

Ahjoshi Hanbok

by Mea Rhee

I find so much inspiration and pride in the deep pottery traditions within my heritage. Korean culture also provides many other beautiful visual elements, which I love to reinterpret as contemporary pottery forms. *Ahjoshi hanbok* translates to “Korean gentleman’s traditional garment.” The outfit consists of a loosely flowing tunic, loose pants, a sash around the waist, and a distinctively-shaped hat (shown at right). The hanbok is known for its simple lines and flattering proportions. The roominess of the garment is designed for ease of movement, and to be comfortable while sitting on the floor. The style of the men’s hanbok has remained relatively unchanged for centuries. Western clothing began to replace the use of the hanbok toward the end of the 19th century. These days, this garment is considered formal, and is reserved for ceremonial occasions.





Use a large wooden rib to shape a tall cylinder for the body of the canister and to smooth the surface.



Use calipers to measure the size of the lid. Then throw the lid right-side up and smooth the surface with a rib.



Use the caliper measurement (set to 1½ inches wider in diameter than the canister rim) to ensure the lid is the right size.



Trim excess clay out of the canister's bottom, leaving behind a tall foot ring.

My pottery version of an ahjoshi hanbok is a canister. The hat just screams “lid” to a potter. The rest of the design followed. The canister body is a tapered cylinder with a wide, stable bottom. White slip is brushed down the sides to create the impression of flowing fabric. A minimal sash-like mark is underglazed around the middle.

Throwing the Body/Garment

Begin with 3½ pounds of clay to make the body of the canister. On average, that is, as ahjoshis come in all shapes and sizes. After centering, open up a flat floor that is about 1 inch thick. Stop to measure the thickness of the floor with a needle tool, to make sure there's enough clay to work with when it comes time to trim. After establishing the thick floor, throw the remaining clay into an eight-inch-tall cylinder. To finish the cylinder, use a large wooden rib with a straight edge. The rib helps shape the cylinder into a slightly tapered form, and to smooth the surface (1). Once done, use calipers to measure the top diam-

eter of the cylinder for the lid, which will overhang the body by roughly ¾ inch on all sides.

Throwing the Lid/Hat

With two pounds of clay, throw the lid right side up, so you can shape the hat form out of wet clay, using ribs and the motion of the wheel to give life to the shape (2). The top portion is a small, hollow cylinder. The rest of the lid, for now, is solid clay. Use the caliper measurement from the cylinder to make sure the rim of the lid is the right width (3).

Trimming

When the parts are leather hard, they're ready to trim. Trim out all of the excess clay from the bottom of the canister body, leaving a deep foot ring (4). Then use an X-Acto knife to remove rectangular cutouts on the front and back of the foot ring. This establishes the pot as a biped form and thus anthropomorphizes the design (5).



5 Use a sharp blade to make rectangular cut-outs to the front and back of the foot ring.



6 Use the canister body as a trimming chuck for the lid. Trim the solid underside of the lid and create a flange.



7 Prop the canister right-side up on a narrow chuck, then brush white slip onto the canister's body.



8 Brush on a minimal sash detail with black underglaze. Coat the interior with a liner glaze.

Use calipers to measure the diameter of the inside edge of the body's rim, then transfer that measurement to the bottom of the lid. The lid is still a very thick piece of clay, so use a needle tool to measure the thickness in key spots: where the flange will be and the very center where it's the thickest. You want to trim away the right amount of clay, not too much or too little. After trimming, the lid thickness should be close to the thickness of the canister's walls.

The canister body makes an ideal chuck to support the lid upside-down for trimming. Using your needle-tool measurements as a guide while also visualizing the shape of the top of the lid, trim out the bottom of the lid, leaving behind a flange (6). Flip the lid over and test fit it with the canister body several times to make sure the flange is the right size. To me, the right fit should have a little wiggle room to it at this stage. These are two different sized pieces and they will shrink slightly differently as they dry and fire. If the fit is perfect at this stage, it may disappoint

you later. It's better to establish a fit now that will accommodate either piece shrinking a little more than the other.

Surface Decoration/Garment Embellishment

As I mentioned earlier, the canister body is covered with brushstrokes of white slip. Prop the canister up on a narrow chuck, which allows your brush to make an uninterrupted swoop off of the bottom edge of the pot (7). Set the chuck on top of a banding wheel, so you can spin the pot incrementally after each brush stroke of slip. When everything is bone dry, use black underglaze and a tiny brush to paint on the garment sash (8). Again, use a banding wheel to aide with this process. Bisque fire the pots together (the lid placed on the canister) to cone 04.

Glazing

The glazing process begins by dipping the foot ring of the canister body and the rim in melted wax. I use liquid cold wax, applied with a brush, to wax the concave surfaces on the underside of



9 Dip the bottom half, then dip the top half of the exterior to overlap two glaze dips creating a waistline on the pot.



10 Add subtle texture to the exterior by splattering on layers of glazes to create shadow and depth.



11 The final glazing touch involves flinging loose brush strokes of a subtle contrasting glaze.



12 Ahjoshi Hanbok, 9 in. (23 cm), wheel-thrown dark stoneware, white stoneware slip, black underglaze, glaze, fired to cone 6.

the lid. I glaze the interior of the canister body with a glossy, off-white liner glaze, by pouring in then pouring out. Next, I glaze the outside of the canister body in a light gray, semi-matte glaze. I dip the bottom half, then dip the top half, aiming to place the overlap of the two dips near the middle of the painted garment sash (9). This is to further suggest a waistline-like area for the pot. Finally, I dip the lid in a dark gray, matte glaze.

After the pieces have been dipped in glaze, the remaining glazing steps are all designed to add subtle texture and depth to the surfaces. I have a few favorite tools for this: sprayers, splatters, and brushes. The same three glazes that I've mentioned before get used again, to layer over the dipped glazes via spraying and splattering. I spray the dark gray glaze over the light gray canister body, creating soft shadows of dark gray. I splatter the glossy liner glaze over the dark gray lid, using a splatter tool (10).

The final glazing step is to use a deer-tail hair brush to make long, loose brush strokes of dark gray glaze onto the canister body. The correct verb here is fling. I fling the glaze off of the brush and onto the pot with quick wrist movements (11). These brush strokes add vertical movement, further suggesting the swishing of the hanbok's flowing fabric. Finally, fire the pots together to cone 6.

The finished canister functions perfectly as a cookie jar. Some of you are probably wondering, "does she make an ahjumma hanbok" (the female version)? I haven't fully figured it out yet, but I'm working on it! The ahjumma doesn't wear a hat, therefore this design is shaping up to be a vase.

Mea Rhee is a full-time potter based in Silver Spring, Maryland. To see more of her work, visit <http://goodelephant.com>.