

# **Clay on Main Student Handbook**

**313 Main St. Oley PA 19547  
610-987-0273  
[www.clayonmain.org](http://www.clayonmain.org)**

# **Welcome to Clay on Main!**

I would like to welcome new and returning students to Clay on Main (COM)! Thank you for taking classes with us this term. Please use this guide as a reference tool for the studio. While you are here to take classes, remember that there is much more to Clay on Main studio; details on all of our programs can be found on our website.

Clay on Main is a non-profit 501(c) (3) artist cooperative located at 313 Main Street in the village of Oley, PA. The studio serves the local community with a variety of clay arts programs. We teach community classes and workshops in clay for adults and children, host professional workshops, collaborate with other non-profit organizations to offer learning opportunities through art, and hold public lectures and events. Information about studio events can be found on our website: [www.clayonmain.org](http://www.clayonmain.org)

Clay on Main also houses a cooperative gallery that serves as a venue for the display and sale of members' and guest artists' work.

Located in historic Oley, Pennsylvania, Clay on Main is about an hour's drive northwest of Philadelphia and three hours from New York City. Clay on Main is located on Main Street in the village, housed in a 19<sup>th</sup> century farmhouse, later the site of the Heffley family bakery. The township of Oley, a rural mix of farmland, forest, and quaint villages is on the National Register of Historic Places. Rural Berks County, a center of Pennsylvania German red ware continues to inspire clay artists to experiment with creative and contemporary work.

**Enjoy your class and welcome to our studio!**

**Dolores Kirschner  
Executive Director**

## **Our Programs**

Clay on Main's primary focus is to provide artists time and space to pursue ceramic arts. Adult classes include classes in wheel throwing and hand building that provide instruction on making vessel forms and sculpture, technically focused classes in tile making, mold making, surface treatments, and historical classes. Children's classes include outreach programs in public and private schools, and a studio class for kids. To compliment these programs, the studio hosts lectures and demonstrations. The studio also supports the larger arts community and individual artists through its public exhibition program. The Gallery provides a venue for contemporary artists, both emerging and established, in addition to exhibiting our members and faculty in various shows throughout the year.

## **Fundraising**

As a non-profit and registered 501 (c)(3) organization, Clay on Main receives support from generous individuals who value the importance and scope of our programming and the role we have in the local and arts community. Annual fund-raising events like "Jammin for Dollars" help to supplement our programs.

## **Scholarships**

Periodically funds are available for student scholarships. See Dolores for more details.

## **Additional Information**

If you would like additional information about any of our opportunities and programs, including learning about volunteering, please do not hesitate to contact us. Please let us know if you have any questions, comments or concerns that you would like to bring to our attention.

## **Introduction to Clay on Main Studio Guidelines**

This information is provided to remind returning students and to acquaint new students with the studio's guidelines. We encourage each student to become familiar with the information in this handbook to ensure that things run smoothly in the studios and we can provide you with the best experience possible.

If you have any questions, please speak with your instructor or the director. Feel free to offer your comments and suggestions, as they arise.

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# **Work Environment and General Guidelines**

If we all share a common understanding of this work place, all studio members can enjoy the benefits of a productive environment. Here are the basic guidelines that have evolved over the years to support a creative and fruitful environment.

## **Studio and administrative questions**

If you have questions regarding studio issues, please speak with the instructor or other staff member. Please keep in mind that the studio staff is willing to help you whenever possible, but there will be times that they cannot immediately address your concerns.

## **Production and work flow**

COM provides a learning environment, not a production studio, and cannot support the volume of work produced at a production pace. We ask all students to investigate and develop their forms in series rather than produce multiples of any great quantity. We have an equal responsibility to fire the work of all students, and when one student is producing many items, it slows down the process of everyone else's work. Bisque ware should be promptly glazed and taken home after the final firing. The ware shelves will be periodically sorted through, and unclaimed work may be discarded.

## **Cleaning up**

COM is a busy studio, but with your help, we can keep it clean! Wheels, tables, bats, ware boards, and banding wheels should be sponged, put away, and left clean for the next class or open studio session. Please don't store work on bats. Clean wheel splash guards and replace on wheel for next person. The floor under your wheel should be wiped clean of wet clay or dust with a sponge or sponge mop (stored near the sink.) When using the slab roller, take care not to allow clay to extend past the canvas, and clean the metal rollers if this does happen. Rinse or wipe undersides of glaze bucket lids after use. All tools and equipment should be cleaned and returned to its storage area. The sink and counter should be left clean and free of items. The plaster wedging bats should be scraped and wiped clean with a damp sponge. In the kitchen, clean all used dishes and utensils and make sure not to leave expired or unwanted food in the refrigerator. Every class and open studio session is responsible for leaving studios clean at

the end of their session, and it is sometimes necessary to clean up what others have left behind. Faculty members and studio staff may delegate clean-up responsibilities to ensure complete clean up of the studios.

### **Leaving the studio**

Please make sure you have cleaned up, put your work away, and leave the building by closing time. No students are permitted to remain in the building after closing.

### **Breakage and loss**

COM is not responsible for the loss or damage of work or personal property. Do not handle or touch the work of others. If you must do so, please exercise great care, and treat the work as if it were your own. Never place your piece on top of another person's work. If you accidentally damage another person's work please leave a note on top of the piece. If there is a shortage of space, notify your instructor or the studio staff. Be frugal with space; place work in the corner instead of the center of the shelf, and follow the signs designating shelf use.

### **Lockers**

COM provides lockers for student use. Personal belongings should be kept in your locker. Lockers should be cleaned out by the last day of class if you are not returning. Lockers of non-returning students will be emptied and reassigned. The studio is not responsible for damage or loss of the contents of lockers that have been emptied.

### **Open studio time**

Open studio time is provided for adult students to pursue their work outside of class time. It is offered on a first-come, first-served basis and is equally available to long-time students and newcomers alike. Open studio hours are posted on the studio website. Students may work only during scheduled open studio hours. Open studio time may be preempted for special presentations or scheduling changes; these changes will be listed on the bulletin boards. Every effort will be made to give advanced notice about open studio changes or closing.

## **Weather closings**

During weather emergencies, COM closes in accordance with Oley Valley School District, as broadcast on the radio and local TV news.

## **Make-up classes**

Clay on Main cannot reimburse students for missed classes. However, make-classes are permitted within the same 6 week class session. Contact your instructor for permission to make up a class.

## **Facility and Equipment Use**

### **Glaze area**

All COM students share the Glaze Area, and certain guidelines apply to its use:

- ┌ All students may use the Glaze Area during their own scheduled class time.
- ┌ Plastic, rubber, or latex gloves must be used at all times when glazing.
- ┌ If you have not re-registered but have work that needs to be glazed, you may use the Glaze Area during the first two weeks of the next term during scheduled Open Studio hours.

### **Library**

The library is a tremendous resource, offering a selection of publications and periodicals on contemporary and historical ceramics as well as technical instruction. Students can borrow books during the sessions they are registered for but they must be signed out. We are always trying to improve our collection. We welcome donations of art and ceramics books; please see Dolores concerning donations.

### **Gallery space**

Our main gallery space hosts several exhibitions each by invitation. Our kitchen and library display spaces are reserved for Clay on Main co-op members.

### **Studio safety**

As in any clay studio, it is very important to work safely with ceramic materials. Glaze chemicals, clay dust and studio

equipment all have the potential to cause serious injury if improperly handled. The following rules have been established to minimize studio hazards for all students, faculty and staff. It is essential for your own safety and that of your classmates that you understand and follow these rules at all times.

## **Ceramic materials**

The majority of ceramic materials used in the studio are safe if handled correctly. However, over-exposure to any materials, through lungs, skin or mouth, can be harmful. At the studio, the most common hazard is airborne clay dust, which can cause silicosis and other serious lung damage if inhaled over many years. In addition, many metal oxides and metal compounds used in glazes are poisonous in their raw forms. Never sand or scrape bone-dry clay or glaze inside the studio. If you need to sand a piece, please do so outside on the patio, and wear a particle mask. Be sure to clean up sanding dust afterwards with a wet sponge, or by sanding over a bucket of water.

- [ Clean up spills and clay trimmings before they dry. Clean all surfaces by wiping with a wet sponge – never with a dry paper towel or broom!
- [ Clean up thoroughly after yourself in the studio, including the floor around your work area, when you are done working.
- [ Clean all bats and boards with a damp sponge after you use them.
- [ It is required that students use gloves when handling raw glaze materials and washes, especially those containing heavy metals such as copper, cobalt and manganese. Disposable gloves and masks are available in the studio.
- [ Please DO NOT pour excess slip or glaze down the drains. They are pollutants and cause drainage problems. The studio staff can advise where to dispose of contaminated glazes.
- [ The director must clear the use of all commercial glazes, including underglazes. This policy applies to all COM members and faculty. Many of these products are not allowed in the studio because they contain lead or other dangerous chemicals that may create unsafe communal working conditions.



## **Equipment**

Kilns, wheels and other equipment at the studio are both delicate and potentially hazardous. Students are asked to take the following precautions to avoid accidents and injury:

- ┌ Never place anything on kiln lids, at any time. These lids are fragile and often very hot and are not meant to be used as tables.
- ┌ Students may not touch kiln equipment without the permission of a studio staff person.
- ┌ Students may not use the slab roller, or extruder without proper orientation from a teacher or studio staff member. All equipment must be left clean after use.
- ┌ Turn off electric wheels when you are done using them.
- ┌ If faculty, staff or a fellow student reminds you to follow any of these safety precautions, please follow their instructions. Their comments are offered with concern for your welfare and that of others in the studio.

## **Materials and Handling**

### **Clay**

Students receive 25 lbs of clay with class registration. Additional clay is available for purchase. The cost is \$35 for 25 lbs of clay, which includes glazing and firing fees. The studio stocks four basic types of clay: stoneware, porcelain, sculpture, and earthenware. All clay used must be supplied by the studio. Reclaimed clay is available for \$10 per 15 Lbs.

### **Reclaiming clay**

Throwing slurries and trimming scraps can be put in the reclaiming buckets located under or near the wedging tables.

### **Other clay bodies**

No student or teacher may bring clay into the studios. Only clay provided by COM can be used. The limited available storage space and the increased likelihood of clay contamination and kiln accidents necessitate this policy.

## **Glazes**

A large number of studio glazes, slips, and washes are provided in the studio. Test tiles are displayed to show how each glaze may look when fired. These glazes are all food-safe unless otherwise noted. Some glazes and washes are caustic or mildly toxic in the raw state; we require that you wear gloves when using glazes. Your instructor or the studio staff can answer any questions concerning glazing.

## **Contamination**

One of the main elements that ensure good results in glazing is avoiding contamination of individual glazes. When mixing up a bucket of glaze, be sure that surrounding glaze buckets are closed, and mix the glaze thoroughly without splashing. Dipping can cause contamination. If you plan on dipping two different glazes on one piece, wait until the first coat is dry to the touch. Remember to cover the glaze buckets when finished. Oxides and washes are only to be used with your instructor's supervision.

## **Consistency**

The ideal consistency for glazes is similar to heavy cream. Before using, mix glaze thoroughly with the whisk provided in the bucket. Glazes have a tendency to settle to the bottom of the bucket. If the glaze seems too thick, please ask an instructor or studio staff to thin.

## **Cleaning**

Your piece should be free of dirt or grease before glazing. If you decide to wash your piece, you must wait until it is thoroughly dry before applying glaze. A damp pot will absorb less glaze and may result in washed-out colors.

## **Coverage**

Glaze thickness and uniformity is the key to success or disaster in glazing. In general, the thicker the glaze coating, the more likely it is to run, crackle, fall off or crack the piece during firing.

Combining two or more glazes can also lead to running and other problems. As a rule of thumb, the ideal thickness of most glaze coatings is about the thickness of a dime or quarter. A single dip is usually enough to achieve this thickness. When dipping over a

glaze, be certain that your first coat is thoroughly dry. Be sure to make your second dip a conservative one. If a glaze is listed as being runny, it will be even more so as a second coating over another glaze, and should only be applied to top 1/3 of pot.

If glaze is too close to or on the bottom of a pot, it will be placed on the "Problem" shelf. If you find one of your pots there, clean up the bottom and put it back on the glaze-ware shelf.

## **Kilns and Firing**

The **only** work fired in COM kilns is work that has been made and completed in our studios, with no exceptions. Work that was made outside COM may not be brought into our studios. This rule is necessary to avoid kiln accidents that can cause costly damage to the kilns and other peoples' work.

### **Firing**

Pieces ready for firing should be placed on the appropriate shelf. All shelves are clearly labeled with firing temperature (cones): e.g. bisque, cone 04 oxidation, and cone 6 oxidation. It is important to make sure to place your work on the correct shelf.

### **Selecting work for firing**

Once fired, clay becomes a permanent material that doesn't break down in the environment. We suggest you consider the need to fire pieces that cracked or chipped during the drying process, didn't meet your expectations, or that you plan on re-making anyway.

### **Paper 'armatures'**

If you've stuffed paper inside your piece, please remove it before firing. Firing paper-filled pieces in the electric kilns is harmful to the kiln elements.

### **Firing schedule**

The firing schedule is generally M and W cone 6 and T and Th bisque/low fire. Do not hesitate to ask studio staff about the firing, status of your work, especially if you find that you've been waiting too long. Given the volume of work we fire, you should expect a turnaround time of at least 2-3 weeks for a piece to be fired once it

is on the shelf. Smaller pieces tend to have a shorter turnaround; large or flat work can often take even longer due to available kiln space.

### **Finished work**

Once your piece has completed its final firing it's placed on the finished glaze shelves. Please retrieve your work promptly. If you do not wish to take your finished work home with you, discard it or donate it to the studio for sale items. Don't leave unwanted work to occupy valuable space on the shelves. Each student is responsible for his/her work; unclaimed pieces cannot be held indefinitely and will be discarded periodically. The studio is not responsible for lost or unclaimed work.

Note: If you are unable to glaze all of your work before the end of the session and you are not re-registering, you may glaze your work during the first two weeks of the next session (in the fall for end of spring session).

### **Glazes: A Note on Food Safety**

All cone 6 and cone 04 glazes at COM are food safe unless otherwise noted. This means that our glazes are chemically stable and contain no lead, barium or other highly toxic and soluble material. Whether or not a glaze is "food safe" is determined by a number of factors: glaze and clay maturity; glaze melt; and solubility or stability of fired glaze materials. Our "non-food safe" glazes are generally so designated because they are unstable in the fired state and may leach metal oxides into foods, especially acid foods, that come into contact with them. Most highly matt 04 glazes are not considered food safe for this reason, because their mattness is achieved essentially by underfiring, which leaves them unstable. For a surface to be food safe it must also be properly sealed (i.e. clay and glaze have bonded properly, and both have been fired to maturity. Every clay and glaze has a range of maturity; however, there are limits. High fire clays that have not been fired to maturity (i.e. cone 6-10) have not reached temperatures sufficient to vitrify the clay and bond clay to glaze. Low fire glazes on high-fire bodies will tend to craze badly and peel off, because their thermal expansion is not suited to the high fire clays. Food and liquid can easily penetrate the glaze surface. For

this reason we consider all our lowfire glazes food-safe ONLY when applied to the low-fire earthenware.

## Glossary of General Terms

**Bisqueware:** Unglazed ware fired to a temperature sufficient to harden but not mature the clay body. All moisture has been removed and the ware is easier to handle and glaze.

**Bone dry:** Work that is completely dry but not yet fired.

**Commercial glazes:** Manufacturers like Duncan, Mayco, and Amaco produce products that can be used directly from the jar. Colors that are difficult to make, like bright yellows, oranges, and reds are available. Underglazes can be applied on greenware or on bisqueware. These products are primarily used on low fire clay bodies such as earthenware, but some can be fired up to cone 6. In addition, if multiple firings are desired, you can fire up to cone 10 and then do a second firing at lower temperatures, from cone 04-08. (Note: Many of these products are not allowed in the studio because they contain lead or other dangerous chemicals—please consult with your instructor before using.)

**Earthenware:** Pottery that has been fired at a low temperature and is porous and relatively soft.

**Glaze:** A vitreous coating that has been melted into a clay surface with heat.

**Greenware:** Dry, unfired clay.

**Leather hard:** The condition of a clay body when most of the moisture has evaporated, A semi-dry state, suitable for carving, burnishing, and joining slabs.

**Mason stains:** Commercially produced oxides that come in a variety of vibrant colors.

**Oxidation firing:** A firing method with complete combustion allowing the maximum oxygen. Electric kilns always produce oxidizing firings unless reducing materials are added.

**Oxide wash:** A mixture of raw chemicals and water.

**Reduction firing:** A firing method in which the supply of oxygen is reduced and carbon monoxide is produced.

**Silica:** The most common of all ceramic materials, found in nature as quartz or flint sand.

**Slip:** A homogeneous mixture of clay and water.

**Stoneware:** A type of clay body fired to a temperature at which the body becomes vitrified, dense, and non-absorptive, but not translucent. Matures at a temperature above 2192F/1200C

**Terra sigillata:** A silky, fine slip used by the Ancient Greeks and Southwest Indian potters. A mixture of clay, water, and a very small amount of deflocculant to aid clay suspension.

## **Student Rights and Responsibilities**

**Clay on Main students can expect that every effort will be made to provide:**

- ┌ Courteous and helpful guidance from COM staff.
- ┌ An enthusiastic, knowledgeable teaching staff.
- ┌ Access to provided materials.
- ┌ Equipment that is in good working order and that meets safety standards.
- ┌ Access to the Library, Lunchroom, and Gallery during scheduled hours.
- ┌ An environment that is free from sexual harassment or discrimination for reasons based on race, color, religion, sex, age, sexual orientation, national or ethnic origin, citizenship status, veteran's status, or disability.
- ┌ Students are encouraged to report difficulties or make suggestions for improvements to COM's Executive Director, Dolores Kirschner or other staff.

**While on COM's premises, students must:**

- ┌ Be aware of and abide by all rules, schedules and procedures as noted in the COM student handbook, brochure and as instructed by COM staff.
- ┌ Maintain appropriate behavior and language. Aggressive language or behavior including shouting, profanity, pushing, hitting, throwing of materials, stealing, etc. will not be tolerated.
- ┌ Do nothing that compromises the safety of any COM member, including oneself.
- ┌ Participate in studio clean up each time they use the studio, including communal work areas and equipment.

- ⌈ Remember that COM is an educational studio, not a production studio. Students are expected to investigate and develop work in series rather than produce multiples of any great quantity.
- ⌈ Not smoke in the studio.
- ⌈ Not eat or drink in the studio. The kitchen is available for meals.
- ⌈ Use only the clay bodies and glazes provided by COM.
- ⌈ The studio does not fire work completed outside its studios.
- ⌈ Your cooperation is vital to sustaining our communal studio environment.

**Thank you!**

