



Craft Kit #32

Mini Coil  
Pots

108

CONTEMPORARY

*Art. Craft. Design.*

# Who is Juan Quezada?

You read *The Pot that Juan Built* by Nancy Andrews-Goebel. The potter in the book, Juan, is based on a real person who is alive and working today. His name is Juan Quezada Celado. The way Juan makes clay pots is based on the method that his ancestors used thousands of years ago. We know the modern style as Mata Ortiz pottery.

- **What surprised you about Juan's process of building his pot?**
- **Can you think of reasons why people would have made clay pots thousands of years ago?**
- **Why might Juan Quezada want to make pots this way in modern times?**

# Who used clay like Juan's ancestors?

Archaeologists have found clay pots in ancient cultures all over the world. In Africa, Asia, Europe, and the Americas, people used clay to make their lives easier. They used clay to make:

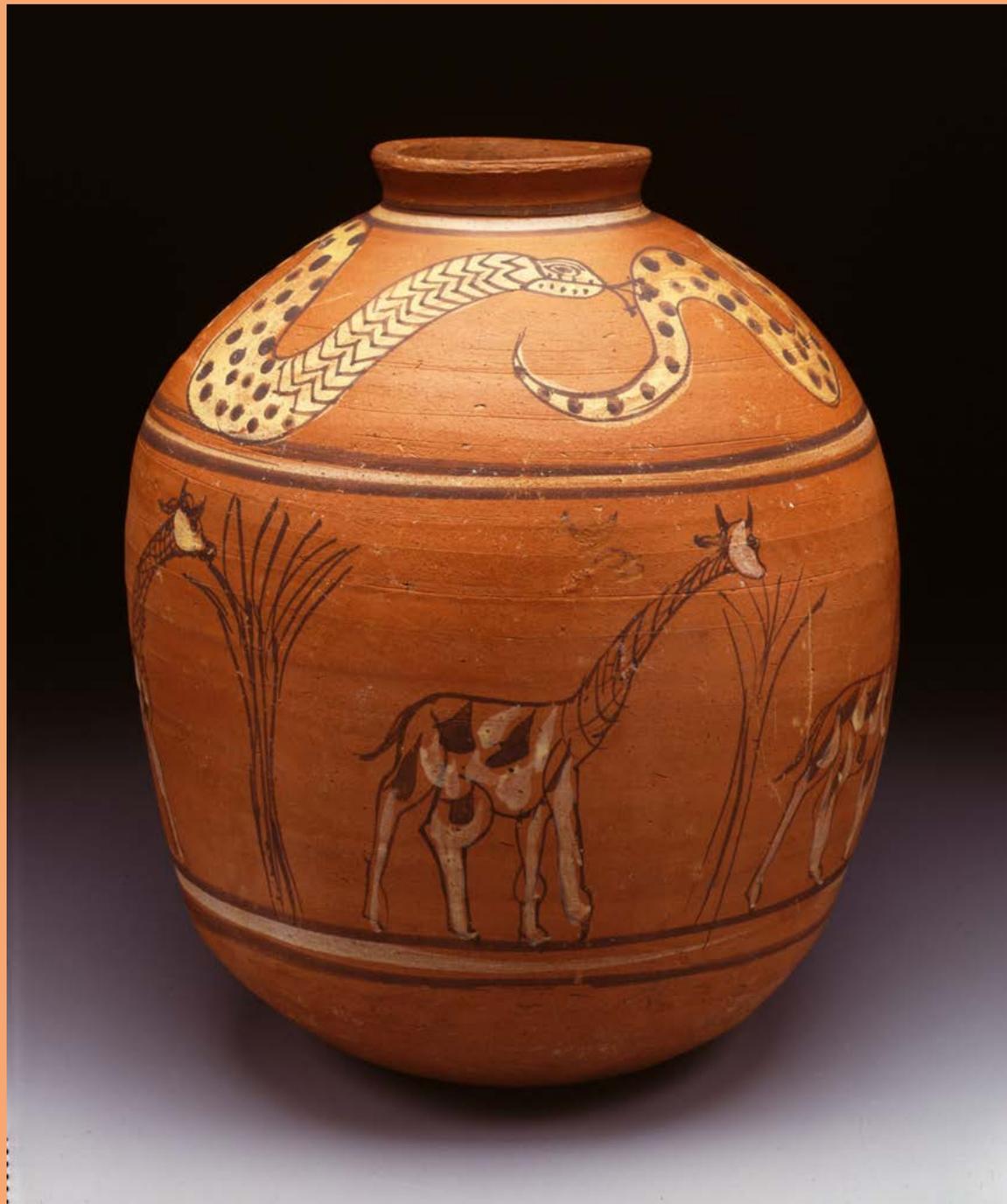
1. [Pyramids in Peru](#)
2. [An army for an emperor's tomb in China](#)
3. [Houses in North America](#)
4. [Baths in India](#)

Let's look at ancient pots from around the world. What do these pots tell you about the people who made or used them?

This is a Nubian vessel from 100 B.C.

Nubia was a large area in Africa that now is known as Sudan. Many different empires were formed in Nubia, spreading as far north as Egypt.

Can you find Sudan on a map?



Mesopotamia is one of the oldest civilizations we know about. This bowl is about 4,000 years old!

What do you think the decoration on the side might be?





This pot is from the Maya Empire. It's about 1900 years old! The black decoration might have come from using a different temperature on the base of the pot.

We know about three empires in Central America. The Maya Empire is the oldest of those three. What are the other two?

Can you find Sudan on a map?

# Coil Pot Step-by-Step Instructions



Juan built his pot with a “tortilla” and a “sausage” of clay. This means he built a coil pot, and you can build one, too!

Let’s make a miniature pot with Juan’s method.

# Materials

In your craft kit you'll find:

- 1 cup of air-dry clay
- 1 Instruction sheet

You'll need:

- Water
- Toothpick or fork for scoring
- A clean surface or plastic mat
- Spoon, plastic card, or small sponge for smoothing



# Before You Start

Pour a little water into the cup. You can dip your finger in the water to help the next steps if your clay is too dry and crumbles.



# Step One: Prepare the Clay

Remove your clay from the plastic cup and knead it until it is soft.

The clay should not be so moist that it sticks to your hands. If it is too dry and crumbles, knead a drop of water into the clay.



## Step Two: Form the Base

Separate a small amount of clay to make the bottom of your pot, just like Juan's "tortilla."



## Step Two: Form the Base

Roll this smaller amount into a ball. If you want a wide pot, simply use more clay than you see in this example for the base.



## Step Two: Form the Base

Use your thumbs or the spoon to press the ball flat



## Step Two: Form the Base

Shape the flattened clay into a thick circle. The wider your base is, the shorter this pot will be.

If you want your pot to be a different shape, you can form a different base. It could be a triangle, a rectangle or square, or a diamond!



## Step Three: Make Coils

Knead and form a another ball of clay. Roll the ball under your palms to make a rope, like Juan's "sausage." Keep rolling the rope back and forth to lengthen it.



## Step Three: Make Coils

It's important that the length of your clay rope is an even thickness. If it is thick in some places and thin in others, then the coils of your pot will not connect well. Don't be afraid to practice a few times!



## Step Four: Attach the Coils

Use a toothpick, a fork, or another tool to score the edges of your base. To score the clay means to make scratches in the surface.

Having a rough surface helps the clay stick together.



## Step Four: Attach the Coils

Dip a finger into the water in your cup. You just need a drop!



## Step Four: Attach the Coils

Moisten the score marks around the edge of your base.



## Step Four: Attach the Coils

Gently press the first coil into the score marks, wrapping it all the way around the base.



## Step Four: Attach the Coils

Pinch off any excess clay to add to another rope. Smooth the two ends of the coil together.

If you use the whole rope of clay to build layers without stopping, that's okay! There are many ways to build a coil pot well.



## Step Five: Continue Building Your Pot

To attach the next coil, repeat this process:

- Score one surface
- Moisten the score marks
- Add a rope of clay
- Pinch off the extra rope
- Smooth the ends together



## Step Five: Continue Building Your Pot

You can build the coils out to make a wider pot, or in to make a narrow pot. What silhouette do you want your finished pot to make?



## Step Five: Continue Building Your Pot

Remember to knead the clay well before you make another rope. If your extra clay is drying out, knead a drop of water into it. Do this before you separate sections to make more coils.



## Step Six: Let Dry

Once your pot is the size and shape you want, you can let it dry overnight and then decorate it! Acrylic paint works best, but you can experiment with other materials. Did any of the ancient examples inspire you?



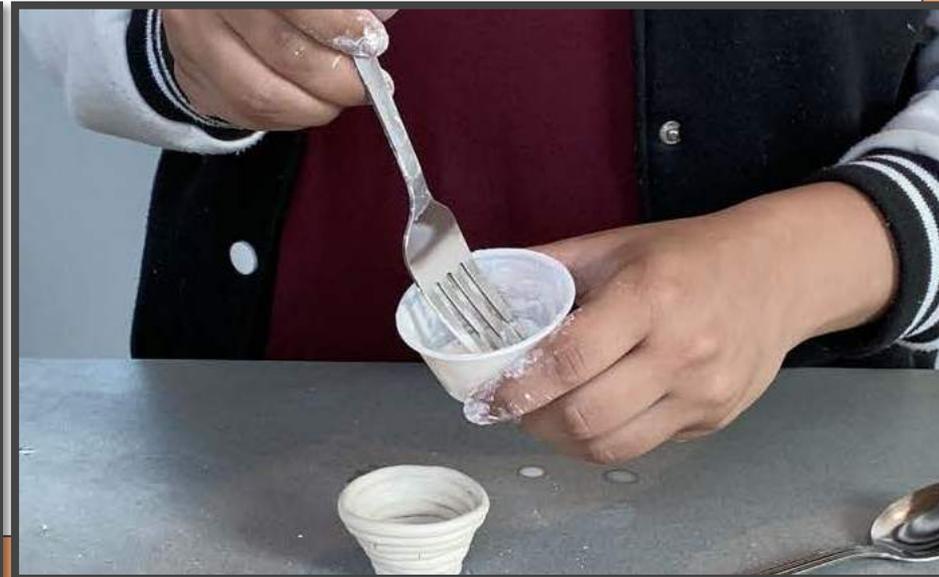
## Option: Smooth Walls

If you want to hide the coils, use your fingers to press the coils together as you go. This works best if the ropes of clay are thick.



# Make a Slip

Place a small amount of clay in the plastic cup and mix with water. The slip should be as thick as cake batter.



# Apply the Slip

Brace two fingers on the inside of your pot, then “paint” the slip on the outside with your other hand. Use small strokes and enough pressure that the coils smooth together.



# You Did It!

Share your creations with the @108\_Contemporary Instagram with the hashtag #108craftkits!

Store the slip in the plastic cup with the lid tight. If your pot cracks as it dries then you can fill them in with the slip!



## Other Resources

- Visit [108 Contemporary.org](https://www.108contemporary.org) for more craft kits.
- Watch a PBS Frontline special about Juan Quezada  
<https://www.pbs.org/frontlineworld/stories/mexico403/index.html>
- See more examples of coil pottery  
<https://www.artbrit.com/coil-pots.html>