

Alex Olson

BROOKLYN, NEW YORK

Ceramics Monthly: What inspires your work in clay?

Alex Olson: My artwork is driven by my curiosity about the rhythms of the natural world and the intersections of landscape and home. Motion in the landscape (e.g. patterns of light and shadow, shifting seasons) fuels my desire to create and inspire the organic shapes in my pottery. I'm drawn to clay's malleability and versatility as a material, and I craft functional forms that people can integrate into their daily routines and rituals. More broadly, while making my work I consider how experiences in nature stay with us in transformative ways—and how we hold on to those experiences by bringing elements of the natural world into our homes.

CM: What techniques do you use to make your work and why?

AO: I make my pottery from a variety of porcelain and stoneware clays. Each piece is thrown by hand, carved, and textured using found objects such as shells and stones. In my work, I explore concepts of mark making and imprinting through both process and form: found objects from the landscape make physical marks in the clay, leaving imprints of place on my pottery. The compositions of curving edges and textures on my pots offer a rich sensory experience and tactile feeling in the hands that encourages mindfulness. Wood-firing my pots adds complexity to their surfaces, creating gradients of color and texture that mimic patterns in nature; I also use this effect to reference the cycles and transitions of the natural world. In addition to the results one can achieve through wood firing, I'm also drawn to how immersive and collaborative



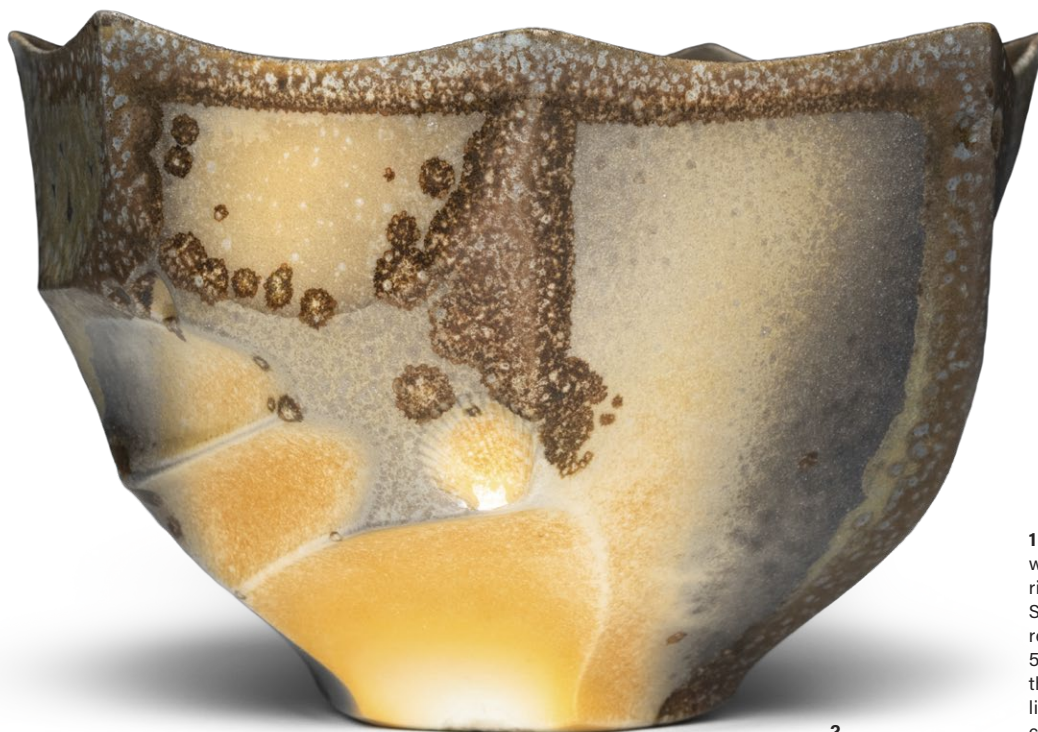
a process it is—how it requires a great amount of presence, time, understanding of materials, and teamwork to strategically load and fire a kiln.

CM: What role do you think makers play within today's culture? How do you think you contribute?

AO: I believe makers help us connect more deeply and intentionally with the world we inhabit. Living with and using beautiful, thoughtfully crafted objects reminds us to be present and helps ground us during difficult times. Close your eyes and recall the feeling of finding a special rock, iridescent feather, or delicate wildflower . . . that wonder and curiosity you feel when noticing the tiniest detail or appreciating an intricate texture is what I'm hoping to spark with my pottery. I carry this intention while documenting my process and finished pots: the images and videos I create are

often educational and hopefully inspire creativity and appreciation for craft in others. As I continue in my practice, I'm also discovering my love for teaching and helping others explore their ideas through clay.

*Learn more at
www.alexolsonarts.com.*



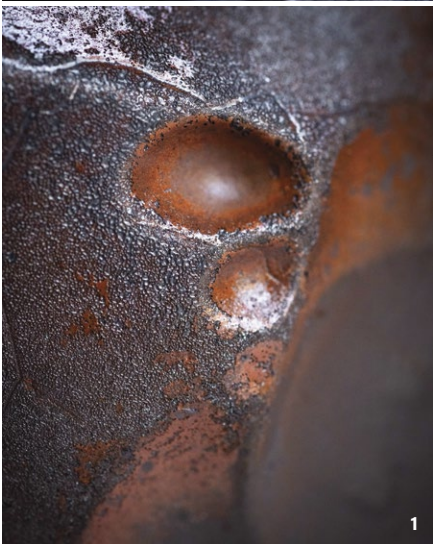
1 Bowl, 4 in. (10.2 cm) in width, wheel-thrown and altered iron-rich stoneware, Red Art Flashing Slip, wood fired to cone 9/10 and reduction cooled, 2023. **2** Teabowl, 5¼ in. (13.3 cm) in width, wheel-thrown and altered porcelain, shino liner glaze, wood fired in reduction to cone 11, 2023.

cone 9 and up

by Alex Olson and Will Talbot

The following recipes, shared by *Ceramics Monthly* 2024 Emerging Artists Alex Olson and Will Talbot, create finished, high-fired surfaces with plenty of variation.

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ARTICLE
51
ARTICLE



1 Top: Alex Olson's wood-fired bowl (detail), 5 in. (12.7 cm) in width, wheel-thrown and altered iron-rich stoneware, Red Art Flashing Slip, wood-fired to cone 9/10, reduction-cooled. Bottom: Alex Olson's wood-fired bowl (detail), 5 in. (12.7 cm) in width, wheel-thrown and altered iron-rich stoneware, Red Art Flashing Slip, wood-fired to cone 9/10, reduction-cooled. **2** Will Talbot's tea cup, 4½ in. (9 cm) in height, Standard Clay 378 stoneware, David Shino, fired to cone 10, 2023. **3** Will Talbot's tea cup, 3 in. (7.6 cm) in height, Sheffield 92700 porcelain, Higby Water Blue, fired to cone 11, 2023.



Alex Olson's Recipe

RED ART FLASHING SLIP (1)
Cone 9–10 Reduction-Cooled Wood

Cedar Heights Redart Clay	100%
	100 %

To make this slip, mix Cedar Heights Redart with water until it forms a thin slip. I aim for a consistency similar to whole milk or almond milk, but consider experimenting for different results. You can dip, brush, or spray this slip onto bisque-fired pots.

I was first introduced to Redart flashing slip through the work of ceramic artists Lindsay Oesterritter, Emma Louise Kaye, and Kayla Noble. When participating in reduction-cooled wood firings, I often apply this slip on pots made from iron-rich stoneware clays. I love how simple the recipe is and am continually amazed by the variety of surfaces it creates. The color of the fired slip ranges from red and burgundy to silver and black; dramatic scaly textures can emerge, and the surfaces frequently take on a metallic, iridescent quality. The final surfaces are impacted significantly by how the wood kiln is fired, the clay body, and a piece's location in the kiln.

Will Talbot's Recipes

DAVID SHINO (2)
Cone 10 Wood

Soda Ash	18.37 %
Nepheline Syenite	42.86
F4 Feldspar	10.20
Cedar Heights Redart Clay	5.10
EPK Kaolin	9.18
Ball Clay	14.29
	100.00 %

I bisque to cone 012, so I thin my glaze down and apply it quickly. I only use this glaze on black clay in long wood firings. It is interesting on porcelain and gray stoneware but the color is much brighter. Usually this glaze comes out orange. When it is fired for a longer amount of time on a darker clay body it develops gold and copper tones.

HIGBY WATER BLUE (3)
Cone 11 Wood/Soda

Gerstley Borate	5.05 %
Ferro Frit 3110	77.78
EPK Kaolin	7.07
Silica	10.10
	100.00 %
Add: Copper Carbonate	6.06 %
Bentonite	4.04 %

I thin down my glaze more than most. I haven't experimented with putting it on thicker but I assume the results would be similar. My coffin kiln fires slightly cooler on the top so anything with this glaze sits higher. On the cooler side it comes out an ocean blue, on the hotter/more reduced side it gets to be a darker teal with red tones.

Want to test more high-fire glaze recipes? Looking for recipes at different temperature ranges? Visit ceramicrecipes.org.

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M O N T H L Y



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