



Reclaimed Vase

MAKE A PAPIER-MÂCHÉ VESSEL OUT OF AN OLD PLASTIC CONTAINER.

BY NATALIE FRIEDMAN



While back I started noticing how many plastic containers I had in my life. And while many are recyclable, I thought there had to be some cool way of reusing these things too.

I made my first vessels from tennis ball cans — they're the perfect size for storing long paintbrushes. Since then I've used yogurt containers, laundry detergent bottles, pill bottles,

and food containers. It has completely changed the way I look at my recycling. Who knows, my next artistic masterpiece may be in there.

When not tending to her two most exciting projects, Max (8) and Helen (2 $\frac{3}{4}$), Natalie Friedman spends her time painting, sewing, drawing, and of course making all manner of papier-mâché items at her home in Oakland, Calif.

Photograph by Sam Murphy



» MATERIALS

» **Container** For this project I used a big laundry detergent bottle.

» **Newspapers**

» **Mixing bowl**

» **Flour, water, and salt for mâché paste**

You can also use white craft glue or wood glue and water. Alternately, you can use wallpaper or wheat paste.

» **Acrylic matte varnish, or gesso and acrylic paint** to decorate the vessel

1. PREPARE A CONTAINER.

Find a nice plastic container. Clean it and let it dry.

2. PREPARE NEWSPAPER STRIPS.

Rip sections of newspaper into strips approximately ½"–1" wide by 3"–5" long. You'll need a lot of strips. I usually rip a whole newspaper so I don't run out.

3. MIX MÂCHÉ PASTE.

In a bowl, mix your papier-mâché paste. The simplest recipe is 1 part flour to 2 parts water with a few tablespoons of salt to prevent mold. The consistency you want is that of thick pancake batter. Add more water or flour as necessary (Figure C).

Another simple recipe is to dilute white craft glue or wood glue with water. Use approximately 2 parts glue to 1 part water.

I also like to use wallpaper paste or wheat paste. Follow the directions on the box. These mixes usually have mold prevention in them, and I like to add a little craft glue to the mix.



E



F



G



H

4. COVER THE CONTAINER.

Dip a strip of newspaper into the paste to coat it, wiping off the excess with your fingers (Figure D, previous page). Starting at the top of your container, drape your strip over the top edge so that approximately 2" of the strip is on the inside of the container. Continue adding strips like this, all the way around the top edge of the container, overlapping the strips (Figure E).

Once you've covered the top rim, add more overlapping strips to cover the whole container, even the bottom. This is your first layer. I usually apply each layer either vertically or horizontally, so I can keep track of where I have already papered.

5. ADD SCULPTURAL DETAILS (optional).

You can wad up pieces of newspaper and press them onto the surface to add sculptural details (Figure F). Shape the wad as the wet paper becomes pulp-like and is easily manipulated. Paste some strips over the top of the wad to attach it to the container.

6. REINFORCE THE CONTAINER.

To make your container durable, you'll need to add

several layers of papier-mâché. Allow some time for the piece to dry between layers, although it doesn't need to be completely dry to start the next layer. I wait until a piece is slightly tacky to the touch, which can take between 1 hour and 1 day, depending on the weather. The more layers you add, the stronger the piece will be. I usually do 3–6 layers.

After the final layer, let the piece dry completely. This usually takes a couple of days, depending on the weather and how much wadded newspaper you've used to add detail (Figure G).

7. FINISH.

After you've added all the layers, you have some choices. You can apply a clear coat of acrylic matte varnish to keep it looking like rough newsprint papier-mâché. Or you can gesso the whole surface, paint it with acrylic paint, and varnish it (Figure H). I'm sure there are many other possibilities. ✕

NOTE: The papier-mâché surfaces are not waterproof. If you want to put water inside, make sure the water doesn't come above the papier-mâché on the inside rim.