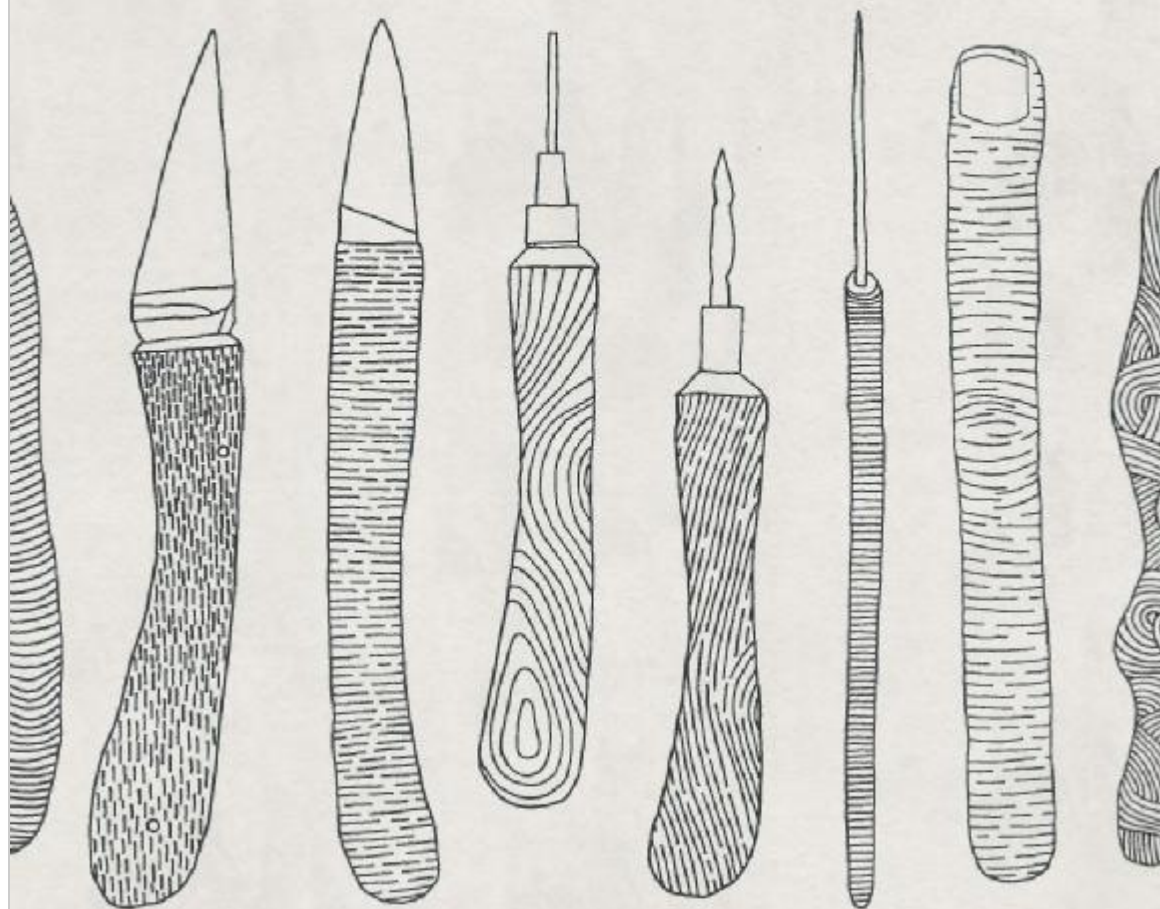


The Journal of
**AUSTRALIAN
CERAMICS**

513 November 2012 \$16



Focus: Technical
Les Blakebrough

Akio Takamori
Masamichi Yoshikawa

Focus: Technical



Flow and Twist

Chris Weaver on tools

Growing up in a family of five boys, you learned quickly that if you wanted something you had to make it with what you had, or go without. This often meant you had to make the tools first in order to be able to make that something that you wanted.

I built myself a potter's wheel while at high school and taught myself to make pots. While I was an art student in Dunedin in the early seventies, I made my first throwing tools and what began as a necessity has become a passion.

I live on the west coast of the south island of New Zealand, which is a fairly isolated part of the country and it helps to be resourceful. The nearest ceramic supply store is three hours drive away over the Southern Alps and phone or internet orders mean a wait of a couple of days at least. As I made new work in the early days, I was often not able to buy tools that were suitable to use. I found the generic tools available uncomfortable and unsympathetic, so I began making my own tools from the wood that had been swept down the flooded rivers and washed up on local beaches. The driftwood pieces I found were quite sculptural and fitted my hands comfortably. The pleasure I got from making and using these tools added to the pleasure of making pots.

I've discovered that the best pieces of wood are found close to the high-tide mark but it is usually the shapes that first attract me. What I look for are the hardwoods that invite you to pick them up to be handled. I bring an armful home following a visit to the beach and add them to my supply drying in the shed.

Often when developing a new series of work, rather than be limited by what I have at hand, I'll make new tools if I need them. I know precisely what I want it for before I start, so from the pile I'll pick a dry piece that suits my needs and feels comfortable to hold. The flow and twist of the grain has a bearing on the final outcome but I treat each piece as a sculptural object and work on it until I'm satisfied, often reworking it over and over until it feels right. I rough them out first with a motorised disc and drum-sander and hand-sand to finish. Because the wood fibres swell when wet, I finish the pieces with wet

Focus: Technical



Above and below: **Chris Weaver** tools; photos: artist



Focus: Technical



Driftwood washed up on the Hokitika Beach after a storm



Chris Weaver

and dry sandpaper in water before use. After I began using my new throwing tools, I quickly became dissatisfied with my brushes, knives and turning tools so I made replacements for them too.

Earlier this year, I collaborated with furniture designer Tim Wigmore, who had earlier commissioned me to make a tool for a project he was working on. Then he asked for a wood and ceramic tool that was relevant to my work to exhibit in one of six custom-made native timber cabinets he would construct from the same species of wood as the contents. I chose to make a cutting wire attached to Rimu ends with porcelain plugs. For the wire I used a guitar string from the local music store twisted up with an electric drill and a vice.

I use these tools not as replacement for, but as an extension of my fingers and they allow me to do more than I can with just my fingers. They also offer an excuse to indulge in my passion for making in a material other than clay.

www.chrisweaver.co.nz

Finished tool



Focus: Technical



1 Sliced tea set, 2009 2 Cutting wire with glazed ceramic inserts 3 Driftwood tools 4 Detail showing the ceramic bung and wire attachment 5 Metal tools with wooden handles. The cutting wire is made from a guitar string and stones from the beach 6 Made to measure teapot, 2011; All work by **Chris Weaver**; photos: artist