

NERIAGE - COLOURED CLAY

Technical Tips And
Product Information

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Neriage is a coloured clay process which involves marbling, laminating and combining coloured clay to create composite clay images/patterns. It is an ideal way to create interesting beads and small forms.

TO MAKE COLOURED CLAY

Choose one single white base clay (i.e. earthenware, mid-fire, stoneware or porcelain) and a range of stain or oxide powders. Slice the clay into 1cm thick slices (like bread), and dip each slice into water before placing it into an open plastic bag. Sprinkle stain or oxide onto each layer until all the clay is used. Close the bag up and sit overnight. The water helps compensate for the addition of the dry oxide or stain. The next day, knead wedge the clay until it is evenly coloured (to your taste) and still quite moist.

FORMING

The key point to note with neriage is that the coloured clays you join together must be of the same moisture content and be created from the same white clay base material. This ensures that they have the same shrinkage rate and the work won't crack apart while drying or firing.

MARBLING

Take a small ball of one coloured clay (it could be white), and then make a coil out of another colour clay. Wrap the coil in a spiral around the ball. Pat the coil into the ball and then knead lightly. Slice across the ball – the marbled areas should be strongly defined. Continued kneading will make the areas of different colour thinner and eventually mix the two clays completely.

These cross-sections of marbled clay can be laid into a plaster press-mould (the mould soaked in water for 5 minutes prior to use). Once the mould is lined with the clay pieces, smooth over the joins with your finger to integrate the pieces into one solid shape. Place the mould with its clay lining into a plastic bag to sit overnight. Next day, open the bag to allow a very slow evaporation and eventual firming. Once firm, scrape over the surface of the form with a metal scraper to reveal the full design. Do not sponge – this will blur the coloured clay design. When dry, remove the clay shape from the mould – the outside surface will be brilliantly coloured and patterned. Sand the edges of the form before firing. This form could be glazed with a clear glaze, or left unglazed and fired to the uppermost temperature the clay type can handle – 1100°C for earthenware, 1200°C for mid-fire or 1300°C for stoneware or porcelain.

LAMINATING

Take thin slices of different coloured clays, dip each slab into water and then place them one on top of the other. Slam them together or to a sheet of compressed cement sheet to make a solid stack (block) of layered clay. It's very important that NO air is trapped between the layers of clay when they are sandwiched together. Once the stack is shaped, wrap it in plastic and stand overnight. Next day, slice the block with a wire harp to reveal the strata layers of colour (like a licorice allsort lolly). These slices can be used to line a plaster mould or bisque clay shape. Always soak the mould before lining it with clay – this prevents too rapid drying of the clay. Once the shape is leather hard remove it from the mould to dry. You can sand once fully dry. This type of form could be glazed with a clear glaze, or left unglazed and fired to the uppermost temperature the clay type can handle – 1100°C for earthenware, 1200°C for mid-fire or 1300°C for stoneware or porcelain.

COMPOSITE FORMS (MILLEFIORE)

For a more complex coloured clay effect, place side by side extruded moist coloured clay coils (the same way as for laminating) to create solid logs. These logs can then be rolled up in sheets (thin slabs) of coloured clay to create thicker multi-layered logs of colour. Once again, wrap the clay in glad wrap overnight. Next day, slice across the clay log with a wire harp to reveal the millefiore layers. These can then be laid into moulds or used as brilliantly coloured slabs of clay for jewellery. (The effect is very complex pinwheel sandwiches.)