
Arts

RR 2017/024

The Potter's Dictionary of Materials and Techniques (6th edition)

Frank Hamer and Janet Hamer

Bloomsbury

London and New York

2015

xvi + 454 pp.

ISBN 978 1 4081 8419 6 (print);

ISBN 978 1 4081 8483 7 (ePub)

£75

Keywords Dictionaries, Pottery

Review DOI [10.1108/RR-09-2016-0235](https://doi.org/10.1108/RR-09-2016-0235)

This updated and enlarged sixth edition of *The Potter's Dictionary of Materials and Techniques* is illustrated in full colour throughout for the first time, the majority of the images being provided by the authors. The *Dictionary* is aimed at ceramic practitioners together with teachers and students, as the level of detail is well above that needed by the amateur. Compared with the 1975 first edition, which was all in black and white, this latest edition is justifiably called “the potter’s bible”, as it is the definitive, technical and scientific tome for all ceramicists working with clay.

New entries include “historical work from 5000 BC to 2000 AD” (Preface) such as Egyptian Paste and Iron Age pottery. Sprinkled throughout the *Dictionary* are entries on influential people in line with the above policy. Alexandre Brongniart (1770-1847), the Director of the Sèvres porcelain and Bernard Leach are two examples, though a two-line separate entry on Friedrich Mohs seems unnecessary, as it is followed by more than half a column on Moh’s Scale of Hardness. New subjects include 3D Printing (under T rather than at the beginning of the book) and smoke crackle as practiced by Patricia Shone.

The length of the entries varies from a couple of lines (Oligoclase) to more than four pages on Raku and eight pages on Crack. Technical data such as the Twadell Formula and the Periodic Table are clearly laid out, and techniques, for example, making spouts and slip-casting, are well illustrated. The chemical nomenclature is that “recommended by the International Union of Pure and Applied Chemistry”, which sounds

a worthy body. See references either in the text or at the end of the entry are informative and useful: Carbon see Black Core, Stoneware see Porosity, Hard and Vitrification.

An appendix of tables provides additional technical data on subjects ranging from Standard Abbreviations to Bullers Bars to Incandescence to Mesh Sizes. The bibliography is small and very selective but does include Internet Resources, which of course are notoriously difficult to keep up-to-date. In the middle of the *Dictionary*, there are 16 colour plates of subjects in the book, referenced within the text; however, Plate 1 Colours from Iron Oxide is not referenced under either Colour or Iron Oxide, so the plates seem to be simply extra colour examples. Perhaps it would have been better just to have the images in the body of the text, as flipping back and forth between text and images is a pet hate of this reviewer. The *Dictionary* ends with a Recipe Appendix, which current potters have provided such as Emmanuel Cooper’s glaze for oxidized porcelain and Christine McCole’s glaze for large oven dish for wood firing.

A postscript by Dr Andrew Livingstone briefly outlines some of the current new and exciting developments in the use of clay, going way beyond the plinth to working with new materials such as graphene (not in the *Dictionary*) in innovative ways and the growth of practice-based PhD ceramic research.

A couple of titles on this subject include Elisabeth Cameron’s *Encyclopedia of Pottery and Porcelain: the 19th and 20th Centuries* (1986), which concentrates more on exponents than on techniques, whereas *Pottery Analysis: A Sourcebook* (Rice 2005) is most similar to Hamer’s, though from an American perspective. Priced at £55, *The Potter’s Dictionary of Materials and Techniques* is an up-to-date, easy-to-use reference work which is a must-have for all art libraries both in the UK and overseas. The only sad note is that Janet Hamer died before its publication but as Frank Hamer states in his Preface, “[he] hopes that this sixth edition is a worthy memorial alongside her ceramic work”, which the reviewer believes is the case.

Penny Dade

Freelance Reviewer, Glasgow, UK

References

- Cameron, E. (1986), *Encyclopedia of Pottery and Porcelain: The 19th and 20th Centuries*, Faber, London.
Rice, P.M. (2005), *Pottery Analysis: A Sourcebook*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, IL.



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Volume 31 · Number 1 · 2017 · p. 34

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