

# How to Paint Maiolica:

## An Abruzzi-style Foliage Border with Heraldic Lion



by Lady Dairine mor o' uHigin

Maiolica, or tin-glazed pottery, is a branch of ceramics that shifts the emphasis from the vessel to the surface decoration.

Glazing with opaque white made from tin was first developed near the end of the 10th century in Baghdad to imitate white porcelain from China. The Persian art of tin-glazing spread to other parts of the Muslim world as potters migrated during the next four centuries. Muslim potters in Spain exported tin-glazed ware to other parts of Europe through shipping ports in Majorca. The Italians were big consumers of these wares and called them Majolica or Maiolica after the Latin name for the island port.

Maiolica style pottery was the most popular kind of pottery in Italy for almost 400 years. It reached its zenith during the Italian Renaissance when classical artists began designing for the pottery trade. Regional styles emerged and some designs were even "copyrighted" to certain towns.

Here is an example of a design in a regional style. This foliage border is typical of the Abruzzi region of Italy which is on the east side of the peninsula facing the Adriatic sea, roughly parallel with Rome.

### Materials and Tools

All of these items can be purchase at ceramic shops or directly from the author.

To do this project you will need—

- ✂ 13" earthenware plate fired to bisque (cone 04 or 1945°F). Pictured Hobby Colorobia MHC0497
- ✂ A banding wheel, Amaco's #5 aluminum wheel costs around \$18 is good for beginners.
- ✂ Round brushes in #6, #2, and #0.
- ✂ Liner or striper brush size #4
- ✂ Fan brush #6

The recommended glazes are—

- ✂ Duncan Satin Opaque White Glaze (SN 352)
- ✂ Hobby Collorobia detailing black (FDG 500) and brown (FDG 500A)
- ✂ Duncan Envisions Navy (IN 1077), Sunset Red (IN 1004), Baroque Gold (IN 1072)
- ✂ Duncan Diamond Clear Glaze(GL 612)
- ✂ and my favorite glaze colorant, zaffer.

Zaffer is powdered cobalt oxide mixed with water and gum arabic. I buy cobalt oxide by weight at Mar-Jons. One quarter pound costs about \$10 and will last for literally hundreds of projects. I place about a half teaspoon in a small ceramic dish and add two drops of Windsor and Newton gum arabic and 4 to 8 drops of water. I mix it with a brush, adding more drops of water as needed to bring it to a smooth, shiny ink-like texture. It is very black in this raw state but it fires to a sapphire blue, hence the period name, "zaffer."

### Preparation

- Step 1. Start by dusting the bisque plate and dipping in water to dampen its surface. Paint on one generous coat of Duncan Satin opaque white with a #6 fan brush and let it dry for about 30 minutes. Put on a second coat and let it dry for an hour or two. Put on a third coat and let it dry overnight. "Sand" with a paper towel to make the surface smooth and free of drips and brush marks.
- Step 2. Put the plate on the banding wheel upside down and get it centered. Load a #4 striper brush with water for practice. Imagine that your brush is a needle and the plate is a phonograph record. Spin the plate and touch the tip of the brush to the surface drawing a circle on the plate in water. Do not move your hand while the plate is spinning. When you are confident that you can do it with color, load your brush with zaffer thinned to the consistency of ink and paint a few bands on the back. Now you are ready to start on the front. Take a deep breath and turn the plate over.

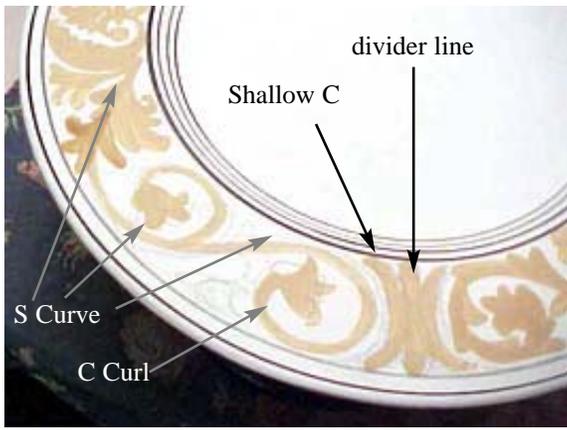


### Painting the Front

- Step 1: Band the plate with two narrow bands near the outer edge and three bands on the inner slope using zaffer. Lightly pencil a circle at the top and bottom of the border to indicate the location of the palmetto design. Paint the two outer palm branches around the palmetto with Baroque Gold.



- Step 2: Using generous amounts of Baroque Gold and a #4 or #6 round brush, paint a palmetto with curling lower leaves inside each circle of palm branches. With a little practice you can paint these without even using the pencil lines.



Step 3: Turn the plate so that the palmettos are at the 3 and 9 o'clock positions. Paint a "divider line" on each side of the border at noon and 6 o'clock. Paint a shallow "C" curve on each side of this divider line. Paint a long "S" curve from the bottom of the palm branch to the divider. This "S" will be the center line of the vine. Add "C" curls to the vine with little blossoms at the ends. Repeat in each quadrant.



Step 4: Paint fat "leaves" attached to the vine with a #6 round brush and fill in empty areas with unattached blossoms, leaves and berries.



Step 5: With a #0 brush and zaffer outline the fat leaves, blossoms, palmettos and dots. Its okay if some of the white shows inside the outlines.



Step 6: Paint in the background with detailing black using a #2 brush.



Step 7: Paint the middle ring in the slope yellow. Paint the other two rings on the slope Sunset Red. Paint the two outer rings on the border yellow and red.

Step 8: The background needs three coats of glaze or the dark color will look streaky. Here I am painting the second coat with Navy Blue instead of another coat of black so I can see exactly where I have painted. Step 9: Using detailing brown, model the leaves as you see fit. I like to outline each leaf and make the it darker at the bottom.



Step 10: Shade with Sunset Red on the yellow leaves to give them more modeling and to bring out the golden color. Lightly scratch out some highlights and clean up any small mistakes with a wooden toothpick. Add some "roping" (slanted lines) to the small red border closest to the center of the plate.



Step 11: Paint the third layer on the background using detailing black. Carefully outline each element since this is the most important coat of glaze on the background.



Step 12: Draw the heraldic lion in the center in pencil very lightly and paint it with a base coat of Baroque Gold. Model the lion with shading and crosshatching in brown. Finish by outlining him in black and strengthen the shadows under his leg, arm, mouth and eyes with black. Scratch out some highlights and added a grass hillock under his feet.



Step 13: Handle it carefully at this stage because the glaze easily can be rubbed off. Fire it to cone 06 in the kiln (1828°F). The pencil lines in the background will burn away.

Optional: To bring out all the depth of color and make it glossy, paint a single coat of Duncan Diamond Clear Glaze over the whole platter before firing it to cone 06. This takes guts because the Clear Glaze is opaque pink in its raw state and it turns clear in the kiln.



About the author:

Lady Dairine mor o' uHigin, born the daughter of an Irish pirate during the 15th century and was shipwrecked off the coast of Wales in her teens. After many adventures she settled down in southern France and opened a successful souvenir shop near an important shrine. The constant traffic of pilgrims and merchants brought her into contact with many of the greatest minds of the early Renaissance including those involved in maiolica, printing, and illumination.

Gael Stirlor is the owner of Chivalry Sports, which can be found on the web at <http://www.Renstore.com>. All of her lessons in maiolica, illumination and silk painting can be found at <http://Gutenbergscribes.com>.