

Continuing A Tradition of Craftsmanship

Here's a brief narrative about how we make our pottery. We hope sharing a behind-the-scenes "tour" will help you appreciate the first quality materials, skills, time, and care we put into each and every piece of our entirely hand crafted Dedham pottery reproductions.

The Potting Shed makes its reproduction pottery in the tradition of The Dedham Pottery by using a painstaking, multi step process: Each piece is individually molded, shaped, painted, glazed, fired, and finished by skilled artisans. Since our reproductions are entirely hand-crafted, slight variations in shape, color and design may be detected when comparing one piece to another. These are hallmarks not found in machine-made pottery.

As part of quality control at The Potting Shed, we prepare all of the chemical mixtures - clay, paint, glaze, and lampblack - used in our manufacturing stages. For the pottery, we buy sedimentary clays that are selectively mined in Kentucky and Tennessee. The casting clay mixture, or slip, is soupy so it can reach all the nooks and crannies when we fill the molds. A thicker clay mixture, called "pug," is used in a hydraulic press for molding items such as plates.

Our experienced casters carefully fill the plaster molds with the slip. During this stage, the walls of the molds wick moisture from the slip. As a result, a layer of clay congeals on the molds' inner surfaces. We pour off any uncongealed slip from the set molds and put them aside to dry for two to four hours. Then, we separate the mold pieces and remove the castings.

From here, we transfer the dried castings, called "greenware," to a finishing area where sharp-eyed workers remove seam lines and smooth surface irregularities by hand. They aim to shape uniform interiors for items such as our teapots and to preserve the detail of exterior characteristics such as bunny "fur." Now, off we go to painting.

Our talented artists apply our cobalt paint to the prepped greenware. They decorate each piece with a steady hand and a discriminating eye, without the aid of stencils or decals. The finished pieces, though based on a specific design, exhibit the personal touch of each artist right down to his or her initials and the date, painted along with our trademark star. (Choosing that symbol was an easy decision for the Starr family!) The star importantly signifies that our products are reproductions of the original Dedham pottery.

Well, we're about half way through our creative manufacturing process, so let's move on to the kiln room. Here, the painted pottery is loaded for its first firing, called the "bisque firing." Our adept operators load the kilns with attention to correct techniques so that the resulting bisque will meet our quality standards - and keep breakage to a minimum!

We move the bisque to the glazing department where our craftsmen carefully hand-dip each piece to make an even coat of our lead-free glaze.

Additional techniques ensure that the second (and final) "glost firing" will yield blemish-free crackled pieces. Walking through the kiln area after the glost firing, you would see that the opaque, powdery, white glaze has been transformed into a transparent, glossy, crackled glass-like finish. And if you were standing by quietly, you would hear the soft tinkling sounds made by the cooling pottery as the characteristic "crazing" (crackling) occurs.

Finally, the pieces are ready for hand rubbing with a mixture of water and lampblack, a non-toxic coloring compound. The lampblack accents the crackles in the glassy surface of the glost pottery. We wash the pieces in a commercial dishwasher and remove the small marks made on the bottom of each piece by the setting stilts that are used in the glost firings. As we have done in earlier phases of our pottery processing, we inspect each piece before placing it on the shelves. At last, our handsome reproduction Dedham pottery is ready for shipping to eager customers throughout the United States.

We hope you enjoyed the "tour" and keep in mind what you've learned about The Potting Shed, our pottery and our hand crafted process when you look through our catalog. We look forward to hearing from you soon and to building a long-lasting, mutually satisfying relationship with you!

