



Silver sweet plates

BY JULIA RAI

Serve delicious treats in these delightful bonbon dishes

These 1:12 scale shell-shaped dishes are inspired by vintage pieces. Silver bonbon dishes first appeared in the Victorian era and were often made in pairs, either with small feet or sitting flat on the table. The shell form was a popular design. Using a sea shell as a mould makes this project easy for beginners to achieve.

MATERIALS

- 15g silver clay
- Silver clay paste
- Silicon two-part moulding compound
- Sea shell
- Playing card
- Paintbrush
- Polishing tools
- Liver of Sulphur (optional) ➔



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17

Dolls' House PROJECT

1. Take equal quantities of each colour of the two-part moulding compound, being careful not to mix the colours in the pots. Combine them well using a pinching and rolling motion, until the compound is only one colour. Form the compound into a ball and place it on a flat surface with the shell you have chosen.

2. Using a playing card, slightly flatten the top of the ball. Press the shell into the compound until the edges are level with the surface. Using a playing card to press in the shell helps retain a flat top. Be careful not to press it down too far so you don't come through the bottom of the compound.

3. Leave the shell in place until the compound sets – usually around 10–20 minutes. Poke a cocktail stick into the edge of the compound to test if it is ready. Warmer conditions will speed up the setting time. When the compound is set, pop the shell out and check the impression is clean and true to the shell form.

4. Roll a small amount of silver clay into a smooth ball and form this into a flat patty, about the size of the shell impression in the mould. Press the patty down into the mould with your finger, making sure that the clay is right down in the middle, and draw it up the sides, effectively lining the mould.

5. If your clay comes up significantly higher than the edges of the impression, you have used too much clay. This process can take a couple of goes to get it right as it often takes much less clay than you think. Remember, you are not filling the mould; you are lining it.

6. Take care not to make any areas too thin; you need the clay to be around 1mm thick over the whole area. When you are happy with the clay-lined mould, take the shell and press it gently into the clay, rolling it from side to side so the whole of the clay surface takes the shell texture impression.

7. Leave the clay in the mould to dry for as long as possible to preserve the shape and texture. If you want to speed up the drying time, use a hairdryer on the clay and when the upper surface is dry, pop it out onto a hotplate to fully dry. Do not put the silicone mould onto a hotplate.

8. While the shell is drying, make the feet for the dish. Make three balls of equal size by taking a small amount of silver clay and rolling it on the palm of your hand with a finger. Make sure the balls are an appropriate size as feet for your shell. Put these balls aside to dry on a hotplate.

9. When everything is completely dry, stick each of the ball feet to the underside of the shell dish with a blob of silver paste. Clean up any excess paste with a damp paintbrush as you go. Make sure the balls are placed so the dish sits level. Make a second dish using the same process and dry thoroughly.

10. Cushion the dishes using a fibre blanket so they are supported on the kiln shelf. Fire the dishes in a kiln at 900°C for two hours. You can also fire them using a torch. When they are cool, polish them with a brass or steel brush and/or tumble polish. Oxidise them using Liver of Sulphur if you want to create an antiqued look.

TIPS

This project uses a very shallow shell but for a different look, experiment with a deeper shell.

Almost anything can be moulded and used to make items with metal clay. If you don't have a shell, buttons work particularly well.

Silicone moulds do not need to be oiled when using metal clay, but if you have a heavily textured item, use olive oil sparingly on a paintbrush to get oil into all the nooks and crannies.

EXTRA PROJECTS

Explore buttons to create bowls with different designs to fit other periods. Larger or smaller shells could be used to make dishes in a different scale. Simple balls make good feet for the dish, but you could have some fun with trying out different shapes.

RESOURCES

Silver clay, silicone moulding compound: metalclay.co.uk

PHOTOGRAPHS: ANTHONY BALEY, JULIA RAI

