

# Tea and Friskets

Capturing designs one layer at a time

by Frank James Fisher

For the last few years I've been creating teapots that I refer to as "Tea-Cans." They owe a great deal to industrial fuel-can designs and all the various plumbing fixtures found around the workshop. The glaze effects on these tea-cans slowly evolved over four years with the first tests starting at Cone 10 reduction firing and finally ending at Cone 06 raku firing.

There are many ways to reproduce a graphic image on ceramic surfaces—decals, transfers, screen-printing or even applying paints. The guiding force behind each technique is to control and present a precise image on the ceramic surface. I wanted a method of reproducing the look of a printed graphic—something where the graphics would not only be a part of the overall glazed surface, but actually

be the glazed surface. Using a range of glazes, my experience in painting, airbrushing and commercial printing, along with a few new twists to control the glaze application, creating a graphic from glazes evolved.

Finding a way to enliven the predictable but plastic-looking glaze color required something in between two extremes. I wanted controlled glaze edges, but with vibrant areas of color. My application method provided accuracy, but the "lively color" owes as much to the raku process as to my glazes or glazing techniques. Raku firing provides an aged and worn color palette to the tea-can not achievable in other firing methods, and also lends a touch of spontaneity into my art. Here is the technique I developed and use with a reasonable degree of success. The tea-can in the photos is bisque-fired porcelain.

**Right:** "Sunoco Tea-Can" by Frank James Fisher, 6¼ inches in height, thrown and hand-built porcelain, raku fired, with metal and wood handle. All of my work is rooted in the commercial world. Marketing is everywhere we look. It is part of life. I embrace the impact of advertising and use it frequently. Applying a logo and graphics changes a ceramic piece from a generic sculpture into a singular American object. The use of logos and brands is a shortcut to the viewer. It provides instant common ground for artist and audience. It gives the work immediate, real-world, daily-life context.







I originally airbrushed everything using this frisket process, but adopted the sponge method to reduce the need for overspray masking. Sponging contributes to a healthier studio environment as well; however, airbrushing is still an excellent technique to produce glaze color gradations.



Spectrum glazes (other commercial glazes would work as well) provide the intense commercial paint colors found in mass-produced products and printed logos. My own hand-mixed raku glazes offset the intense commercial hues. I like the balance achieved by incorporating both types of glaze mixes: intense commercial color versus the more unpredictable earth tones.





**1** Use image as-is or manipulate them using image software (included with most PCs & Macs), print several copies.



**2** Cut through two sheets of paper at the same time so you'll have a second set for a back up.



**3** Label each frisket, then check for color and fit.



**4** Spray adhesive on the back of the frisket.

## Technique

**Find an image.** Applying a real-world logo to my forms adds a stronger impact to my work. The Internet, especially eBay, is a great source for industrial shapes and graphics. After locating a 50-year-old oilcan logo (figure 1), I stretched and pulled the digital image until it was the perfect size and shape.

**Cut a frisket.** A *frisket* is used in airbrushing to mask off areas you do not want to spray. To make a frisket, take the printout and carefully cut out the printed shapes and letters with a sharp knife (figure 2). For each color, you'll need a different frisket. Label each frisket with the color and the order it is to be applied (figure 3). Make sure to

double check your work for fit. Note: Determining the order in which the friskets are applied is a key element of the design, and the first one is often the most complicated one you've cut.

**Apply glue.** The paper frisket needs to adhere to the bisqued surface. Set up a quick spray booth with a cardboard box and hold the frisket with its reverse side toward you (figure 4). (Caution: Protect your hands with disposable rubber gloves.) Using spray mount adhesive (I prefer 3M Spray Mount Artist's Adhesive), evenly coat the frisket. Keep the booth set up and spray each frisket as needed.

**Apply the key color.** The entire design keys off the first frisket, which will help you position successive colors, so mentally plan the process once more to be sure of placement. (You may want to practice the technique on a piece of paper first before attempting it on your bisqued piece.) When the adhesive is dry but tacky, position and press the frisket into place. Dab a stamping sponge into the glaze and apply the color (figure 5). When the glaze has fully dried to a chalky texture on the frisket, it's safe to peel away (figure 6). Peeling the frisket while the glaze is still damp results in tearing, leaving adhesive residue stuck on the bisqued surface.



### Tip

Use a Post-It note to hold small pieces while spraying.



**5** Sponge the glaze within the masked bare clay surface.



**6** Carefully remove the frisket when glaze is dry.



**7** Attach the next frisket and apply glaze.

**Apply next colors.** Repeat step 4 for each color and for each frisket you've made (figure 7). If the frisket touches already glazed areas, the glue will not stick to the chalky surface. In these cases, tape a frisket without the spray adhesive firmly in place and sponge the glaze onto the surface. Since there is no glue, you may remove the frisket immediately (figure 8). Note: I always glaze the logo first because of all the jostling during the application of the many little design elements. If I glazed the larger but simpler areas first, those surfaces could be rubbed off and ruined while glazing the logo.

**Glazing the piece.** Use a frisket to protect the finished logo while applying glaze next to the logo's edge. This design has two large areas of color so I taped off the bottom rim for a second accent color. Apply each color in turn (figure 9). The final result is a precisely glazed logo and a tea-can ready for firing . . . almost.

**Adding chaos.** Since every thing is too clean and precise, I like to add a little chaos to the surface. After setting up another quick spray booth and placing the tea-can into position, I glaze the lid, which doesn't have any tight color areas, only an aged metal look. Now it's time to

splatter, drip, fling, smear and wipe the glaze across the surface. Use a stiff toothbrush and assorted hobby brushes to launch the glaze in an even-handed but haphazard manner at the surface (figure 10). Some glazed areas are dry wiped with a stiff paper towel to thin the glaze application. Other areas are wiped damp or even scratched to reveal a bare bisque surface that will become blackened during the post-firing reduction. The tea-can is now ready to raku fire (figure 11). ●





**8** Two glaze colors have been applied and friskets removed.



**9** Apply base color and trim glazes after applying detailed design work.



**10** Use an old toothbrush to speckle the glaze surface.

## RECIPES

### Alligator

(from Robert Piepenburg)

Bone Ash	25.0%
Gerstley Borate	50.0
Nepheline Syenite	12.5
Copper Carbonate	12.5
	<u>100.0%</u>

### Mecham White

(from Robert Piepenburg)

Gerstley Borate	80%
Copper Carbonate	20
	<u>100%</u>

Glaze splattered with a toothbrush

### Commercial Glazes

Spectrum Raku Yellow

Spectrum Raku Blue

Spectrum Raku Red

### Clay Body

Rovin's Porcelain 99G

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**11** Applying and allowing the edges of two glazes to touch may result in blurred or melted edges. Control the integrity of the edge by leaving a thin line of bare bisque surface between the colors to prevent bleeding. For my work, I prefer the colors to blend as it provides a nice balance to the tight execution of the logo image.