Mosaic Lifestyle
Create Pique Assiette Mosaic Treasures from Your World.
A detailed guide to creating Pique Assiette mosaics

By
Melissa Miller
www.MelissasMotif.com

Create Mosaics using antique china shards, personal mementos, photographs and ephemera, floral sculptural pieces, vintage jewelry and other found objects.

Updated May 1, 2017

No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without written permission from the author.

Kits Available on a limited basis from my website.
MelissaMiller8@msn.com
Contents

Chapter One: Introduction – The Possibilities:
Bringing a beautiful craft into your life, and your beautiful life into a wonderful craft

Chapter Two: The Search: Finding Broken Antique China & Pottery
Flea Markets, Antique Shops, E-Bay, Thrift Shops, and other sources of damaged collectibles to use in your mosaics. American Art Pottery, Fiesta Ware, Tiles, Fine China, why you should steer clear of new china

Chapter Three: Decoupage in Mosaics
Old photos, letters, postcards, recipes, match books and other ephemera, How to acquire copy and treat images, incorporating images into mosaics

Chapter Four: Expanding your scope: Found Objects in Mosaics
Finding unusual objects and preparing them for mosaics, how to treat vintage rhinestone jewelry pieces, the problem with pearls, recycling bonanzas

Chapter Five: Supplies, working space and preparation
Types of grout & mastic, coloring grout, sanded vs. non-sanded grout, the difference between grout and mortar, which adhesives to use, types of bases, safety measures, efficient work-area tips, confusing mosaic supply issues clarified

Chapter Six: The Basics: Cutting china, gluing, & grouting
Nippers vs. hammers, controlled nipping, cutting made easy, cutting apart damaged Capodimonte floral pieces, how to glue down shards, characteristics of adhesives and which types to use for different objects & bases, incredibly detailed grouting instructions

Chapter Seven: Projects
Picture Frame or Mirror, Bowl, Cigar Box, Shovel, Mosaic Table, Brief Overview of Pins & Pendants
WANT TO GET STARTED? TRY ONE OF MY BEAUTIFUL KITS! PERFECT FOR GIFTS, AS WELL...

Melissa’s Motifs Pique Assiette Mosaic Boxes, Bavaria Collection
The Possibilities

The fine craft of Pique Assiette mosaic can transform your life by changing the way you see nearly everything around you—from broken antique dishes and pottery, to vintage jewelry, collectibles, beads, old photographs and antique post cards. This book explains the basic pique assiette technique and then raises it to a whole new level. You'll learn how and where to find materials that are perfectly suited to your tastes, and you'll discover how to incorporate these into unique works of art that reflect and further develop your true creative nature. By incorporating all of the fundamentals described here, you'll soon find that the possibilities of this craft are truly unlimited.

Many craft books are created for people looking for things to do in their spare time. Since many of us have so little spare time, I felt we needed a book that demonstrates how to carry a craft into other parts of our lives. We need an artistic activity that opens us up to creativity wherever we go, and inspires us no matter what we’re doing. Thus the name, and the attitude, “Mosaic Lifestyle”.

Pique Assiette mosaic is a gratifying craft that requires neither formal training nor special skills, and you won’t need the precision and patience of other crafts such as sewing, glass work, or jewelry-making. The instructions for my basic techniques have been fine-tuned through years of teaching this craft, both in regular art classes, and through feedback from my on-line instruction books. I’ve also gained knowledge from web-sites such as Mosaic Basics, Arctic Mermaid, Joy of Shards, and the hilarious UCM Museum, all listed in my web page.

Many of us are down-sizing these days, and with that process come the sometimes painful choices about what to save and what to pass on. It’s difficult to decide which old photographs and mementos to keep, throw away, or continue to store in dark drawers and boxes. Scrap books are fun, but they have their limits. A pique assiette mosaic can contain a number of elements of different sizes, materials, shapes, and textures. Family silverware, old watches, and antique kitchen tools are just a few ideas that would not work well in a scrap-book, but can be fabulous in a mosaic.

Pique Assiette mosaic provides much more freedom in style and form than the more common forms of mosaic. As you develop your own methods, you’ll gain enthusiasm and may even grow as passionate about this craft as I have over the years. Every day you’ll be bombarded with new ideas, and you’ll view your surroundings in a whole new light.

The search for materials is enjoyable on its own: finding just the right elements to use in a project, shopping for damaged antique china in the colors and patterns you love most, sorting through junk drawers and jewelry boxes, finding family keepsakes, browsing flea markets and thrift shops, building customized searches on E-Bay — in fact the search can become all-consuming.

The basic techniques described here will provide you with the skills and know-how needed to incorporate a wide variety of elements into your mosaics. You'll learn which objects need special treatment and how to preserve them, and which items are best to avoid. You'll learn how to cut dishes with tile nippers, which adhesives are best, and detailed grouting instructions. The basic materials needed for this craft are easy to find
and fairly inexpensive—grout, mortar and mastic can be found in just about any hardware store. I’ve yet to see a student who was unable to master the basics of this craft after just one class or lesson.

I learned Pique Assiette from the book, “Making Bits and Pieces Mosaics” by Marlene Hurley Marshall, listed on my webpage. I fell in love with the craft, developed my own style and techniques, and after several years of practice I now work at my craft full time, making and selling my pieces in shops and galleries throughout the United States and in Hong Kong.

**How to use this book**

This book contains just five projects, in varying sizes and types, but you can easily branch out from these projects once you learn a few tricks. These lessons were chosen carefully in order to provide you with a comprehensive array of instructions and ideas, and the best selection of techniques and materials. The projects appear towards the end of the book, but you’ll want to read the proceeding sections carefully for a full understanding of the basic technique. In other words, all of the sections in the book are inter-changeable. In fact, you might consider this book a sort of mosaic of its own!

The technique for gluing down shards with mastic is explained in the picture frame project guide; you’ll be able to use those instructions for any future project that involves a flat wooden surface.

The shovel project demonstrates the technique for using concrete mortar as an adhesive, and can be applied to projects such as concrete bird baths, metal boxes (such as recipe or mail boxes) or garden items such as planters and trellises. This is a fun and easy project, great for those who love folk art gardens, unique porch and deck areas, or interesting fire-place area pieces.

The bowl project will help you to master rounded surfaces, and the cigar box project incorporates a number of elements into a functional piece that has endless possibilities.

The table project provides instructions for small furniture, and can be applied to garden mosaic tables, coffee tables, end tables, or even your kitchen table. And the jewelry project explains how to make small, wonderful heirloom treasures to wear or give as a gift.
The supply list is long and contains a lot of information; there are hazards involved with grout and mortar but these problems are easily avoided. Protective safety goggles and gloves are a must. And you’ll want to start thinking about a work space, since this craft does take up quite a bit of room. It’s best to find a space that’s safe from small children and pets, and that has good ventilation. A bare floor is helpful, because of the dust from the grout and mortar, and the small pieces of glass that flake off your shards as you nip them into suitable pieces. As you gain experience, please feel free to write to me at my web-site with suggestions or ideas of your own.

The step-by-step instructions may seem extremely detailed, but I feel that good, detailed instructions are essential to how well readers enjoy learning the craft. I have requested that no editing be done with my instructions; these have evolved over several years of feedback from my on-line manual and my classes. I welcome suggestions from you as you run across methods or ideas that you might want to share with me and other pique assiette enthusiasts. It is important to me that you succeed.
Chapter 2:

The Search: Were to Find Broken Dishes and Treasures

Colors

Finding the raw materials for mosaics can be a full-time adventure. Once you get started, you'll find yourself developing a new appreciation for ordinary, everyday things. Don't be surprised if you find yourself in a daze while looking at displays of small trinkets, imagining their effect when incorporated into your project-of-the-week. The search for shards comes first, of course, this is the foundation for the rest of your mosaic. Think of your shards as your paint, and you'll be able to focus more clearly when you hit the junk market.

Do an inventory of which colors you love the most, and which types of china or pottery best reflect the colors you love. For me, it's always American Art Pottery, or what some people call the "muddy" or "vintage" colors. These dishes have a texture, glaze and hue that I cannot find in any other shard, and they attract my eye quickly when I'm on my junk quests. My personal favorite is a dish that comes from a line of pottery used at meal-times during my childhood, so this type of memory can easily flow into your work, making it even more meaningful to you. Antique dishes are easier to cut with nippers, too, and they break into interesting shapes. If you love patterned china, you're in luck, because there are millions of pieces of damaged floral cups, bowls, and plates on the market.

Antique shops, flea markets, tag sales, garage sales, and internet sites are just the beginning. If you have a Goodwill store or Salvation Army in your area, stop in often to see what's available. And once friends and relatives find out what you're up to, they'll be on the look-out as well. Many women have at least one broken dish in a bottom drawer someplace that they can't bear to part with--a wedding gift or piece of every-day family china--and the possibility of incorporating these broken dishes into a work of art is always exciting to them. I often find small sacks of broken dishes on my front porch, left there by friends who want something useful to do with these broken dishes. It's comforting to people when they find a creative use for something that's been relegated to the junk pile.

For your first expedition, have a base or project in mind, and take it with you if you can. For the projects in this book, you'll need a wide-framed picture frame, a wooden bowl, a cigar box, and an old shovel. Or, use the link at the bottom of the page for my kit.

Ideas for finding bases appear in the "Projects" section of this book, but chances are you have at least one of these items languishing in your work area, basement or garage. Everyone loves reinventing things that have become useless or are taking up space. Think of your base as your canvas, and then proceed to the “gathering” phase described in these next sections.
WANT TO GET STARTED? TRY ONE OF MY BEAUTIFUL KITS! PERFECT FOR GIFTS, AS WELL...
Textures and Crazing

Look for dishes that have interesting surfaces, such as the circular textured lines blended into the surface of some round bowls and plates. Bottom rims are beautiful when cut into small pieces, as are decorative patterns formed onto some pottery dishes. McCoy has a lot of these textured pieces, check out their old planters, sometimes found for as little as $1.00 due to crazing. What's bad for them is good for us, because crazing, that crackly pattern that appears on some dishes over time, adds a rich visual component to mosaic designs. It is possible to advance the weathering process of shards somewhat by burying them in dirt. I keep a couple of dirt and shard-filled flower pots in my basement, which I water once a week (When visitors to my work room ask about these pots, I tell them I'm growing shards!).

Antique Shops and Flea Markets

Look for antique shops that have dark, cluttered basement areas. In these spaces, you'll often find stacks of damaged dishes for pennies. I've found that many antique dealers are pack-rats, and can't bear to throw anything away. They love to have an outlet for their goods, and will sell for a very low price, or even toss in a few "freebies". Remember that many antique dealers are on limited incomes, and aren't in the business of giving things away. Try not to haggle too much with sole-proprietor antique dealers, they'll be more willing to share finds with you in the future if you develop a cooperative attitude with them.

Antique malls with locked cases sometimes contain cases where lower shelves hold damaged items, sometimes even a "dollar shelf". I've devoted an entire chapter of this book to searching for found objects, but for now, keep an eye on these locked cases for interesting items such as broken pocket watches and small figurines. Antique malls also have message boards; consider posting a flyer for damaged china and see what turns up. Place a notice in free want-ad publications if you really want a big response.

Flea Markets are the best source for not only dishes, but vintage jewelry and other usable goods. These vendors are more likely to be selling damaged antiques that wouldn’t be carried in traditional antique shops, and there are usually at least 3 booths that have everything marked down 20 to 50 percent.

E-Bay

Here's an effective technique for finding exactly what you want: While shopping for antiques, check the bottom of a favorite dish in order to determine the manufacturer or pottery factory. With this information, you can head back to your home computer, type this name into a search on E-bay, with the words chipped, crazed, cracked or broken in the description field. You can fine-tune your search with the options available on the E-bay site, requesting that an e-mail sent to you whenever an item of this type comes up. Of course, these damaged goods are often dirt-cheap, and there’s no need to waste money on shipping insurance. Every single day you’re likely to get e-mails for chipped or broken pieces in your favorite colors or patterns. You can also place an “item wanted” notice on E-bay, a newer feature of that site which I’ve had some success with.
Old Pottery Factories

You might also check out your local historical society to see if there was ever a pottery factory in your area. If so, there are bound to be pottery "burial grounds" nearby, where you can search for old shards (with the permission of the owner of the property, of course). Red Wing, Minnesota has a popular burial area near the Mississippi river that holds thousands of shards from the old Red Wing Pottery factory. Creeks that run through older neighborhoods often contain shards from old dishes; I've gotten some wonderful shards from neighborhood children who have come across these pieces in their explorations. If you keep thinking along these lines, you'll develop other ideas that will excite and energize your creative flow.

Retirement Homes

Check at retirement facilities to see if there is a community bulletin board for "wanted" items, many retirees are looking for outlets for their treasures that they no longer have room or use for. Residents and family members may even consign you to do a personalized box or picture frame for them using cast-off dishes or mementoes. The craft of mosaic is very old, and was especially popular during the 20's and 30's in the United States, so many of these residents may be familiar with the art.
Traveling Antique Shows

When traveling antique shows come to my area, I check to see if any valuable items were broken in transport. If this makes you feel like a vulture, remember that these antique dealers are in the business to make money on their antiques, and will be happy for any small amount to make up for this type of loss. I also distribute simple, hand-made cards with my name and e-mail address to dealers with the types of pottery I’m looking for, so that they can contact me in the future if they have broken pieces. Be sure to write on the card, I’ll buy your broken antiques! These dealers will save your card, and happily contact you when an accident occurs.

Broken China Ethics: Be sure to check before you break a dish that might have high collectible or sentimental value to collectors. Some antique pottery, even if cracked or chipped, can be repaired by restoration experts. Since these items are becoming more and scarce, it’s a good idea to make sure we’re not part of the problem. I have an antique expert on hand to advise me on these matters.

While you’re looking for things to break, keep an eye out for bases, as well. Wood trays, metal serving dishes, bird houses, wall plaques and other interesting pieces are a dime a dozen at thrift shops. Also keep an eye out for clothing and material to cut into rags -- these can be used later during the grouting process. Old sheets work well as drop-cloths, and compartmentalized serving dishes make good storage units for small shards and pieces of jewelry.

There are times when antique china won’t work or newer dishes are preferred. I have never been able to find a good source of a good shade of red in antique dishes, so I usually pick up small red dishes, such as desert bowls, at department stores. Seasonal projects might call for seasonal china: The Easter section at Hobby Lobby, for instance, is a good place to find inexpensive items to break for children’s mirrors, especially AFTER Easter, when they go on sale. My only caution on those pieces is that the glaze can be much more fragile, so that the color can actually chip off the tops of the shards when you break them. I’ve also had some of the glaze actually wipe off while cleaning the grout from the top of a mosaic. Restaurants with colorful dishes are a great resource. Shops and boutiques that carry new dishes may have broken dishes occasionally, but I haven’t had much luck getting these proprietors to contact me when this happens, and often times they are able to return these to the manufacturer for a refund.

Habitat for Humanity: Check to see if there is a Habitat for Humanity Re-Store in your area, or similar resource. The one in my town is an invaluable source for tile, interesting architectural objects, grout, mortar, mirrors, and paint, all of which are priced at a fraction of the cost at hardware stores. Some hardware stores send tons of grout to our Restore simply because the manufacturer has discontinued the line for a grout with an updated name. To me, there’s no disadvantage to using ”Parchment” colored grout instead of the newer color, ”Haystack”. These places also tend to have kitchen cabinet doors by the dozen, these are perfect for panel mosaics because they are sealed, are of good size, and are light-weight.

Salvation Army: My hands-down favorite for damaged china of 1960’s and 70’s times. Not all stores are alike, though, so if you are unimpressed by one, try another.
**New Dishes** When shopping for damaged dishes, note which pieces tend to catch your eye first, which ones you are instantly attracted to, even if you can't really say why. This way you'll be in control of your materials, and your work will more likely reflect your particular tastes. Sometimes we're tempted to buy a cracked or chipped dish just because it's damaged, and should be saved. If you operate like this, you'll have your work-area filled up to capacity before you know it.

Lucky you if you can find a source of wonderful old but worn figurines! E-bay is my main source for these.
Chapter Three:

Decoupage in Pique Assiette Mosaics

If you enjoy creating scrap-books, you’ll love this section. Images and print materials can be incorporated into mosaics fairly easily, and the results can be fascinating. Old photos, letters, post-cards, and pages from books are just a few ideas. This chapter contains some tips and ideas when considering how to incorporate ephemera into your mosaics.

First, consider your colors and shard-types: if your mosaic will be created from antique dishes, then old black and white photos or vintage advertising would work well in the design. On the other hand, new dishes of bright and bold colors might call for images of a more modern type, such as school logos, sports memorabilia, travel poster labels, recent color photos, or modern art clips. Mosaic projects well-suited for decoupage include family photo frames, graduation frames and mirrors, family heirloom mirrors, and keepsake boxes with decoupage on the inside of the box.

Imagine creating a picture frame or mirror for a friend or relative who enjoys cooking: you could use shards from or similar to the recipient’s favorite dishes, and incorporate some small cooking utensils such as a brightly-colored antique vegetable peeler, a fancy cake server, or a tin cookie cutter. (Instructions for this part are coming up later in the book.) Add an old spice tin, and a smattering of favorite recipes from an old cookbook. It’s so easy to personalize gifts this way. For the insides of boxes, you'll want to wait until you're finished with the grouting process, and then cover the inside, avoiding the opening edges or inside crease/hinge area. If your decoupage medium gets too close to the opening edges of the box and gums up the edges, use sandpaper to smooth the edges, and rub a bar of soap around the edge of the top when dry.

If you have children in your life, you’re bound to have pieces of their colorful artwork posted to your refrigerator or stored around your house. These can be copied and reduced in size for photo and mirror frames, as well as for other projects. Favorite greeting cards, notes, and other personal items can be easily treated and added to a mosaic.
Decoupage can also be used to hide flaws. The backs of standing wooden picture frames can be painted, but it's almost as easy to use decoupage. I sometimes use wooden molding around the edges of my mirrors. If I don't have the time or inclination to cover these raised edges with shards, I use paper or borders from children’s books to cover the pieces of wood. It’s easy to match this addition to the colors of your shards, all you have to do is look for books and old magazines in used book stores, or even use wall-paper borders.

If you plan to use an original photo, letter or other valuable item, you’ll want to make at least one copy of it first; you would never want to use an original in a project that might not work out, or could cause damage in the process. And it’s best to abandon your home copier for the professional capabilities of a commercial copy center, such as Kinko’s. You’ll be surprised at the quality of an old color postcard when it’s been copied on a professional printing machine. The colors and details will be sharper, and the colors less likely to run when covered with the decoupage medium. You can reduce the image to a size that fits in with your project. I usually make about 4 different copies of slightly different sizes, so that I’ll have a choice when the time comes to glue the piece in to place.

Decoupage images should usually be torn around the edges, not cut with scissors. Lightly spray your copied image with a good spray varnish such as “Krylon Kamar Varnish” – this product offers “non-yellowing protection for oil, acrylic, and watercolor paintings”. This spray is meant for protective coating of professional paintings, so it’s a fairly good bet that it will work for your decoupage copies. After treating your paper with the spray, put it aside until later in the mosaic process; usually you will want to apply the piece AFTER the grouting process. The exact process for applying the paper is covered in detail in the picture frame project.

To incorporate an image into a mosaic, the trick is to get the area where the image will be placed built up, so that it is level with the tops of your shards. This can be done by mounting the image on a small piece of sealed wood, which you can easily find in craft stores. Think outside the box: the wood bases can be of different shapes and sizes. I often use old milk bottle caps, copied and then decoupaged on to round pieces of wood found in the “wood shapes” section of my local craft shop.

As you put together your mosaic, experiment with your wood piece until you find a place for it that pleases your eye. Glue the piece of wood on to the picture frame, or whatever it is you’re creating, and then surround it with shards as you make your mosaic. Remember to seal the piece of wood, otherwise, it could warp during the grouting process and cause problems during the decoupage process. When you’re finished grouting, clear the wood piece of grout, and then wait a few days for the moisture from the grouting process to dissipate. Apply your varnish-protected image using Modge Podge or other similar product. When this is fully dried, you can add a brilliant top-coat of varnish, or a matte varnish if you want the image to be more subdued. Never hurry when applying subsequent coats of varnish, adding more varnish before the previous coat has dried can cause the image colors to run.
You’re not limited to flat surfaces for this technique. I’ve sometimes incorporated clear glass bottles into my large mirror frames, and then decoupaged an interesting label on to the bottle. Book stores have beautiful books full of antique labels. With copyright issues in mind, these labels can be cut from books and used on nearly anything. Spice tins are another option: I’ve even copied antique spice tins at Kinkos, reduced them, and then decoupaged them on to smaller spice tins (modern spice tins tend to be smaller, but have hum-drum labels.

If these smaller tins fit better into my mosaic, I simply use my reduced antique label, in other words, re-labeling the tin for my own purposes.

One of my favorite sources for decoupage is an old book from my collection called “Decorum” from the 1800’s. Besides its beautifully-aged brown pages, it contains hundreds of small sections of arcane and often humorous beauty and etiquette advice, and always adds additional interest to my mosaic frames and mirrors. Children’s books are another great source; I have a Dick, Jane and Sally book from the 1950’s that’s been used on several of my children’s mirrors. If you have an old family cook book or bible, you have a treasure-trove of material to use. I love cook book pages that have been discolored by dripping sauces; this makes the piece more authentic. For my restaurant mirrors, I copy the covers of old match books, and then fold and glue the copy around a new book of matches so that it keeps its authentic look and shape.

Decoupage is a craft of its own: Craft and book stores contain dozens of books about this subject alone, so feel free to investigate for more ideas and techniques.
Chapter Four

Found Objects:

The Heart & Soul of Pique Assiette Mosaic
Old jewelry, pearls, coins and other found objects are the high-point of Pique Assiette mosaic. This is what separates Pique Assiette mosaic from the more common mosaic forms, and the segment that gives you the most freedom to express yourself through your art. And if you thought searching for shards was fun, you’ll find a whole new world opening up to you with this feature.

Start with your house: you’ve probably got at least one junk drawer or jewelry box full to the brim with possibilities. Single earrings, broken link bracelets, huge jewelry pieces from the 1980’s, vintage pins from the 1950’s, broken watches, tarnished lockets and charm bracelets are just a few things to look for. Old drawer pulls and knobs are always a good bet. I love to use old silverware, and I pound the pieces flat with a hammer to give them a more interesting look.

There are some rules, and objects you may want to avoid. Any objects that are extremely delicate or porous are difficult to see once they’ve been grouted. Other objects, such as pearls, are beautiful, but need special care in the way they are glued to the surface. Pearls should always be coated with varnish before use, so that the coating doesn’t come off during the grouting process.

Strings of pearls should be glued down and surrounded by shards in a mosaic, never set around the edge of a frame or bowl. If a string of pearls starts to come loose during the grouting process, it can be difficult to get them re-attached at that point. When in doubt about how an object will look, just ask yourself, "how will this look after it's been covered with grout (which is basically like mud, for this hypothetical drill). Even after the grout is wiped back, certain objects may not look exactly the same as they did in the beginning.

Very large or oddly-shaped pieces should be affixed and then surrounded by a sturdy assortment of shards to keep the object in place. My Capodimonte flowers are set in a large glob of mastic or mortar, depending on the project, and then the shards are stuck into the substance that seeps out around the flower. This technique takes practice, and you should not attempt to use a valuable or rare object until you do a few practice pieces.

Marbles or other perfectly round, smooth pieces should be glued down using an epoxy, my favorite for this is Devcon high-strength two-part epoxy. This product comes in 5-minute set-time or 20-minute set time, I've found both types to be sufficient. The benefit of the 5-minute type is that you'll spend less time holding the object in place as it dries; the disadvantage is that once it's stuck, it can be difficult to remove if you change your mind. Certain beads, such as coral, have a tendency to bleed its color when grouting, so always seal those with varnish before grouting. The varnish can be removed after the grout has dried if you want the piece to have a more natural matte finish.

Porous sea shells can be sealed with invisible penetrating sealant, available in the flooring section of your hardware store. I prefer the ‘TEC’ brand of this solution; it is expensive but will last a very long time. Doll faces should be protected with varnish to protect the paint on the face. If you want to use old watches, seal the piece with varnish
or avoid grouting over watches. When moisture seeps into a watch, it can cloud the crystal.

Certain types of metal pieces don’t always stick with mastic, so use glue for those. The best example of this type of problem is when I've used old brass Avon lipstick tubes in my “vanity” mirrors. These will not stay put with mastic, so I use my trusty 2-part epoxy for those. Rubber, such as used in “cause” wrist bands, is extremely difficult to work with, and does not stick well.
Pieces that might disintegrate over time should be varnished first. For my first dog frame, I put a light coat of varnish on some brightly colored dog biscuits I found at my local pet-food store (this is a good example of how difficult it is NOT to find ideas for found objects in mosaics!). I glued these to a wooden picture frame and surrounded the biscuits with shards, as well as pieces from a broken Scottie-dog figurine, and left it to dry overnight. The next morning, I awoke to find that my dog “Chewy” had gotten up on the table and chewed the tops of the biscuits off the frame! Now I use several coats of polyurethane varnish on them, let them dry out of reach, and I warn recipients to keep frames away from their pets.

As with decoupage items, if you use very thin objects such as coins, you may want to build the area up with small wood pieces, so that the object is raised to the level of the shards. Remember as you work with found objects that the effect we’re trying to achieve with this method of mosaic is more similar to a grotto – it has a more natural, rough-hewn look, making it more interesting than the mass-produced mosaic items we see in department stores. Old dump sites are gold mines for pique assiette mosaic artists. An artist near my home-town found a pile of old street car tokens at a former dumping area near the river in her town.
Found Object Ideas:

Watches
Jewelry (avoid delicate, "lacy" pieces)
Mirror pieces
Fishing lures
Campaign pins
Pencils and crayons (seal first with varnish)
Buttons and coins
Marbles (Glue down with epoxy)
Antique shoe and belt buckles
Small Christmas Ornaments
Small figurines, glass animals and antique dolls
Pearls and Beads
Varnished acorns, rocks and sticks (varnish first)
Guitar picks
Antique lipstick tubes and compacts
Charms from bracelets
Varnished dog biscuits and dog tags from beloved animals
Antique Handkerchiefs and beaded fabric pieces (Insert in cup-handles or pocket-pieces AFTER grouting)
Silverware and antique kitchen tools
Small antique farm animal toys
Shells
Antique game pieces
Small bottles with antique labels
Chapter 5 – Pique Assiette Mosaic Supplies and Preparations

The difference between grout, mortar and mastic; Adhesives to use for wood, concrete, glass or metal bases; Setting up your work area, and material overview

Basic Supplies

Detailed information is provided in the section following this list.
Tile nippers*
Mastic or Tile Adhesive* (for wood-based and cigar-box projects)
Concrete Thinset Mortar* (for metal or concrete-based projects)
Acrylic Mortar Additive*
Sanded Grout*
Wood Glue (containing PVA, such as Weldbond, for sealing wood surfaces)*
Super Glue such as Devcon 2-part Epoxy, 10-ton or 5-minute type*
Plastic bowls and containers of various sizes
Plastic or canvas drop cloths, plastic garbage bags, used plastic shopping bags
Sturdy plastic forks, spoons, & one large old metal fork
Small and large plastic baggies for cutting shards
Paper towels, old terry cloth washcloths & rags*
Craft sticks
Goggles
Tweezers
Tooth Picks, one long nail*
Disposable rubber gloves*
Dust mask
Spray bottle filled with water
Aluminum Foil (for mixing small amounts of glue, and for covering freshly-grouted mosaics)
Dremel or file*
Decoupage medium, such as “Modge Podge”
Varnish
Invisible penetrating sealant, for items such as rough sea-shells
Vinegar*
Small pieces of wood, in assorted shapes and sizes*
Old dishes, jewelry and other junk for your projects

Additional supplies needed for Chapter Projects

Projects 1: Small wood picture frame, small image for decoupage
Project 2: Wooden Bowl, small sculptural flower or bird*
Project 3: Cigar Box, Capodimonte or other type ceramic flower
Project 4: Shovel
Project 5: Introduction to Table
WANT TO GET STARTED? TRY ONE OF MY BEAUTIFUL KITS! PERFECT FOR GIFTS, AS WELL...
Pique Assiette mosaic is a fun but messy craft. A basement area works great as a workroom, but if that's not possible, try to at least set up in an area that is not carpeted. A large kitchen garbage container, preferably with a flip-top lid, is essential. Cutting china and glass will result in small glass splinters and shards falling onto the floor around your work area, creating a hazard for small children and pets, so I recommend placing dishes inside plastic bags while cutting them into pieces. Always wear goggles when cutting shards with tile nippers. Avoid inhaling grout or mortar dust, and use a dust-protection mask when mixing powders.

**Nippers:** The best nippers are the old dark grey or black ones pictured in the supply photo. These are hard to find, but can sometimes be picked up at tag sales where basement workshop contents are up for sale. I have one pair that was donated to me by the widow of a tile installer, and I guard these with my life. These old nippers are superior for their shape, heft, and cutting edge. If you can't find old ones, pick up a new pair in the flooring/tile section of any hardware store. Purchase a mid-range model, for around $14 - $18. Avoid the “heavy duty” nippers. I also like the nippers sold by Mosaic Basics, available on-line, and Mosaic Mercantile. None of the projects in this book call for a tile “wheel cutter”, and I have no experience or need for using wheel-cutter tools.

**Mortar:** Mortar is used as an adhesive for all concrete and metal-based projects. Mortar and grout both contain Portland cement, a substance that contains materials hazardous to the respiratory system and harsh when exposed to skin. In small amounts, such as in this craft, dangers from the chemicals in Portland cement can be easily avoided by keeping your area clean, covering your containers, and by wearing a dust mask. I'll explain the difference between mortar and grout a few sections down.

When Thinset mortar is mixed with acrylic additive; it causes a reaction which makes the mortar “sticky”. Happily, most mortar and the big hardware stores in MY area (Home Depot, Lowes, and Menards – and I sometimes have to go to ALL 3 OF THESE before I find everything that I need.

I’m not picky about brands for mortar, but I do sometimes check with store personnel for advice if there is more than one brand available. Mortar comes colored in white or grey; which color to use depends on your project. For my concrete bird baths, I use grey. For other projects, I use white, and mix in a little brown paint. The reason for the mortar coloring is this: Sometimes in the gluing-down process, small amounts of mortar will seep up between the shards. If you are not diligent about getting this mortar cleaned out of the crevices before it dries, it will harden and show a little bit after the grouting process. The coloring of the mortar causes this seepage to blend with the grout, assuming you are using brown grout. This is one of several “work-arounds” I’ve developed to compensate for my messy nature; if you are meticulous and detail-oriented, as many of my students are, you can avoid this step entirely, and use the mortar in whatever color you find.
LEFT: MIXING UP GROUT.

RIGHT -- MIXING A LITTLE PAINT INTO MASTIC, OR TILE ADHESIVE
MASTIC: Mastic, or tile adhesive, is my favorite adhesive for all wood-based projects. Mastic is a very slow-drying, super-strong bonding substance, and its thick consistency makes it ideal for gluing down uneven shards and large objects such as Capodimonte flowers. The slow drying and curing aspect of mastic means more time needed between gluing and grouting, but the benefit is more flexibility during your working time. If you're gluing down shards and you decide to change course – maybe you don't like your colors or you want to try different shapes in mid-stream, it's easy to pull the glued pieces off and re-do an area. Another advantage compared to glues is that it does not have the high, sometimes dangerous, scents and fume of glue.

After you have pasted down all of your shards on a wood project, you'll let your mosaic set in a warm, dry room for at least 2 days before grouting. I generally try to wait one week before grouting, especially for pieces with heavy or large, oddly-shaped objects. Mastic is also very messy and is difficult to remove from clothing. Mastic can be found in the flooring section of most large hardware stores, and is often labeled as “tile adhesive”. If you have a choice between regular "floor" tile adhesive and "wall" tile adhesive, choose the "floor" type. This type is stronger, and works well when gluing down large objects. One brand of mastic is labeled “Type-A” adhesive, I've used this for years and it works well. If you find the types and brands confusing, ask for assistance from store personnel. Be sure to emphasize that you need a very strong adhesive for gluing heavy objects on vertical surfaces.

The Difference between Mastic and Mortar as Adhesives

Mastic should be used on all wood bases. Mortar should be used on concrete bases, and projects that will be used in outdoor areas, such as metal trellises, shovels, and metal dishes. I have used both on glass bases, such as glass wine bottles I've decorated, and have found both to be effective. I use mortar on terra cotta planters.

Grout: Grout and mortar appear to be similar, but they’re not. The chemical reaction for each is different, as well as the end result after these substances have dried. Generally, I don’t provide exact measurements for water/additive ratios for grout or mortar. This is disconcerting to my students; we all like to be able to follow a recipe. However, after 12 years of working with this craft, I have found that a number of factors affect how much water to use with grout, from the heat and humidity of your environment, to the type and brand of grout used, and even a difference in batches within the same brand of grout. Altitude and other factors, some apparently very mysterious, can cause fluctuations in liquid requirements. So if I did provide exact measurements for the amount of water to mix with your grout, the recipe would be unreliable about 75 percent of the time.

Certain types of grout call for mixing with either water or a grout additive. Recently I’ve noticed that many grouts only call for water, because the chemicals formerly contained in the additive are now mixed with the dry grout. The benefit of mixing an additive to grout that does not have these additives is that it makes the grout stronger and more pliable. Currently, I use Polyblend grout. Visit the Polyblend website for more detailed information about this product, and to view their color chart.

NOTE: I do NOT recommend pre-mixed grout

WANT TO GET STARTED? TRY ONE OF MY BEAUTIFUL KITS! PERFECT FOR GIFTS, AS WELL...
The first rule of grout is this: Never wash grout, either wet or in dry powder form, down your drain, because it will ruin your pipes. I always use plastic containers to mix grout, and then discard the container after use. You can re-use plastic containers by popping out the dried grout after use. I use paper towels and old rags to wipe off grout during the grouting process, and then discard those materials after use. The color of grout used depends upon your personal taste, but my rule of thumb is this: Pastel shard colors stand out more with darker brown grout, bright colors really “pop” with white or off-white (sometimes labeled “antique white”), and black grout makes a stunning mosaic when really bright colors are used. Many professional mosaic artists use grey grout, exclusively.

Grout is usually approximately 2 shades darker when it’s wet than after it has dried. The color patch affixed to boxes of grout is accurate most of the time, but not always. At last count, my basement workroom contained 18 boxes of different shades and brands of brown grout. I mix these up in varying ratios to try to customize my colors. I’ve yet to create the perfect shade, and sometimes I add brown paint to my wet grout in order to reach my ideal color. Grout is very dense, so it takes a huge amount of paint to color it. I usually purchase the highest pigmented paint available, the brand ‘Golden’ is a good product, but the high pigment content of this paint brings the price of a small jar of paint to around $12.00. Or you can just use acrylic craft paints from craft stores or walmart, and just use a lot more of it.

The branded colors of grout change as quickly as consumer tastes change, and color names reflect cultural trends. “Summer Wheat”, “Haystack” and “Linen” are my current favorites in the Polyblend line, but I won’t expect those names to stick. I purchase grout, mortar and mastic from my local Habitat for Humanity ReStore. I’m signed up to get their e-mail advertisements, so I receive weekly lists of available products from them. Just today, I received a bulletin announcing a huge shipment of discontinued grout donated by The Home Depot, and an overstock of tile adhesive. I’m not concerned about using discontinued products; my guess is that these old lines are usually being jettisoned in favor of a slightly different hue, a change of color names, or labeling improvements. These are just a few of the useful materials I find at my local Habitat for Humanity ReStore.

Sanded Grout vs. Non-Sanded Grout

I use sanded grout, almost exclusively. Sanded grout will lend a rougher, more “grotto-like” look to your mosaics, but sanded grout also has a tendency to scratch some shards and objects – it is harsh! The benefit is in the grout line of the finished project: mosaics using non-sanded grout tend to develop cracking in the grout-line. Since I sell my work to galleries and gift shops, I can’t have any cracking in my pieces or they will not sell. Cracking in the grout line does not necessarily indicate a possible failure of a piece, but it is a deal-breaker when it comes to sales. If you do use non-sanded grout, be sure to mix it with at least a small amount of sanded grout.

Preparing Grout for Use on Mosaics

Illogical as it sounds, sanded grout requires much less water than non-sanded grout. For the projects in this book, start with two cups of sanded grout, and stir in water or additive by the tablespoon, stirring as you add liquid, until it reaches the consistency of
thick mud or cookie dough. A fork should stand up by itself in the mixture when mixed correctly. Make sure that all of the dry grout from the bottom of the bowl is mixed up into the mixture. The old metal fork is efficient for this task, the mixture will be so thick that plastic forks often break during the stirring. Never have grout too watery; even sanded grout will develop cracks if there’s too much moisture in it. You’ll know for sure that you’ve added too much water if there is a shimmery film on the surface of your mixture after it slakes. If this happens, add a small amount of grout.

Once the correct consistency has been reached, the grout needs to sit (“slake”) for 5 minutes.

This mixture will stay workable for one hour at the most. At any time during grouting, if you feel the mixture is becoming too dry, DO NOT ADD MORE WATER. Adding more water will not help the mixture, the chemical reaction has already occurred during the slaking process, so adding more water at this point will only add more damaging moisture. Frequent stirring of the mixture and lightly covering your bowl with aluminum foil during the grouting process will keep it pliable enough for you to finish a small project; for larger projects, you’ll want to mix several small batches during the process as you go.

**Gloves:** Use the disposable kind available in the house-cleaning department of grocery stores, not the large heavy-duty ones. You’ll need the flexibility of the disposable gloves, and at around $1.50 for a package of 10, they’re inexpensive enough to replace as they develop tears. Good gloves can also be found at beauty supply stores. When I take my son to his orthodontist appointments, I pick up several pairs of dental gloves, which are very flexible and extremely strong. Gloves are needed when you’re cutting shards and when working with grout or mortar.

**Paper Towels:** Use Viva, “Box of Rags”, or blue shop towels for wiping back grout, they are worth the extra expense. I look for terry cloth wash cloths on sale in the end-aisles of department stores, you won’t be able to wash these and re-use them in your washing machine. When I shop for dishes at donation stores such as the Salvation Army, I look for worn towels and other absorbent items that can be cut into pieces and used as grouting rags. Many mosaic books direct us to use a sponge and bucket of water, rinsing the sponge frequently while wiping back the grout. I don’t use this technique because it’s easy to end up with too much moisture from the wet sponge, and then there’s the problem of how to dispose of you used “grout water”.

**Dremel:** The Dremel is a tool I purchased after reading the book ‘Making Bits and Pieces Mosaics’. This is an invaluable tool which is used to grind sharp edges when finishing a mosaic. The battery-operated ones are best, I often do my grinding outside to avoid releasing glass dust into the air. I prefer the blue-tipped “grinding” bit, it is currently labeled as part number 84922 – Silicon Carbide Grinding Stone; this attachment is perfect for hard-to-reach edges in mosaics. Glass-grinding Dremel bits are usually available in hardware stores that provide a wide selection of Dremel accessories. See the Dremel web site for more information about their products.

**Wood PVA Glue** This product is for sealing wood surfaces, and is explained in detail in my first project sheet. Don’t be put off by the “PVA” prefix; this is a substance that is...
found in nearly all wood glues, including Elmer's glue. Try to find “Weldbond” glue for these projects; it is versatile and inexpensive.

The long nail listed in the supply list is a handy tool for chipping any left-over grout from your shards when your mosaic has fully dried. Helpful hint: Clean as much grout from you shards as possible while the grout is still damp; chipping it off with this nail is not enjoyable.

**High Strength Epoxy**, especially 5-Minute Setting-Time Epoxy
This will be used for emergency situations described in my projects section

This supply list will be updated occasionally on my web site, [www.MelissasMotif.com](http://www.MelissasMotif.com)

Many of the supplies listed above have been included as a result of suggestions from my students. If you find an item that you think would be useful and which is not listed here, please submit it to me for inclusion on my web-site list. I have learned a great deal from my students, at least as much as they have learned from me, so join the club with any ideas or suggestions. Other features you'll find on my blog are new suggestions for projects, a gallery of work done by students of my classes, updated lessons, and easy links to wonderful mosaic resources and supplies.
Chapter Six: Cutting China with Tile Nippers

ABOVE: Proper Placement of Nippers:
Mark this page and refer to it often!
Note: Always wear protective goggles and gloves when cutting shards. Nipping shards inside several layers of plastic bags provides additional protection from flying shard bits. Or you can do your cutting over your open garbage receptacle to avoid accidents.

Cutting up dishes with tile nippers is not difficult, but it does take practice, and there are a few tricks to it. The key is proper placement of the cutting part of the nippers. Place the nippers into the edge of the dish approximately ¼ of the way into the cutting part of the nippers, as shown in the photograph. View this photograph often as you are cutting. If you are struggling to get a cut on a standard dinner or salad plate, your placement of the nippers is probably incorrect: check to see if you are going too far in with your nippers, and if so, back them up a fraction of an inch, and try again. Most beginners place the nippers too far in, and this makes getting a clean cut difficult. Proper placement will give you the leverage you need, and will prevent shattering of the dish in unpredictable ways. You'll also have better control of your shapes, especially if you are trying to cut out patterns on a dish.

I always cut dishes over my open garbage can, so that if a large piece falls away it will not fall onto the floor and shatter. With practice, cutting china becomes almost as easy as cutting paper. Homer Laughlin dishes are the easiest to cut; I could spend all day cutting around the flowers that run along the borders of Homer Laughlin plates. You'll often see mosaic instructions that advise you to cut your shards into similar sizes. This is advice I never follow, because I love the look of a variety of shapes, sizes and textures. This is another aspect of design that sets Pique Assiette mosaic apart from other types of mosaic.

**Plates:**

Place your plate inside double or tripled plastic shopping bags. Set this on your tabletop, or rest it sideways inside your garbage container. Visualize how the plate will break and be sure that your hand is not going to be in the way of a falling shard piece; where durable rubber gloves are thick garden work gloves until you feel confident working with large pieces. Place your nippers on the edge of the plate, sometimes it helps to go in at a slight angle. Squeeze the nippers, and the plate should break. If the plate breaks in half, take one of the halves and place this inside another doubled plastic bag. This time, go into the freshly-cut edge of the plate, near the clean outside edge, and cut again. This should give you a long edge piece, which can be used as-is, or nipped down into smaller rim pieces.

I like to cut an assortment of sizes of rim pieces, especially for square projects: Some pieces are long with a slight curve, while others are cut as thin as narrow teeth. This combination looks beautiful when glued on to the outside or inside border of a mirror or picture frame. To cut long rim pieces down to these smaller, teeth-like pieces, cut in from the clean outside edge. If you have difficulty getting a cut, turn the plate over and go at it from the underside.

The book “Making Bits and Pieces Mosaics” contains good instructions for removing the bottom rim from the undersides of plates, but I have never mastered this particular skill. I find it easier to trim the edge away from the rim, and discard the bottom rim piece. I do
sometimes use bottom rim pieces by cutting them into narrow pieces, they make interesting “bumpy” pieces and add texture to a surface. Remember that the more texture you can work into your mosaic, the more interesting it will be.

Sometimes it’s easier to get large plates broken into more manageable pieces by placing the plate in a doubled-plastic bag, covering it with a blanket, placing it upside down on the ground, and then tapping the center bottom of the plate with a hammer.

Patterns:
Many mosaic artists cut up floral designs on dishes and then place the design back together in their mosaic. This is an attractive design technique, but I prefer the look of a design where these pieces are put back together in a design differently than the way they appeared on the original dish. Experiment with both methods, to see which one appeals to you. If you definitely want to keep a pattern intact, apply masking tape over the design and on the underside as well, and then nip around that area.

Capodimonte flowers
If you’re interested in using Capodimonte flowers, such as the ones I’ve used in most of my large projects, there are a few safety precautions you’ll need to observe. These flowers are as sharp as they are beautiful, and even a small cut on a finger from one of these will ruin your day. Not only do the petals have sharp edges, the undersides of the flowers often have small sharp points that are difficult to see – until you cut yourself on one of them. Always enclose your flower pieces inside several layers of plastic shopping bags, and wear heavy gloves when working with these.

To break a large piece, such as a glass basket of flowers or multi-flowered candle holder, place the piece inside your multi-layered plastic grocery bag, and if possible, wrap with an old towel or place inside of an old pillow-case. Turn the piece sideways, and place this bundle on top of a cushion such as an old towel or pillow to protect the flowers. Place another towel over the top of the bundle, and, wearing your goggles, tap the side of the bottom lightly with a heavy hammer until you feel the piece come apart. Then, carefully remove the pieces from the sack, and look at what you’ve got.

Discard the sack with the shattered remains at the bottom, and use another batch of sacks if you find it necessary to repeat the process. You may have to do more hammering to get the bottoms of the flowers removed, or if the stem pieces aren’t too thick, you can work at the stems with your nippers. To do this, wrap paper toweling around the flower so that you don’t cut your fingers. This also protects your fragile flower while you’re working on it. How much to leave at the bottom of the flower pieces depends on how you intend to use your flower: For the top of a cigar box, you’ll want to get the flower as flat on the bottom as possible.

Sometimes the leaves on the flowers will break into separate pieces, these leaves are beautiful blended back into the flower area on your mosaic, or placed elsewhere on your mosaic.

Some baskets, centerpieces, candle holders and figurines have a hole at the bottom, and this makes everything much easier. If you can get your nippers into part of the hole and cut, the piece will come apart easily and usually with very little damage to the
flowers. Then it’s just a matter of cutting away the rest of the basket piece until the flowers are all that’s left.

I love to find old powder jars with chipped Capodimonte flowers on the lid. These are so much easier to cut apart than the candle holder or large basket pieces. Just turn the lid over, place it inside a doubled shopping bag, and cut the edge of the lid through the plastic protective wrapping. Most of the time, the lid will break into several large pieces, and then you can trim the base part more if needed. I usually leave some of the base on the bottom of the flower, because trying to completely remove the flowers from the lid will often damage the flower beyond use, and also this flat piece is easy to attach to flat bases such as frames and boxes. It’s best to grind down sharp edges and points on flowers before you start working them into a mosaic, this way you will avoid cutting yourself on the flowers during the gluing process. If you have petals that have broken off from flowers, save them for incorporation into your mosaic.

Some old dishes may contain lead. For this reason, I generally try to break up large pieces outdoors, and am careful about disposing the left-over pieces.
Cup Handles
Remove cup handles by nipping down from the top edge of the cup. If you are lucky, you'll end up with the handle intact, and then you can just trim around the handle. Even with years of practice, my cup handles only stay intact about 50 percent of the time.

Bottoms of dishes
Always check the bottoms of your dishes for interesting back-stamps. These add interest to mosaics and are intriguing to viewers, especially if the brand of the dish has meaning. I love the raised letters on Shawnee and McCoy dishes, and the logo found on Homer Laughlin plates. I often use round bottom circle of a cups on my mosaics, and sometimes I cut this circle in half, and place the halves in a balanced design on the piece.

Very large heavy dishes
large casserole dishes can be difficult to nip, so for those the best technique is to place the dish inside many plastic bags, place upside-down, cover with towels or blankets, and then pound the dish into pieces with a hammer.

New dishes
I don't like to use new dishes for my mosaics; they are difficult to cut, and often the top glaze chips off during cutting. But sometimes I have to use new dishes if certain colors can’t be found in old dishes. Red is difficult to find in antique shops, and the chance of finding good red dishes that are damaged to the point of being useful for our purposes are slim. I buy new red dishes at places like Target, the after-Christmas or Valentine’s Day sales offer a bonanza in pinks, whites and reds.

Very thin dishes
Tea-cups and saucers can be so thin that the nippers will not close on them. If this happens, try wrapping the dish in paper-towels, and nipping through those.

Other figurines: Most figurines have a hole in the bottom. Try to work your nippers into that hole, and cut up from that. You may want to ask yourself: Can this piece be glued on whole, as it is? Or does it need to be broken? Usually, I prefer to cut figurines so that the don't protrude too far out on my mosaic. I feel that if they protrude too far, they loose the blended, subtle look of Pique Assiette mosaic. Balance is a factor, as well: Unless you really want this piece to be the focal point, try to get it blended in, so that viewers can appreciate your whole piece, and not be distracted by one part of it.

You may be surprised to find that many dishes are already broken, and have been glued back together. This is often the case with antique china that appears to be much less expensive than usual. The damage might be unnoticeable to the un-trained eye, but an antique dealer would be able to spot this immediately.

Reminder:
At the risk of being repetitive, I’ll emphasize repeatedly the importance of not placing your nippers too far in from the edge of dishes in order to complete a clean, easy cut, and the importance of eye-protecting goggles.
Chapter Seven

Projects

You've learned just about everything you need to know in the preceding pages of this book. Now, it's just a matter of putting it all together!

These instructions have been created and improved through years of trial and error, not only from my experience but with help from my students, on-line lesson recipients, mosaic artists, and tile installation experts. Some of my instructions may be contrary to information contained in other books and columns, and you are free to develop your own techniques as you gain experience with these materials.

Before you start: You'll be ahead of the game if you review the trouble-shooter section in the back of the book BEFORE you set out to create your first mosaic!

Basic Grouting Instructions for all projects, Preparing Grout for Use on Mosaics

Counterintuitive as it sounds, sanded grout requires much less water than non-sanded grout. Many mosaic instructions will recommend non-sanded grout, especially for mosaics with very small spaces between the shards. However, I find sanded grout to be highly superior for a number of reasons, but mainly because it has less likelihood of cracking when it dries. My current favorite brand of grout is “Mapei Keracolor-S, Sanded Grout with Polymer”. This brand comes in many colors, and is mixed with water.

For the projects in this book, start with two cups of sanded grout. Reserve about 2 tablespoons of dried grout for later repair work, if needed; you’ll want to preserve this amount from the SAME BATCH as you used for your mosaic (grout batches vary slightly in color).

But Wait, Before you Start!

Before mixing up your grout for any of these projects, take a close look at your mosaic: You will be covering this piece with what basically looks like thick mud, and then wiping this substance off. If any objects in your mosaic are porous or “lacy” (intricate jewelry items), or have a finish that could be easily wiped off along with the grout, you’ll want to avoid them when you pour your grout on the mosaic, or you may want to treat them with a coat of varnish. Old pearls have a coating that is especially vulnerable to the harsh properties of grout. You can also cover small pieces with aluminum foil.

Stir in water by the tablespoon, stirring as you add liquid, until it reaches the consistency of thick mud or cookie dough. (As stated in the materials section, I’m unable to provide exact measurements for your grout/water ratio because of a wide range of factors). A fork should stand up by itself in the mixture when mixed correctly. Make sure that all of the dry grout from the bottom of the bowl is mixed up into the mixture. The old metal fork is efficient for this task, the mixture will be so thick that plastic forks often break during the stirring. Grout should NEVER be too watery, this is the first cause of grout-
line cracking, even with sanded grout. You'll know for sure that you've added too much water if there is a shimmery film on the surface of your mixture after it slakes (slake is the technical term for letting grout set for 5 minutes after mixing it up). When you see that simmer, add dry grout by the spoonful and mix until it's thick.

Once the correct consistency has been reached, the grout needs to set ("slake") for 5 minutes. This is another important step in the process, don't cut even a second off that time or you'll risk cracking, according to my “grout experts".
This mixture will stay workable for one hour at the most. At any time during grouting, if you feel the mixture is becoming too dry, DO NOT ADD MORE WATER. At this point, the chemical reaction of the grout/water mix has already occurred, so adding more water now will only add more damaging moisture. Frequent stirring of the mixture and lightly covering your bowl with aluminum foil during the grouting process will keep it pliable enough for you to finish a small project; for larger projects, you'll want to mix several small batches during the process as you go.

I have some really good how-to images starting on the next page so that it's easier to actually see the process.

Pour or spoon the grout on your mosaic, covering everything except those objects that absolutely need to be avoided, such as lacy earrings or other jewelry pieces. Wearing your gloves, push the grout into all of the crevices. Some mosaic artists will let the grout sit on the mosaic for several minutes to assure that it sinks in, but this is a step I usually avoid, being in too much of a hurry to get started.

Start wiping the grout off with paper towels, old rags, or even scraping the grout off each piece with a craft stick. You can dampen your towels a little, but too much moisture on the towel may add additional harmful moisture to the grout.

As the grout begins to dry, you can spray the mosaic VERY LIGHTLY if needed, if the grout is getting too dry too fast. As you work, you may experience the frustrating problem of clumps of grout falling from the edges on projects such as frames, and boxes, and even bowls rims. Just pick these clumps up and mold them back into place, treating the grout as a clay-type substance.

Now that you've gotten most of your grout wiped back, take a good look at your piece from all angles. Nothing screams “amateur” like missed crevices, and these crevices can cause weakening in other grout lines near the missed spot. Small crevices and textures can be further cleaned with toothpicks. It's important to get as much grout off now as you can, what’s tiresome now will be extremely difficult once the grout is dry; it will have to be chipped off with a nail at that point.

When you are finished, store the piece in a cool indoor area. Let it dry like this for several days, checking on it often and doing further cleaning. If there is cracking at this point, try to smooth it out or patch it with your reserved patch-kit grout. You want this to dry and cure as slowly as possible. Spray it lightly from time to time, aiming your spray up and away from the surface, in order to avoid big drops of water landing on your grout lines.

After a day or two, clean with a mixture of vinegar and water, the same mixture you might use for cleaning windows. Sharp edges can be ground down with a hand-file or Dremel.
Grouting: First steps
Note: Never wash grout down your sink. It will ruin your pipes.

The set-up (5-hour energy drink optional). I’ve colored white grout with some brown and yellow paint, the kind of paints that you can just pick up at Walmart or craft store.

I’ve started on the trickiest area, as I tend to get a little sloppy and lazy as I go along.

Be sure to wear your gloves, grout is really hard on your hands. Your gloves may get torn on the sharp edges of the shards, if you get grout on your hands DO NOT WASH THEM DOWN THE SINK! Wipe off with paper towels and later, some water and vinegar to restore the pH balance to your skin.
Grouting Instructions Part 2

Note: Never wash grout down your sink. It will ruin your pipes.

Everything is covered except for the flowers. Don't forget your edges. Later, though, be sure to get the grout out of the inside area where the picture goes, you won't be able to insert a photo if it's all gummed-up with grout.

Try to go kind of fast here, careful but fast, because the grout dries incredibly fast. and the gloves are off now, so that I can both see AND feel what I'm doing.

Getting there, but what a mess, right????
Grouting Instructions Part 3
Note: Never wash grout down your sink. It will ruin your pipes.

moving on, I’m getting impatient so am working in larger areas.

Brushes can come in handing, even an old toothbroth, but mind that they can also make a bigger mess of things sometimes.

Use old towels or washcloths, but DON'T PUT THEM IN THE CLOTHES WASHER! GROUT RUINS PIPES!

(Can you tell that I have had personal experience with this???)
Grouting Instructions Part 4 Finishing Up

Note: Never wash grout down your sink. It will ruin your pipes.

Toothpicks for clearing small spaces

Ugly missed-spot that I need to go back and fill in.

Very easy to miss parts of the edge, a flaw that always indicates a novice. Not that there’s anything wrong with being a novices, but if I’m to sell this mirror for as much as I want to, it had better look professional. Don’t try to be too perfect, though. The charm of this craft is its more primitive, rough-hewn look.
Grouting Instructions Part 5 MORE Finishing Up

Note: Never wash grout down your sink. It will ruin your pipes.

Clean with a mixture of vinegar and water. Let piece “cure” in a reasonably dark place, uncovered, going back and cleaning it up more later.

I left a big part empty to accommodate a jewel. Normally I would not do this, I don’t like a “stuck on” appearance. But this particular piece, even damaged as it was, cost me a lot of money. I just go back in and use some mastic, colored with craft paint so that it kind of matches the grout, and then stick it in, clearing the edges.

More tooth-pick work.
Finished Mirror. That big broach MAY have been a bit too much, it sticks out more that I would have liked.
Project A: Small Picture Frame or Mirror with Decoupage Image Accent

This project is a good one to start with because frames and mirrors have a flat surface, the end product is functional, and wood frames and mirrors are inexpensive, making this a low-risk starter project. Small six-inch frames can be purchased at craft stores such as Michaels or Hobby Lobby for around one dollar. Purchase several of them, and experiment with your technique. You might vary the size of your shards, or experiment with the spacing between the shards.

Spacing of Shards: It is best to have a space between shards of more than 1/8 inch, yet no more than ½ inch. I’ve seen mosaics with much wider spacing, but my concern is grout cracking in these spaces when they get too wide. My jewelry pieces often have space between shards of less than 1/8 inch, my guide for those pieces is a toothpick: If the tip of the pick can be inserted into the space, it’s wide enough. The goal is to have enough room between the shards for the grout to sink in around the shards, but not so much space that the grout-line is more than ½ inch. Opinions on this subject will vary from artist to artist, and people who work with tile professionally have their own code of standards. You will often read that un-sanded grout should be used where spaces between shard is less than ¼ inch, but I have found that advice to be unnecessary for mosaic purposes, and may apply more to tile installation projects in building trades than our mosaic work.

First things first: do you plan to hang your piece on a wall?

Many of these small frames come with a small peg enclosed, which can be inserted in a hole in the back of the frame. This creates a good stand for your finished project, but if you’d rather have a hanging piece, attach hanging hardware to the back BEFORE you start the mosaic process. The picture-hanging section of any hardware store will offer an array of hanging hardware, I prefer 2-hole ring hangers, such as Bulldog Brand item number PH-57, because they are easy to install and will hold well if your frame ends up being very heavy.

If you choose to create a hanging piece, you'll want to keep weight distribution in mind as you work; if one side contains heavier shards or objects than the other side, the result could be a piece that is crooked when hung on your wall. Also, be sure that you have your frame or mirror positioned correctly before you start the shard-gluing process, you don't want to compose your piece and then find that you've created it upside down, with the hanging-hardware on the bottom of the frame or stand-hole at the top! If you prefer to do a mirror, your best option is to purchase IKEA ‘Malma’ mirrors, usually available on E-Bay for around $3.00 each. These are 10” wide-framed mirrors and are perfect for this project. I have used one of these mirrors in this section’s photographic instructions.

Sealing your wood base

Mosaic is a labor-intensive craft, so preparation of your base is important. All wood bases should be sealed. How to seal wood is a matter of some contention among mosaic artists, so I’ll tell you what works for me and let you research the other methods.

WANT TO GET STARTED? TRY ONE OF MY BEAUTIFUL KITS! PERFECT FOR GIFTS, AS WELL...
on your own if you choose. I seal my wood bases with a mixture of one-part PVA wood glue to 4 parts water. PVA stands for polyvinyl acetate, and this substance is found in several types of wood glue, a glue under the brand name of Weldbond is a good choice. Other artists use whatever wood sealant is available in the wood-sealing section of hardware stores, and I’ve used these as well. My problem with these cans of wood sealant is that they have a strong odor, and are just not as easy to work with as wood glue mixed with water. I have also heard, but not confirmed, that these wood sealers may affect the adhesive properties of the mastic. Sealing wood is important, because it prevents the wood frame from warping during the grouting process. Warping is a serious problem with mosaic, causing grout lines to crack, and chunks of the finished mosaic can come loose from a wood frame that has not been sealed.

**Selection and preparation of image for decoupage**

Choose a photo or other image you plan to use for your decoupage on the frame. Take your image to a professional self-service copying store or department and make several color copies of your image, in varying sizes, so that you’ll have some flexibility when you create your frame. (This is more expensive than running off a copy on your home printer, but the price is worth the higher quality and color-fastness of the commercial color printer). A size of approximately two inches square is good for an image on this particular project. Apply a light coat or two of spray varnish, such as ‘Kamar Varnish’ available at art stores or in the fine-art section of your local craft store. Fold and tear around the image, for a natural look. Set the images aside and work with placement ideas as you apply shards to your frame.

**Getting down to business**

Gather your dishes and start cutting them into shards. Detailed instructions for cutting dishes into shards appear in the cutting section, but to re-cap, be sure to wear goggles to protect your eyes, and always keep in mind that the proper placement of nippers in the cutting process is to have the cutting edge in about ¼ in from the cutting edge of the nippers. The size of the shards can vary, from very small (1/4 inch) to large: up to 2 inches wide. The best size for a starter project is around one inch.

As you cut, experiment with shapes and sizes. Be sure to bring some textured shards into the mix, and some possible “found objects” to incorporate. Before you do your final layout, be sure your mirror or frame is positioned so that the hanging hardware or peg-hole on the back is right-side up.

Avoid having very sharp edges extending out from the sides of frames. Sharp edges can be ground down with a file or Dremel, but for this first project, it’s easier to avoid that extra step by using plate rim pieces for the edge of the frame. You can also use tiny tile, available from Mosaic Basics, to fill in the outside edge. Information about Mosaic Basics appears in the resources section of this book.

Place the shards on the frame in a design that is pleasing to you. Experiment with placement, sizes of shards, and shapes. Objects can be incorporated into your design, just be sure to review the section on that aspect of the craft in the Found Object section of this book. Again, to recap, avoid placing round objects, such as strings of pearls or beads round the edge of your frame. Marbles and round beads should be glued down
with high-strength epoxy, such as Devcon High Strength 2 Ton Epoxy, or Devcon 5-Minute Epoxy. These glues, found in hardware stores or in the hardware department of department stores such as Walmart, come in a 2-part tube which is mixed in a small tray to create a super-strong bond. It's a good idea to keep this glue handy, the 5-minute version is a life-saver if, during the grouting process, a piece comes loose from your base. I'll provide more detailed instructions for that problem further on in the grouting instructions.

**Reserve your image space**

When you have your design laid out, pencil around your soon-to-be-decouaged image on the frame, so that you will know exactly how much space to reserve for you image as you glue your shards to the frame. You may want to find a small piece of wood, the size of your image, to glue down in this space during the shard-gluing phase of this project. Otherwise, your image will be lower that your shards. Applying a wood backing for your image will lift it up to the level of the shards, giving the image a more finished look. I usually keep a supply of assorted wood shapes near my work area because they come in handy for many reasons. Small wood shapes are available at craft stores, and you may have small pieces of wood already available in your house if you have a wood-working area in your basement or garage. Remember to also seal this piece of wood so that it doesn’t warp during the grouting process.

Open your tub of mastic (tile adhesive) and transfer a small amount of the adhesive from the tub into a small disposable plastic or Styrofoam container. You won't want to work directly out of the large tub, because the mastic will begin to dry out and this will affect the mastic’s adhesive abilities. The rule of thumb for mastic is this: If mastic dries to the point where there is a skin on the surface, the mastic should not be used. I find it easier to get a general idea of my design, and then to remove all of the shards from the frame before applying them to the frame with the mastic. This allows for a clean slate, and will also give you some creative leeway to create your design as you go along.
WANT TO GET STARTED? TRY ONE OF MY BEAUTIFUL KITS! PERFECT FOR GIFTS, AS WELL...
Attaching Shards:

Apply the shards to the frame by scooping a small amount of the mastic on a thin craft stick, and then “buttering” the back of the shard. Place the buttered shard on to the frame using light pressure and a slight twisting motion. Some of the mastic will squeeze out from under the shards—this is fine, as long as it doesn’t squeeze up too far, or over onto the tops of the shards. You will need to have room between the shards for the grout to fill in, during the grouting process.

You can also apply the mastic to the frame, and then press your shard into the mastic. This method is easier for me, but it’s messier, and requires cleaning between the shards with a toothpick before the mastic dries. A third method is to pick up you shard with tweezers, tip it in to the mastic, and then apply it to the base. The benefit of this method is that it’s not as messy, and there’s less risk of getting mastic on your fingers. Mastic in small amounts is not too hazardous, but it is a sticky, messy substance, and will dry your skin. Remember to avoid your penciled-in decoupage area.

I don’t recommend covering the side edges of the frame for this first project. After some practice, you can experiment with sides and edges, but I’ve found that for small projects it’s easier and just as attractive to paint the edges and the back of the frame with a complementary color.

Grouting your Mirror or Frame

NOTE: I have not yet been able to have a professional photographer in to take pictures during my grouting process, so grouting photos are basic pictures from several different projects, to give you an idea of the process. Grouting is the same, pretty much, from project to project, with some variation as far as covering edges of bowls, frames and projects. Whatever you are grouting, be sure to study the edges of the thing, to make sure spaces between the shards, and between the shards and the edges, are filled in with grout, but that excess grout the seeps down sides or inside boxes is cleared away.

Place your mirror or frame on plastic sheeting or garbage bags. For this project, start with one to two cups of dry grout, and add water by the tablespoon, stirring to mix with a sturdy metal fork, until it gets to be the consistency of thick mud or brownie mix. Your fork should stand up when stuck into the center of the bowl of grout. The amount of water needed varies from colors of grout, whether the grout is sanded or not, and mixing conditions at the time it’s being mixed. The dark, sanded mocha colored grout needs less water than bone-colored grout, white grout needs even less that bone and has a sticky consistency.

After mixing, let it sit (slake) for 5 minutes. If your mixture looks too thin at this point, add just a small amount more grout. One indication of too much water is the appearance of a thin shiny film of water on the top of the mixture.

Using your fork or a plastic spoon, plop a generous amount of grout onto your frame. Wearing your disposable rubber gloves, push the grout into the spaces between the shards. Your shards will be covered, too. You can do a small area at a time, or one-half or the whole top of the piece at once. Grout dries in about one hour, so you’ll want to work fairly fast, and hopefully without interruption.
Once you’ve covered the shards and pushed the grout in, remove your gloves and start wiping the grout off your shards with a dry paper towel or old washcloth. (I prefer Viva brand paper towels, but any sturdy paper towel will work). Don’t wipe too hard, or shards may come loose from the box surface. You should have your spray-bottle of water within easy reach, and use it to lightly mist the piece occasionally to slow down the drying process. When you’ve removed most of the grout from your frame, you can dampen your paper towels and wipe any left-over grout from the shards. Be sure to wipe away all grout from the penciled image area.

Let the piece set for a day or so. You can go back to it every so often and check it, wiping more grout off that you may have missed. The drying and curing process should be slow, several days is best.

When your mosaic is fully dry, apply your image to the area with a decoupage medium, such as Modge Podge or one of the many products available from the Golden Company. If you’ve decided to use a wood piece to lift up the image to the level of the shards, this is where you can glue the wood on to the mosaic. After you’ve applied your image, let it dry. Apply varnish at 2- to 3-hour intervals, until it has the finish you want.

Polish your mirror or frame with a vinegar/water mixture, and grind down sharp edges with a file or Dremmel. The sides of your piece can be painted or decoupaged.
Bowls and Bird Nest Bowls

WANT TO GET STARTED? TRY ONE OF MY BEAUTIFUL KITS! PERFECT FOR GIFTS, AS WELL...
Project B: Bowl

I prefer unfinished bowls such as those from the Hofcraft Company (see www.Hofcraft.com), which come in many sizes and prices. They have a wide rim, allowing for a mosaic border on the top, which makes an attractive piece. You can use old wooden bowls, but be sure to seal them well. I’ve had problems with these bowls in the past, because if they are not sealed properly, moisture that resides inside of the bowl (from salad oils used in the past, sometimes) can cause problems with adhesion.

How to start on the inside of your bowl

Note: This lesson is for a basic bowl with no bird, flower or other object attached to the top of the bowl. Instructions for that project follow this section. To begin my bowls, I like to place a small round object, such as a small coin, jewelry piece, or bead, in the very bottom of the bowl. If the piece is perfectly round, such as a marble or pearl, I glue it down with high-strength epoxy. Mastic doesn’t always work well for round objects, especially if they are metallic.

Cutting shards to fit the curved bowl surface:

Cut your shards into pieces, this time concentrating on how your shards will look best in a circular piece. I often use longer, thinner shards for bowls, and I especially love the look of long, angular pieces. You might be tempted to use pieces from other bowls, glued in to fit the curve of the bowl. Try gluing curved pieces in with the rounded part facing out, as well, so that they curve up. This adds a beautiful texture to the piece, and makes it look like more of a folk-art piece, rather than a perfectly level mosaic item.

Attaching shards to your bowls with mastic

You can butter each shard with mastic, and attach it to the bowl using slight pressure and a twisting motion. Mastic will squeeze out under the shards, but you can clear this away with a toothpick, or leave it if it’s not squeezing up so far as to interfere with the grouting process, or getting on the tops of your shards. Generally, I work from the center-bottom of the bowl up, but this is not a rule. Space your shards no farther than ¼ inch from each other; rounded surfaces such as bowls are especially prone to cracks when dry.

Once you have all of your shards glued to the bowl, let it sit for at LEAST 24 hours before grouting.

Attaching a bird or other sculptural element to the ledge of your bowl

It’s best to practice a few simple bowls before moving on to this step, so that you can get a feel for the shape. Attaching a bird, flower or other object to the bowl almost requires that you use a wide-edged bowl such as the ones from Holtcraft Crafts, although there is a work-around if you want to use a different bowl.

The bowl I made for the Country Home Magazine feature was actually a chalkware figurine. Once the orders started coming in for those bowls, I had to improvise: Finding no more chalkware birds anywhere at any price, I made them from Scupty clay. I could have used glass bird figurines, which are plentiful and beautiful, but my customers...
wanted a bird similar or exactly like the one in the magazine. Sculpy is a fairly easy substance to work with; you can find it in any craft store.

**Outside First**

If you plan to attach a bird or flower to your bowl, it's best to shard the OUTSIDE of the bowl first.

**How to decide what type of object to use for the top of a bowl**

Many old jars and powder containers have small birds attached to them, and small bird figurines are plentiful at flea markets. These birds can be separated from their base fairly easily, by cutting up from the bottom hole of a figuring, or cutting around the edge of a jar-lid until you can get the bird removed.

Attach the bird to your ledge by applying mastic to the edge, inserting the bird with light pressure and a twisting motion, and then surrounding the bird with shards, pressing the shards into the mastic that has squeezed out under the bird or flower. If you don't have a wide-rimmed bowl, stick extra-thick shards to the inside of the bowl near a small part of the top edge of the bowl, creating a wider ledge area for your object. Let these “support” shards set for a day or two before installing your object on top of them.

**B4: Attaching shards to the outside of the bowl**

You can shard the outside of the bowl, but be sure to leave enough room at the bottom so that the shards don’t interfere with how the bowl will sit on a flat surface (I usually sit the bowl upright, and then draw a pencil line around the outside, near the bottom, at a point that’s a safe distance from the bottom).

I usually place my bowl on a rolled up terry towel to make it easier to cover on the outside,

If you don’t want to tackle the bottom on this project, paint it with a color that corresponds with the shards.
WANT TO GET STARTED? TRY ONE OF MY BEAUTIFUL KITS! PERFECT FOR GIFTS, AS WELL...
Project 3: Garden Art Shovel

This is a fun project that is easy and can provide dramatic results. For this project, we won’t be covering the handle, it can be enhanced by using a clear varnish or glaze on the wood part, or even painting it with a corresponding color from the sharded part of the shovel.

I like to use antique shovels; in the Midwest it’s common to find them for $2 to $5 in old antique shops. If you can’t find one of these, or if you want to start with a smaller shovel, purchase a “utility” shovel from the gardening section of any outdoor gardening store.
Clean the metal part of the shovel well to remove any loose dirt or rust. Mix up concrete mortar with water to the consistency of thick mud – it doesn’t have to be as thick as grout, the picture gives you a better idea of consistency. I usually add a little paint to the mortar, any kind of craft paint will do, because I use a lot of mortar to glue my shard on. When the mortar squeezes up between the shards, you don’t have to worry because with the mortar colored, it won’t show up very much after it is grouted: the two substances will blend in both color and texture.

Mortar dries very quickly, within minutes in some cases, so just mix small amounts at a time. If you’ve found and mastered the cutting of a Capodimonte flower as in the chapter about cutting shards, this is an excellent place to use one of those. Other found objects can be added to the shovel: Coins, small rusty tools, typewriter keys, jewelry pieces, mirror pieces, even beads and pearls can be used. Round objects stick with mortar better then they do with mastic, but if you do have problems with these falling off when the grout is dry, just glue them back in with epoxy, right in the place where they came un-stuck.

Let shovel sit for at least 12 hours, and then grout.

Below: Gluing
Below: Grouting
Cigar Box

I use cigar boxes exclusively for my boxes: I love their shape and size, they're plentiful, inexpensive, and very functional.

Preparing your box:

Place a 2-sheet piece of paper toweling inside box, as pictured above, so that the edges stick out from the opening of the box. This will prevent you from getting adhesive and shards too close to the edge, which would hinder the opening and closing of the box lid.

Note: You don’t have to lay your pattern out as it is here. You can design it however you’d like, even using a combination of your rim pieces with other objects. Lay out the edge pieces and flower on your box top according to your liking, to get an idea of your design. Don’t plan the whole rest of the top out in too minute detail, though, you’ll want to have some flexibility as you go along, like putting together a puzzle. You can fill in spaces in between these rim pieces with the tiny tile and flat-backed marbles if you’d like. You can plan the rest of your design, the surface between your border and the flower, as you go. Note: Your flower will be chipped or cracked when you get it…this is appropriate for this project, and in fact this is how I order these flowers.

To cut the shards into the size and shape you want, place a shard in a plastic baggie and twist it shut. With your nippers, and wearing your goggles, cut the edge of the piece until it breaks. You should go into the shard piece just halfway into the nippers, as shown. Pull the pieces out of the bag and toss the small crumbs of shards. I can’t stress enough the importance of not going too far in with the nippers, if you go in too far, it will be a struggle, especially if, like me, you have any arthritic-type condition in your hands.

To begin the gluing: first grab a big glob of the mastic and plop it onto the top of the box for the flower. The glob should be about the size of a golf ball. Take the flower and set it into the glob of mastic, twisting it slightly while pushing down gently, to set the piece. Don’t press down too hard…just to the point where you feel the flower piece make contact with the box.
6. Mastic will squish out from under and around the flower base. Press small shards into this oozing substance in order to support the flower. Try not to get the mastic on the tops of the shards, and wipe your fingers off often on a rag or paper toweling. The mastic is messy and sticky; you’ll constantly be wiping it off your fingers. I always surround my work space with paper towels, old rags, or tissues, because it is so sticky. Try not to get the mastic or grout on your clothing, it’s difficult to remove.

Note: mastic is a sticky, messy, annoying substance, but nothing beats it for this particular project. Drying time is 24 to 48 hours, so you’ll have plenty of time to work on and perfect your design. But remember, this particular type of mosaic is supposed to have a cruder, not-so-neat type of look to it.

For the rim pieces, you can “butter” each piece and place it around the edge of the top. Or, you can spread the mastic on the edge, and then press the rim pieces on to that. Try it both ways, and see which way works best for you. Add additional pieces such as the tiny tile to fill in the edge if needed. (you can even nip the tiny tile in half, for a smaller, lacier effect). For mastic that squeezes out from under these shards, you should try to remove most of it with a stick or toothpick. You'll want to have room for the grout to sink in around the shards when you reach that phase. However, if some mastic remains between a few of the shards, it will be o.k. because the mastic will blend with the grout, which is why I’ve colored the mastic. To cut the rim pieces to smaller widths, cut in on the finished edge.

Finish the rest of the top of the box by buttering the pieces of shards, or spreading it on and pressing the shards into that. You can press thicker shards all the way down and the press the thinner shards just a little bit, so that the pieces are fairly level no matter what their thickness. Most of the sharp edges will be covered with the grout, but if any are sticking up too much, you’ll have to file or grind them down later (I use a dremel). Press your other trinkets in among the shards. Shards should be no more than ¼ apart, but there should be enough room for the grout to sink in between the pieces when you pour it on later. I prefer to have the shards as close together as possible, but that’s a matter of personal taste and style. Also, experiment with different shapes of shards. Cutting them with nippers will be difficult at first, but with practice, it will be like cutting paper with scissors. Nipping the shards into pieces is my favorite part of the process.

Once everything’s glued down, the box will need to set for 24 hours, at least, and I usually wait 48 hours, just to be on the safe side. While you wait, whenever you pass by your box, you can clean out any left-over oozed-out mastic with a tooth pick. If you can’t get it all out, don’t worry, it’s tinted for this very reason---so that after you remove your grout, if any of this is sticking out, it will blend in better.

If you want, you can decorate the sides of the box, but be sure to steer clear of the top and bottom of the box, to prevent problems with the operation of the box. It’s best to wait several hours, or even a day, before turning the box to the next side, so that the shards will have time to stick well. You can also paint or decoupage the sides, and in fact the inside of the box, later if you’d prefer. It’s easier, and can be quite dramatic. After it’s all set:
Note: never let any grout go down any drain in your house, or you will ruin your pipes. Also, grout dust can be harmful to the respiratory system, wear face-mask while mixing.

Remove several spoons-full of grout and reserve for later use. Add water to the grout, a little at a time, and stir, continuing to add until the grout reaches the consistence of thick mud. I can’t emphasize enough the importance of not getting your grout too runny. If it does get too thin, add some of your reserved grout into the mix to thicken it up. If you do get it too runny, and run out of grout, run to any hardware store and pick up a carton or bag of unsanded grout. I actually use a mixture of sanded and unsanded grout, but unless you’re going to make more mosaics, it would be kind of wasteful to get a bag of each.

You'll have about one hour to grout this piece. Place grout on top of box. Avoid the top of the flower piece, it's hard to wipe grout out of the tops of these flower pieces, but do grout well around the base of the flower. Use your gloves and press the grout down into the spaces between the shards. It will look messy at this point, but don’t worry. Let the grout sit for a couple of minutes. Then, using paper towels, wipe the grout from the top, exposing your shards. Spray with a spray-bottle of water to keep moist, if it’s taking you a long time to wipe back the grout. I use lots of paper towels to do this, but others scrape back with a craft stick, or an old terry cloth towel. Do not put your old grout-covered rags in the washing machine, it’s best to just throw them away. This is a time-consuming and tedious process. Try to get as much grout off while it’s wet, once it’s completely dry, after a day or so, it will be more difficult to remove…you’ll have to chip it off with a nail. The picture below shows me grouting a picture frame, but the technique’s the same: Pour it on, press it in, and wipe it off!

Go on to the sides, if you’ve glued shards on to them, making sure to remove grout from the top and bottom edges.

When you’ve gotten it pretty well cleaned up, loosely drape the piece with a plastic garbage bag, in order to slow down the drying time. It will be dry within a few hours; you can check on it and remove any left-over grout from the shard and trinket pieces with small paper towel pieces or a tooth-pick. It doesn’t have to be perfect...lots of times I know I’ve left shards covered with grout because I’ve lost track of them under the grout. And I also like to have a little of a “buried treasure” look to my shards and trinkets, so don’t mind if there’s a little grout left on some of the pieces, especially the textured ones.

Remember again that this technique is supposed to look a little rougher than the usual mosaic pieces we see more often in gift shops and from mass-production lines. Think of the way a grotto looks…this is the effect you’re trying to get.

After it’s pretty well dried, dampen the washcloth with water mixed with a little vinegar, and shine it up. Windex wipes work well, too!
Cover the top lid of the box with shards. You can continue covering the sides of the box, after the top pieces have dried, or leave the sides and paint or decoupage after grouting.

Use different shades of grout for a very different look for your pieces.
Mosaic Table

Small tables can be purchased from thrift stores or flea markets for just a few dollars. For outdoor tables, metal is preferred, because wood has a tendency to expand and contract with weather conditions. If you choose metal, make sure that it is sturdy, and that there is no flexibility in the table top. Some metal tables have a glass top insert, one of those would work well for this project.

I don't have as many step-by-step photos for this lesson, but I think by now you’ve probably gotten the gist of it: Break dishes, glue to base in a design that's appealing to your eyes, let dry, and grout!

I always use wood tables because they're so easy to find. They are ALWAYS at thrift shops and garage sales, and friends often drop them off on my front porch if they see or have one that looks like it could be cool for one of my projects.

My first step is to seal the top, both on top and on the underside, with a mixture of one part wood glue and 4 parts water. For bigger projects such as this, it's always better to be safe than sorry. I'm big on over-kill in the sealing of tables, because if there is any warping from moisture, I will have wasted much more time and energy than with a smaller project. Remember that wood also contracts and expands with extreme temperatures, so consider this a table that could be outdoors, but not left out during the winter or in other harsh climate conditions.

This is a thicker mixture than other mosaic instructions call for, and a ratio that I have found to be quite successful. I let this sealing treatment cure for 24 hours.
Why a cross-legged table? It's so easy to jam a pretty Capodimonte flower into the cross-section, as in the photo. A huge glob of mastic, spooned into the small space, and then set the flower into the mixture. Look sloppy? GOOD! Remember, we're trying for a more "grotto" look here.

Gather your shards, and think about your design. Plate rims, tile, or tiny-tile from Mosaic Basics make a good border for a table top, you don't want sharp edges on the outside of the top. You can grind down sharp edges with a dremmel, but since I'm lazy, I prefer to avoid that step by using edging pieces.

Cut your shards into manageable pieces, following the cutting instructions above. The best size for table tops is one to two inches, but this is not a strict, hard-fast rule. Vary the sizes of your shards for a unique, interesting design, rather than a mass-produced table such as the kind found in garden stores and import shops.

I like to use the green leaf tiles from Mosaic Basics on the borders of my tables, and here, I've also used "tiny tiles" from the same fabulous supplier.

Find some other objects to mix with your design: Coins, flat jewels, buttons, and flattened silverware are a few ideas. The incorporation of found objects is what sets Pique Assiette mosaic its unique appearance.

I usually start from the center of the table and work out, but jump to creating the border before I get too far out from the center. Then, I go in and fill in the rest of the top.

You can butter each shard with mastic and apply to the table top, or, as I prefer, cover a small section of table top with mastic and press the shards into that. The mastic should be thick enough for a little mastic to squeeze out from under the shards, but not so much that the mastic seeps up and over the tops of the shards. You do want some space between the shards, enough for grout to seep in between the shards during the grouting process. Clear out mastic between shards with a toothpick if your crevices are too full of mastic. Try to do that fairly soon, before it's dried for more than a day, because the longer you wait, the harder it will be to get the mastic cleaned up.
Remember that since this is a table, it will need to be fairly level. But not perfectly level! We don't want anything to be "perfect" in our pique asseitte mosaics. If that's what we wanted, we could just purchase a ready-made, mass-produced table from a chain garden or craft store! (Can you tell that I don't like mass-produced mosaic tables???)

So how do we do this, create a level table-top when we have an assortment of shards of varying thickness. That's the beauty of using mastic (tile adhesive) as our adhesive. You will adjust the amount of mastic according to shard thickness: more mastic for thin shards, less for thick shards.

The blue table here was one of my all-time favorites. The table edge was very thick so I tiled the outer border. I love the old blue paint, so I varnished over that (not a necessary step, but I'm a varnish and shellac nut). Of course I junked up the bottom there, with flowers from a broken Capodimonte centerpiece.

**Once your shards are glued down, let the table set for at least 48 hours.**

I usually wait a week or two, but I remember when I first started, it was more important to me to get my fun table finished! So go ahead, 48 hours should be sufficient curing time in most climates. The main hazard of not letting it cure long enough is in increased chance of grout-line cracking, which can be patched up later in most cases.

Prepare grout as described in the grouting section, and be sure to let the mixture set (slake) for 5 minutes. If at all possible, try to grout your table outside, because it can get pretty messy. If your table is very small, you can pour grout over the top and spread out towards the sides, doing the whole table top at once. If it’s larger, do small areas at a time. You can use a damp towel for this, be sure to have a bucket of water handy to rinse your towel, don't forget the all-important rule of never washing grout down a drain.

Be sure to get any grout wiped from the sides of the table top.

Finish the process by wiping the top with an old washcloth dampened with a vinegar and water mixture. File down sharp edges with a Dremmel or metal file. Let cure for at least 48 hours before using. You can seal the table top with grout sealant, but this is not absolutely necessary.

Recently, I completed a large table top the courtyard of a bed and breakfast in Charleston, South Carolina. The table was fabricated of stainless, and then shipped to me. It was basically a large circle with a lip around the outside edge, which extended up ¼ inch, in order to provide the depth needed to set in the shards. The designer wanted flowers in the center, but wanted the outer services to be level enough to be able to set plates and drinks.

I set up my artist tent outdoors for this project, and purchased special mortar and admix from a local tile distributor. When finished, it weighed 250 pounds, and cost over $500 to have crated and shipped back to South Carolina. It was a hit, and now this summer I will be working on a matching table for the same place, a square, this time.
WANT TO GET STARTED? TRY ONE OF MY BEAUTIFUL KITS! PERFECT FOR GIFTS, AS WELL...
Jewelry

Use wood shapes from your local craft store for these interesting pins and pendants. Spray paint the backs first, you can seal them first with a mixture of wood glue and water, as on the mirror project, but I found that unnecessary as time went on – they just did not seem prone to warping. I use regular glue for these, and used pre-made “findings” at the top. You will need to also purchase “jump rings” to thread through this hook, to slip your chain or ribbon through. Pin-backs are also easy to find and inexpensive, just glue them on to the back, towards the top of the piece to that the pin lays correctly when worn. I usually used old chain to rim the piece with, and then glued tiny, nearly egg-shell think pieces of shard on the base. You may find it difficult to get purchase of the shard with your nippers, with the shard pieces being so tiny, my work-around for this was to wrap paper toweling around it and then nip.
Thanks for purchasing my guide. Please feel free to e-mail me at melissamiller8@msn.com if you have any questions, although it sometimes takes me a few days to respond to questions.

Melissa Miller

April 12, 2017