Raku: It’s More Than the Glazes

We’d like to present here a few ideas for raku techniques that we’ve seen over the years. We came up with some of them, but others were invented by some of our truly creative students in our raku classes.

When it comes to decorative techniques for raku, the first thing to bear in mind is that raku is a lowfire process. Georgies’ raku glazes are formulated to mature (fully melt) at cone 06, or roughly 1830°F. That's the same temperature as most lowfire ceramic products from manufacturers like Duncan and Mayco! This means some of their products adapt readily and easily to use in raku. The unique character of raku glazes and raku firing, however, open up many more possibilities than you’ll find in an electric kiln.

- Raku glazes are easiest to apply, and work best, when you brush them on at a consistency roughly equal to chocolate milk. You can thin Georgies’ raku glazes with water as needed to reach that consistency. It’s all about what works best for you: you can leave them thicker or make them thinner if you prefer.

- Use separate brushes to apply White Crackle and colored glazes. A little contamination from one of the colored glazes can go a long way in White Crackle.

- Georgies’ patina glazes (like Blue Dolphin) work best when you apply two coats at that consistency of chocolate milk. The gloss glazes (like White Crackle or Midnight Luster) work best with three coats. The number of coats will vary, however, with the thickness of your glaze. You may need to apply more or less.

- You can mix raku glazes together in various proportions to create more color and texture options. Visit the “How-To Projects” page on www.georgies.com for color examples and information.

- Use Duncan’s French Dimensions, which are raised or “puffy” glazes, on raku glazes OR on bare clay where it will smoke to black in post-firing reduction. French Dimensions work best when applied over the patina glazes, so they don’t get moved around when the gloss glazes melt.

- You can also change the color of White Crackle with Duncan EZ-Strokes or Mayco One-Stroke translucent underglazes. (Lighter colors like yellows, pinks or light greens may tend to burn out in the fast raku firing, but darker colors hold up better.)

- Spatter drops and streaks of Blue Dolphin across a background of White Crackle for a blue-&-white “marbled” look with some copper flashes.

- Try applying three coats of White Crackle, let it dry, then scratch or carve out a design through the glaze back down to the bare bisque. Make the lines bold and thick: as White Crackle melts during firing it will “flux,” meaning that it bubbles up on your piece as the glaze minerals melt. (All gloss glazes flux to varying degrees, but patina glazes don’t.) This fluxing may thin out or fill in some of the lines of the design. Use that to your advantage in some designs, like trees: cut the lines for upper branches thinner, so they’ll gradually fill in. It looks great!

- Experiment with different clay colors under White Crackle. The color of the clay body will dramatically change your results.

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