

# Pattern & SOCIAL MEDIA

by Shana Salaff

As a student at Nova Scotia College of Art and Design in the 1990s, I used to photocopy design books from the library stacks—especially patterns by William Morris and his contemporaries. After leaving the library with a heavy load of books, I'd lug the school's opaque projector up to my studio and transfer photocopied designs to my clay vessels.

Today, all a student has to do to find pattern inspiration is go online. Social media is a treasure trove of intriguing material. Through Pinterest, I've discovered that many people share my addiction to historical and contemporary patterns. Pinterest users create boards to collect images; in my case some boards are dedicated to different types of patterns. The site is designed so that, as you save images to your boards, suggested, related images link you to an ever-widening net of shared interests. You can download an image and transform it into a repeating pattern using image editing software (like Photoshop Express, Photoshop Elements, Photo Scape, Canva, Photo Pos Pro, etc.). The pattern can then be used in a number of ways: create a stencil for slip or underglaze application; draw on top of the printed pattern to lightly transfer it onto the clay as a guide for a freehand drawing or painting; or use a projector to project the pattern onto the piece.

## Creative Content Conditions

Before I incorporate a pattern sourced online into my work, I ensure that I'm not violating anyone's creative content rights or stealing an original decorative idea or copyrighted image. You

can use an online pattern as long as one of the following three conditions are met:

1. You ask or purchase permission from the creator or owner. Pattern stamps fall into this category, as do stencils or designs purchased online.
2. You're using non-copyrighted patterns. This applies to historic sources like the William Morris patterns I love, as long as you aren't using a copyrighted photograph. Some historical patterns are so ubiquitous that they really can't be copyright protected. The Moroccan-style trellis pattern I use on some of my ceramic plates falls into this category.
3. You alter the pattern so that it's no longer identical to the original source. Although there might not be a copyright, follow this general rule regarding trademark infringement: "If market confusion could potentially exist, infringement is likely."<sup>1</sup>



The poppy pattern on this plate was part of a bundle of 18 original patterns sourced from a vendor at <https://creativemarket.com> (\$9 for a standard license).<sup>2</sup> The image was imported into Photoshop to create a tiled, repeating image, then was printed onto transparency film and projected onto the plate using an overhead projector.



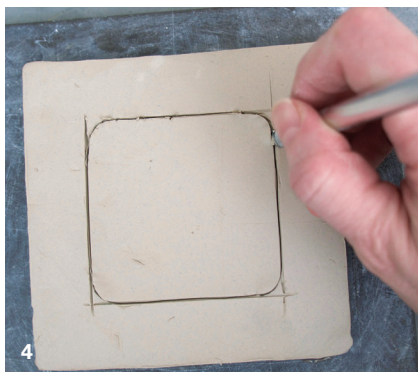
1 Pour the plaster slowly into the Vaseline-coated wok.



2 Use a metal rib to remove extra plaster from the bottom of the mold.



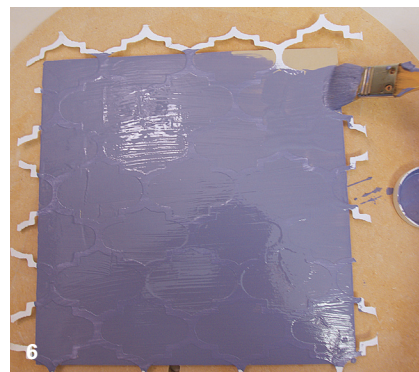
3 Cut the slab to 10x10 inches for a smaller plate (12x12 inches for a larger plate).



4 Use an X-Acto knife to cut the interior shape of the foot.



5 Lightly press the stencil into the slab using a pony roller.



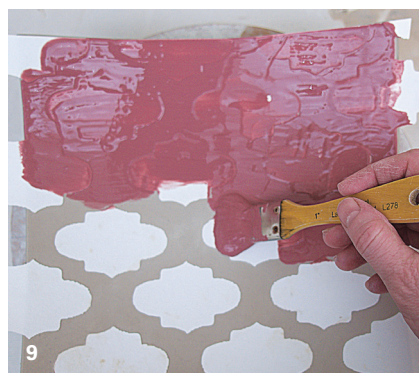
6 Paint underglaze over the stencil. After it loses its sheen, remove the stencil.



7 Use the pony roller to gently shape the slab to the plaster bowl form.



8 Attach the foot to the bottom using the pony roller.



9 To use a stencil after the plate is constructed, use smaller pieces of paper.



10 Project a contrasting pattern and use an X-Acto knife to carve it in.

## Combining Patterns

It's a lot of fun to combine different patterns on one piece. I find that the most effective way to do this is to vary the application technique, the type of pattern (organic, geometric, floral, etc.), and the scale of each different pattern. I prefer a layered look to a mish-mash. A variety of surface qualities helps as well (dry, matte, shiny glaze, etc.). Some of this variety happens naturally when you apply patterns in layers.

## Creating a Mold Form

Plates are an excellent canvas for color, pattern, and imagery. I used the interior of a cooking wok to create a plaster mold with a continuous gentle curve that forms simple, but lovely plates ripe for creative surface ideas. To make your own, use a 14-inch diameter wok for 10-inch plates (8½ inches fired), or a 16-inch wok for 12-inch plates (10 inches fired). Look for a round-bottom wok that needs a stand to stay upright and purchase both.



Apply a thin layer of Vaseline to the interior as a mold release. For the smaller plate, you'll need 4 quarts of warm water and 11½ pounds of #1 Pottery Plaster (use 1½ gallons of water and 17 pounds 2 ounces of plaster for the larger plate). Measure out the ingredients and put the water in a large bucket. Gently sprinkle handfuls of plaster over the surface of the water, allowing the plaster to fan out rather than plop in a lump. Once all the plaster is added to the water, let the mixture sit for 5 minutes. Stir the plaster continuously until it's smooth. Break down any lumps with your fingers as you go. Keep stirring until the plaster begins to set. You'll see and feel it getting thicker. Pour the plaster into the wok slowly and carefully, filling it to about ½ inch to 1 inch from the rim (1). Tap the side of the full wok with a wooden stick so you see bubbles rising to the top of the plaster. Once the plaster gets stiff enough to hold its shape, scoop out a few handfuls of plaster from the base and interior of the mold in order to reduce the weight (2). **Caution:** You don't want any plaster to get into your clay or clay working area. When the plaster is set (after sitting long enough to have cooled down, a few hours or overnight) you can remove it from the wok. Pull at the handles of the wok in a few different directions to dislodge the plaster cast. Use a Surform to remove any sharp edges, then rinse the mold in warm water, and allow it to completely dry out.

## Making a Patterned Square Plate

Use 4½ pounds of a smooth white clay body to create a ¾-inch-thick slab. Rib both sides of the slab smooth and place the slab on a large bat. Cut the slab to 10×10 inches for the smaller plate (3) (use 5½ pounds of clay for a 12×12-inch slab). Make another 5×5-inch slab from 1 pound of clay for the foot (use 1½ pounds for a 6×6-inch slab). Measure 1 inch in from the edges of the foot and use an X-Acto knife to cut out the interior shape (4). Use the cut-out interior piece as a test tile for the plate, using the same decorative techniques.

The first layer of pattern can be applied while you still have the slab on a bat. Create a stencil with one of your geometric patterns using an X-Acto knife or stencil-cutting machine such as a Cricut. You can use paper with surface texture while you're at it to get an extra effect. Press the stencil into the clay with a pony roller (5) to impress the pattern then brush colored underglaze/slip over the surface (6). Remove the stencil when the underglaze has lost its shine.

Allow both the plate slab and the foot to firm up until they hold their shape but are still flexible. Place the slab stencil-side down over the mold. You can draw concentric lines on the mold in advance, using a banding wheel, then line up the corners of the slab. Use a pony roller (7) to gently, but firmly, encourage the slab to conform to the shape of the mold. Adjust and center the slab using the lines that you have drawn, then smooth the surface with a damp sponge. Next, center the foot on the plate, score the attachment area, apply slip, then attach, using a pony roller again (8). Let the slip firm up and then

use your finger to clean the edges, pressing the excess slip into the seams. Run a damp sponge over the area to clean up. Cover lightly with plastic and leave overnight or until stiffened. After removing the plate from the mold, use a Surform to even the edges, then use a damp sponge to refine the rim.

Here's where you can apply another layer of pattern. You can stencil if you didn't do so earlier: use small pieces applied individually since a whole sheet won't conform to the new curved shape (9). You can also paint with slip or underglaze, and/or project an image onto the surface. I use an old overhead projector that I found on eBay and print my pattern on acetate to project onto the surface (10). Try a floral or organic pattern for variety. Use an X-Acto knife to draw into the surface of the plate alone or after painting the basic shape on with underglaze. Do the same on the back. When the piece is bone dry, use a green kitchen scouring pad to get rid of the sharp bits before bisque firing.

Next, inlay a dark, fuming glaze into any carved lines on the front and back. Sponge the glaze over the entire surface before wiping it almost all off, so that it fumes a little bit. Fill the pattern in with a new glaze. Add another, different type of pattern to fill in empty spaces for a final layer if you like.

*Shana Salaff is a ceramic artist, writer, and educator living in Fort Collins, Colorado. To learn more, visit [www.shanasalaff.com](http://www.shanasalaff.com) or follow her on Instagram @shanasalaff.*

1 [www.upcounsel.com/design-patent](http://www.upcounsel.com/design-patent).

2 [https://creativemarket.com/Curly\\_Pat/1547971-Floral-Seamless-Patterns-Bundle](https://creativemarket.com/Curly_Pat/1547971-Floral-Seamless-Patterns-Bundle).



### WILLS CRACKLE BASE

Cone 5–6 Oxidation

Lithium Carbonate . . . . .	13.40 %
Strontium Carbonate . . . . .	23.71
Whiting . . . . .	3.10
Nepheline Syenite . . . . .	24.74
Ball Clay . . . . .	3.10
Silica . . . . .	31.95
	100.00 %

For Wills Saturated:

Add: Copper Carbonate . . . . .	10.00 %
Chrome Oxide . . . . .	1.00 %
Bentonite . . . . .	3.00 %
Silica . . . . .	5.00 %

This is a very runny glaze. Use very thinly to inlay into carved lines or apply using a glaze trailer. The Wills Saturated variation is a dark teal green when thick and orange-brown when extremely thin. Extra silica was added in order to decrease the runniness and make a stronger glass.