

## Clay Meets Steel

by Janey Skeer

How did I get here? How did clay meet steel in my work? I was in the midst of making a large diamond-shaped wall piece. It was supposed to be two panels of clay with a gap in between and a layer of tiles beneath, but the gap was too large. I was walking back and forth in my studio, trying to figure out what to do, when I walked outside to the kiln yard. A friend was rebuilding a large gas kiln, as the steel jacket had rusted and had to be replaced. The old steel had been removed and was leaning against a table. It was beautiful.

"I wish I could use this in my work," I said.

"Why don't you?" he replied.

"I don't think scissors will cut this steel."

"I have a plasma torch in the truck. Do you want to use it?"

"Of course," I said. "What's a plasma torch?"

After he showed me how to use the torch, it seemed as though I could cut the steel into any shape I wanted. Fire and sparks were everywhere. It was amazing. I cut about 12 pieces, but had no idea what to do with them. Walking back into my studio with the steel in hand, I solved my gap problem. The rusted metal created a perfect edge, and the gap was successful. I called this piece "Bridge," and sold it two weeks later.

I signed up for a welding class. The plasma-cut edges of steel can be clean and precise, or ragged with slag (melted steel). Both are beautiful.

Moving the torch quickly over the steel surface is like drawing with fire. Every movement is carved into the steel. The surface comes alive. With no specific plan in mind, I cut shapes out of the steel and examined the pieces. How to incorporate them into my work was the next question.

Not having a plan can open avenues to new ventures. Trusting the process is a key ingredient. Small clay and steel



"Strata Series #1,"  
23 inches (58 centimeters)  
square, steel-stamped clay,  
with terra sigillata, stain, underglaze,  
glaze, and steel with ground edge, \$750.



"Spirit Box II," 11 inches (28 centimeters) in height, steel-stamped clay, with terra sigillata, stain, underglaze and glaze, with plasma-cut steel handle, \$195, by Janey Skeer, Denver, Colorado.

wall pieces (8x5 inches) started coming together. I floated the steel under and over the clay. I discolored the steel with muriatic acid. Stainless steel, brass-plated steel, rusted steel, hot-rolled steel—I tried them all. Many more pieces with every imaginable combination of clay and steel followed. Sales were good.

Not only was the steel used in the piece, the texture on the clay was made with the cut steel; impressions yielded a variety of lines and shapes. I had become bored with my clay stamps and grabbed some cut steel pieces—pounding them into the clay's surface changed everything. The texture was deeper, richer and different from anything I had done before.

What's next? As Nan McKinnell, a great artist and teacher, once said: "One thing leads to another."

"Clay and Steelscape V," 7 inches (18 centimeters) in height, clay textured with steel, with terra sigillata, stain, underglaze and glaze, with expanded and flat steel, \$195.

