Unfired Clackmannanshire clay, straight from the ground, is marbled grey and brown with iron ochre. *Photo: Helen Gilmour.*

Black Scarva Earthstone, vermiculite on left, perlite on right. *Photo: Helen Gilmour.*

boulders or fragments of clay are pressed into the surface of her large vessels, just as they have been dug up, to the extent that you can see the line of the shovel and the naturally occurring strata of secondary iron ochre and white clay.

Byrne-Sutton describes her Clackmannanshire vessels as 'rural pots embedded with ferns, Scots pine, boulders of clay from a farm; an embedded biodiversity echoing a local human population with strong communal links.'

The Clyde River area near Glasgow is another of her favoured locations for collecting clay samples and this **strath** clay is a deeper red than Clackmannanshire clay, due to a higher percentage of iron oxide. Her Glasgow vessels are 'urban, painted with topsoil slip. They are pressed with "weeds" that have arrived on the wind, growing out of roadside crevices, opportunist, seeking out their chances like migrant city residents.'

All these elements represent the personality of the material and the place.

Process

Byrne-Sutton's forms start off in a plaster mould lined with Scarva black Earthstone clay. Sometimes she presses **vermiculite** into the clay before filling the mould, which helps the thick walls dry evenly and reduces the overall weight, an important consideration in large forms. She advises that care be taken with vermiculite, as it can cause the clay to blister. It should be pressed, rather than wedged, into the clay.

Vermiculite in the black Scarva gives a warm, toasty speckle to the ceramic body, which Byrne-Sutton says makes the black clay 'sing'. She then partially paints the interior of the form with white **slip**, before pressing in lumps of found clay. This allows the orange tones of the dug clay to stand out from the black base. Seasonal plants are pressed in and painted over with Clackmannanshire slip, dug from the ground. The slip will fire white or different shades of orange depending on which clay strata it was dug from. White slip is sometimes mixed with found clay to give a greater range of colour tones. Red iron oxide, manganese dioxide and copper wire all give different blacks

ABOVE LEFT: Fiona Byrne-Sutton building up the wall of the vessel: Pressing and not wedging vermiculite into the clay body avoids creating air pockets, helps the thick walls dry evenly and makes the bowl lighter after firing. *Photo: Helen Gilmour.*

ABOVE RIGHT: Surface decoration: boulders of marbled Clackmannanshire clay are inserted into black-firing Earthstone. The grey clay fires white while the iron ochre in the clay body reverts to red iron oxide when fired; the boulders show the sedimentation patterns of the clay in the ground. Vermiculite is rolled into the surface and the golden speckle makes the black clay come to life. Unlike perlite, it doesn't disappear during firing. *Photo: Richard Campbell.*

RIGHT: Surface decoration: seasonal plants are pressed in and painted over with Clackmannanshire slip. The slip will fire white, or different shades of orange, depending on the clay strata from which it has been dug. *Photo: Helen Gilmour.*