

# Building a Weathered Surface

by Angelo di Petta

Like a lot of potters and ceramic artists, I pretty much stumbled into working with clay. I didn't know much about it when I entered art school. My interest in architecture motivated me to pursue studies in interior design.

One of the required courses in my first year was an introduction to the craft studios. This involved five-week sessions in ceramics, metal, wood, and fiber. I enjoyed this introduction to materials and processes so much that it became clear to me that working with my hands as well as my head gave me great satisfaction. So, I abandoned my desire to study interior design. In my second year of studies, metal was my favorite medium, but by the end of my fourth year, I was fully immersed in the ceramics studio and graduated with a major in ceramics.

A turning point for me was a third-year class visit to a sewer-pipe factory. Enormous lengths and diameters of clay pipe were being extruded. Seeing this changed my ideas about how clay should be formed and what clay objects should look like. My fourth year was spent making dies and extruding stoneware and porcelain forms.

In the mid 1970s, I spent a year in Faenza, Italy—a center of pottery production and majolica since the 13th century—

studying ceramic design and production processes. Earthenware was the dominant clay used for functional and decorative objects, tiles, and architectural elements. Imagery plays a very important part in all these applications. So it was there that my journey with low-fire clays and the use of molds began.

## Inspiration

The natural and built environment are a major inspiration and influence on the work that I make. I see ceramic forms and surfaces in everything around me; abandoned buildings, layers of paint peeling off concrete walls, insect-eaten bark on trees, polished beach stones, etc. This is all visual information that eventually finds its way into my work. Each piece I make is an exploration of the natural process of weathering and the gentle wearing away of surfaces by water and sand. This process reveals layers of colors. These patterns suggest some other mysterious activity. My etching process mimics natural phenomena.

## Casting Slips

I use several types of casting-slip in my studio, including a red and a white earthenware, mid-range porcelain, and black



Angelo di Petta's low-fire cups, underglazed and etched.



