

A guide to your self-isolating, temporary home ceramics studio

SURFACES

Ideally, you'll need something non-porous to work on, not a glossy table or countertop, stone/metal/tile/formica/etc. My studio tables are made of unfinished plywood, mostly smooth but not perfect. Unvarnished boards are also good. You can easily use a board covered with a piece of fabric - canvas or an old T-shirt. Just stretch the fabric around the board and staple or duct tape it on the back. This will give you a nice work surface that your clay won't stick to when you're rolling slabs or coils or whatever else you find yourself up to.

WATER

If you're handbuilding use water sparingly! It can create a slick surface that prevents the clay particles from actually being knit together (blended, smooshed, compressed.) You might want a spray bottle to gently mist your piece or hands periodically, but otherwise a small dish of water to dip your fingertips should be plenty.

Clay in your pipes is bad news. In my studio, I have a gallon bucket of water with a big sponge which I use to wipe my hands and clean up. Then I let that bucket sit overnight and the muck will settle to the bottom. I feel OK pouring off the clear water, then just scrape any sediment into the trash or outside.

PLASTIC

Unfortunately, all plastic is not created equal. The type of nice, soft, non-porous plastic we are used to using is dry cleaning bags. If you have some of those around, draft them into your cause first. Crinkly grocery bags are not awesome, trash bags may or may not be up to the task. Produce bags are nice and light and soft, but might not be thick enough to do as well as we're used to. One good thing about this is that you're probably close to your work all the time, so you can open it every day and make sure it isn't drying too much, instead of just hoping it lasts until your next class. Check it daily, use your misting spray bottle if it needs water, wrap it up again—or wrap it in two bags and see how that does.

While you're handbuilding/coiling/scraping/compressing, it is easy to lose track of time and suddenly your open bag of clay is harder than you would like. Train yourself to keep extra clay covered at all times.

CLAY DUST

We know that long-term exposure to clay dust is not great for our health. Inviting clay into your dwelling means it's that much more important to keep your dust under control and preferably away from places you eat, hang out, or sleep. Here are some dastardly ways that clay gets into the air and you should avoid these at all costs:

- Brushing off your apron/pants/shirt/towel
- Shaking out your plastic/towel. Try to keep your plastic clean so it doesn't leave flakes every time you move it.
- Any clay scrapings that fall onto the floor and get trampled and tracked by your feet
- Stroking the bristles of a dry brush
- Clapping your hands after a job well done
- Blowing away any scraps/mess on your table or piece

HELPFUL TOOLS

- An adjustable rolling pin will help you make slabs with an even thickness—mine is by Joseph Joseph and has four thicknesses. Make sure you get a wooden rolling pin so the clay doesn't stick like it will with metal. A normal rolling pin or even a wine bottle will work in a pinch.
- You might want something to be a wareboard to make it easier to move your work. Scraps of wood are perfect, you can try cardboard (although it will get moist and warped so be careful.) Drywall is an excellent surface and easy to cut, just wrap the raw edges with duct tape. In my studio, I use square plastic bats. And—bonus—these will still be useful when we're back into the studio!
- Save some newspaper, it will be super useful.
- Make yourself some quality slip, but not by adding water to moist clay. Pinch out several pieces of clay as thin as you can and stand them up to dry in a window or with a fan. Once they're bone dry, break them up and add water—perfect smooth slip every time!