

Wet Cleaning Method for Porcelain

I wanted to share the steps to wet cleaning Soft-fired porcelain for anyone who has had questions or who would like to do this procedure. I like the wet method because you don't have the dust flying (which, by the way, is not good for you to breathe) and also lets you get a better-cleaned piece. I took pictures to help show what I'm explaining to you so if you still have questions, feel free to call or e-mail me and I'll help you through. I'll first give you some Do's and Don'ts that will help you. Please read through these completely before starting.

Don'ts:

- Don't ever grab holes of any kind. This could put a stress crack in the piece. This is a crack that is very hard to see to the naked eye unless you know what you're looking for. Then, when it comes out of the kiln, you may have a crack coming from that hole. Some people claim you need to clean each hole smooth or it will crack in the bisque fire (firing to porcelain.) This isn't true. You don't have to smooth them at all. They're up in your body pattern and you never see them. Most stress cracks come from smoothing the holes in arms, legs, head, etc. If you feel you personally need to smooth the holes, be very careful.
- Don't squeeze the piece between your fingers and thumb. Most people don't know their own strength and if you squeeze too hard, you'll either crush the piece in your hands or create that stress crack I already talked about. Either one is devastating.
- Don't force the water into the piece too quickly. This is very important because it causes pressure inside the piece and could cause breakage or cracks in the bisque or even in the china fire. The larger the piece, the longer it will take to fill up. Keep the opening and piece level with the water line and let it slowly fill. Take your time.
- Don't prop your piece on a hard surface to work on. Put it on something soft. The yellow side of the 220 grit scrubber works great. Use this only to work on areas that aren't convenient to hold in your hands; toes, tips of fingers, etc.
- Don't sand any part of your piece other than the seam lines unless you have deep grooves or rough spots that aren't part of the mold. Any sanding you do sands away porcelain. Once it's gone, it's gone.
- Last but not least... don't rush your cleaning and rubber gloving (which I'll explain later.) Rubber gloving is the most important part of wet cleaning. As you sand down the seams, you put a lot of scratches in your piece and rubber gloving them will take all the scratches out. You should spend extra time doing this.

Do's:

- Keep piece wet during cleaning. You do this by briefly dipping pieces into the water when they become dull looking. This helps with the cleaning of the piece and also keeps it less fragile. You don't need to submerge the piece, just splash water on it. If the piece gets too dry, then dip it back into the water and continue.
- Allow water to flow into and out of the piece slowly by holding it horizontally with the water.
- If you pretend your working with an egg, you'll be fine.
- Turn piece in your hand carefully. Remember don't squeeze or grab holes.
- Always support the area you are working on. Example: Don't sand the top of the arm while holding it at the wrist. This could cause you to break something or cause stress cracks. Always adjust the piece in your hand to accommodate supporting where you are sanding.

I've tried to highlight the important things to remember when cleaning porcelain. It's very important not to get discouraged if something breaks. No matter how many pieces you've cleaned or how many years you've been making dolls, these things happen. Just smile and start over with a new piece. You'll get better with time and practice. Making porcelain dolls is meant to be fun, not aggravating.

I hope my suggestions will help you out on your dollmaking.

Here we go...

1. This is my setup. I have my cleaning tools, piece submerged in water, tray and towel to keep me from getting so wet!



2. This is the piece I will be cleaning.



3. Each piece of sfgw (soft fired greenware) needs to be fully immersed in water, any temperature, for 12-15 minutes. There is no time limit on how long a piece can be in the water. You can leave them in there for weeks if need be. Here I show you how to

put the piece under water. As I explained earlier, it's very important not to force it under the water too quick. Allow the water to slowly fill the piece and it'll go under at it's own pace. Keep the piece horizontal while filling. Set the piece on bottom gently. If you do force the piece under, you may have breakage in the firings. Slow is the key word here.



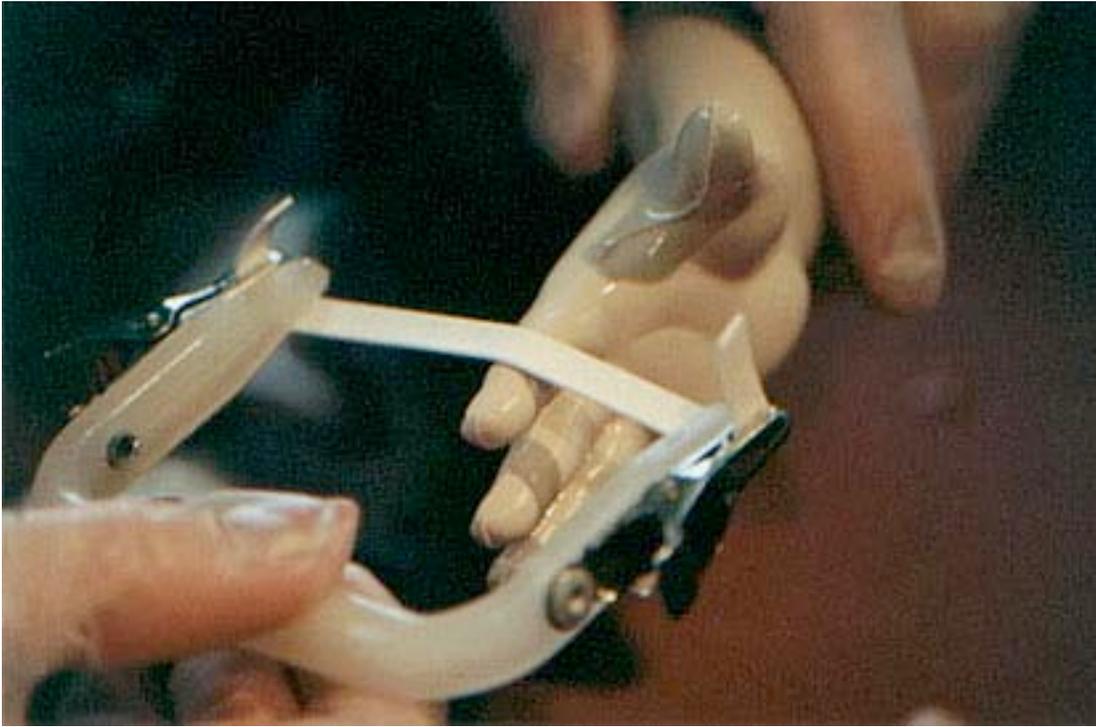
4. Another shot on how to submerge your piece.



- Using a 220 scrubber, or scrubber of your choice, sand the seams down as shown here just below the wrist. During the bisque fire, each piece shrinks 15%. If you leave a seam raised, it will stay raised during the bisque fire. This seam is known as a raised seam line. At this point, it's too late to fix. You want to train your eyes to see these during cleaning so you can sand them down before firing them. Note: When cleaning with water and sanding the seams, you'll still see a faint line where the seam was. In most cases, unless the mold is worn or you didn't get seams down, these lines will fade almost completely in the bisque fire. If you've dry cleaned before, you're telling yourself you've never seen those lines before. True.. The seam lines don't show during dry cleaning. You will like this method better but you'll be worried about the seam line you see until the piece gets fired. You'll like it then. If the mold is worn and your seam are wide, the seam line will be a little more prominent but will cover some with the china painting. When you're sanding the seams, all you want to concentrate on is getting the raise to go away. Until you train your eyes, you may need to let the piece dry some to see what you missed. Also, turn your piece different directions to let the light help you see. If you turn it and see any shadow at all from the light, your seam is raised. Get wet and sand some more until it is gone. Only sand the flat surfaces with the scrubber. Deep areas and grooves I will explain later.



- This tool is called a seam whacker. It does just what it is called... wacks the seams! While rocking back and forth, the motion will sand the seams. This tool is great for fingers! It allows you to sand down skinny fingers with ease and little pressure. It is very important to only sand down 3/4 of the fingers. If you go all the way to the V of the fingers, you'll put a nasty groove in that's hard to get out. If you happen to do this, work the groove with your stiff brush. I will show you how to clean the V of the fingers later.



7. The blade of a clean up tool is used to get some of the seams in places where your scrubber would flatten or doesn't fit. Make sure when you're using this tool, you support where you are scraping so you have less chance of breaking something. Only take most of the seam down and use your stiff brush to smooth the rest.



8. I feel the stiff brush is the most important tool in cleaning greenware. It lets you sand down the seams without losing the natural feature or curve of the piece. This tool

allows you to smooth around fingers without flattening them. Here I show you how to get the seam in the curve of the wrist. I can't express how much a stiff brush makes all the features look natural by smoothing.



9. This is another sample of what the stiff brush is used for. It lets you smooth between the fingers and keep the natural curve of the finger.



10. Here you see a piece propped on the yellow side of a 220 scrubber to allow me to work on the fingertips easier. One important thing about setting a piece this way is that you don't push the piece into the pad. This could cause stress or cracks. Just allow the edge to rest while you work. Most molds have seams that run right across the fingernail is. This is where most people leave a seam thinking it's a fingernail. It's very important to sand this down using a stiff brush and then re-detail the nail back on. If you leave the raised part, you won't be happy with the results.



11. I don't have a picture for this next step because it wouldn't show up for you so I'm going to explain it the best as I can. Some pieces, depending on the size, shape, the speed it was poured, the way it was angled when poured, may have "Pour lines." These lines are hard to see until you "train" your eyes. Have you ever wondered why you have this shiny line that you can't get any paint to fire on or looks like a shiny spot on your fired china piece? These are those wonderful "Pour lines!" Most pour lines are minor and just on the very outside of the porcelain. Some are deeper than others so you need to study the piece closely to make sure you get all of the line out. All pour lines have a top, bottom, left side, and a right side. They come in all different shapes and sizes. Once you fixate your eye on a pour line, start sanding, and follow the line with your eye. Try to get all of the line off and you won't have that line interfere with your finished piece. This takes some practice and studying pour lines so don't get discouraged if you miss some. Your trained eye will come with time.

12. After you've sanded your seams and got all the pour lines, if any, the most important part of wet cleaning happens. As you sanded, scraped, and smoothed your piece, you wouldn't believe how many scratches you've put in. This is where the gloves come in. Rubbing the piece with wet gloves smooths all of the scratches out. Now, it's very important that you keep your piece rinsed off and your fingers wet. If the porcelain starts to "goop" on you as you're rubbing, that "goop" will just fill in the scratches. After you rinse the "goop" off, you'll still have scratches. Be careful around fingers. Take your time.



13. Rubber gloving...



14. Rinsing while rubber gloving...



15. Here's a shot of that "GOOP!!!"



16. After you have rubber gloved your piece very well you'll be ready to detail with a tool called a "stylus". The stylus has two different sized balls at the ends. You may use whichever end you feel comfortable with. As you can see in this picture, I'm supporting the finger I am detailing. This is very important because of the pressure you are putting on the delicate piece.



17. Another shot of how to support while you're detailing.



18. Here is my completed hand. I put two lines just above the fingernail and three lines for the middle knuckle. Your thumb only has one bend so I put on set of three lines just like the middle lines on the fingers. Detailing your fingers and toes are up to each individual's taste. You'll find you own way of detailing that will be you're trademark for your dolls.

