

Lisa Pavelka's Top 10 Polymer Clay Tips

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- 1.** Always, always, always bake your clay with at least two thermometers! Why go to all of that work to create a thing of beauty only to find out your oven is running too hot? It's the best few dollars you'll ever spend. It also is great for making sure a class or friend's oven is correctly calibrated before use. I personally use two or three, especially when traveling. If one is off, you have a damaged thermometer, when using a third thermometer, as long as at least two match temperature you know what the correct temp is for calibration. Always preheat the oven first to prevent problems from spiking.
- 2.** Use a smooth ceramic tile for your work and baking surface. They're nearly impossible to scratch, they're easy to find and inexpensive. They go straight from your worktable to your oven. It can be handy to have several on hand, and in different sizes.
- 3.** Deli sheets or parchment paper are wonderful to have on hand when you don't wish your clay to stick to your work surface. These are commonly found at warehouse grocery stores and restaurant supply stores and may be found under names like "waxies or patty paper" too. They also make great stamping and powder masks on your clay. When handling a piece of uncured clay, tear a small piece of deli sheet and place under your fingers to prevent leaving a fingerprint. These also make turning your work easy; almost like a mini "Lazy Susan."
- 4.** Always begin conditioning and working with the lightest colored clays first, whenever possible. This will help prevent color contamination. Clean hands often between colors with a baby wipe. For stubborn residue, rub a dab of hand sanitizer on your palms and fingertips before wiping with a baby wipe. For final clean up, wash with a pumice-based waterless hand cleaner followed by soap to remove all traces of clay residue.
- 5.** Use Armor All® or STP Son-of-a-Gun automotive protectant spray to prevent clay from sticking to molds, rubber stamps, plastic texture plates and acrylic rollers. Spray a small amount on the clay and spread with your fingertips and not on the stamp directly. This ensures a fine, even coating on the entire surface of your clay for better results.
- 6.** Keep your clay blades sharp and extend their life by sanding with 800 grit (automotive grade wet/dry sandpaper). Fold a small square of sandpaper in half (about 2" x 2"). Hold the folded sandpaper inside of a piece dishwashing sponge for safety and slide the paper back and forth over the edge of the blade to clean and sharpen. Make sure to turn the blade over and do this on the other side. This will clean residue from the blade and sharpen it at the same time. Safely dispose of old blades by covering them entirely in scrap clay and bake for throwing in the trash.
- 7.** Camouflage surface defects such as fingerprints and nail marks by stippling clay with a texturing tool. Very coarse sand paper is one of my favorites. Ball tip styluses are great for creating a spoon carved look. Try other items such as the end of a retracted ball-point pen or coffee stirrers for interesting circle patterns. Rummage through the junk drawer for interesting items including buttons, screw heads, screw threads, and many more surprising finds for making interesting texture treatments; even when you're not hiding surface imperfections. Try highlighting textured surfaces with mica pigments or dabbing on acrylic paint with a cosmetic sponge to get unique surface effects.
- 8.** Separate the ends of millefiori canes by color families (i.e. purples, blues, greens, etc.). When you've accumulated a large amount of clay in these colors, mix them together through the pasta machine to create new colors. I like to save these for when I'm watching TV. It doesn't take your concentration to blend scrap clays.

9. You can cover almost anything with clay and bake it: metal, paper, chipboard, wood, glass, and even some plastics. If you're unsure if an item is safe for baking, make a template of the surface to be covered. Build the clay veneer on a ceramic tile and use the template to trim the finished clay piece to size. After baking and cooling, carefully slide the clay blade under the veneer to remove it from the tile. Attach to the surface to be decorated using a 5-minute setting two-part epoxy. Glue will adhere better if you give one or both surfaces being bonded some "tooth" or texture for the glue to hold on to. Use an awl or needle tool to gouge the surfaces to roughen them up. Remember, when using any glue, less is more! Too much glue may not cure due to lack of sufficient oxygen.

10. Recycle old jewelry findings by removing the existing stones or cabochons from the metal settings. Make a new piece to glue into the old settings for a completely new and updated look. Many centerpieces can easily be molded into scrap clay and used to make the new clay

Lisa Pavelka is an award-winning artist, author of four books on polymer clay and instructor. She has worked professionally with polymer clay for over 25 years and is recognized for her work as an Art Clay Silver Master, SWAROVSKI ELEMENTS as an official Ambassador, wire , resin and more. Lisa is a regular contributor and columnist to numerous magazines. She has appeared dozens of times on programs including HGTV's Carol Duvall Show, DIY Network's Jewelry Making, Discovery Channel, and more. Lisa teaches creative workshops and cruises throughout the world. Her signature product and button lines are distributed in over 2000 stores, in over 40 countries. To learn more about Lisa's work and classes, visit: www.lisapavelka.com

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