



### *Cholla Design Process*

I began my cholla series with a gifted specimen from an old friend's backyard. I was fascinated with the strength of the material, despite being covered in perforations. My friend had been dragging any sign of cholla on their five acre lot into small piles and burning it, determined to rid their yard of the spiky burrs. Each old bush carried away left a blank spot in the already sparse desert, and I thought of the tiny

creatures that try to get by among us humans. Other friends have taken these worn down sticks from their resting spots and carry them home as trophies of the desert. I decided I would try making a set of cholla bones, and illuminate them in some way. Let them become a new kind of trophy people can take home from the desert.

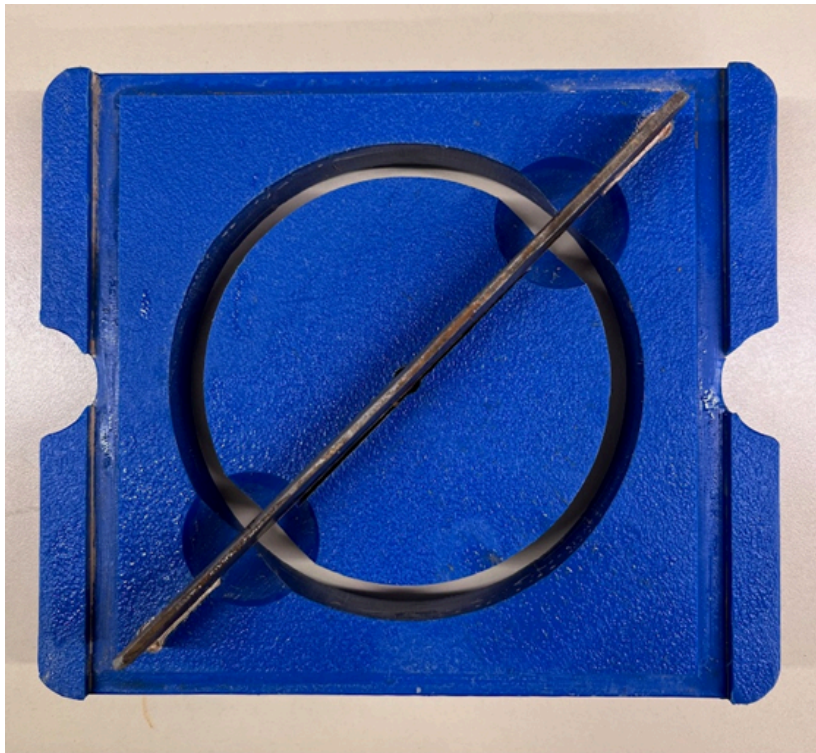


[This Photo](#) by Unknown Author is licensed under [CC BY-NC](#)

I work with photos of live examples of cholla bushes in order to get inspired by shapes, knots and joinings.

The clay is first chosen due to level of grog and cone requirements. I choose high fire clay in an interest to fully vitrify the clay body, along with a preference for glaze options in this firing range. Grog can affect how the clay dries out and holds its shape, and I like to experiment with these levels in order to have contextual knowledge of options and behaviors for future projects.

The clay is then cut and wedged, and extruded using a wall extruder. Specific dies allow for cylindrical shapes. Different diameters are used for variety among the series. The clay cylinders are stored in a wet box until ready for shaping.



When shaping the clay, I keep support blocks like sponges or other materials nearby in order to keep the material from drooping or falling out of place. Then I use a needle tool to begin cutting out the holes of the cholla bones, while using a photo reference. When each arm of the cholla has the holes cut out, I can arrange the way I would like the branches to spread out. I do my best to make this arrangement happen, while allowing myself to divert from the original plan if the clay is not cooperating.







After bisque firing, glazing options are explored. I am a fan of all glazing techniques, so I am using each piece as a type of test tile. Some have glossy glazes, some matte, some are fired raw with just a bit of underglaze filled into the carvings.

Glaze firing is completed once the community kiln is filled. Providing all goes well, the kiln is deprived of oxygen for a time in “reduction” which pulls out various properties of the glaze components. The path of the fire’s flame can be reflected in the glaze results, which adds to each fired piece’s unique finish.

