

A House BUILT FOR BUTTER

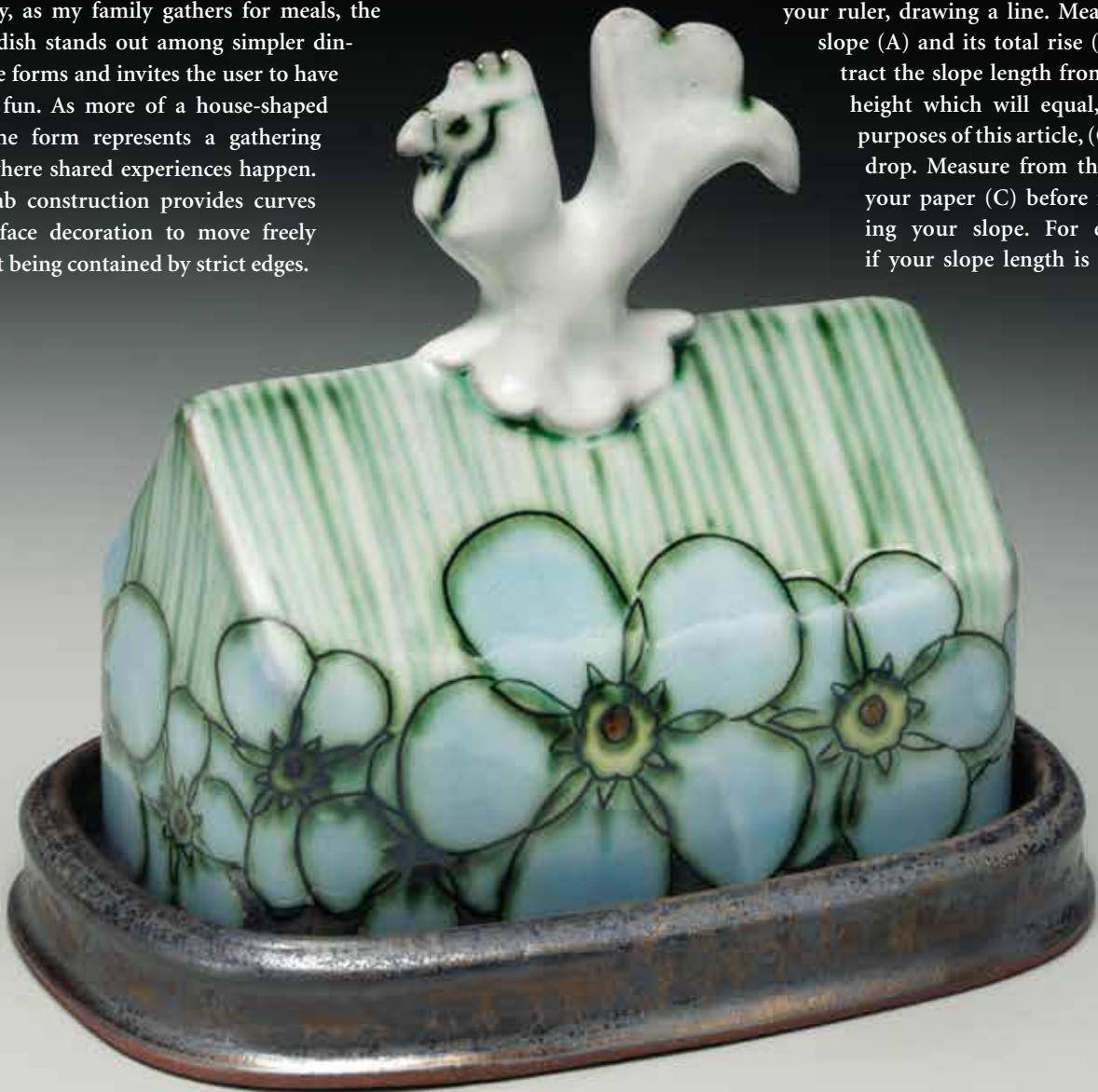
by Courtney Long

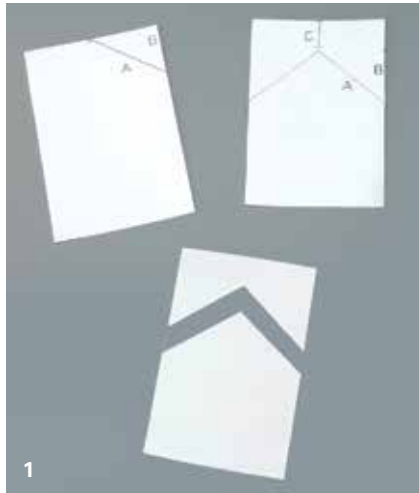
The butter dish, no matter how elaborately designed, in essence, is an informal form reserved for informal dining. The butter dish is the first pot I touch in the morning for making toast, a daily ritual since childhood. I remember my Grandmother Ruth's glass butter dish surrounded by other condiment containers: sugar, salt, pepper, Mason jars of preserves, and honey, all centered on her kitchen table welcoming family to eat, stay awhile, and enjoy. Butter is a part of my family's meal time history.

Today, as my family gathers for meals, the butter dish stands out among simpler dinnerware forms and invites the user to have a little fun. As more of a house-shaped dish, the form represents a gathering place where shared experiences happen. Soft-slab construction provides curves for surface decoration to move freely without being contained by strict edges.

Creating Templates

To begin, measure the item you wish your object to contain and create a house-shaped template, making sure to consider your clay body's shrinkage rate. The house's width is the main concern for creating a second template of a roof slope to be cut away, letting the remaining clay sides fold over and connect at the ridge line. Cut a paper sized for the form's height and width (1). Mark the center of your paper at the top and choose a slope that's pleasing to your eye. Angle your ruler, drawing a line. Measure the slope (A) and its total rise (B). Subtract the slope length from its rise height which will equal, for the purposes of this article, (C) or the drop. Measure from the top of your paper (C) before re-drawing your slope. For example, if your slope length is 2 inches





1 Create templates of the roof slope and negative space. Use either to make the cutout, assuring the sides meet at the ridge line.



2 Form the slab into an oval and tack the ends together. Don't overlap ends past the meeting angles or you'll get a lump.



3 Use both hands to form the oval-shaped slab into a soft-cornered rectangle. Do this on both short ends.



4 Hold the sides of the house with your palms and use your thumbs to fold the roof clay down beginning at the eaves.



5 Starting at the peak, pinch the edges together between your fingertips, working downward to the eaves.



6 Lay the form on its side and press your finger in a steady line motion along the corners to accentuate the shape.

and the height is $1\frac{1}{2}$ inches, then drop down $\frac{1}{2}$ inch before drawing your slope. If you eliminate this step, you will be left with too little clay on the long sides to meet at the ridge line. Transfer your design to tar paper, then label and clip the templates together.

Rolling a Consistent Slab

It can be difficult to roll a slab at a consistent thickness without a slab roller, so use $\frac{1}{8}$ -inch-thick wooden spacer sticks. Set the sticks apart just inside the width of your largest rolling pin. Cut your clay lengthwise $\frac{1}{2}$ inch thick and place it between the spacers. Press down and away from your body. The clay will want to stick to the surface between rolling pin swipes. For larger slabs, simply pick up the edges and peel back before placing back down to roll thinner; this action itself may thin the slab further. Continue rolling until the slab has leveled to the thickness of your measuring stick. **Tip:** I use a Super Surface Clay Mat when rolling slabs because it has a rubber backing (so it does not move while rolling and tossing slabs) and it has a non-textured surface. Cut desired sections and fine tune the thickness with even swipes, flipping the slab between passes. Compress and smooth the slab with a rib. Let the slab rest on unfinished wood or a plaster drywall board to absorb some moisture until it's soft leather hard.



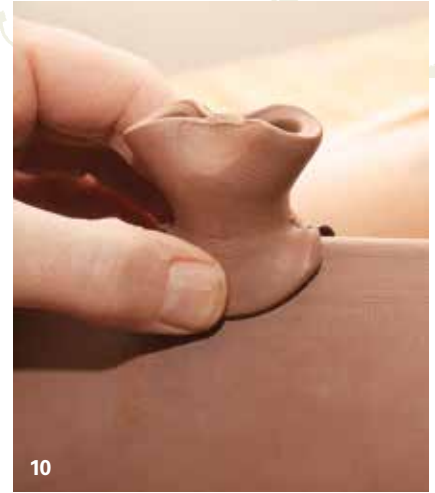
7 Throw a knob shape from a large lump of clay on the wheel. Make it proportional to the house shape.



8 Pinch the slightly flared rim of the knob together in the middle, leaving two openings on each end.



9 Cut a deep slice through the middle of the knob, then cut an angle toward the slice on both sides.



10 Join the knob to the ridge line, creating a decorative attachment with deep finger marks that's ready to be sculpted.



11 Roll out a hollow cone, cut it at an angle, flip it, and reattach in the opposite direction creating a right angle.



12 Continue smoothing and sculpting. Poke a hole in the hollow knob for air to escape during drying and firing.



13 Throw a bottomless ring on the wheel. Compress it while slowly pulling the ring outward to create a wall for a tray.



14 Create a ridge to accentuate the slab foot, designate a place for waxing, and slow glaze runoff.

Building the House

Trace the butter dish template with a needle tool onto the slab. X-Acto blades are thin and will give you a crisp line without dragging the clay and slightly altering the shape. Hold your X-Acto knife vertical when cutting, don't angle it. To create a seamless connection at the joints, bevel the slab's edge, and score before flipping and beveling the opposite side. Pick up the slab and shape it into a cylinder, finger tacking one end before flipping over and finger tacking the opposite end (2). Work downward toward the middle as you coax the seam closed, flipping once again and repeating. Working this way prevents clay dragging, which can cause an uneven top and bottom. Try not to overlap the ends too far past the meeting angles or you will get a lump. Use a serrated rib and gently scrape away any excess clay gathered at seam. Compress and smooth the seam with a rubber rib while pressing from the inside with your other hand across from the ribbing motion. Form the slab into a soft-cornered rectangle by cupping your hands around the ends and pressing (3).

Trace the roof-slope template with a needle tool on both sides of the rectangular-shaped cylinder. Bevel the edges that will be joined together for each roof line when cutting them out. After serrating the beveled edges, apply slurry water with a brush, keep-

ing wetness localized. Hold the sides of your house with your palms and use your thumbs to fold the clay down, beginning at the eaves (4). Fold the roof over, tacking at its peak first before working the remaining clay connection in a downward motion toward the eaves. Repeat for the opposite side before pinching the edges between your thumb and finger tips (5). Compress all inside seams with a rubber-tipped tool.

Next, gently lay the form on its side and press your finger in a steady line motion on the interior to further emphasize the corners and define volume (6).

A Rooster-Shaped Handle

The knob is thrown from a larger clay hump. Separate a small ball of clay from the centered mound, roughly the size of a cherry tomato. Wrap your left hand on the outside of the small ball as you press your left thumb in the middle making a hole. Pinch and pull the walls upward 1 inch (7). Run your rib on the outside; use the curved side to create a flare at the bottom and to slightly pull upward and outward, flaring the top. Pinch the middle of the knob together (8). Cut the knob off of the hump as level as possible using a wire tool. Once the knob is soft leather hard, flip it over, make a deep slice, and cut an angle toward the slice on both sides so it will grip the ridge line of the roof (9). Serrate the clay and add slurry water with a brush. Pinch the knob onto the house form (10), then create a decorative attachment with deep finger marks if desired.

Create two small hollow cones for the rooster's tail and head by inserting a rounded wood tool such as paint brush handle into the cone's base. Press down as you roll away from yourself until the cone bottom flares. Let the cones set up to a soft leather hard. Serrate the cone base and opening, add slurry water, then gently glide the two back and forth until they stick together. Move some of the cone's outer wall downward with a serrated rib into the knob below. Smooth the inside and outside connection with a wooden tool. Pinch one end closed to create the tail and cut the edges to reference feathers. For the head, cut your cone at an angle. Remove the tip, flip it in the opposite direction creating a right angle, and join (11). Continue sculpting the head and adding details (12). Be sure to add an air hole to the hollow forms.

Creating the Tray

Center ½-pound ball of clay on the wheel to create the butter dish base. Wet your hands then place your palms against the clay, pressing to move the clay up into a cone shape. Press the cone back down into a biscuit shape. Press your left thumb down with your right fingers into the center of the mound all the way to the bat head. At 6 o'clock on the wheel head, grip the clay donut with your left hand and place your right index and middle fingers on top, compressing while pulling outward (13). Let the



Above and below: *Farmhouse Salt and Pepper Shakers in Caddy*, to 6½ in. (17 cm) in length, earthenware, porcelain slip, sgraffito, Patina copper wash, layered glazes, including Odyssey Clear, Amaco Celadon Sky Blue C-21, and Spectrum Glaze Gold Rain 1114, fired to cone 5, 2016. *Photos: Tim Barnwell.*

PATINA
Cone 04–10 Oxidation

1 Tbsp Gerstley Borate
1 Tbsp EPK Kaolin
1 Tbsp Black Copper Oxide

The patina can be applied under or over glaze. The fuzzy edges give a sense of movement. I paint the wash over sgraffito lines and, wearing gloves, wipe away excess with a damp sponge.

ODYSSEY CLEAR
Cone 5–6 Oxidation or Reduction

Gerstley Borate	20.00 %
Wollastonite	10.00
Nepheline Syenite	30.00
EPK Kaolin	10.00
Silica	30.00
	100.00 %
Add: Bentonite	2.04%



clay go around one full rotation for each motion outward because opening too fast will cause the clay to oval. I find that a 6½-inch-diameter ring is perfect for a butter-dish tray. Pull the clay upward creating a ring with a slight taper at the bottom on the inside. Let it firm up while still attached to the wheel.

Roll a ¼-inch-thick slab and let it dry to leather hard. Once the ring can hold its shape, wire it off and cup the sides with your hands, squaring in the same manner as the house. Score the bottom of the clay ring, add slurry water, then attach the ring to the slab. Sandwich the tray between two bats and flip it over. Using a pony roller, compress the slab to the ring and angle it to create a slight bevel and reinforce the attachment. Flip the tray back over and trim the slab to fit it. Use a rubber-tipped tool to accentuate the base, creating a decorative outline (14). The line also helps stop a runny glaze from going past the foot and designates a place for waxing.

Courtney Long is a studio potter and educator living in Morganton, North Carolina. She received her MFA from Syracuse University and is the Professional Crafts Coordinator at Western Piedmont Community College.