Contemporary Introduction to Wafer Paper Sculpting

Cherry Blossom

Materials
Equipment
Mold Basics
Airbrushing
Assembly

by Lisa Berczel
**introduction**

This installment of Wafer Paper Sculpting builds on the skills developed in the previous How-To: Contemporary Introduction to Wafer Paper Molding. The ultra light, fine details resulting from molding with wafer paper will take full advantage of the effort that goes into creating custom sculptures.

Wafer paper’s strength allows for the creating of free-standing tree branches that can support additional flowers and buds. Textures and finishes can be explored and added to provide visual variety.

Flowers and decorative elements can be made in advance and stored till ready to color and decorate. For this example, elements are painted and assembled on a faux ceramic fondant base.

**materials**

- Fondant
- Wafer Paper
- Edible Printer Sheets
- Dragees - *Plain*, *various sizes*
- Piping Gel *Clear*
- Edible Glitter - *White*
- Colored Cocoa Butter - *Eclipse Black*, *Chocolate Brown*, *Aureolin Yellow*
- Colorants: *Powdered*- Yellow. *Emulsion Gel*- Green

**equipment list**

- Hollyhock 5 petal flower Silicone Mould, 3” - *cupped half*
- Scissors, Plastic Tweezers, Water dish
- Cake Dummy - *Vinyl wrapped*
- Airbrush
- Paintbrush - *00 script liner*, *round*
- Sculpting: Aluminum Foil, Sculpting Clay, Clay Tools
- Silicone - *Fast Mold Cartridge Gun*

**Getting started**

This project requires sculpting and molding separate elements that must assemble in a cohesive manner. A sketch is used to plan the color, composition and assembly sequence. The artwork is created full-scale so that life-sized templates can be printed and used for reference.

**Armature**

The central structure of this project is a tree branch. Wafer paper will be built up papier-mâché style onto an aluminum foil armature that is sculpted on a styrofoam cake dummy. The dummy is first wrapped in vinyl and is re-usable.

To make the branch armature, tear, twist and crumpled bits of aluminum foil using the full-size print out of the mock-up to check scale and shape. Because wafer paper is being used, the armature can have limbs that extend away from the surface of the dummy. This provides perspective and depth to the design. While the base of the branch is thicker and has contact with the sides of the dummy, light and delicate branches can end in mid air and even cross over other branches.

Affix the aluminum foil branch onto the vinyl covered cake dummy with a hot glue gun. Glue does not have to come into contact with the wafer paper. The aluminum armature must be generously coated with vegetable oil in order to prevent sticking.
**sculpting the branch**

To mold the tree branch, wafer paper is torn into strips. Cut edges can show up as abrupt, straight lines on the final piece. Torn edges also reinforce the desired bark texture of the crumpled aluminum foil. Dip the wafer paper into water and quickly placed onto the armature. Place the strips going with the flow of the design. A damp brush can be used to press wafer paper into the texture of the armature. Overlap and build 3-4 layers for strength. The strips should wrap to the sides — but NOT behind the armature. The back of the armature must remain open in order to remove it from the final piece.

Once dry, the branch — armature and all — can be removed from the vinyl dummy. Carefully pull the armature out of the back of the wafer paper. The final result will be a hollow shell of wafer paper. It is not uncommon to have to destroy portions of the armature to successfully free the wafer paper. It can be easier and faster to create several branch segments and assemble them later on the cake.

*Refer to Wafer Paper Molding Part 1 for basics of wafer paper.*

**sculpting custom blossom mold**

Custom sculpted cherry blossom molds offer a way take full advantage of the unique properties of wafer paper. Petals are sculpted so that they overlap and have deep cut-backs. Vein details and center are exaggerated. The perimeter of the sculpting is left raw so that the final molded petal edge has increased variety and shape. Once satisfied with the clay flower, fill the sculpture with food-grade silicone. A Fast Mold System cartridge and tip is an ideal choice for small, detailed pieces such as this.

De-mold the silicone after the designated cure time. Cut off any extra flashing and begin molding. Individual petals should be used. This allows each petal to shrink against an individual mold petal as it dries. The final flower will be very natural looking.

**making buds**

Cherry buds are made using paper punched wafer paper and plain dragees. The cupped-half of a flower mold is perfect for cradling the buds as they dry. Wafer paper is dipped in water and placed at the base of a mold depression. After a dragee is placed on top, petals can be folded over the dragee to make partially open buds. Additional petals can be placed around the circumference. The water used to wet the wafer paper may partially melt the dragee. The resulting misshapen dragee is desirable as it mimics a natural irregularity of the bud rather than just a round dragee.

Different size buds are important to creating a sense of distance in the design. Vary the size of the dragees and the paper punch shape to have a selection of buds.

**coloring - airbrush**

Airbrush color onto the molded wafer paper to suit the design.

Flowers and buds can be left mostly natural white with just a blush of color strategically applied. Luster can be sparingly airbrushed for a satin center. The more luster, the more fantasy the blossom will have.

Fondant stamens can be glued into place using clear piping gel. Pollen is mimicked by dusting dry color onto matching colored cocoa butter tipped ends.

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The tree branch needs much more color applied in order to look realistic. Because the branch is a hollow shell, start by airbrushing brown on the inside. A film of vegetable oil will remain in the inside surface and color may bead, but the goal of painting the inside is to provide a color base, not detail. Airbrush the outside surface starting with a layer of solid brown. Angle the branch to the airbrush spray and “catch paint” on bottom of detail edges and shadow side of the branch using black.

*Refer to Wafer Paper Molding Part 1 for basic airbrush on wafer paper.*

coloring - hand-rubbed cocoa butter

Wipe the branch with a dry paper towel or cotton swab to remove excess airbrush color off of the highest surfaces. Alternately, hand rub chocolate brown and eclipse black cocoa butter into the deepest crevices of the wafer paper branch. Repeat the wiping and rubbing process till the desired branch color is achieved. If desired, rub cocoa powder or powdered spice onto the branch for a dry bark appearance.

assembly

Branch segments and can be “stitched” together using a patch of wafer paper. The patched pieces should be propped into the final desired position so that the shape is held once the patch is dry. Because of the residual vegetable oil on the inside of the branch shell, it is best to assemble from the outside surface. However, painted elements can be made patched from the inside even though the patch will not be as durable.

final touches

Cherry blossoms, buds and branches are assembled onto a faux cracked porcelain base. This glass-like finish is very shiny with inclusions that create depth and light refractions. Note that although the wafer paper elements are very stable, the glass finish does have a lifespan and will haze. Porcelain glaze finishes last approximately 2 days before noticeably dulling and eventually drying out.

Edible printer sheets are the base layer of the finish. Print a strong crack texture that harmonizes with the design. The printed sheet is fixed to a fondant covered cake using a very thin layer of piping gel or royal icing. If too much “glue” is used, it can soften the printed sheet which can subsequently slough off. Airbrush additional color gradients as necessary.

When the cake is ready for final assembly, spread a very thin layer of clear piping gel onto the printed design. Next, flock clear edible glitter onto the piping gel and let the tier sit till the piping gel has an opportunity to set up – approximately ½ hour.

The glitter can now be generously coated with another layer of clear piping gel. Use a wide spreader with long, even stroke. Avoid using too much pressure. The goal is to keep as much of the glitter intact as possible. Work from one direction so that small air voids are created behind glitter pieces. This creates the inclusions that catch the light and give depth to the effect.

Again, allow the piping gel to set. Now the wafer paper elements can be pressed into the gel with a minimum of settling.

Experiment with different colored glitter and tinted gels for a wide variety of finish options.