

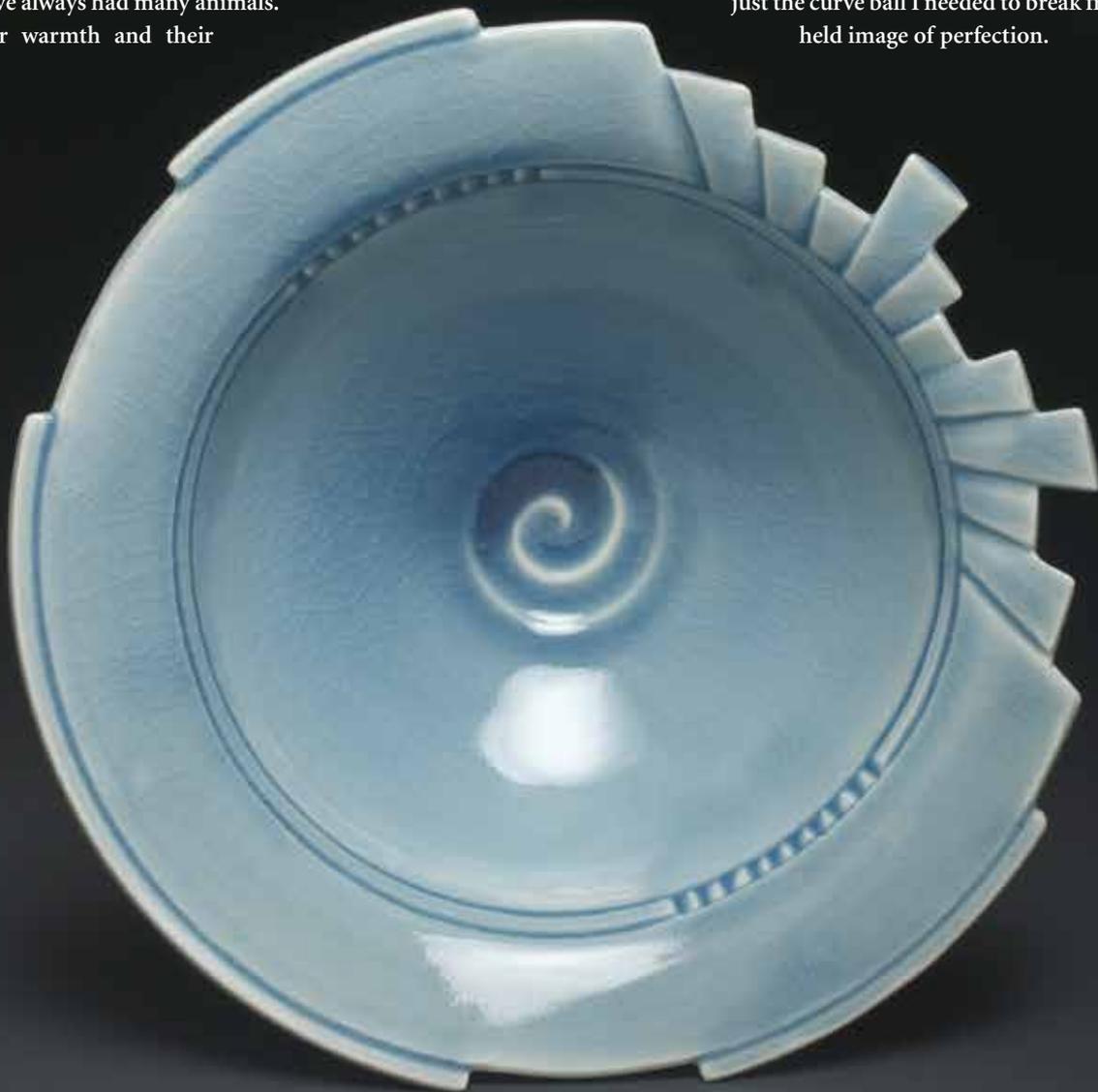
# REDEFINING THE RIM

by Linda Heisserman

I find making pottery to be a continuous creative process. It took me many years to develop the skills to make the shape, with the right thickness and height, to fit the image I had in my mind. As I made more pots, I found that sometimes I had to let go of what I thought I wanted and really take a good look at the piece and see if what I had was better than the image in my head. Occasionally, life would just throw me a curve ball, sending my work off in a totally different direction.

I fondly refer to one curve ball as my bunny bowls. I have always had many animals. I like their warmth and their

willingness to be themselves. Simon was a pet bunny who had a mind of his own. One day, I had a bunch of thrown and trimmed bowls sitting out on my back porch. I had recently begun supporting myself fully from my pottery and every piece was going to pay my bills. While I wasn't looking, Simon took a bite out of each bowl. Just one bite . . . out of each bowl. When I noticed, I thought, "I am going to lose a whole day's work!" Then, inspiration hit and I took out my single-edge razor blade and used it on the rim where the bunny had left a bite mark. It was just the curve ball I needed to break from a long held image of perfection.



All process photos: Dorothy Eberhardt.



1 Use the straight edge of a piece of paper to guide your hand when carving.



2 Make at least two passes with a single-edge razor blade to cut through the rim of the bowl.

## Throwing and Trimming

I use a high-fire porcelain called Crystal Springs, created by Patrick Horsley, and sold at Georgie's Ceramic & Clay Co. in Portland, Oregon. It's a very smooth and forgiving porcelain, which is helpful when doing a lot of post-throwing carving and altering. From start to finish it's the perfect white canvas to support my patterns.

When I throw a vessel for carving, I pay particular attention to its thickness, making sure the walls are uniform throughout. On my larger vases, where I often have foreground and background images, I throw the walls so they're  $\frac{1}{4}$ – $\frac{3}{8}$  inch thick—I don't add clay to my carvings. I tend to carve deeply in order to have deep spaces for my translucent celadon glazes to flow into. Once my vessel is formed, I eliminate the throwing marks so they're not a distraction to the finished piece.

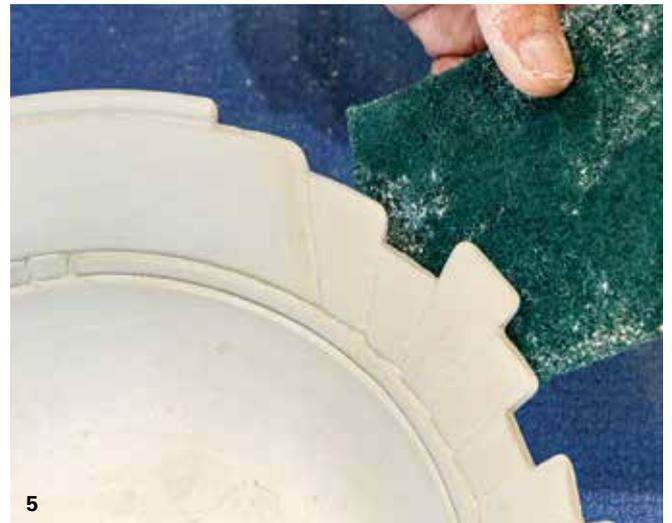
I trim a tall foot on platters so it acts as a pedestal and visually lifts the piece off a flat surface. While the bowl or platter is upside down, I run a wet sponge on the underside of the rim to keep it from drying out as the foot sets up before I trim it.



3 Make sure the clay is moist-leather hard when you cut through the rim to keep cracks from forming.



4 Support the back side or the rim edge as you shave the clay away to define the notches.



5 Use a green kitchen scouring pad to refine the edges of the rim and to soften any sharp points.



6 Try an alternative rim with a continuous pattern of carved teeth.



7 Finished carved piece showing the depth of carving and shadows of the piece.



8 Platter, 17 in. (43 cm) in diameter, porcelain, glaze, fired to cone 10 in reduction.

All finished photos: Courtney Frise

## Carving

I use simple tools to carve my vessels; single-edge razor blades, a Kemper Lace tool and Recess Smoother, dental tools, and green kitchen scouring pads. When I carve, I hold the form as if I'm holding a ripe mango to lessen the stress on the rim and avoid distorting the shape. Most carving patterns are drawn free hand with a pencil on the leather-hard platter. When I'm altering the edge of the piece, as in my bunny bowls, I use a single-edge razor blade to cut the edges while the piece is on the wetter side of leather hard. If the piece has abstract or wildlife images, I then carve an outline around the drawn image with either a razor blade or a Kemper Lace tool. Once those areas are defined, I can work with the piece in the leather-hard or bone dry stage. My preference is to carve away most of the clay and rough in the image while the piece is leather hard because there is less dust. I begin to shave with my razor blade to create depth and ridges for my images. I don't think of myself as a strong two-dimensional artist, but when I start to carve and lights and shadows emerge around the image, then the design starts to make sense in my brain.

When I carve the teeth or notches out of the rim on the bunny bowls, I eyeball the size and the spacing of the notches in relation to the size of the whole platter drawing in pencil. I use a Kemper tool and the straight edge of a sheet of paper to guide my hand as I begin to carve deeper lines over the drawing (1). Next, I use the single-edge razor blade to cut through those deep lines to redefine the rim of the platter—much like Simon did (2).

When I cut the notches out of the rim, the clay needs to be at a moist-leather hard stage (3). If the edge dries out too much, cracks form on the underside of the rim that show up in the final firing. In order to cut through the edge from the top side of the piece, hold the rim gently from the back side with your opposite hand so you don't distort its shape (4).

The final carving is done when the piece is bone dry, to obtain the smoothest surface possible. I use a wet sponge to soften the edges slightly and clean up the dust on the pot. Then use a dental tool to sharpen the images in certain areas. If I have pierced an area, I also use the dental tool to better define and open the hole.

Lastly, I use a green kitchen scouring pad to smooth the edges (5). **Caution:** Always wear a dust mask and work in a well-ventilated area when carving and sanding drier pieces.

## Alternative Carving Patterns

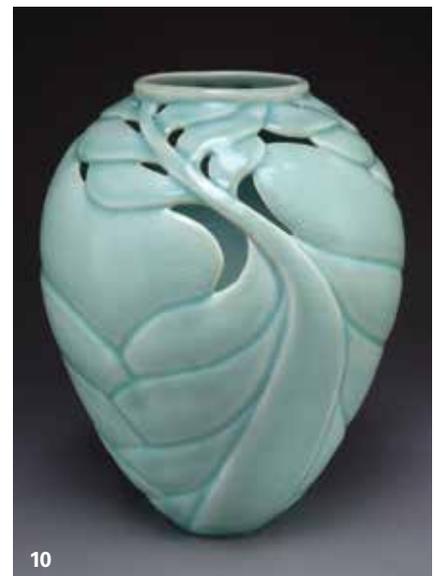
Expanding on the idea of teeth, try carving a platter with a symmetrical pattern of continuous teeth (6–8).

Carving to add depth has led me to piercing forms as well. First carve and shape the vase, then pierce the piece when it's bone dry by slowly shaving down areas you want to open up (9). This carving technique greatly minimizes warping and creates beautiful depth in a piece (10).

*Linda Heisserman received her BFA from Virginia Commonwealth University. She has studied with Jack Earl and Thomas Kerrigan and is currently a studio potter in Bend, Oregon.*



9 Using a dental tool to pierce and open holes in the vessel.



10 Pierced vessel with stem and leaf design, 10 in. (25 cm) in height, porcelain, glaze, fired to cone 10 in reduction.