



Basic Wheel Throwing with Keith Hershberger



A

The process of throwing clay on the potter's wheel has been a practice since approximately 2500 BC. With the exception of modern technology, this process has gone largely unchanged.

Keith Hershberger, a Union Project co-op member and local ceramic artist, sat down to guide us through the basic steps of throwing a cylinder on the wheel.



B



C



D



E



F

A. Beginning with a ball of wedged clay approximately the size of a softball, firmly adhere the clay to the center of the potter's wheel.

B. Centering: Start your wheel, dip your hands in water, and ground your elbows into your lap. With an open palm, firmly push against your clay from an 8 o'clock position. Using the side of your other hand, push down on the top of the clay until centered. When a piece is centered, it will spin symmetrically. It is important not to move onto step C until your piece is fully centered. Keep your hands wet and slippery to avoid working with rough clay. [Ouch!]

C. Opening: Forming a claw with one hand, push down and create a cavity in the center of your piece with your fingertips. Use your other hand to pull your claw toward you, enlarging the cavity to create the floor of your cylinder. Once your pot is open, use a sponge to compress the bottom of the piece. Use moderate pressure, and press down on the floor from edge to center.

D. Raising the walls: With stability, use your thumb and middle finger to clasp the wall of your piece near its base. With even pressure and steady speed, pull upwards to increase the height. Doing this will also thin your walls. It is important for your walls to have a uniform thickness for structural stability. Repeat until your walls are the desired thickness.

E. Once your walls are the desired height, you can begin finishing your piece to achieve the texture you desire. The artist shown uses a metal rib to achieve a uniform smoothness on his cup.

F. Hold a wire tool [not shown] taut between your hands and run it under the bottom of your piece. This separates your creation from the potter's wheel. Your piece is a little flimsy when wet, so either remove from the wheel carefully or let it dry a little before removing it. Your piece is now ready to dry and be fired!