

CASUAL COCKTAILS

by Keok B Lim



Having grown up on a farm as the youngest child in a large family, I spent my childhood observing nature, playing with my eight older brothers, and daydreaming. Today, I look to my childhood explorations as inspiration for my creations and drawings.

My illustrations often have a backstory, and I tend toward whimsical and colorful graphics with loose lines. With my pitcher and martini cups, I build clean, simple porcelain forms with a smooth surface, with the intent of illustrating a before-and-after party scene. I further define the form by leaving the seams exposed, making them look like casually folded origami paper.





1 Gather these tools and templates to create a martini cup.



2 Compress the cone tip with a roller, then paddle it to avoid cracks forming.



3 Gently roll the narrower end of the foot on a tabletop to form a rounded edge.



4 Attach the foot, then reshape the cup form using the curved end of a rubber rib.



5 Score, overlap, and compress the edges of a cylinder together to form the pitcher.



6 Roll the bottom edge of the pitcher body on a tabletop to form a rounded ledge.

Constructing the Martini Cups

To make the body of the cup, I use a template (1) made out of a 7½-inch circle with a cut-out angle of about 120° (you can play with this cut-out angle, which determines the flare of the martini cup, by overlapping the edges of the template more or less). Roll out a soft porcelain slab to a little less than ⅛ inch thick. This thin wall will produce a translucent look and make these cups feel like lightweight, delicate glasses.

After compressing the slab with a large metal rib to realign the clay particles, trace and cut around the template with a knife, and then smooth and thin out the edges with a damp finger to give it a softer look. Score and slip the slab edge, then fold the slab to create a cone-like form (see 2), overlapping about ¼ inch at the edges to create the body of the cup. Gently press the edges together using your fingers, then compress the seam with the smaller end of a pony roller on the outside and the curved end of a rubber rib on the inside. Special care should be taken at the tip of the cone, as cracks tend to form here. I often paddle gently in addition to compressing the tip with a roller (2). Rest the cone upside down on a piece of foam until it dries to a soft leather-hard consistency before attaching the base.

To make the base, use a thicker slab, about ⅛–⅜ inch thick, for the foot. Simply trace and cut along the foot template (see 1), smooth the edges with a finger, and join the short sides by scoring

and compressing. Rock the narrower end of the base gently on the table to create a ledge for attaching to the body (3). Let the foot and body rest until they are both soft leather hard before attaching them together. Score and gently tap the two pieces together. Once the two pieces are attached, reshape the cup form using a rib, and compress and thin the edges with your fingers to make the martini cup (4).

Constructing the Pitcher Body

Using a ⅜-inch-thick slab, trace and cut the rectangular wall using a template (see 1). After smoothing and thinning the edges, score and overlap them to form a cylinder, compressing the joint with your fingers. Use a roller on the outside (5) and rib on the inside, while leaving the seams exposed. Holding the cylinder upright, gently roll the bottom edges on the tabletop to form a rounded ledge (6) for attaching to the base later. Then, rest the cylinder on a piece of foam so the edge does not become distorted.

To make the base, cut the slab (also ⅜ inch thickness) about ¼ inch bigger in circumference than the pitcher body. In this case, I intentionally cut an irregular circle to make the seams overlap, adding visual interest. Let the pitcher body and base rest until they reach soft leather hard before attaching them. Smooth the edges and assemble by scoring, wrapping the base around the



7

Attach base to the pitcher body. Compress with a roller to form a rounded base.



8

Cut the pitcher wall just inside the spout's slip mark, then smooth the edges.



9

Attach the spout and compress the seams with a roller.



10

Use a fine-tip (0.3 mm) underglaze pen to create thin, delicate lines.



11

Vary the slip-trailer tip size and pressure to create different strokes effects.



12

Brush watered-down underglazes over the drawings to add color and dimension.



Set of four mugs, 4½ in. (11 cm) in width each, porcelain.



Blue and White Yunomi, to 3¼ in. (8 cm) in height, porcelain, underglazes, fired to cone 6.



Corrugated Box Mugs, 4½ in. (11 cm) in width each, stoneware, underglazes, fired to cone 6.

bottom edges of the body (7). Take care to compress the seams. Thin the edges using a roller, rib, or paddle.

Constructing the Spout

Roll out a slab that is slightly thicker than ¼ inch, trace and cut out the spout shape using a template, then smooth the edges. When fitting the spout, gently curve it, then lightly score the edges that will attach to the pitcher. Apply a thin layer of slip on the attachment edge of the spout, then press the spout lightly against the wall to mark its final location. Remove the spout and cut the pitcher wall just inside the slip print mark (8). After smoothing the edges, score and attach the spout to the pitcher body. Reinforce the attachment using a pony roller (9).

Reshape the spout to form a smooth V shape. **Tip:** To avoid dripping when pouring, it is important to create a thin wall and a sharp interior edge at the V tip of the spout. Use a sharp knife to slice off a thin strip of clay at the V tip when the clay is a hard leather hard, leaving the edges sharp.

Dry all of the pieces slowly and evenly by loosely draping three layers of plastic over them.

Decorating and Designing

For this pitcher and martini cup set, I used an Axner Precision Trailing Bottle with a metal tip and black underglaze to draw on the surface after the pieces were bisque fired. I choose an extra fine (0.3 mm) tip when I need fine lines and detailed drawings and a fine tip (0.5 mm) for bolder strokes. The finest tip tends to clog easily. I find adding a few drops of water into the underglaze and shaking the bottle for 30 seconds or more helps prevent clogging.

I often make my form with some vague ideas about the surface decoration, but it often changes as I progress. I spend quite a bit of time staring at the form before deciding what to put on it. If I'm working on new designs, I search images of my subjects, do sketches on paper, and then make very quick pencil marks on the surface of the pieces to be decorated. Drawing on the surface

happens intuitively, without following the pencil marks. When I draw using the underglaze trailer, I often do it quickly, decisively, without worrying about where each stroke should land. If I make a mistake, I wait until the underglaze is totally dried, then scrape the mistake away with sharp carving tools. Do not try to correct the mistake when the underglaze is still wet as it'll leave dirty smudges. One advantage of this slip trailer is that you can create different strokes by varying the pressure and speed of your application. I like to combine tiny, delicate lines by drawing quickly and lightly using the finest slip trailer tip (10), with bolder lines using the larger tip, squeezing with more pressure and at different angles, at times scratching on the surface similar to using a palette knife on canvas, achieving some very interesting effects (11).

Coloring

When the black underglaze outline of my drawing is dry, usually several hours later, I brush very watered-down underglazes over the drawing to add color and dimension (12). If the designs are very detailed, I sometimes bisque fire my pieces again to set the underglaze drawings so they won't smudge when apply a finishing glaze.

Finish these pieces with a shiny clear or matte translucent glaze fired to cone 6. I don't usually glaze the outside of my functional pieces because I like the feel of an unglazed, sandpaper-polished porcelain surface; that way, the illustrations look more like drawings on paper.

After the pieces have been high fired, I sand the unglazed surface with 400-grit sandpaper. I do this step either wearing a good quality, professionally fitted respirator in a well-ventilated space or using wet sandpaper on wet pieces to avoid inhaling dust.

Keok B Lim was born in Singapore and worked as a dentist for 20 years before moving to Atlanta in 2001 with her family. She began making pottery and sculpture 15 years ago at the Spruill Center for the Arts in Dunwoody, Georgia, while homeschooling her autistic son. Her years of teaching special-needs pottery has taught her to simplify, laugh, and "just do it." Learn more at www.keoklim.com and on Instagram @keokblim.