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I grew up in the 'Potteries' of Staffordshire, England and I suppose it's natural that I enjoy the look and feel of porcelain and other decorative ceramics. As I now like to sculpt objects in polymer clay, I suppose it was to be expected that, before long, I would attempt to re-create the potter's art in the incredibly versatile medium of polyclay.

The ceramic, which appealed to me particularly, was the simple, monochrome 'Delftware' which was produced for general household use in the 19th Century, both as ceramic vessels and wall tiles. My idea was that if I could find ways to reproduce the colours and make similar patterns to Delft, then miniaturists who wanted an authentic look could make polyclay tiles and use them to make period fireplaces and for their kitchen 'splash-backs' tiled panels.



Having decided to make a series of canes in blue and white, I then had to find a close representation of the famous blue in Polyclay. I'd always assumed it was cobalt blue and so I ordered some Premo in that colour (just to be on the safe side, I also bought some ultramarine, in Premo and Fimo). I was surprised that the Premo Cobalt blue seemed rather lighter than I'd expected but the Premo ultramarine is a very rich colour - just like the pictures of Delft I'd seen.

I found it helped the final appearance of the blue to mix it with translucent clay - I used Fimo. The palette was easy, simply mixing varying amounts of blue with the white ground clay gave me five or six shades - more than enough for simple canes. I don't know about you, but I'm always surprised how far some colours go - you don't need much of some in a blend for others to be overwhelmed!



I decided to make a total of 10 different canes. Most were simple plant themes such as flower heads of several varieties and leaf motifs. In addition, I made some stylized botanical designs of bud or fern-like images. In an attempt to break up the botanical theme, I made a few very simple abstracts to intersperse with the others. All the canes were, of course, square sectioned and roughly the same size - about 0.5 to 0.6 inches wide.

My first job was to find a reasonable representation of white-ground ceramic in polyclay. At first I thought the obvious solution would be to go to pearl clay and use it 'straight'. I did some initial trials using Fimo and Premo. I found that Premo Pearl is fine in some lighting but in daylight it has a strange yellowish cast which would detract from the 'look' I was attempting. I also found that Fimo Pearl on its own looked too sparkly after varnishing.

After these tests, I decided to mix the pearl with white. The mix which gave the most realistic look after baking and varnishing was a one to one Fimo Classic White with Fimo Classic Pearl combination. I used Fimo Gloss spirit varnish - diluted with a little 'Nitro' thinners to reduce the likelihood of surface blemishes such as bubbles and brush marks.

Next came the designs. As I wanted to get a feel of the antique look, I decided to use a very simple colour palette. The classical Delft was rich blue and white. I checked several websites which displayed Delft ceramics and even found a tile museum's website which has some unbelievable designs and colours of all manner of tiles - not just Delft.

I shan't go into any detail about the construction of my canes - there is a plethora of information out there on all types and complexities. I will say that even the canes that were 'failures' in that they wouldn't pass as complete tiles, weren't a complete waste of time. They could subsequently be used reduced as borders or even as flower centres.

In order to check the overall look of the 'tiles' I decided to cut several

sections from each cane and bake and varnish them all. Anyone who knows my strange little ways will know that I couldn't resist covering some glass vessels with the canes.



I simply cut lots of slices of each and randomly covered a pair of fairly large, parallel sided jars. The process of covering the glass was far easier than I had ever known using cane slices. As all the canes had a white background, they fitted together very easily and the joins were simply rolled away.



As my main interest lies in polymer clay jewellery making, I also couldn't resist making a number of 'Delft-ish' pieces - beads, pendants and brooches all made from the same 10 canes.

Again, I simply randomly associated different elements until I found a pleasing effect.



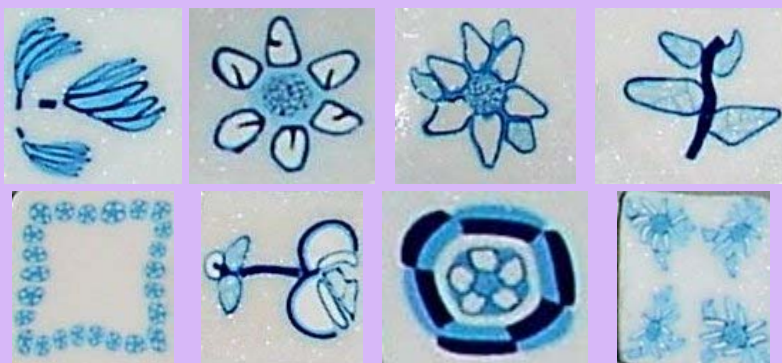
A little trick I did enjoy was that I cut some of the background from the top of a 'stem' cane slice and combined it with a flower cane slice and used the complete stemmed flower as a pendant design.

The beauty of a project such as this is that one can make as many or as few canes as one wishes. The canes may be as simple or complex as one is able to produce, but because the colours are from the same palette, the canes always match and can be used in so many different ways.

Try it - it's fun!

Colour references:

- Fimo Classic White - - ref. No 00
- Fimo Classic Pearl - - ref. No 05
- Premo Ultramarine Blue - - ref. No 5562
- Premo Alizarin Crimson - - ref. No 5383



Do take a look at the tile museum site - it's really amazing: <http://www.tile-heaven.co.uk>

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