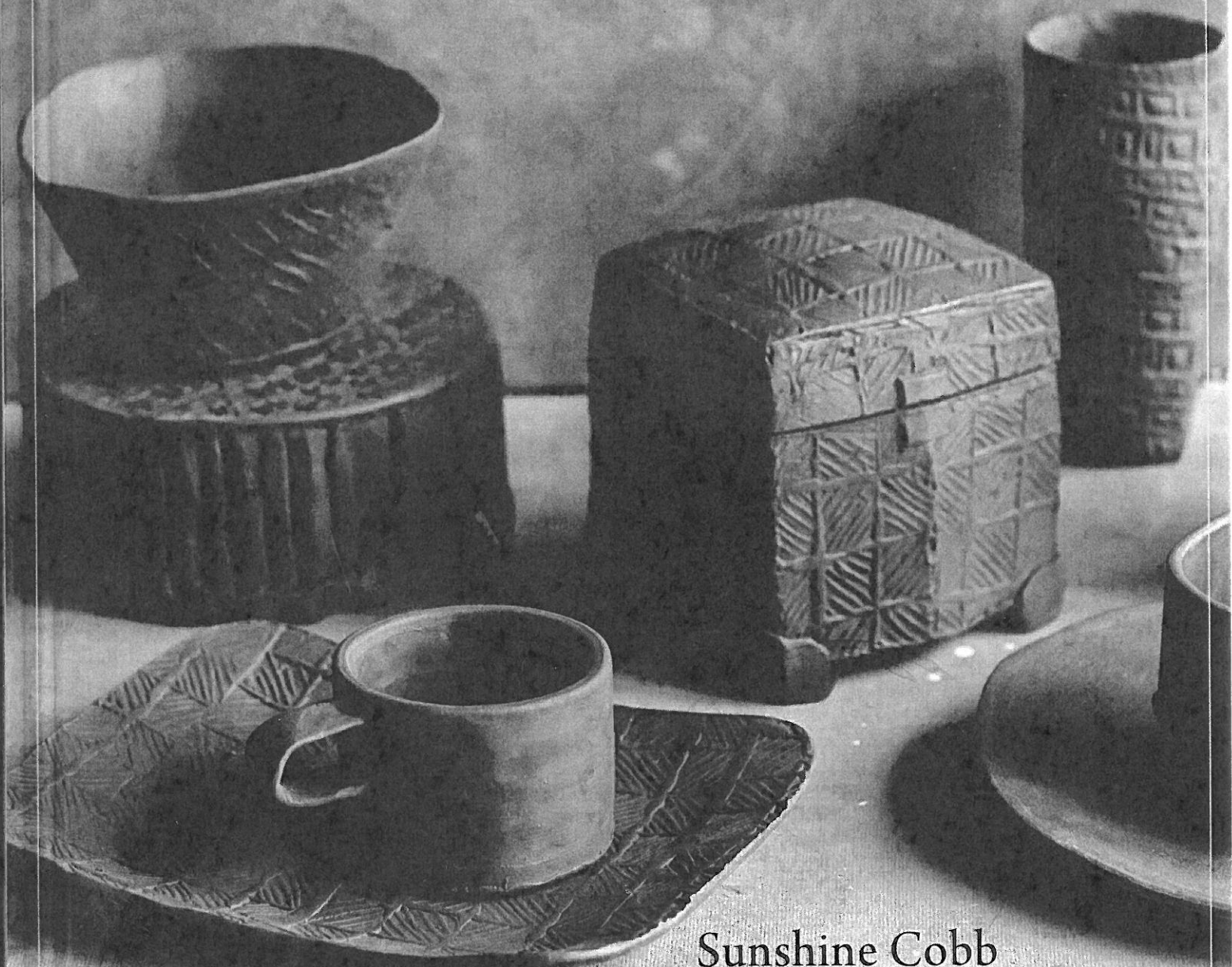


MASTERING HAND BUILDING

TECHNIQUES, TIPS, AND TRICKS FOR SLABS, COILS, AND MORE

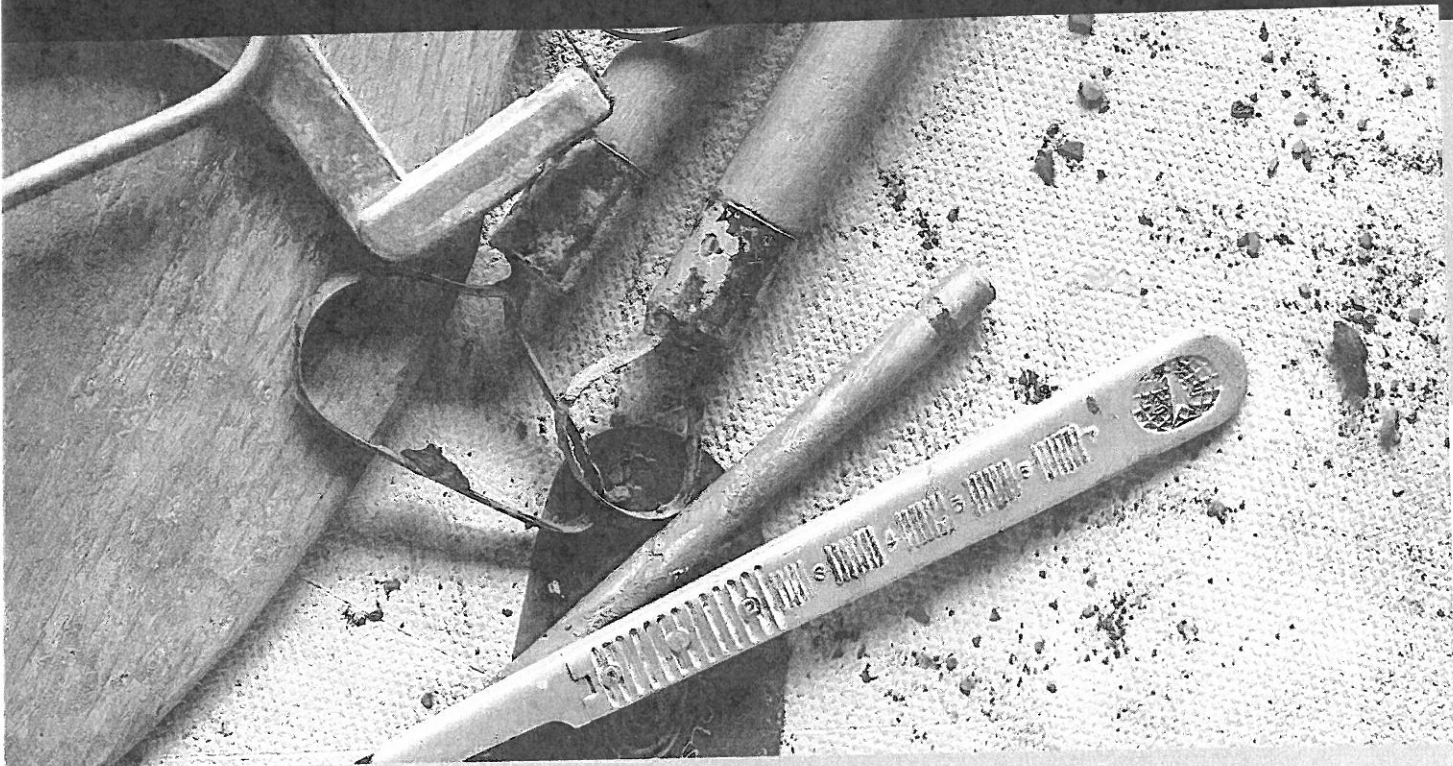


Sunshine Cobb
Foreword by Andrea Gill



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FEATURED ARTIST

Peter Christian Johnson

Computer Modeling

How did you get your start in clay?

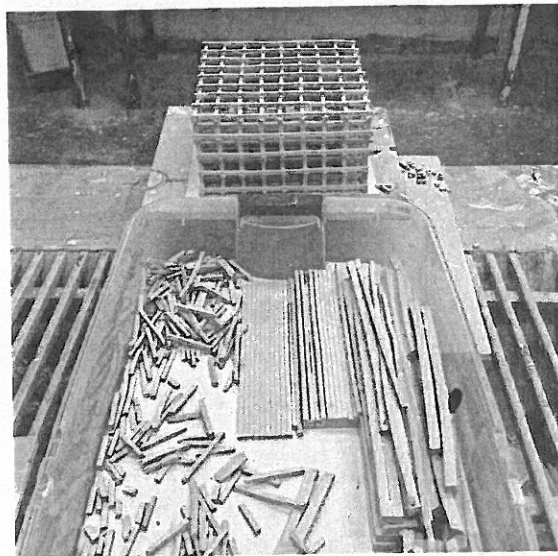
I was a science major who stumbled into art toward the end of my education. I was excited by the challenge of learning the wheel, and I was drawn to the quantifiable nature of skill development. Is it taller? Is it thinner? Is the curve better? Is the foot cleaner? This structure and focus on technique appealed to my science background and experience in construction. Of course I soon learned that skill development can get you only so far.

What types of objects are you drawn to making and why?

Over the last ten years I have focused more on architectural and industrial forms. The why is an important part and something I am constantly trying to better understand. One simple answer is that it is what I know. As a kid I wasn't interested in art any more than the average child, but I did watch my father build things with his hands, including our home. Eventually, in my early teens, I began working for his small construction company. The more complicated answer is that I am interested in industrial and architectural forms because they are clearly human endeavors or manmade objects. Therefore they have the ability to talk about the human experience or human potential. Through weathering, slumping, or collapsing these forms, I am then able to allude to our own finiteness, our failure, and, hopefully, ultimately the beauty in brokenness.

What is your process for developing a new piece? How much planning and staging is required and how do you use computer modeling?

I do a decent amount of planning these days. In the case of my recent body of work that references Gothic cathedrals, I spent a good amount of time finding historic blueprints, researching how the



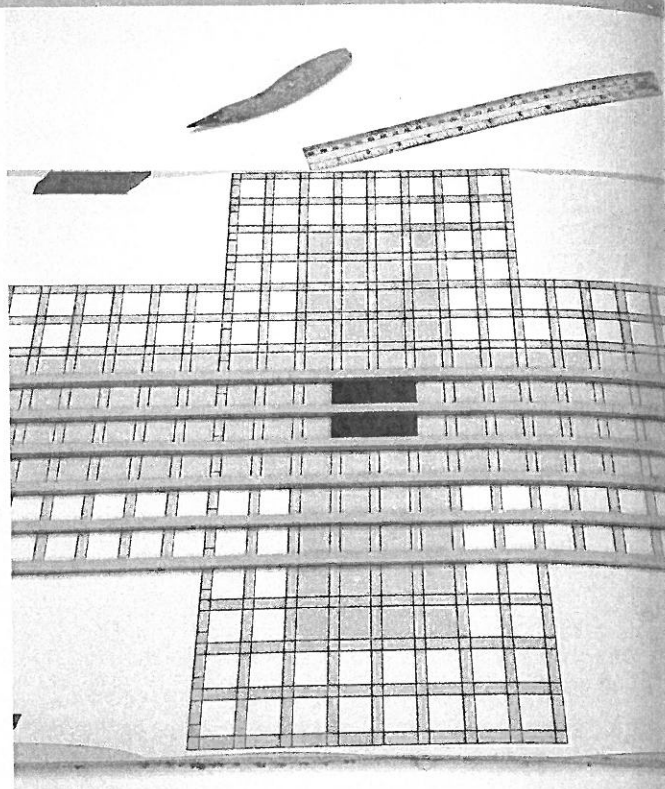
Extruded Parts Ready for Assembly. Peter Christian Johnson. I usually spend a full day extruding parts. I keep them in a plastic container with 1 inch of plaster that has been saturated with water, which keeps them leather hard for months.

original buildings were constructed, understanding the symbolism of each area within the building, and learning how many generations were required to complete the task of construction. I then used the computer to model abstracted versions of the cathedrals I was most drawn to, using the historic blueprints as a reference. It was important to me that I didn't create a miniature version of the original but, instead, created a sculpture that referenced its source. The computer-modeling process provides a number of advantages to my process. For one, it allows me to troubleshoot how I will actually build the sculpture. I try to model it on the computer in a way that approximates how I might build it in my studio, and usually this leads to exposing problems I need to solve in order to make it in clay. Second, the computer allows me to rotate the model in virtual space,

FEATURED ARTIST, PETER CHRISTIAN JOHNSON



Parts for Construction. Peter Christian Johnson. Small vertical sections; each piece is attached with a small amount of stick-up slip.



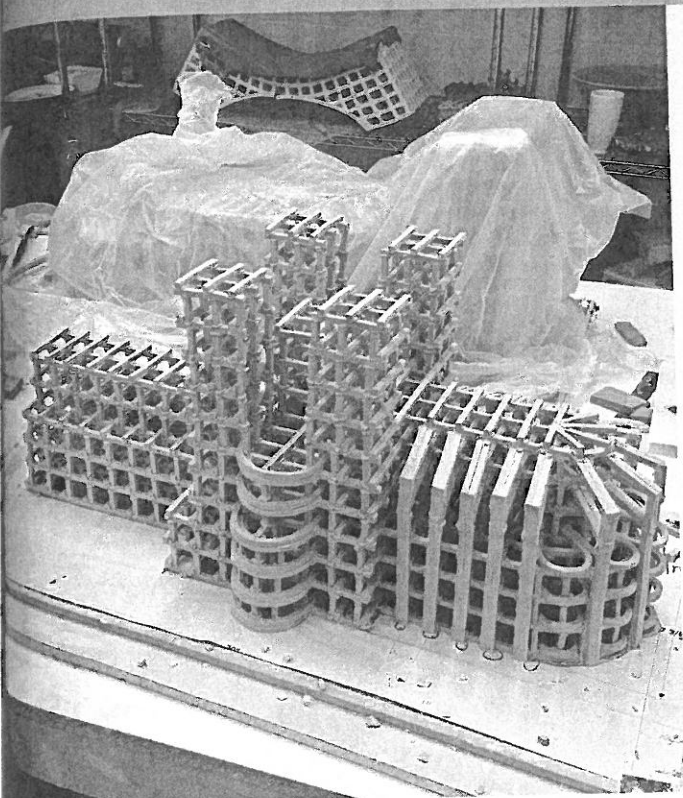
Using Blueprint to Build. Peter Christian Johnson. This illustrates how I build from the blueprint.

allowing me to better critique its formal properties, judging the sculpture's potential before I begin to build it. Last, it allows me to measure elements within my model and to print paper blueprints that aid in the construction process.

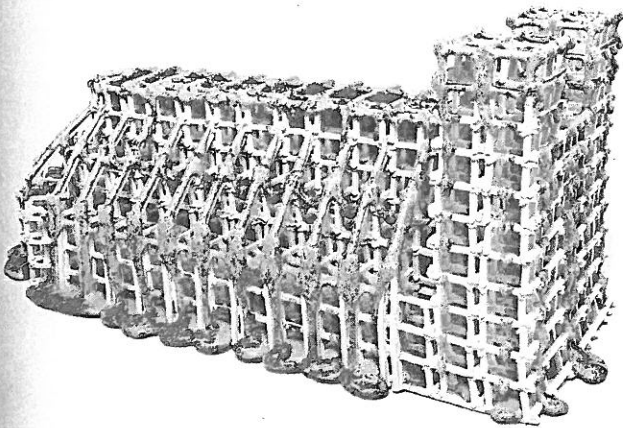
Could you address how you build your forms from many pieces?

I have been extruding the components of my sculptures and have made a number of dies to aid in the process. I was pretty skeptical about art made with an extruder and had to talk myself into using it. (In the 1990s pottery magazines were filled with bad extruded art.) In the end it

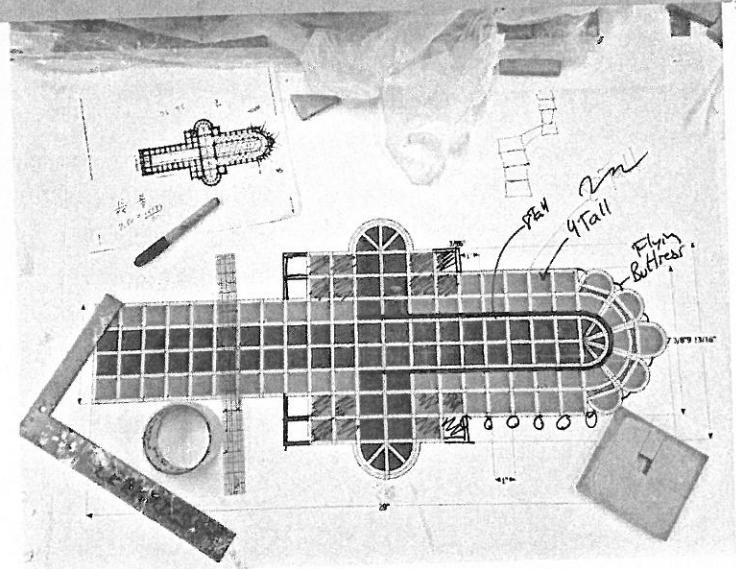
is just another tool that can be used in a variety of ways. As a general rule I think you don't want your audience to think about how the thing was made. If people look at particular work and think, "Oh, those parts are extruded," then you have created a distraction. I use an extruder because it is the fastest and most effective way to make the parts I need. My recent pieces are made of three thousand to four thousand pieces, and I can't think of another way of making the components more efficiently. But again, if you are thinking about the extruder when you are looking at my work, then I am probably doing something wrong.



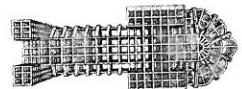
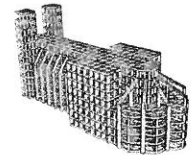
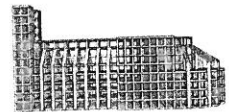
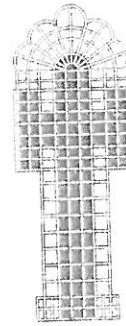
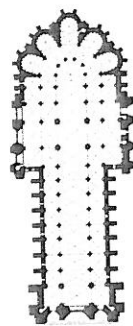
Leather Hard on Blueprint. Peter Christian Johnson. This illustrates building on blueprint. I create a blueprint from my computer model and use it as a map to lay my first few courses of extrusions.



Preludes, from *Poise* exhibition. Peter Christian Johnson. Extruded and assembled parts using blueprints from a 3-D model.



Preparing Blueprint. Peter Christian Johnson. This is the planning stage; before building I review the blueprint, looking for adjustments that may be necessary.



Reims Blueprint. Peter Christian Johnson. Laser-printed blueprint for exhibition. Sometimes I exhibit blueprints with the sculptures.