

Taking the Complexity Out of Complex Caning

(or, “Feel the Fear & Clay It Anyway!”)

By Lisa Pavelka

One of the most attractive canes is a “Kaleidoscope” or “Complex Cane.” Like the name implies, this type of cane is a geometric repeat pattern. These striking canes can be created a number of different ways. While there are a variety of techniques for producing complex canes, many require days or hours to assemble. One of the more inviting aspects of polymer clay is its promise of instant gratification. You can produce a great looking cane in minutes with little or no polymer clay experience. Once learned, this technique and the easy methods for creating variations can be made by simply experimenting.

Materials:

(1 version) Fimo Soft clay in Black, White, Fluorescent Green, Lemon Yellow, and Brilliant Blue
Poly Bonder Glue
Clay dedicated pasta machine
Acrylic rod
Polymer clay blade
Craft Knife
Needle tool (or toothpick)
Deli sheets (parchment paper or waxed paper may also be used)
Ruler
Smooth ceramic tile work/baking surface

Step 1. Condition all clay by kneading for a minute or two or running it through the pasta machine several times until smooth and pliable. Start with the lightest color, working your way through to the darkest. After the clay is conditioned, roll out 3” long log of blue (5/8” in diameter), green (1/2” diameter), and white clay (3/8” diameter).

Step 2. Create “Bull’s Eye” canes by wrapping each log in a single layer of clay rolled through the 4th or 5th largest setting of the pasta machine: wrap blue with yellow clay, green with blue clay and white with black clay. To heal the seam, gently roll each wrapped snake over the work tile with the palm of your hand.

Step 3. Stack the bull’s eye canes in a triangular fashion, placing the smallest (white and black cane along the top. Compress the entire length of the combined canes gently with your fingers to further define the triangle shape.

Step 4. Reduce and elongate the triangle by pinching along the length of each edge. Rotate the clay often as you do this, gently pulling to stretch and lengthen the cane. Continue until the cane is 6” long. Cut off the distorted ends with the clay blade and cut the cane in half.

Step 5. Flip one half and press the two pieces together, matching the pattern along any side you choose to create a mirrored pattern. The cane that will now be diamond shaped. Keep in mind that each of the three possible ways to match you cane halves will produce a completely different pattern. You may wish to rotate the cane halves before you match them up to select the mirrored pattern you like best.

Step 6. Smoosh the edges of your diamond shaped cane between your fingers to reshape the entire length into a square shape. Once the basic shape is formed, you can use the acrylic rod to refine the shape of the square and sharpen the edges.

Step 7. Cut off the distorted ends of the square cane and cut the trimmed cane into fourths using the ruler to measure these sections equally. Assemble the four cane sections to create a new square cane. These sections should also mirror each other along the inside edges. As in Step 5, the way you choose to position the design will determine the finished look of your cane.

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