





# Split Rail BASKETS

by Barbara Banfield

*“A craftsman becomes an artist when he starts innovating. The experimenters blur the edges between craft and art, who can say if that is a pot or a sculpture?”*

—Crafty Artist Exhibits, Frank Ross

## Creating a Basic Basket Form

To create a basket to accommodate a cane handle, begin with a bottomless cylinder on a bat with 1–2½ pounds of clay, depending on the desired size. When shaping the cylinder, it’s best to create a form that’s wider at the base and narrower at the top. This allows for greater stability when you start cutting the sides. Once you’ve established the shape you like, clean the sides, removing any excess slip.

If you plan to add lugs as an additional aesthetic handle, you’ll need to leave some thickness at the rim. This serves as a stable platform. If not, still consider how you want to treat the rim. It’s the finishing point of a dynamic surface. When you’re satisfied with the form, use your trimming tool to remove excess clay around the base, leaving a beveled edge.

## Altering the Surface

Moving the wheel at a medium slow pace and supporting the form on the inside with one hand, use a Dolan knife or any other thin, sharp blade to run around the form, cutting into the surface but not all the way through (1). This takes practice and you have to know your pot and feel its thickness. If the cut into the form is not deep enough, you will not be able to push the cut from the inside out enough to create a nice split on the exterior. You can make as many cuts as you like. Vary the width and the depth and even the direction.

At this point, take the bat off the wheel, leaving the form attached to the bat. Let the form set up until you can touch the rim without distorting it or leaving a wet mark, but it’s still soft enough to manipulate.

Once the form is set up, place the bat back on the wheel. Working from the bottom up, start the pushing out process. Gently but firmly ease the split open with a back and forth motion using your index finger (2). Move up the form, alternating pushing out so that

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1

Throw a cylinder, support it from the inside, and use a sharp knife to slice the surface, but not all the way through.



2

Let the form set up, then with your hand on the interior, gently push out with your index finger to ease the splits open.



3

Alternate when pushing out to prevent the splits from being on top of each other, then cut the form off the wheel.



4

When you can touch the clay without leaving a mark and it's still pliable, gently oval the form.



5

Place the oval form on a rolled slab, then trace the form and cut the shape out of the slab, leaving a little extra.



6

Turn the basket over, support it on foam, and use a rubber rib to compress the slab onto the base of the basket.



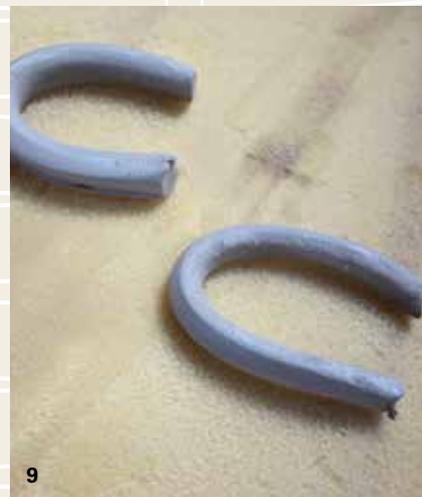
7

Compress the excess clay from the slab into the wall of the form. Cut a profile for the base into an old credit card.



8

Place the basket on a banding wheel, and use the cut credit card rib to remove excess clay from around the base.



9

Roll two small coils for the handle loops. Tap and shape them into the desired thickness, then allow them to set up.



10

Hold the basket firmly and use a wooden paddle to strike the bottom edge of the pot to create sharp, angular dents.



11

The two the most commonly used cane for handle making are the 1/4-inch flat reed and the round reed.



12

Soak the reed in water for 4-6 hours before use. It needs to be soft enough to bend without splitting or breaking.



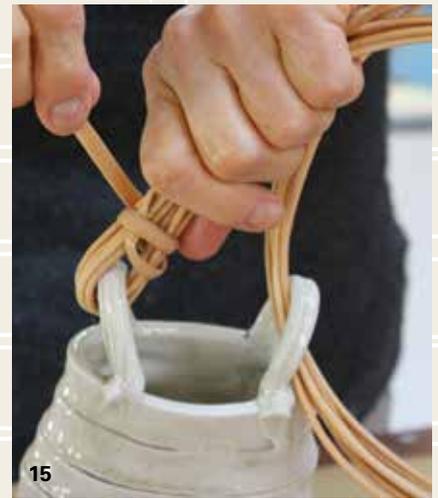
13

Use a single round reed to measure the length for the handle. Allow extra for over lapping and securing the ends.



14

Cut the number of round reeds for the desired thickness of the handle. As the reed folds back, the thickness doubles.



15

Hold the overlapped round reed tightly around the lug and start wrapping it snugly with the flat reed.



16

Continue wrapping and twisting evenly as you go around the handle right to the other side.



17

After wrapping, cut the flat reed sharply on an angle and feed it back under the wraps as far as possible to secure the end.



18

After the handle is completely wrapped, use a pair of scissors to cut the excess reed while it's still damp.



Flower baskets, 16 in. (41 cm) in height, porcelain, stoneware, fired in wood and oxidation kilns. *Photos of finished, fired pieces: Dale Roddick.*

one split isn't on top of the other. You can play with this to create different effects and outcomes. Push out once gently from bottom to top and then go back and push a little further, accentuating the splits (3). When you're finished pushing out and defining the splits, cut the cylinder off of the bat. It's much easier to push the cuts out when the form is still anchored to the bat.

### Adding a Base

Roll a slab for the base, about the same thickness as the walls (¼ inch). Be sure to compress the slab.

When the basket form is still malleable, gently oval the form (4). Next, measure the size of the basket's base by resting the oval on the slab. First make a small mark on the side of both the base and the form so you know which direction to place it when you attach the two pieces. Then, trace around the basket, making a mark on the slab (5). Using a fettling knife, cut slightly outside your line.

Support the basket up-side down on a piece of foam, then trim any excess clay away from the inside of the cylinder, score and slip both the basket and the slab, then attach the base. Use a soft rib to compress the base to the cylinder (6). If there's enough excess clay on the inside of the form, compress it on the inside to seal the base, otherwise add a small coil to the interior join to ensure the base does not crack.

Use a rubber rib, followed by a rasp, then a homemade tool cut from an old credit card (7, 8), and a sponge to define the base by running each tool around the form in successive order.

### Lugs and Other Finishing Touches

At this point, make coil lugs for attaching the cane handles. I bend the lugs right away and let them set up (9). When they're firm enough to support themselves, score, slip, and attach them to the pot.

With a soft brush and a sponge, clean up any rough edges. Lastly, using the side edge of a flat paddling tool, I tap firmly

into the base, making several indentations to create a foot and give the pot a bit of lift off the table (10). Slowly dry the form, then bisque fire, glaze, and re-fire the pot.

### Cane Handle Making

Throughout history, cane handles have been used on ceramic vessels of all sorts. Due to the nature of the cane material—its pliability and strength—the possibilities for design and function are endless. Your imagination is your only limitation. This is a very basic handle that you can extrapolate into numerous ideas.

There are a wide variety of reeds that can be used to make the handles. I use a ¼-inch-flat oval and the basic round reed (11). You can purchase the cane from companies that sell materials for caning and repairing chairs. A little research on the web will result in a supplier close to you.

Prepare your tools before you get started, as your hands get busy holding everything in place while you wrap the reed. You'll need the following tools: needle-nose pliers, flat-nose pliers, scissors, and a spray bottle for water. Soak the quantity of reed you'll need for at least 6–8 hours in water (12). You can use fabric dyes to add color to the cane.

Using a single strand of the round reed, measure the amount you will need, being sure to leave extra for overlapping on the ends (13). Select and cut the number of round reeds to attain the handle thickness that you want. Cut extra length and a few extra reeds. The round reeds fill the interior of the handle. The flat oval cane wraps tightly around the outside to secure the round reed. Holding the reeds, thread them through the lugs, back and forth over each other, loosely shaping the handle (14).

Next, securely hold the round reed at the base by the lug and position one end of the flat reed so that when you start wrapping, it will be caught under itself. Wrap the flat cane back over itself to secure it tightly (15). Continue wrapping the flat oval cane around the round reeds, twisting and tightening the flat oval cane and keeping it flat as you go (16). **Tip:** Spritz the reed with water to keep it moist and pliable.

When you get to the end of the wrapping, cut the flat oval cane on a sharp angle and feed the end back under the wrapped cane, tucking it up as far as possible (17). The wrapped cane can be tight; sometimes pliers can be useful to assist in pulling the reed back in order to keep it from unraveling. When the reed is secure, trim the loose ends to your liking (18).

As the cane begins to dry, it will tighten and shrink, which will make it stronger. You can always rehydrate the reed if you need to tighten or repair.

*Barbara Banfield came to clay after 20 years in the garment industry. She graduated from Sheridan College near Toronto, Ontario, Canada, in 2010. She takes great pleasure in learning new techniques and exploring the endless possibilities and process that working with clay demands.*