

HAND MADE TILES

**Designing
Making
Decorating**



**FRANK
GIORGINI**



Opposite page: Diane Winters
Untitled, 1990
Each 5" x 5" (12.7 x 12.7 cm)



Left: Diana and Tom Watson
Design by Sussman Prejza
*Leo Palace Resort:
Daro Road Sign*, 1993
36" x 312" (91.4 x 792.5 cm)
Photograph by Bielenberg

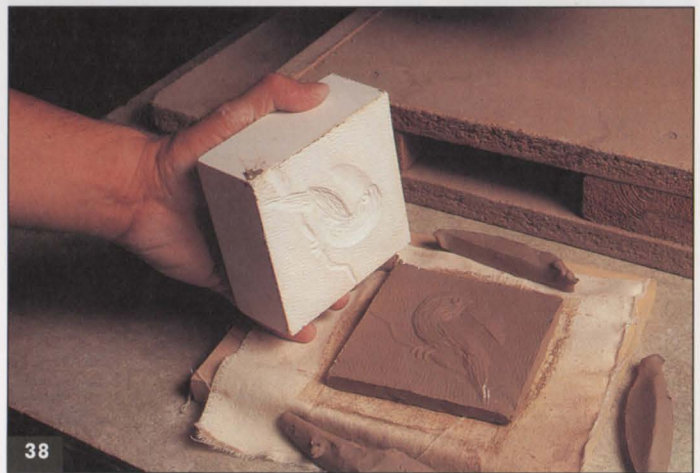
Pressing Tiles by Hand

There are two ways to use your carved plaster block to create the relief surface on your tile: pressing by hand and mallet or pressing with a tile press, a tool that is described in the next section.

To press your tiles by hand, first place the carved block face up on a cushioning bed of newspapers. Then cut a slab of clay that's the same length and width as the block; you can trace around the block itself. The thickness of the slab should be slightly greater than the thickness of your finished tile, including its relief portions. For a very shallow relief—1/8" (.3 cm), for example—the slab shouldn't be much thicker than the finished tile. For a 3/8"-deep (1.0 cm) carved design, the slab might 1/2" (1.3 cm) thick. If you find that your slab is too thin, just roll out one that's a little thicker.

Next, place the slab over the block and position a piece of canvas on top of the slab. Then, on top of the canvas, place a wooden board that's about the same width and length as the plaster block. If the board is too large, you'll have a difficult time keeping it level as you pound it. If your carved block is exceptionally large, perhaps 18" (45.7 cm) or longer, use a small wooden block first, moving it around the surface as you pound, but finish up with a large block.

Tap the wooden block down with a mallet so that the resulting tile is of uniform thickness. When the tile is the desired thickness, trim away the excess clay by running your pin around the block's perimeter. Then carefully peel the tile from the block, trying not to bend it as you do. You should have an exact positive impression of your carved design (Photo 38).

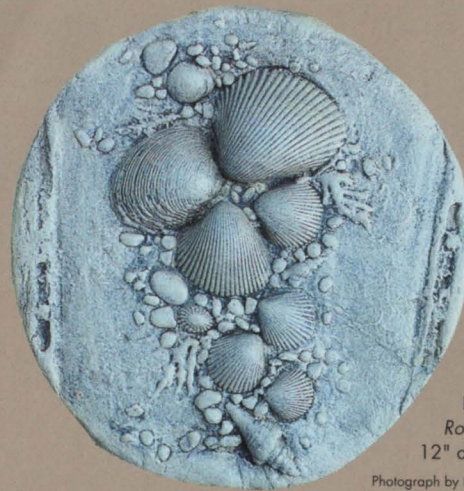


Place your pressed tiles on a board or piece of wall-board, cover them with plastic, and let them dry for a day or so. To complete the drying, gradually pull back the plastic, letting more and more air get to the tiles. (Drying boxes can be purchased, but it's easier to build a wooden frame and surround it with plastic instead.)

A variation on the carved-block technique is shown in Photo 39. The plaster blocks on the left-hand side of this photo were actually cast right from the surface of a relief pattern. Like a carved block, a mold cast in this manner is the same width and length as the moist clay tile that is pressed with it. In the example shown, a plastic replica of an architectural molding was cut to about 6" (15.2 cm) in length. Cottles were set up flush with the edges of the plastic model, the mold was sealed with moist clay from the outside (not the inside), and the plaster was mixed



Andrea Rudner
Star Mosaic. 1993
 Image: 7" x 9" (17.8 x 22.9 cm)



Hanna Lore Hombordy
Round Shell Tile. 1989
 12" diameter (30.5 cm diameter)
 Photograph by Hanna Lore Hombordy

Opposite page, left:
 Diana and Tom Watson
*Brentwood Plaza
 Stair Risers*. 1993
 Each 4-1/2" x 4-1/2"
 (11.4 x 11.4 cm)
 Photograph by Diana Watson

post in the middle of the base with one face against the brace. Fasten the post to the brace with No. 8 x 2-1/2" drywall screws, as shown in the illustration. Also insert one screw through the bottom of the base and into the center post. To attach the foam support to the top of the post, center it on the post and then insert two No. 8 x 2" drywall screws through its face. Glue the foam to the support with rubber cement.

Slab Cutter

Used to cut small, tile-sized slabs of clay that are uniform in thickness, this tool is my own invention and makes the process of cutting multiple slabs quite easy. Its operating principle, depicted in Photo 84, is simple. The tool is placed on a block of clay and the cut-off wire is pulled across the metal edges of the tool to slice off slabs of a thickness determined by the distance between the edge of the angle irons and the bottom surface of the Masonite pad attached to the underside of

the base. For specific instructions on how to use the slab cutter, see page 48.

On this particular model, constructed from scrap materials, I used 8"-long, 90° angle irons to create the metal edges across which the wire is pulled. As an alternative to the angle irons, I could have attached 1/4"-thick lattice strips or thin metal strips to the two edges of the 6" x 8" base. By doing this, I could easily change the thickness of my slabs whenever I wanted to, just by exchanging those strips for others of a different width. For my purposes, however—the production of six hundred identical tiles—the angle irons worked well.

To make sure that each slab was cut to a particular thickness, I attached a piece of Masonite (slightly longer and wider than the slabs I wanted to cut) to the underside of the base. (The pad is visible in Illustration 10 but not in Photo 84.) The 7/8" width of an angle iron's arm minus the 1/8" thickness of the pad equalled the 3/4" thickness of my desired slab.

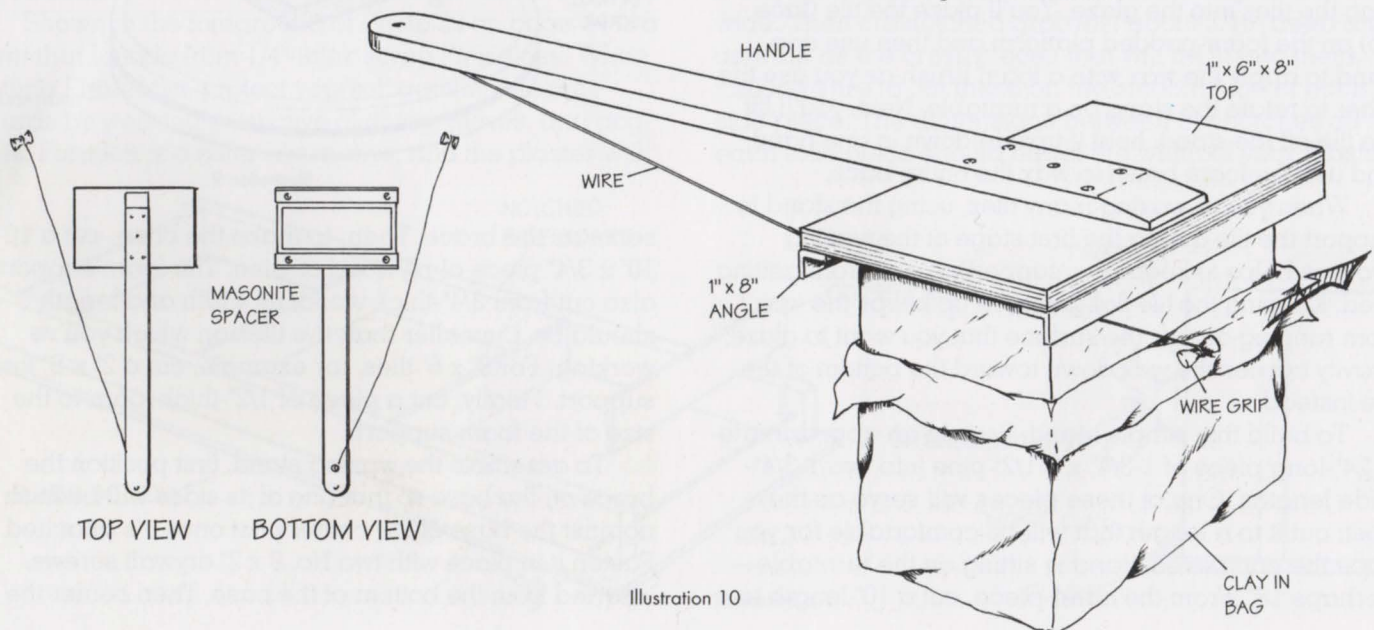


Illustration 10



Dale Wiley
 Scarab. 1987
 5" x 5-3/4" (12.7 x 14.6 cm)
 Photograph by Peter von Wilken Zook



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Apart from the dimensions that determine the thickness of the slabs to be cut, the dimensions of the other parts of this tool may vary quite a bit. The handle does need to be long enough to allow the wire to cut across the entire block of clay. I used a 24" long 1 x 3 furring strip. The base is 6" x 8", but these dimensions may be smaller or larger depending upon the desired size of the slabs.

If you use lattice strips rather than angle irons, you can avoid splitting the lattice as you attach it to the edges of the base by predrilling holes in it before inserting the 3/4" wood screws. If you do use angle irons, attach them to the base with 1/2"-long screws.

Though the dimensions of your slab cutter's parts may vary, the assembly procedure is fairly straightforward. Attach the angle irons, lattice strips, or metal strips to the base first. If you use the angle irons, center and glue the Masonite pad to the underside of the base, making sure that its smooth surface faces outward.

One end of the handle may be beveled at 45°, as shown in Photo 84, but this step isn't necessary. Mark locations for the five screws that will fasten the handle to the base. Then, centered about 1-1/2" from the oppo-

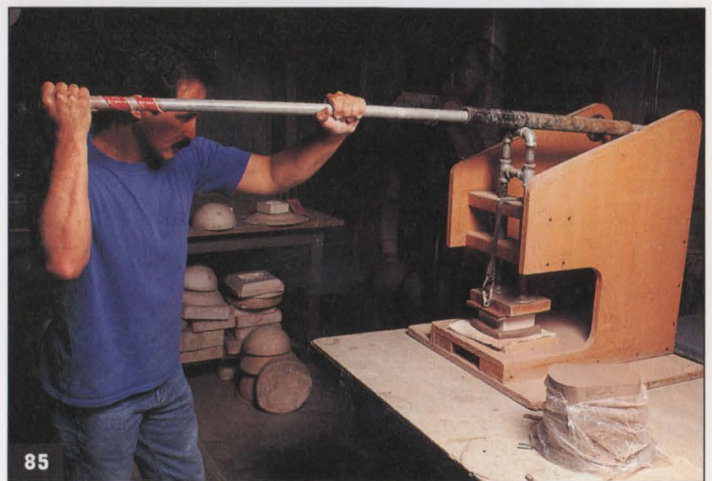
site end of the handle, drill a 1/4" hole through the handle's face. Measure and mark a point centered 3-1/2" from the same end and insert a small screw eye at that point, with the eye in the handle's bottom surface.

Fasten the handle to the base with five countersunk No. 6 x 1-1/4" wood screws. Then fasten one end of the wire to the screw eye. Monofilament line makes a good substitute; though it will wear out more quickly, it won't fray as braided wire will. Cut the wire's other end so that about 12" of wire extends beyond the base. To make a grip for the wire, wrap this loose end around a short length of dowel. Loop some wire or string through the hole in the handle's end so that you can hang the slab cutter up when it's not in use.

Giorgini Studio Tile Press

The tile press featured in Photos 85 and 86 is my original design. It's used to press out tiles from either carved-block or open-face molds. For instructions on how to use it, refer to chapter 6.

The design is based on that of traditional manual presses used by tile manufacturers around the turn of



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