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Illustrated

# In the Studio: Alternative to Darting

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Head to toe and lip to foot, we describe pottery using our own anatomy. This process of throwing and altering introduces even more to the pot's human anatomy with a face and (for lack of a better term) a butt. At the same time, the pot becomes asymmetrical when viewed from the side and symmetrical when viewed from the front, like that of a human.

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This method of alteration can be used on any form and in your own way to help further the lexicon of ceramic craft. Yes, the form here can be achieved by darting, which would also be easier for beginners, but in time, this approach becomes faster, cleaner, and allows for much more fluidity in formal development than the surgical-like procedure of darting. Darting does have its merits and should be a tool in every potter's bag, but consider this an alternative to darting. By learning to bend and stretch the clay in these ways, you will become a more proficient potter and learn something deeper about the physical nature of clay. With that said, this approach aims to steer a little closer to the Mingei craft tradition by enhancing the direct contact and efficiency of pot making.

### Throwing and Trimming

The first step is to create a freshly thrown, trimmed pot with an hourglass shape (1). If you throw a pot with a thin floor, you can trim wet while it's still on the wheel or trim after drying the surface with a heat gun or torch. It is possible to take care of all the necessary trimming in one fell swoop with a wooden knife (2). Hold it higher than you intend to trim, almost touching the pot. Steadily lower the wooden knife following the inner shape. Drive it steadily down with both hands, gradually cutting deeper into the wall until the tip touches the wheel head. When executed correctly, you will have a freshly thrown pot with even walls throughout. You can practice this on every pot you throw on the wheel because when you get it right, it cuts out the need to trim, pun intended. If you don't get it, your tried-and-true method of trimming is always there, so why not give it a shot?

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1 Throw an hourglass-shaped vessel on the wheel.



2 With a thin floor, you can trim right after throwing with a wooden knife.

## State of Clay

Alterations addressed in this article require a soft, plastic state of clay, which is why trimming must happen sooner rather than later. The pot must have a blend of plasticity and structural integrity. The ideal state is somewhere between wet and leather hard. I like to use a torch to have precise control over drying. Others may simply prefer to wait one or two hours until the clay is at the right state.

## Altering

To begin altering, make the pot oval by gently pinching opposing sides (3). The result produces a wider-looking pot from one side, and a more slender pot 90 degrees from that angle. From the top down it will look like an oval.

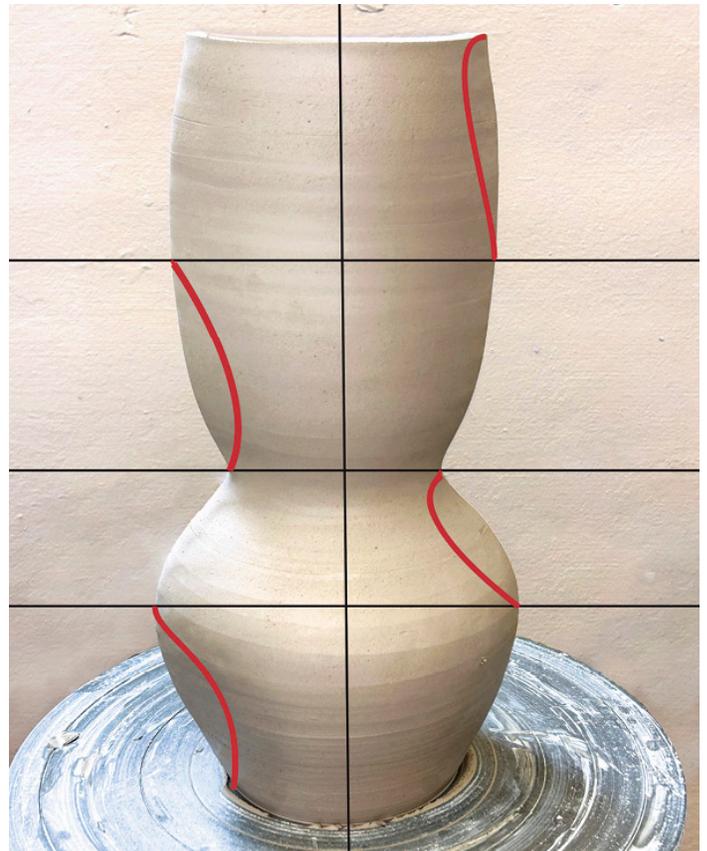
Viewing the pot from its wider angle, visually break it up into eight separate regions shown by the black lines in figure 4; vertically through the middle, and laterally at the widest and

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and up and down). (Sometimes I prefer to use my fingers for this step, depending on the feeling of the moment. As you coax the walls to bend, practice restraint. If too much pressure is applied, the wall can dent too far inward making it difficult to bend back. It will also compromise the integrity of the form, so it's very important that you use caution. While employing the metaphor, some clay may shave away during these alterations, which is usually a negligible amount.



3 Using your full hands, press the vessel into an oval shape.



4 Divide visually at its widest and narrowest points and decide bend areas (red).

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5 Move side to side and up and down to bend the wall inward with a metal rib.

On the next section above, but this time the bending is on the right (6). Going upward, bending alternates from side to side. This crisscross method allows for subtle manipulations that appear more extreme than they actually are. Since every indentation opposes one another, they magnify each other to make it appear as though the form is altered more than it actually is. Coincidentally, this alternating gives the pot its human-like gestures and introduces the butt (7) and the face (8).

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viewed from the top. This method of bending the wall inward can be thought of as coaxing the form back toward its round state.



6 Switch to the opposite side as you move up the form and begin to bend.



7 This alternating wall pressure begins to give the vessel a human-like form.

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8 Continue to refine the curves of your form from foot to face.



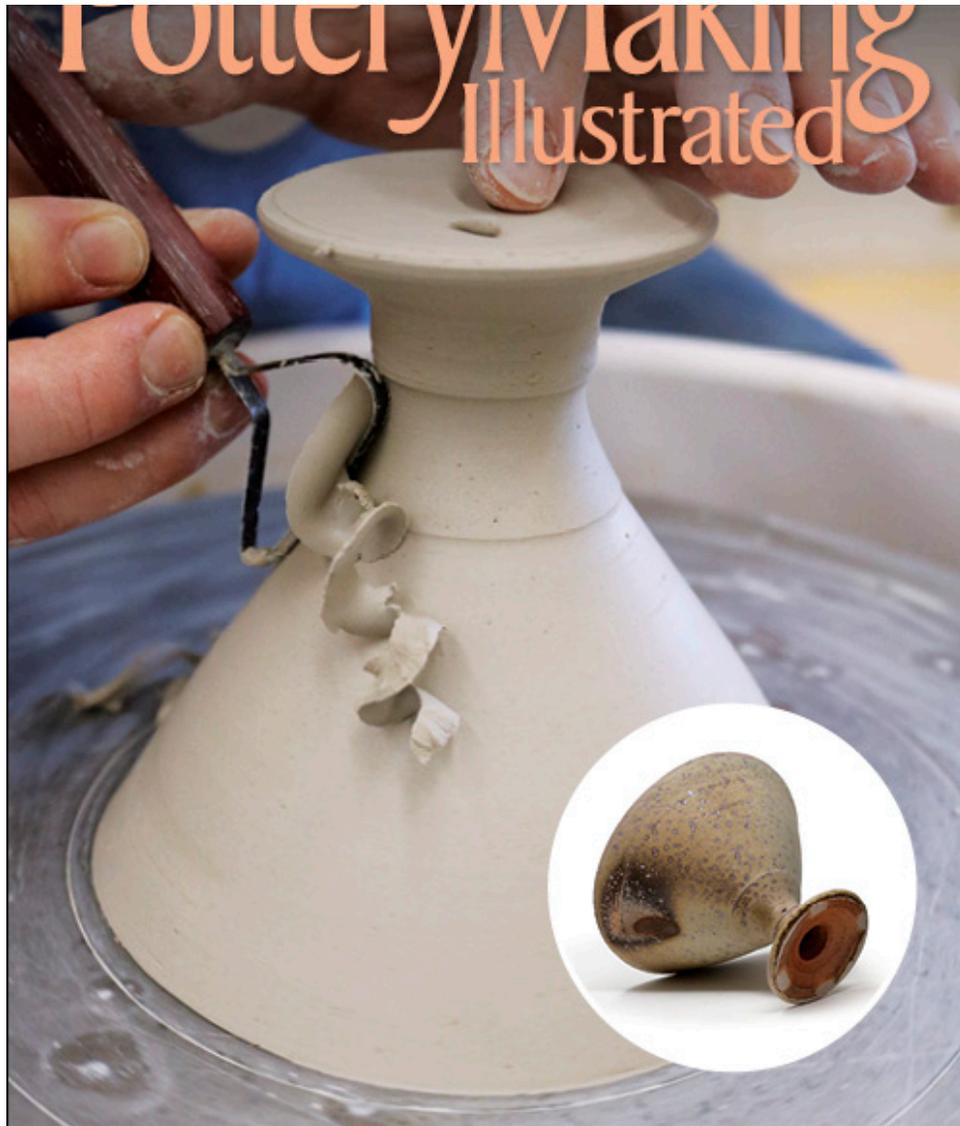
9 Once your form is complete, determine where the spout and handle will attach.

What results is a pot that has a little more in common with the human form (9). Any hourglass pot can employ this technique, and if it's not an hourglass, or if you plan to only bend the wall in one or two regions.

As I worked on this piece, I could almost hear it ask for a spout and handle, and it was obvious to me where those additions would go. The final form strikes a pose—like someone standing with a hand on their hip, exuding confidence and a touch of sass.

*Coleton Lunt is a ceramic artist whose work explores the interplay of material, form, and environment, drawing from the geologic rhythms and landscapes of the American Southwest. His practice, rooted in atmospheric firing techniques and shaped by the traditions of wood and soda firing, reflects a dynamic relationship between natural forces and human intention. In the fall 2025, he will join the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley as an associate professor of ceramics.*

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