creating a little bit of a slurry or a slip. And that's gonna help you close the seams. Make sure that it is straight, parallel to the spout, the top and bottom of the handle are on top of each other. Now we're gonna put it gently, cradle it in your hands, supporting it with your hands, we're gonna take our rib. I like to use the metal one first 'cause it scrapes better. You're just gonna take some of the clay from your handle, pushing it down to the where it's joined, and come out and moisten the clay if you need to with your brush or your finger. And your goal is to move the clay rather than remove it. And don't worry about any imperfections that may happen. We're gonna be cleaning this up. And this just helps seal any gaps where the handle meets the pitcher. And just

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gently rotate the pitcher as needed so you can get all around the entire handle. Don't forget to moisten it. So just dragging the clay and pulling it out, making it into one piece instead of two, gently supporting it. It can be a little tricky doing the inside underneath the handle, but just go slow. You might have a tendency to rush through this, but you've come this far, let's just go slow. We're basically just wanting the seam to disappear between the handle and the pitcher, And your paintbrush can help smooth out any of those edges. 151 00:13:09,855 --> 00:13:09,975 I love how the bottom of that handle is turning out. The clay is working with me today. Let's work on the top of the handle. Remember to keep your rib cleaned off. It can get a little gunky and the sharper the better. And you can wipe it off using another rib, or I just like to wipe it on the edge of my work surface. With the top of the handle, it's so close to the rim that you have to be careful when shaping it because this is the part that people are gonna see the most. I like to gently support the pitcher with one hand while taking your hand with the rib. I'm gonna smooth it going inward towards the pitcher, just removing that seam, bringing the clay onto itself. Don't forget to moisten as needed. Remember to retain the shape of the rim, smoothing that out, pushing it back out. If needed, Continue closing the join around the entire handle and don't forget to keep your hands washed. Then take your pottery rib and clean the entire vessel, the body as well as the handle and the spout. For example, I noticed that this side of the spout is a little bit thicker, so I'm gonna be using my pottery rib to take off some of that clay and smooth it. Just remember, go slow. You can always take clay off, but it's really hard to put it back on. I love how it turned out. Sometimes you never know, the clay can be a little finicky. The clay becomes what the clay wants to become. But now it's time to let it dry. It's gonna take a couple days for this to completely dry, but it's very important to let it dry slowly. The handle is smaller than the base and is gonna wanna dry quicker, which might pull out moisture from the base, which could cause cracks. So we're gonna wrap it in Saran wrap and let it dry as slowly and evenly as we possibly can. So I just like covering it all around, especially the handle, still being gentle with it. It's still malleable. And now you just wanna set that to where it will be untouched and let it dry for a couple of days. Keep checking on it. You'll know it's fully dry, the color's gonna change, it may not be consistent, and it won't feel cold to the touch. Cleaning up your tools after working with air dry clay is very important. Air dry clay won't reconstitute after being fully dried, so it could ruin your sponges and your brushes. Also important, don't pour your wet clay down the sink. Take a wet paper towel, wipe that out and throw it into the trash. Now that my pitcher's fully dried, I started sealing it, which provides a really great sheen and gloss, as well as protects it and makes it water resistant. Let's finish sealing it. And I just use a paintbrush for this. Now that it's hardened, I like to support it on my hand and it will change colors as you seal it, but it will dry back to the same white. But it does help you to see what spots you've missed, Clean up any drips just by thinning it out, smoothing it over with your brush. And now we're gonna carefully let this dry after this is fully dry, it will be safe to turn over so that you can seal the interior as well as the rim. Be sure to let it dry at least overnight. And if you're interested in painting it, I'll show you how with our next vase style.

Build a face vase

- We are gonna turn this vase into a face. I'm not entirely sure why I started creating these face vases, but I just love the little character they each have and how they can engage with each other when they're all finished and painted. So we're going to be adding the nose to this one. We're gonna grab just a little tiny piece of clay. We need just a slight amount of clay for the nose. We want it to be the same moisture content as your vase. So basically I'm kind of sculpting a pear shape almost.

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And I'll slowly form it into a just a simplified nose, triangular. And I don't think you can go wrong here with size or shape, just whatever you're feeling. You can use a little bit of water to shape out any folds or cracks that form. But you want the back of this form to be flat, that's where we'll attach it to the vase. We're gonna grab our straight edge, I'm using my X-Acto knife to score the backside of the nose, making those cross hatch marks, which will help the clay adhere to itself. And I like to wet it and place it on the clay so I'll know where to score the vase. I haven't let this dry after building and it's still moist. Put a little extra moisture on there. I think this feels just about right. And you'll get different characteristics depending on how high or how low you place the nose. And now I'm gonna score the vase where the nose was touching. Now we're gonna gently support the vase from the inside and wiggle our nose around to get that clay to attach to itself. And you can moisten the clay to help it mold to itself, over itself. And don't worry about any little dents you might make. We're gonna be cleaning that up. We're gonna use our paintbrush to moisten the edges of the nose so that we can easily bring that clay onto itself. And you can use your rib, metal or the silicone to bring the clay and close those seams. I like to start with the bridge of the nose and work up Carefully supporting it. You're gonna have to get it in different angles. Just bring the clay in a downward motion down towards the vase. Sealing that join smoothing as you go, but it doesn't have to be too perfect at this step. Our focus is to join the clay. Carefully moving the clay so you can get at a better angle and moisten as necessary. This side is a little trickier for me because I am a lefty. And let's not forget underneath the nose, I am pretty happy with that join. And now we're just gonna clean it up. Remember, if you need to reshape your vase, it's perfectly moist and you can still do that. And cleaning off your ribs will help, also. I am going in with a metal rib now 'cause now that I've smoothed the joint, I feel like the metal rib just has enough sharpness to start taking clay off where I need it to. And just shaping my nose. I love to use my fingers to shape it. There's no wrong way to do this. It's just about where you're satisfied and where you think the nose looks absolutely cute. And you can use your paintbrush, just lightly dampened to smooth any clay on that nose. Before we move on to making the eyes, we're not gonna worry about cleaning up any imperfections around the vase right now 'cause we'll be handling it a lot when we put the eyes on. Isn't it so cute? Sometimes I leave it just like this, I love it with or without eyes. But next we'll be putting on the eyelids. You're just gonna grab a little ball of clay. It's about a dime size and you're gonna roll it, wetting any cracks that might be present. Then we're gonna put it onto our board and flatten it. I just flipped it over so it wouldn't stick. And we're gonna cut that in half. It feels a little big to me. These are actually eyelids and not the whole eye right now. And you can shape it in your hands, elongate it if needed. I like the size of that. And just remember, as the clay dries, it will shrink also. And if you don't feel comfortable carving away, you can just roll another smaller ball. Be sure and get the edges of those eyelids, also. Get these eyelids close to the same size as you can. We're gonna score these before placing them. Moisten them and we're gonna place them onto our vase where we want them to be. And the wet marks will show where we need to score on the vase. And eye placement is pretty important, it changes the mood of your project. I tend to go for a cutesy look, so I like my eyes to be placed lower. - I think that looks about right. - And that's something just have to experiment as you make more. Let's score our vase where the wet mark is. And it doesn't have to be perfect. We'll be cleaning that up. Just add a little bit of moisture to help the clay stick to itself. Gently wiggling it around in place, gentle taps just helps the textured clay to grab onto itself. You can use your paintbrush to go around the edges. This just softens the eyelid. I don't like harsh edges on here. And you can gently use that paintbrush to tap it down as well. - It looks so cute already. There we go. 125 00:14:14,080 --> 00:14:15,080 Let's take a look. Straighten anything that

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you need to straighten out. I love it already. So now we just need to clean up some of these marks and dents. We can use our pottery rib for that. Make sure that we reshape the interior back to a round cylinder. And we're gonna take our pottery rib, always supporting the interior. 'cause as you're pushing in, you don't wanna push out, but just hold it stiff. We're just gonna slowly go around the entire vase and we're not really taking clay off. Some may come off, but we're just smoothing. See, just a tiny bit might come off. And just keep that rib clean. Just rotating it as you go. And this vase is fairly moist, oo as I'm gliding the rib across, the clay is pretty much gliding with it. If you are more interested in carving some off, you might wanna to just let it dry for about 10 minutes, stiffen up, just makes it easier to carve. But I love working in this state. I love seeing texture and lines, but if that's something that's not your favorite, you can just dip you finger and water and rub it over. Now, as we come to the front of our vase with the facial features, you just wanna be more mindful, careful with where you're putting your rib and your fingers. Just remember not to make it too thin. The walls will thin as your project dries. You are gonna wanna meet your project at different angles so you don't have to pick it up as much. I'm completely happy with how this little vase looks. Now we're going to let this completely dry. It might take up couple of days. Follow your manufacturer's instructions. And with clay, it always depends on the time of year and the humidity in your house. After it's fully dried, the color might change, get lighter. It might not be consistent. You'll be able to tell when it's completely dry. When it's not cool to the touch anymore, you're gonna wanna then seal that completely inside and out and let that completely dry.

Paint a face vace

- This face vase has fully dried and has been sealed, so now we're gonna start painting it. I'm using this acrylic paint because I love these two colors together. But you could also use acrylic based craft paint or acrylic based gouache, whatever you've got. I would squeeze my paint directly onto my project. It just eliminates one more dish to wash. Depending on your color and what kind of paint you're using, you might have to do two coats. Get that paint into all the cracks and crevices. This type of paint can be a little dry, so don't be afraid to add a little bit of moisture. Don't paint the rim just yet because we're gonna use that to rest our vase on while we paint the bottom. When it's upside down, you can see a lot of spots that you missed. Let it dry completely before adding a new coat or painting the rim and interior. So here's the face vase, it's had a couple of coats for the exterior and a couple of coats for the interior. I just love that pop of blue. We're gonna be adding the facial features using these paint pens. Let's start with white. You're just creating a half moon shape for the whites of the eyes, and you may have to do a couple coats of this until you get it as opaque as you'd like it. Do your best to get these about the same size. And you're gonna wanna let that dry between coats. Let's move on to the cheeks. While we're waiting for that to dry, I like little cute little cheeks, just making a little circle that's coming to life already. Oh, I love this pink. You could use craft paint to put these details on as well, but I love these paint markers. All right, just a little bigger. How cute is that? I love how that color is popping. We'll add the pupils when the eyes are all dry. I'm gonna be using black to put the pupils on, but you could use blue or brown or whichever color you'd prefer. This is where you think about pupil placement. You could have it looking to the side up or down or straight ahead. I always love a good side eye that's already having a lot of attitude. Oh my gosh, I love how opaque that is. It's not gonna need another coat, but I'm gonna use this white. I always love to put a little twinkle in their eyes. Oh my gosh. How adorable is that?! When your face vase is all painted, let that dry completely and then you're going to seal it to protect it and let that dry completely. Look at all we can create from that one foundational vase. We

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have a pitcher, and this is just raw clay dried and sealed. And look at these face vases all looking at each other. Here's the finished pitcher but with paint, and I add a little stencil detail, but you can add water in this jar, here's the jar that we measured, and put some flowers in it or it's perfect for holding office supplies and art supplies. Now this pitcher made from air dry clay is strong enough to hold by the handle, but if you're gonna fill it with water, it's best to just be on the safe side and support it with your other hand. You worked so hard on it. All of the hand building techniques that I've shared with you in this course can also be applied to kiln fired clay. These projects are gonna brighten up your living spaces.

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