



# Christmas table centrepiece

BY JULIA RAI

*Light up the Christmas dinner table with this silver centrepiece.*

This candleholder is 1:12 scale and is designed with the Christmas dinner table in mind. The holly and Christmas trees that decorate the candle holder are made using paper punches. The centrepiece is created using Art Clay Silver 950, which is stronger than the normal fine silver clay. It is very flexible when dry, perfect for using paper punches.

## MATERIALS

- 25g Art Clay Silver 950 metal clay
- Silver clay paste
- Silver clay syringe
- Teflon
- Roller
- Playing cards
- Nesting brass tubes in a variety of sizes
- Craft knife or straight blade

- Ruler
- Holly and Christmas tree paper punches
- Candles
- Small plastic bag
- Sanding sponges
- Small files
- Wet and dry sanding paper (600 grit)
- Paintbrush
- Steel burnisher

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1. This design starts with the paper punches you choose. It uses the negative space created by the punches to form apertures in the sides and ends of the candleholder. Punch out some forms in paper to see the size of the apertures so you can compare this with your candles to ensure the overall scale is correct.

2. The base of the centrepiece will include five candle holders. These are made from donuts of clay, using brass tubes as cutters. Choose a brass tube slightly larger than your candles for the centre holes, then choose a larger tube for the outside of the donut.

3. Lightly oil a piece of Teflon and roll out some clay five cards thick. Cut out a number of donuts from the rolled out clay using the brass tubes, cutting the outside circle first, then the inside circle. Make more than you need as they can break easily. Put these to one side to dry.

4. Lightly oil a piece of leather and roll out more clay four cards thick for the base. Using a ruler, measure the base and cut out a rectangle 4mm long x 1.5mm wide using a craft knife. Transfer the rectangle to a piece of Teflon and put it to one side to dry.

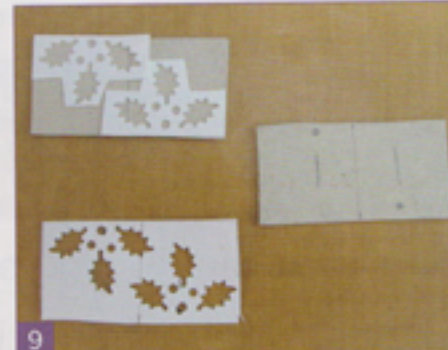
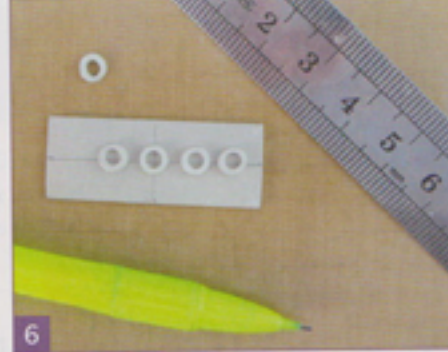
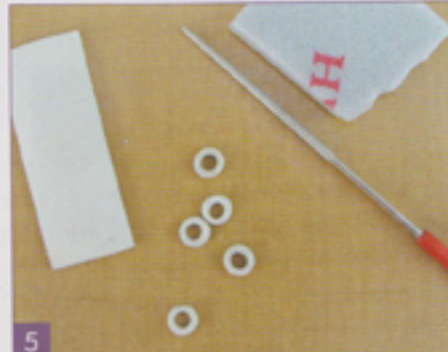
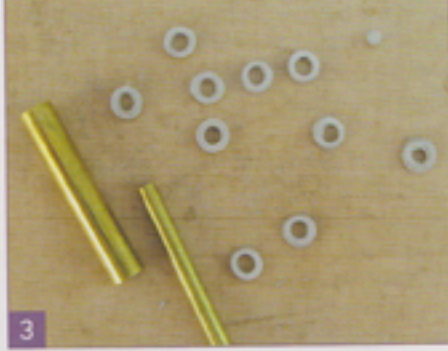
5. Take the dry donuts and refine the outside edges of each one, carefully using sanding pads. Rubbing them on a piece of sandpaper flat down on a table refines the top and bottom of the donuts. Make sure the inside of the donut is smooth by using a small file to remove any burrs.

6. Measure the centre points of both sides of the base and mark these. Draw pencil lines to connect them, showing the centre. Space the candle holder donuts starting from the centre so you have two evenly spaced on each side of the central candle. Stick these to the base using paste and leave to dry.

7. Roll out some clay two cards thick and cut two side panels 4cm long x 2cm wide and two end panels 2cm x 2cm. Dry. Draw a centreline down the end panels and use a cut-out paper Christmas tree to mark the centre top and bottom, making sure the tree is central on the panels.

8. As the side panel is too small to hold while in the punch, put it into a small plastic bag, snug against the bottom corner. Place the punch upside down on a firm surface and slide the panel into the punch, lining it up with the marks. Punch out the shape. Repeat with the other side panel.

9. Mark the centre of the side panels. Punch out two paper holly forms and use these to decide where they will go on the dry panels. Make a pencil mark from the top to the bottom of the central holly leaf and the central berry so you have something to line up with when punching out the apertures. ➔



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10. Place the punch upside down on a firm surface and slide the panel into the punch, lining up the guide marks. Punch out the first shape, turn the panel around, line it up again and punch out the second shape. Repeat with the other side panel. These panels will be quite fragile now, so handle with care.

11. Sand the edges of the side panels and adjust the size against the base, if necessary. Use the syringe to extrude a line of paste along the bottom of one side and stick the panel onto the base, making sure it's flush with the bottom. Prop upright at a right angle to the base and dry.

12. Repeat step 11 with the second side panel and dry. Add syringe paste to the ends of the base and sides and stick on the end panels. Make sure the end panels are centrally placed and lined up with the base. Any gaps in the sides will be filled later but the ends should be flush with the base at this stage.

13. Add syringe paste to strengthen all the inside joins and smooth with a damp paintbrush to neaten the seams. Fill any gaps in the outside seams in the same way. Allow to dry completely. File the open top of the box flat down on the table using sandpaper so the top is level all round.

14. Use thick paste to add a stippled texture to the box. Use a stiff paintbrush and apply the paste, then use a patting motion to stipple the surface. Start with the inside of the box and allow this to dry before texturing the outside of the box. This will cover any obvious seams on the outside.

15. Fire the box in a kiln, following the manufacturer's instructions. The firing schedule is full ramp to 500°C and hold for 30 minutes, then full ramp to 870°C and hold for one hour. To give the fired candle holder a frosty look, rub a steel burnisher all over the surface of the box – this shines up the high spots of the texture only.

## TIPS

Secure the candles in the holders using prop wax or white tack.

Always plan out the design using paper with the punches before committing it to the clay.

Make sure you keep dust and offcuts of Art Clay Silver 950 clay separate from any other types of silver clay you may have – as this clay is a little different from regular silver clay.

## RESOURCES

Art Clay Silver 950 metal clay, syringe and paste: [metalclay.co.uk](http://metalclay.co.uk)

## CONTACT

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## EXTRA PROJECTS

Any paper punch design could be used for the apertures in the sides. Halloween, Easter or a special birthday theme could be used. The top edges of the candle holder could also be cut using fancy scissors or filed to create a different look. Putting the candles on progressively larger posts to raise them up in the middle would also create an interesting effect.

PHOTOGRAPHS: JULIA RAI, LOUISE CLARKSON



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