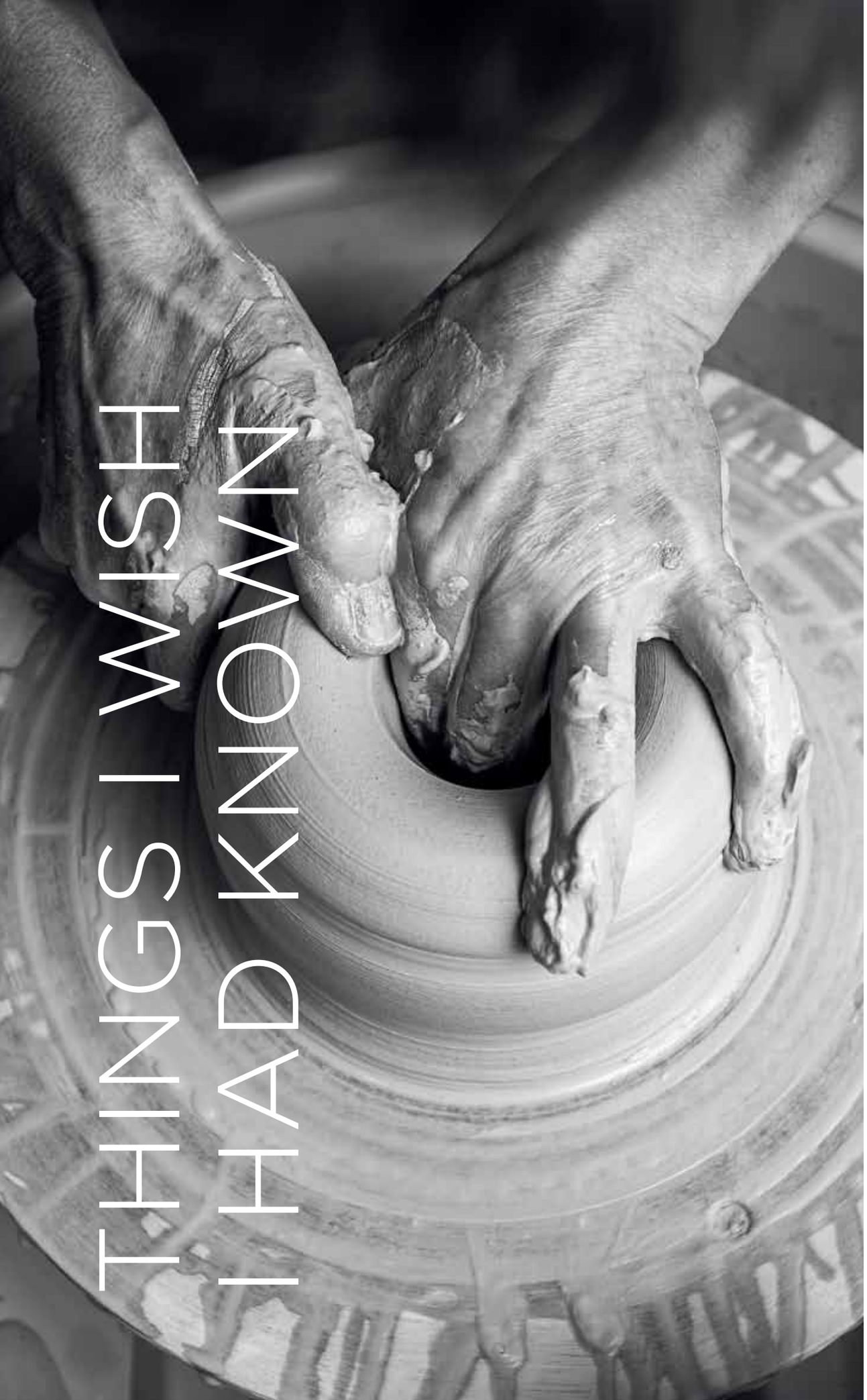

CHAPTER 8

There are so many things I wish I had known as a baby potter. At the top of that list would be understanding the toll that repetitive work takes on the body. Over the years I have had problems with my back, wrists and arms, though overall my body has held up fairly well considering how many tons of clay my hands have pulled up.

This is a very physical job, and for the beginning potter I cannot stress enough the importance of good body mechanics. Having a good physiotherapist can make a huge difference. I don't think I would be in nearly as good condition had I not done regular body work over the years and heeded the advice of my physio on how to improve my work habits.

WEDGING

Wedging is the single most important step in throwing a good pot. If your clay does not have a smooth, even consistency, you will struggle with it as you pull it up. If some areas are stiffer than others, your piece will likely become wonky. It is much more pleasant and satisfying to throw with clay that has the perfect consistency for you. However, purchased clay often has been in storage for some time, and it can be quite stiff when you first start wedging. If this is a problem, I recommend having a water bottle handy so you can spray your canvas-covered wedging table. Then, as you wedge, you can add a bit of moisture to help even the clay out. The height of your wedging table is also very important because you want to be able to rock back and forth with the wedging motion, using as much of your body weight as possible to help with the job. I am and my tabletop is just right at seventy-six centimetres (30 in) from the floor.

A production potter can go through tonnes of clay in a year, which means hours of wedging. I recommend saving up for a good