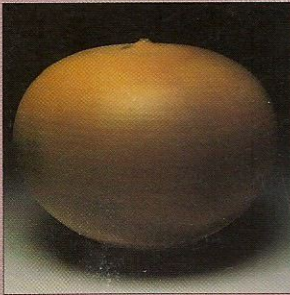


Pottery Making

I L L U S T R A T E D

\$5.00



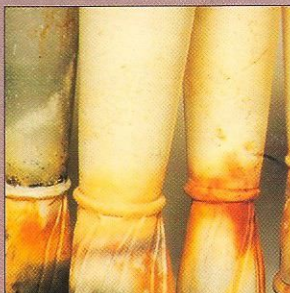
Making Bottles



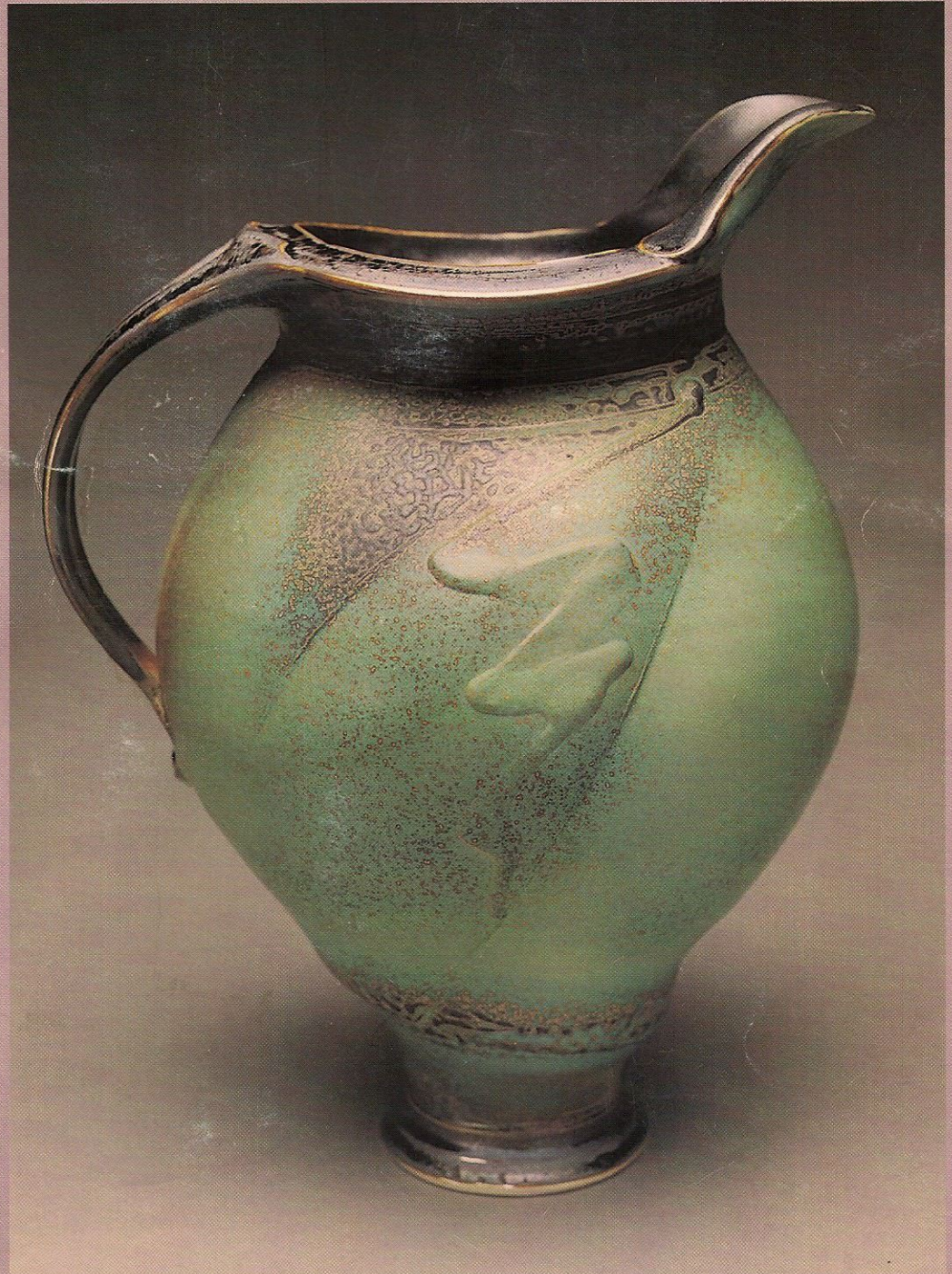
Trimming Basics



Making a Bench



Sagger Firing



Pulling Graceful Handles

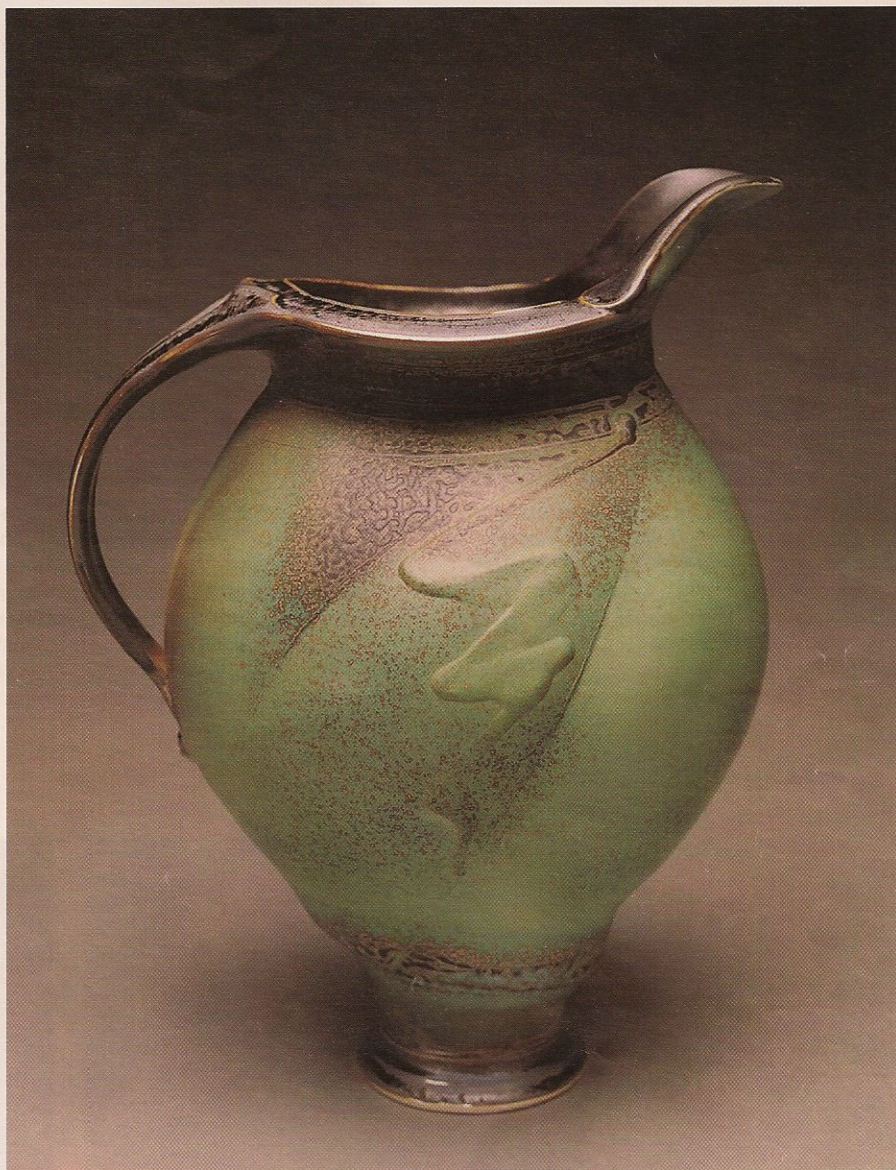
Pulling Handles

by Steven Hill

Even though a handle can be made using any ceramic technique (from pinching to slip casting), I prefer the organic fluidity of pulled handles on most of my pots. Pulling a handle directly on a pot encourages a natural integration with the form, much like an arm or leg extending from a torso.

The primary objective of a handle is to function well. It should be comfortable to hold and of an appropriate size for the pot. A mug handle might caress just one finger, while a large pitcher needs to hold an entire hand.

For me, however, the negative space formed by the curve of the handle is one of the most important design decisions on any pot, maybe even more important than the body of the pot itself. In a purely visual sense, the handle is where thin air and solid form coalesce.



PHOTOS: AL SURRETT

Melon pitcher, 13 inches in height, wheel thrown and altered, slip-trailed decoration, single-fired stoneware. From a design standpoint, the negative space created between the handle and pot will often be more dominant than the form of the pot itself.

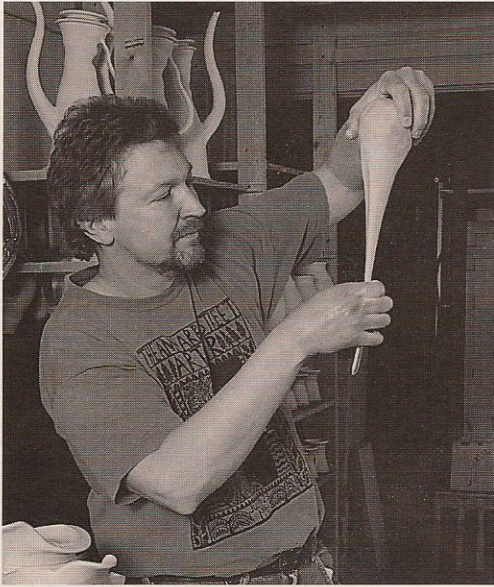


Figure 1. My technique involves pulling clay from a conical-shaped lump large enough for several handles, but not too heavy to hold at arm's length. I'm extremely generous with water, keeping the clay well lubricated. It is important for the handle to be a continuous taper from the base to the tail.

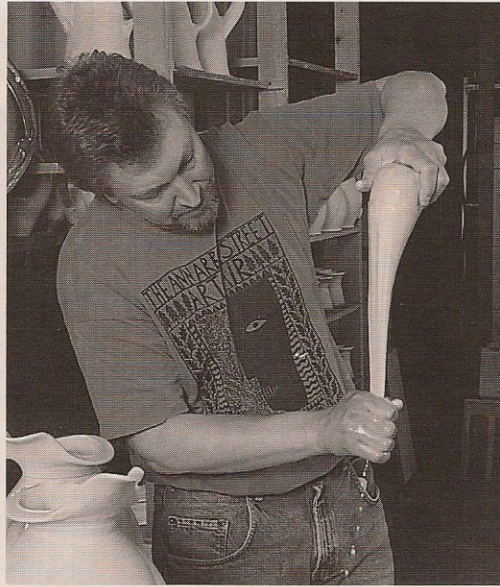


Figure 2. I rotate the clay 180° after each pull to keep everything symmetrical. The handle is pulled between my thumb and first finger of my right hand, but I use the tip of my right thumb to refine the form. The clay must be fairly plastic and not too stiff to pull a fluid handle. If you use a coarser or more non-plastic clay, make sure it is aged well.

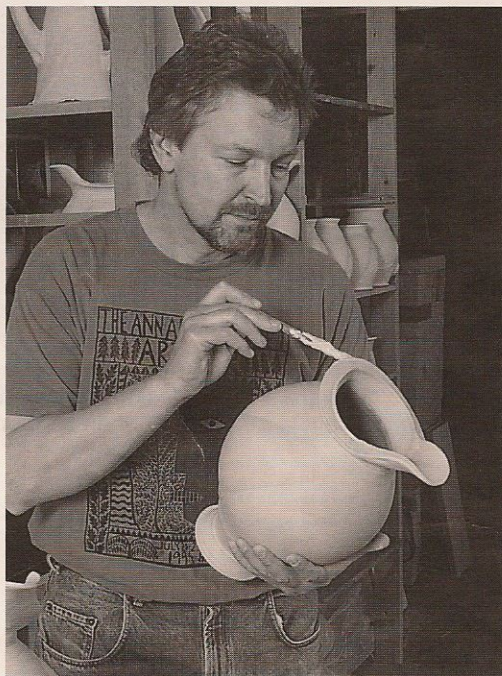


Figure 3. Slip is applied with a brush at the attachment point.

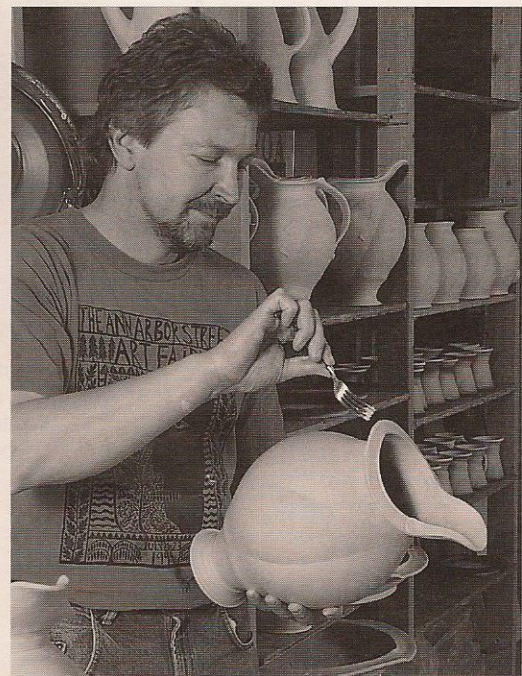


Figure 4. After the slip application, the pot is scored with a fork.

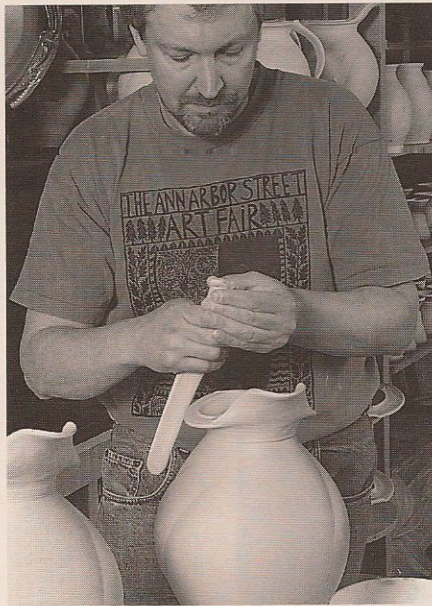


Figure 5. The butt end of the handle is patted out into a flare. This gives me plenty of clay to blend into the wall of the pot. Without this flare, the handle can easily get crimped at the point of attachment.

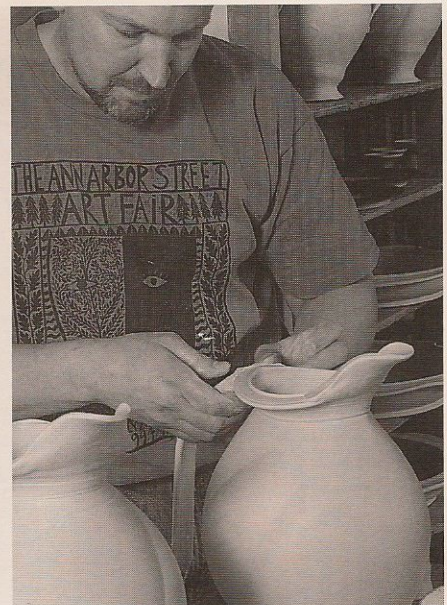


Figure 6. The handle is immediately pressed into the rim and neck of my pitcher. I use a twisting motion until I feel it take hold. Underneath this top attachment, the handle is carefully blended into the neck of the pot. On the top side at the rim, however, finger marks are left to show the direct method of attachment.

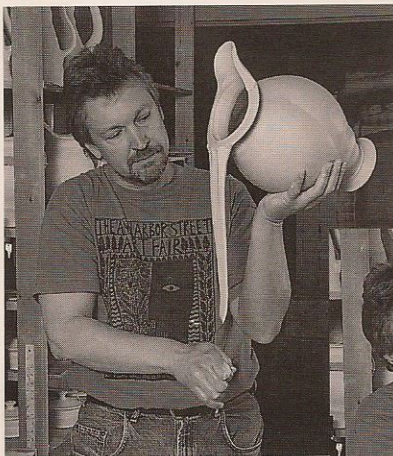


Figure 7.

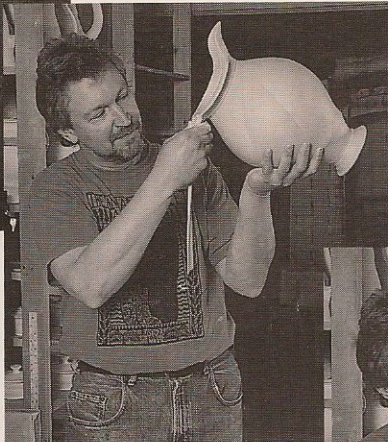


Figure 8.

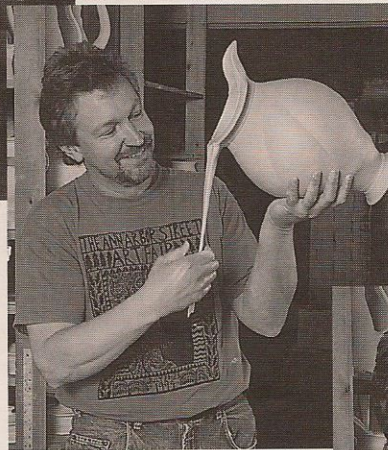


Figure 9.

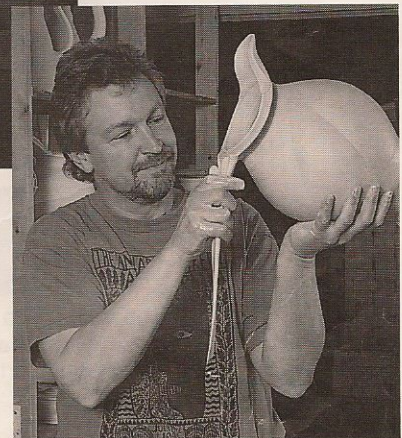


Figure 10.

Figures 7 through 10. On reasonably sized pots, I hold the pot horizontally and let gravity work with me. I continue pulling and refining the handle shape. My objective is to have the handle look as though it is growing out of the pot and not just stuck on. Maintaining the taper at this point will help ensure that the handle springs forth from the pitcher when it is completed.



Figure 11. I then set the pot upright on the edge of a table, gently supporting the curve of the handle.

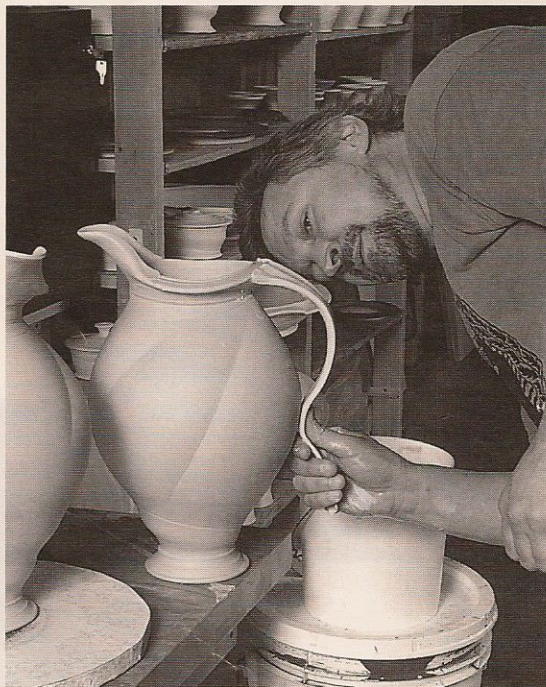
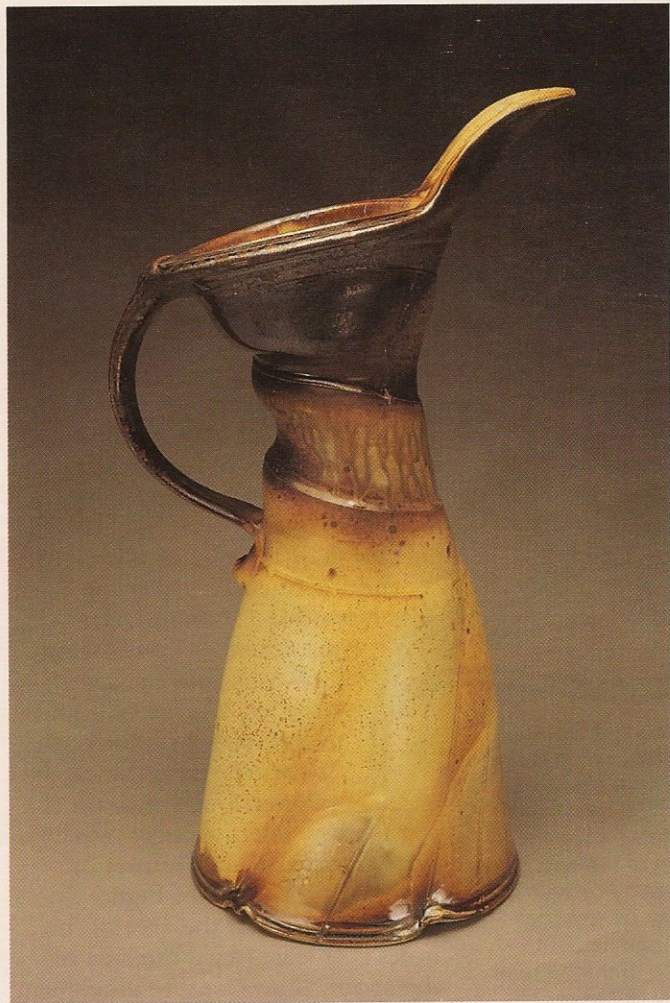


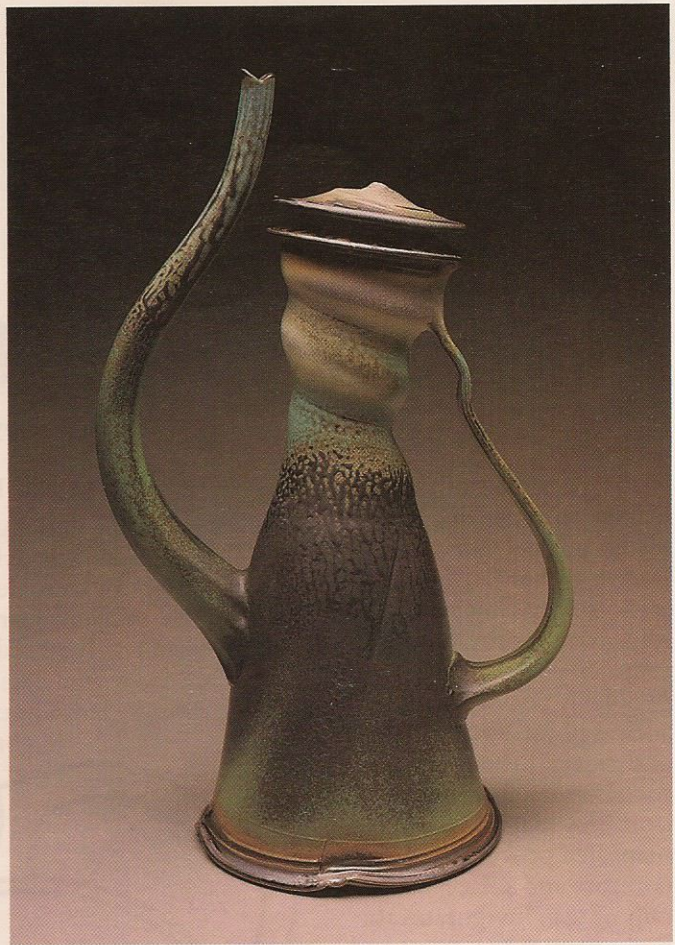
Figure 12. The taper should determine the curve of the handle without a need for any further support.



Figure 13. I use a simple sweeping motion with my thumbs to join and finish the tail end of the handle. After finishing the handle, it is a good idea to cover the pot with plastic overnight, so the water content will even out and lessen the chance for cracking.



Cypress pitcher, 19 inches in height, wheel thrown and altered, with pulled spout and handle, single-fired stoneware. In a purely visual sense, the handle is where thin air and solid form coalesce.



Cypress ewer, 18 inches in height, wheel thrown and altered, with pulled spout and handle, single-fired stoneware. Pulling handles directly on a pot encourages a natural integration with the form.

Steven Hill has been a studio potter for 25 years. He and his wife, Susan, are currently in the process of opening Red Star Studios (located in a former Red Star Yeast factory), a gallery and teaching studio in Kansas City, Missouri. For more information, see "Where You've Been Is Good and Gone; All You Keep Is the Gettin' There" in the April 1998 issue of Ceramics Monthly.