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Ceramics and ceramic planter forms

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CERAMICS AND CERAMIC PLANTER FORMS

by

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The growth of a seed to a fully grown plant is one of the wonderful mysterious secrets of nature. The seed is planted in the earth and begins its metamorphosis from a seed to a fully matured plant. In its transformation, the seed uses four elements of nature. These are earth, water, air and fire (sunlight). The seed needs the earth to take root in and receive its nutrients. It needs air, water, and sunlight to carry on photosynthesis in order to create new cells and grow. The seed uses and transforms these energies and by its own processes, is transformed.

At first, changes are unseen in the germinating seed. But, hour by hour, there are chemical changes going on within the seed. It begins to open and form both roots and shoots. It breaks through the ground and spreads its leaves. It has become a plant.

Everybody has this experience in very early childhood and continues to experience it throughout life. This metamorphosis from seed to a living, growing plant is an ever-expanding experience. Continual metamorphosis fosters my interest in living things, and consequently, the urge to help things grow.

Drawing the growing plant from many angles records these metamorphic changes and expands knowledge of it. The drawn representation of the plant helps one understand form in a very personal way.
It is a way to remember because the study reveals the plant's real character. It tells how the plant bends or carries its weight. The plant explains its foliage, texture, and how it forms shadows. If the plant is in its natural environment, it also responds to the blowing of the wind and the fall of the rain.

Planters are an outward manifestation of the urge to encourage plant growth. The planter provides an ideal environment for a plant because the plant gets sunshine, water, and plant food. The plant, likewise, has dominion over its surroundings and doesn't have to compete with other plants. The commercial red terra cotta drainage pot meets all these qualifications. It has a very simple aesthetic but does not relate aesthetically well to every plant. The design of ceramic planters should be related to plants for each plant has its own personality, features, habits, and idiosyncracies. Their precious individuality demands a personalized planter rather than a universal one for all plants.

Before wholly contemplating aesthetic considerations, one would do well to reflect upon the different technical features the terra cotta pot has answered. The terra cotta pot is a modular unit that comes in a large variety of sizes, and can be with or without both drainage holes and trellises. It has an amazing versatility and can accommodate specific needs. For instance, some plants have deep roots, while others prefer to crawl more closely to the surface of the earth. Still others need room to cling and climb. Some just
like to spill down and over from places on high. A plant such as the lily chooses to be pampered with lots of water. Occasionally, a plant forsakes the sun and seemingly lives on the air, while the cactus family prefers to bask in the unmerciful desert sun.

The inside of planters needs to be designed so that the roots have plenty of room to expand and grow. Some species are prone to root rot and need a hole in the bottom and a catch basin to trap the extra runoff. In a hanging planter a little basin allows excess water to evaporate. The type and quality of soil is equally important. Cacti grow in semi-arid land, but leafier plants require soil richer in phosphates and nitrates.

The cactus is probably my favorite. It is similar to the sun motif. The cactus, especially the round, full variety, is vibrant with energy. It seems to explode the sunlight it has soaked up. The needles are so numerous that the eye cannot handle all the impulses. These pulsate and agitate the eye.

Some cacti are bulky and strong. In Figure 1, the planter's large horns imitate the type of cactus it was designed for. The stamped and applied decoration enriches the planter. Although somewhat dissimilar, the texture of the cactus planter could be analogous to the waterwashed stones that a glacier deposits in a lateral moraine. The glacier places the stones by graded size from larger to finer and one should view this arrangement from the air in order to appreciate its beauty.
Some cacti are ball-like with thin, delicate needles. In Figure 2, the planter is a mirror of this type of plant. The points of the planter are so fragile you wonder how it stands up.

Hanging ivy is another interesting type of plant whose long tresses of green leaves cascade similar to small waterfalls. Its leaves tumble in different directions as water does when gravity brings it crashing down upon the rocks during its descent.

The outside surface of a hanging planter (Figure 3) can be favorably compared to the textural surface of the earth in the patch-quilt patterns of agricultural plantings. It has the winding feeling that reminds me of aerial views of ancient Chinese or Celtic origin rather than the more rectangular layouts of the midwestern United States.

Another thing that interests me about plants is the way they can be made to play hide and seek (Figure 4). A series of ceramic rock formations, and a plant that is not so phototropic can work successfully to play this game with viewer. It relies on the same principles as does a good-strip teaser. It reveals just enough of itself to constantly heighten the viewer's interest and attention.

I feel that planters I design should complement nature. And, what nature does so well should complement them. The use of ceramics is uniquely suited to this purpose. Ceramics, as does the germination of a seed, employ the same four forces of nature. These are earth,
water, air and fire. Firing removes the physical and chemical waters and changes earth to a more rock-like form. Control of the air during firing has a strong indication of how the final colored surface of both glaze and clay will look.

Stoneware clay has the properties that make it suitable for planter shapes. The wet clay allows an unlimited range of forming techniques. Its plastic properties can be molded, pulled, slab-formed, thrown on the wheel, cut, incised, stamped, carved, and modeled. The firing of the clay increases the options in terms of color, texture, and form. There is the possibility of either glazing staining, slipping, or a combination of these. Stoneware clay is also practical because it doesn't crack easily and is impervious to water when fired. No other material lends as much freedom as clay does to a potter.