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Amazing little wheel I've been looking at getting this wheel for a long time. I started with the skutt 1/2hp and it's so heavy and not portable I wanted a fun wheel I could take places and teach my friends pottery or do art shows with. This wheel is strong and amazing quality for the price. And if you really wanted to you could add legs and make it a full wheel but it's comfortable just sitting on the floor to throw on it. I love this wheel and I am so glad I went through soul ceramics to get it, the customer service is great and they have the best prices for speedball wheels. April 11, 2024 In this article, we will take you through the basics of bisque firing, so you can successfully complete your first bisquefire. What is bisque firing?Ceramic piecestypically undergo two firings:1. Bisque Firing2. Glaze FiringBisque firing is the first firing, which converts bone-dry, fragile clay into a more durable and porous ceramic material. During bisque firing (also known as biscuit firing), the clay is heated at a controlled pace and is then allowed to cool slowly.The clay is then ready to be decorated with underglaze, glaze or other decorations, before it is fired again. Before we go on, we will clear up some of the common terminology relating to bisque firing:Bisque or Biscuit Firing: This is the initial firing process aimed at making ceramic ware robust enough for decorationCandling: A gentle heating technique where the kiln and its contents are warmed slightly above ambient temperature but kept below water's boiling point.Single Firing: Firing ceramic ware just once to achieve a finished product.Sintering: A process that strengthens a ceramic piece by heating it until its materials coalesce, through solid-phase reactions or melting, resulting in significant bonding without necessarily changing volume.Twice Firing: Involves initially firing the ceramic ware, then applying and firing glazes to achieve a completed or intermediate product. Bisque firing is a fundamental process in ceramics. It is essential to transform the initially fragile clay body into something more robust and porous. 1. Strengthening the Clay BodyThe initial transformation that occurs during bisque firing is the strengthening of the clay. By subjecting the clay to a controlled heating process, bisque firing hardens the material, making it more resilient to handling and further processing.This increased durability is essential for applying decorative elements, underglazes, and glazes without compromising the structural integrity of the piece.2. Creating a Porous SurfaceOne of the unique outcomes of bisque firing is the creation of a porous surface on the clay body. This is crucial for the glazing process, as it allows the clay to absorb glazes and underglazes better. The porosity allows the glaze to bond well to the surface, leading to a more uniform and stable finish after the final glaze firing.3. Eliminating Moisture and ImpuritiesBisque firing also removes residual moisture and organic impurities trapped within the clay. The controlled heating process allows moisture to evaporate gradually, preventing cracks and explosions that can occur if the clay is heated too rapidly. Additionally, bisque firing burns away organic materials and gases, ensuring that the clay is chemically stable and ready for glazing.5. Facilitating Safe Glaze ApplicationThe bisque firing process not only prepares the clay body for glazing but also makes the application of glazes safer and more efficient. The strength and porosity achieved through bisque firing allow for even glaze application, reducing the likelihood of glaze running or pooling during the final firing. This level of control is essential for achieving intricate designs and consistent finishes in ceramic art. Here are the steps that you need to take to ensure your bisque firing goes to plan! Dry Your Work Thoroughly: Before bisque firing, ensure that your ceramic pieces are completely dry. Any residual moisture can lead to cracks or explosions in the kiln. Allow pieces to air dry slowly and evenly to prevent warping or cracking.Inspect and Clean: Check each piece for any surface debris or imperfections. Gently clean the surfaces with a soft brush or sponge to remove dust that could affect the firing process.2. Load the KilnShelf Placement: Start by positioning the bottom shelf at least 1 inch above the kiln floor to enhance air circulation. Use kiln posts to achieve this spacing.Arrange Pieces Carefully: Place ceramics on the kiln shelves, ensuring they are not touching each other or the kiln walls. This spacing allows for even heat distribution and prevents damage. Remember to leave space between taller pieces and the top shelf or kiln lid to avoid any contact during firing.Optimize Loading: For efficiency and energy conservation, load the kiln as fully as possible without overcrowding. Proper airflow between pieces will allow uniform heating. Here, we will go through what temperatures you should fire your kiln to when bisque firing. The bisque fire temperature is a key aspect. Bisque Firing Temperature: The temperature range for bisque firing typically falls between cone 06 (around 999C) and cone 04 (about 1060C). This range is suitable for most types of clay, including earthenware and stoneware.Bisque Firing Temperature for Earthenware: Specifically for earthenware, aim for the lower end of the bisque firing range (cone 06). This temperature effectively removes water and organic material from the clay, making it porous and perfect for glazing.Bisque Firing Temperature for Stoneware: For stoneware, aim for a bisque firing temperature around cone 5 to 6, which translates to approximately 2167F to 2232F (1186C to 1222C). ...The Firing RampInitial Heating (Candling): Begin with a low-temperature preheat phase (candling) to ensure all remaining moisture is removed. This stage is particularly important for thicker pieces.Ramp Up Temperature Gradually: Increase the temperature slowly to prevent cracks or explosions. A general guideline is to start with a rate of 55-111C per hour until reaching 538C, then adjust according to the specific requirements of your clay body and kiln....Bisque Firing Pottery Tips1. Always ensure your pottery is completely dry before loading it into the kiln to prevent explosions.2. Place a cone pack inside your kiln to monitor the actual temperature and make adjustments as needed.3. Keep a log of your firings to refine your process over time, noting the specific schedule and outcomes for each batch.Reading a Bisque Firing ChartA bisque firing chart provides a visual guide to the temperatures and times needed for the firing process. It usually includes:Ramp Speed: How quickly the kiln should increase in temperature, usually expressed in degrees per hour.Target Temperature: The specific temperature you need to reach for your type of clay.Hold/Soak Time: The length of time the kiln stays at the target temperature to ensure even heat distribution throughout the pottery.There is probably information about the recommended firing schedule for your specific clay on the manufacturer or retailer's website.....As always, if you have any other questions pelase reach out to us at info@thepotterypeople.co.uk! We can design and build your dream garden pottery studio, exactly how you want it. Many clay and glaze faults in ceramic wares are caused by incomplete burnout (oxidation) of carbon and sulfur during the bisque firing. These faults are observed after a glaze firing, but the problems arise during the bisque firing. These initial problems can be attributed to a kiln operators lack of understanding about the chemistry that occurs during this first, critical firing.CarbonMany materials used in ceramics contain carbonaceous matter, including organic carbon and inorganic carbon from clays, whiting, dolomite, and talc. This carbon must be burned out (oxidized) during the bisque firing to ensure the best results possible in glaze firings. Bloating, black coring, pinholing, blistering, and poor color development are all the result of incomplete carbon burnout. To achieve the complete burnout of carbon, you need the following components: oxygen, time, and temperature.OxygenOxygen is the most critical component. Without sufficient oxygen in the kiln chamber, carbon in the clay will have difficulty forming carbon monoxide and dioxide gases that allow carbon to vacate the clay. If oxygen is in short supply, carbon will take oxygen from sources including red iron oxide (Fe_2O_3) that comes from ball clays, kaolins, fireclays, and particularly red clays. When carbon atoms strip oxygen atoms from red iron oxide (Fe_2O_3), the red iron oxide is converted into black iron oxide (FeO), which is a more powerful flux than the feldspars we add to clay bodies. The chemical equation representing the transformation from one form of iron to the other is: $Fe_2O_3 + C \rightarrow 4FeO + CO_2$. Starting at 1650F (899C), the walls of the wares become progressively sealed by the fluxing action of the black iron oxide. When this same clay is then fired for a second time in a glaze firing to maturation, the clay wall will be over-vitrified and soft from the fluxing action of the black iron oxide. Gases from carbon and sulfur that are trapped in the soft, sealed clay wall will expand to form pockets (bloating). In iron-bearing and black clay bodies, the bloats will be small to large pockets where gases have gathered together. In porcelain bodies, islands of trace iron exist that can form pimple-sized bumps in the clay wall.In low-fire ceramics, temperatures are not high enough for bloating or melting to occur, but the carbon can cause faults such as black coring, pinholes, blisters, and poor color development in glazes and underglazes.TimeProper carbon burnout requires time for the oxygen to penetrate the ware and form carbon monoxide and dioxide gas. Much thicker pieces, dense loads, and high-iron clays require substantially more firing time for proper oxidation of the carbon. Sometimes the carbon content of the ware can be much higher than normal due to changes in raw materials.Increased carbon content can cause problems that would not normally occur with established firing procedures that have been used for years, but now have to be planned for.TemperatureOrganic carbon burns out (oxidizes) from 300600F (149316C). Inorganic carbon from clays and ceramic materials burns out (oxidizes) from 12921652F (700900C). Sulfur in various forms will oxidize from 12922102F (7001150C).Kilns must be well vented throughout these temperature ranges, especially from 12921652F (700900C), and the firing should proceed slowly through this temperature range to allow oxygen time to oxidize all of the inorganic carbon and sulfur in the clay.Venting Electric KilnsJust because a kiln is powered by electric elements, doesnt mean that its oxidizing your wares during firing. There are too many carbon sources coming from clays and glazes. Oxygen must be supplied to the kiln through venting by one of two methods. One method is to install a kiln vent, which is the most effective way to introduce oxygen. The other method is to prop the lid open to inch and remove all of the spy hole plugs. Venting should be done from the start of the firing and continue until the inside of the kiln chamber has achieved 1700F (927C). A good prop for the lid is a 2-inch deep 12-inch wide 1-inch thick piece of ceramic fiber blanket. It will compress to inch. If placed on the rim of the kiln wall next to the control box, it will shield the control box from excessive heat. Be sure to not place the lid prop over the air gap between the kiln wall and the control box. This needs to be clear so cool air can flow upward (convection) between the kiln wall and controller. When 1700F (927C) is achieved, use a pair of leather gloves to carefully remove the lid prop and place it in a location where it will cause no bodily harm or become a fire hazard while it cools. Keep the lid closed for the remainder of the firing. The spy holes should remain open.Loading Electric KilnsIts your job to make it easy for this process to work. You should load the kiln in a manner that allows for enough space between the wares for the exchange of gases throughout the clay wall. Another consideration is the space between the kiln shelves. There needs to be enough shelf height above the wares to allow the elements to emit radiation (electromagnetic wavelength of light) onto the wares. Having an element visible below the shelf so that the radiation can emanate down on the pieces is ideal.Due to the static movement of air throughout electric kilns, heat has a tendency to rise to the top of the kiln via convection, resulting in wares at the top of the kiln being fired to a higher temperature than wares in the bottom of the kiln. Its best to load tall and loose at the bottom of the kiln, and short and dense from the middle to top of the kiln so as to balance out the heat throughout the kiln.Gas Kiln Bisque Firing ChartBisque Firing with a Gas KilnIn a gas kiln, oxygen supply is a little trickier. Gas-fired kilns are basically a box where air and fuel are mixed and ignited. The air:fuel ratio is the focus. In natural-draft kilns, fuel comes through the body of the natural-draft burner under pressure. This flow of gas entrains around 50% of the air requirement (primary air) through the burner. Air and fuel are mixed in the burner and the kiln chamber. The other 50% of the required air comes through the burner ports (secondary air). The damper on both updraft and downdraft kilns controls this secondary air and the atmosphere of the kiln.To achieve a reliable, oxidized bisque firing with a gas kiln, a kiln chart (see below) that lists the gas pressure and corresponding damper settings must be employed. As the kiln temperature increases, combustion gases will expand throughout the kiln chamber. The air:fuel ratio will change toward a reduced atmosphere (reduction of oxygen), due to the greater pressure of the fuel verses the pressure of the air. Complete combustiontotal conversion of carbon to $CO_2$is what we are seeking in oxidized bisque firings.Creating the Firing ChartIn order to guarantee that there is always ample oxygen supplied to the wares, a firing chart should be established at a temperature equal to, or above the bisque temperature. Its critical to use repeatable methods of measuring the gas pressure and damper settings.Clean out the kiln, burner ports, and burners. Check the orifices for spider nests, and inspect the flue area for obstructions. Debris in the burner port can cause an area of local reduction within the kiln that may not be noticed during a firing.If the kiln doesnt have one already, install a gas gauge between the burners and the gas control valve.Mark the damper indicating the location of the damper openings of inch or half-inch increments.Fire the kiln empty up to cone 04 and make notations on a kiln chart that include time, temperature, gas pressure, damper setting, and comments.Create a chart that shows the ideal damper setting and gas pressure for different stages of the firing using the following steps.At cone 04, note the maximum amount of gas pressure used. Push the damper in until a flame is visible in the damper area. If the damper area is not visible, observe the flame coming out of the spy hole.Now, incrementally back out the damper until the flame disappears. It may take a minute for the kiln atmosphere to adjust.Once the kiln is in an oxidizing mode (lack of flame), make a note of the damper setting that corresponds with the gas pressure reading. This combination of damper setting and gas pressure should be used in the latter stage of the firing to reach cone 04.From here, the ideal settings to produce an oxidizing atmosphere at lower temperatures can also be determined.Lower the gas pressure by inch, and repeat the same damper adjustments as listed above. This allows you to establish the corresponding damper settings to achieve an oxidizing atmosphere for lower gas pressure readings.Continue this process until youre down to 1 inch of gas pressure.This chart is created at a temperature (cone 04) that guarantees your kiln atmosphere will be oxidizing at lower temperatures. Tip: Its best to make the kiln chart at night when the flame is more visible. Once this chart is established, it should be easy to achieve a well oxidized bisque.Remember that oxygen, time, and temperature must be taken into account when bisque firing.Bisque Firing Program for Automatic Kiln ControllersElectric kilns with automatic controllers break firings down into ramps or segments of heat increase (or decrease), and the readout has abbreviations that correspond to different factors controlling the temperature rise per hour, top temperature in each segment, and thus the amount of time each ramp will take. A segment (SEGS) includes a rate (RA), a temperature (F), and a hold (HLD) setting.Alarm and Delay can be set after you input a program. Read your manual for details.The rate (RA) is the rate of temperature climb per hour.The (F or C) is the temperature that a segment will fire to.The hold (HLD) is how long the temperature will be held for that segment.Note: These same principles can be applied to manual kilns to some degree.Heat TransferRadiation: When electromagnetic waves travel through space, they transfer heat to objects they come into contact with. The sun and kiln elements produce these waves. Radiation is the primary source of heat in electric and gas kilns.Conduction: The transfer of heat between substances that are in direct contact with each other.Convection: Heat transfer caused by the up-and-down movement of gases and liquids. Flue gases moving up a kiln chimney are an example of convection.Pyrometric Cones measure heat work, not a set temperature. If you fire to cone 04 at a rate of 108F an hour, cone 04 will drop at around 1922F (1050C). If you fire to cone 04 at a rate of 270F per hour, cone 04 will drop at a higher temperature of 1940F (1060C).Much of the carbon sourcing information for this article comes from: The Potters Dictionary of Materials & Techniques by Frank and Janet Hamer.Steve Davis has been the production manager at Aardvark Clay & Supplies for 23 years and is the inventor of the Kazegama. KILN FIRING FAQs.Q.When can I fire my pots?A. A pot that is too wet is liable to crack, even explode. Let them dry to the touch before you put them in the kiln. Consider whether a pot that is very thick, or is not finished well, really needs to be fired. Perhaps it is better to recycle the clay and make another pot. Q. What temperature do I fire to?A. The first firing, a bisque (biscuit), is between 900-1000C. The second firing, a glost or glaze firing, depends upon what temperature the clay and glaze mature. Earthenware is about 1100C, Midfire about 1150C, and Stoneware and Porcelain, 1300C. To make plain, unglazed, earthenware cooking pots, fire to full maturity of the clay, e.g., 1100-1200C, and this can be done in one firing as long as all the protocols for a bisque are followed. Q. What is a bisque?A. This is a first firing of greenware in the kiln to produce ceramic that is hard, but not fully fused, or vitrified. While the body retains some porosity, the clay has become ceramic and is not reversible. This firing makes the pots easy to handle and easier to apply glaze and other decoration. Bisque with no further treatment, can be kept as an ornament, painted with acrylic, or used plain in the garden. But it is too soft and porous for use with food and fluids. Q. What is a Glost or Glaze firing?A. This is the second firing following application of glaze material to a bisqued body. The higher temperature will melt the glaze material and harden the ceramic body. A glaze becomes fluid and can run down a pot and stick to the kiln shelf. Remember to thoroughly wipe the glaze off of the bottom, or the foot, of the pot. Wipe a little from the edge corner of the base as well. A fired pot that shows glaze flaws can often be re-glazed, or touched up, and re-fired. Q. Do I need to bisque?A. A bisqued pot is not affected by wetting and so applying glaze to bisque is easier and safer. The glaze recipes found in books, and the mixed glazes in buckets, refer to glazes to be dipped or sprayed onto bisque, unless specifically stated as once-fired or green-ware glazes. It is possible to apply suitably prepared glaze to green, unfired wares, skipping the bisque stage, and firing only once to a high temperature. Since the green clay softens when wet these are a little harder to handle and special care is necessary when glazing, loading the kiln, and firing. Another method used commercially is to fire a high bisque, say 1250C, and then low fire with a low temperature glaze, say 900C. Q. What glaze can I use?A. A glaze is usually tested to mature at a certain temperature/cone number, to fit a particular clay body, and to fire under certain conditions. This information is always shown clearly on the label or by reference to technical information. This should not restrict trying any prepared glaze in a different way, straight from a bucket, as long as the range of the glaze properties are not severely over stretched. An earthenware body, apart from an earthenware glaze, could be fired to the midfire, or low stoneware range. A stoneware body could be fired, apart from a stoneware glaze, at the lower range of an earthenware and midfire. The main point is not to fire earthenware to high stoneware because of the danger of the glaze running onto the shelf, if not the earthenware body slumping, nor to underfire a stoneware glaze and have no glass formed. An earthenware glaze can have a range from say 1100-1200C and a stoneware glaze from 1150-1300C. Q. What cone do I need?A. An electric kiln often has an automatic thermostatic cut-out and/or a cone sitting in an automatic cut-out, as well as there being a timer. For a bisque use cone #08(955C) or #07(984C). Otherwise set a stand of cones in line with the spy hole as follows. For any glaze, enamel, lustre, firing, the glaze has been formulated to mature at a set temperature range, and hence certain cones are needed. It is wise to set three cones, one on either side of the maturing cone, e.g., as in the case of stoneware, #7, #8, #9. Make a small raft of clay and stand them up, low to high, left to right, with the cone markings facing the front. They should lean slightly to the left. Place the cone setting in line with the spy hole. For a more thorough record of the heat work in other parts of the kiln, cone settings can be placed anywhere on shelves. The cones bend and show maturity when fully bending with the tip arching over to touch base. The cones being inside the kiln are affected by the heat, and so show the heat work on the ceramic material. Sometimes there is a discrepancy with the temperature probe and meter which measures only the local ambient temperature, not heat work. If there is a Kiln-Sitter or other automatic timer, pyrometric cut-out, these will also need to be set. Where you have set cones to be visible from the spy hole, the kiln-sitter cone can be omitted. Q. What kiln can I use?A. An electric kiln is best for bisque and for oxidation firings. The electric elements are, however, likely to be working at a reduced capacity with age, and so high temperatures become difficult to achieve. For that reason, stoneware oxidation firings, other than bisque, are best done in a gas kiln. For a reduction firing a gas (or, oil, wood) firing kiln is best. Since there is no flame in an electric kiln there is no immediate way to create reducing conditions. It is possible to artificially cause reduction in an electric kiln but this is detrimental to the electric elements or to the soft bricks where there is this kind of insulation. For all kilns, once you have begun firing, place a sign indicating the kiln is operating, warning of the danger, and avoiding interference. Q. On an electric kiln what temperature controller settings do I use?A. Each kiln varies according to size, type of construction, age of elements. Work carefully and systematically. Try the lower settings and observe the change in temperature over time. Record the temperature on a time chart. Make adjustments according to the rate of rise. Keep in mind the desired end temperature and the time it will take. There are two main types of kiln, 1. Electric and 2. Gas. 1.1. An electric kiln has a regulator knob usually with an indicator dial showing 1-5, Low-High, or 0-100%. The adjustment varies the time the power to the elements is on and off. So there is a click ON- sounds of operation- then OFF- silence (at low this maybe for a minute), then click ON again, and so on. It is a good idea when first turning the kiln on, to stand around to hear the first sounds of operation, because often something needs to be set correctly for this to happen. 2.1. A gas kiln has burners with a non-calibrated adjusting tap. The adjustment increases the amount of gas flow and hence the strength of the flame. However, at first, use only the pilot light, or pilot burner, lit by holding in the press-button. Light the main burner later. When there are a number of burners, these can be lit in stages. This gives more control when a low temperature preheating is required. On the burners, there are adjustable flanges, for regulating the primary air. At start up is best to have them closed to prevent a draught of air extinguishing the flame. Once the initial warm-up has passed, and use of the main burner has begun, after a few minutes open the primary air as much as can be done without a flame-out. Since a closed primary air is also the setting for reduction, this step of re-opening the primary air should not be neglected, even though getting the flame right can be fiddly. Each kiln is different depending on size, age of electric elements, type of construction (brick, fibre), design of kiln. Work carefully and systematically. Try the lower settings and observe the changes in temperature according to the expected rate of rise. Q. In an electric kiln when do I plug the holes?A. There are a number of holes in an electric kiln. Usually one or two on top, one or two at the front bottom, one at the front middle, and one at mid side. The plugs that are used to block the holes are called bungs. The hole at the side is where a pyrometer probe can be inserted. The one at mid front is the spy hole (peep hole) to check the cones. One has to set the cones to be visible from here. Leave this closed or the cold air will affect the cones. The two at front bottom are for air flow in the early stages. Close these during the firing, say at 600C. Later, cooling to about 200C these can be removed prior to opening the door. The two at top are for the smoke and gases to escape and can be left open at all times unless in the late stages it is preferred to retain heat. After firing, close them so as not to cool down too quickly. Then on cooling to about 200C these can be removed prior to opening the door. Bisque firing refers to the initial kiln firing cycle for greenware or unfired pottery to convert clay into a permanent, usable ceramic material. It prepares the clay for subsequent glazing and decoration prior to a final glaze firing.What happens during bisque firing? Why is bisque firing essential? Lets examine the bisque process from start to finish:Temperatures for Bisque FiringMost clay bodies are bisque fired between Cone 08-04, equating to about 1650-1945F. Firing to higher temperatures risks over-firing the clay before glazing. Typical bisque temperatures for common clays:Earthenware - Cone 016-06Mid-range stoneware - Cone 06-04Porcelain - Cone 06-04The exact cone you choose within this range depends on the clay type and desired properties. Higher bisque temperatures make clay denser and less porous.Physical Changes During Bisque FiringAs clay heats in the kiln, several key changes occur:The remaining moisture and water is permanently driven offOrganic binders combust awayClay particles densify as vitrification beginsShrinkage stabilizes after further dryingThe result is permanent, bisqueware ceramic. Bisqueware has an absorption rate of 10% or less, meaning it has achieved near zero porosity.Benefits of Bisque Firing Before GlazingThere are several advantages to bisque firing clay pieces before applying glazes and decoration:Provides durable clay surface for glazes to adhere and bond withPrevents glaze reactions with organics that can cause bubblingLimits glaze color runoff because clay is no longer absorbentAllows modifications, repairs, or additions to bisque pieces before glazingBisqueware has colorfastness if left unglazed for artistic effectBisque firing is a stage you always want to take advantage of!How to Bisque Fire in a KilnFollow these tips for successful kiln bisque firing:Set kiln shelves 1 inch apart and place pieces with space betweenProgram a gradual preheat ramp up to 200F to prevent thermal shockSlowly ramp temperature to target cone over 8-12 hoursHold at peak temperature for 1 hour at leastShut off and allow cooling naturally - do not force coolProper bisque firing prepares your clay work for vivid glazing outcomes. Be patient and let the bisque process run its full course. Bisque firing is a crucial step in the pottery-making process that transforms raw, fragile clay into a durable and more manageable form. By heating the kiln to temperatures between 1650-1940F (900-1060C), the clay undergoes significant chemical changes. This process results in pottery that is sufficiently hardened yet porous, making it ideal for absorbing glazes in subsequent steps. Understanding the technical details of bisque firing is key to ensuring the quality and consistency of your finished pieces. Properly spacing your pottery in the kiln and adhering to the correct firing schedule can make the difference between success and disappointment. For example, you should leave a gap of at least 1 inch between the wares and kiln walls to prevent uneven heating. While the basics may seem simple, mastering bisque firing requires attention to detail and a bit of practice. By following best practices, you can achieve reliable results every time, setting the stage for beautifully glazed ceramics. Bisque firing is the first step in transforming raw clay into durable pottery. This process involves specific temperature ranges and can be carried out in different types of kilns. Bisque firing typically occurs between 1650-1945F (900-1060C). The goal is to harden the clay, making it easier to handle. The temperature range is chosen based on the type of clay you are using. For instance, stoneware might be fired at a different cone level than earthenware. Candling is a common pre-firing step. It involves gently heating the kiln slightly above room temperature to drive off any remaining moisture. This prevents steam buildup, which could crack your pieces. Several types of kilns can be used for bisque firing, including electric, gas, and wood-fired kilns. Electric kilns are the most user-friendly, making them ideal for beginners. They offer consistent temperatures and straightforward controls. Gas kilns provide more flexibility in temperature adjustment and are often preferred for larger batches. Wood-fired kilns require more expertise, as they involve manually feeding wood into the firebox to maintain the desired temperature. Your choice of kiln will largely depend on your experience level and the resources available to you. Formatted as a table: Kiln TypeProsConsElectric KilnEasy to control and cleanInitial cost can be highGas KilnFlexible temperature settingsRequires ventilationWood KilnUnique effects on potteryRequires constant monitoring To achieve a successful bisque firing, focus on choosing the right clay body, ensuring your pottery is thoroughly dried, and loading the kiln efficiently. Selecting the correct clay body is crucial for bisque firing. Different types of clay have varying properties that affect how they respond to heat. Stoneware clays, for example, are fired at higher temperatures and tend to be more durable. Porcelain clays are fine-grained and can produce very smooth surfaces but are more sensitive to firing conditions. Make sure the clay body you choose is suitable for the type of ware youre making and the desired finish. Always consult the manufacturers guidelines for the best results. Keep in mind that mixing different types of clay in a single firing can lead to unpredictable outcomes. Ensuring your pottery is fully dry before bisque firing is vital. Residual moisture can cause cracks or even explosions during firing. To avoid this, allow your pieces to air dry slowly and evenly. Drying time can vary depending on the thickness and size of your pieces. Avoid force-drying methods like using heaters or direct sunlight, as these can cause uneven drying and lead to warping. A common technique is to dry pieces on a shelf in a cool, dry area, often covered with a plastic sheet to control the rate of drying. Use a moisture meter to check that your pieces are completely dry before placing them in the kiln. Loading the kiln properly is essential for a successful bisque firing. Carefully place your pottery to ensure even heat distribution and avoid overcrowding. Leave at least 1 inch of space between the kiln elements and your pieces. If you use kiln shelves, maintain a 1 to 1.5-inch gap between your pottery and the top shelf. Stack smaller items together but avoid contact to minimize risks of damage. If using half shelves, ensure theres a 1/4 inch gap between adjacent pieces. This approach helps in maintaining uniform temperature and prevents mishaps during firing. Always refer to your kilns manual for specific loading instructions. Executing a bisque firing requires careful planning and attention to firing schedules, monitoring the kiln, and ensuring safety measures are strictly followed. This process turns clay into durable ceramic material, setting the stage for successful glazing later on. Setting an appropriate firing schedule is crucial. You will typically start at a low temperature, around 1652F (900C), to drive out any remaining moisture. Over several hours, youll gradually increase the temperature. This slow ramp-up reduces the risk of cracking. The most common firing schedule involves three stages: Candling: Slowly heating to 212F (100C) to remove residual moisture. Medium Ramp: Gradually raising the temperature to 1112F (600C). High Ramp: Elevating to the final bisque temperature. Its critical to consult your kilns manual for exact specifications and to adjust based on the type and thickness of your pottery. Keeping an eye on your kiln during bisque firing is vital for success. Modern kilns come with digital controllers that make monitoring easier, but physical checks are still beneficial. You should regularly check: Temperature Gauges: Ensure they match the programmed settings. Peepholes: Observe the color of the heat inside without opening the lid fully. Kiln Furniture: Confirm that the shelves and supports are stable. Always record key data points. Note starting times, temperatures, and any anomalies you observe. This information will help you fine-tune future firings. Safety in the kiln room cannot be overstated. Bisque firing involves high temperatures, making it essential to follow strict safety guidelines. Protective Gear: Always wear heat-resistant gloves and safety glasses when handling the kiln. Ventilation: Ensure the room is well-ventilated. Fumes released can be hazardous. Clear Workspace: Keep the area around the kiln free from any flammable materials. Never leave the kiln unattended during critical phases, especially initial heating and final cooling. Familiarize yourself with the kilns emergency shut-off procedures in case of a malfunction. By carefully planning and executing each step, youll achieve consistent and successful bisque firing results. After bisque firing, there are essential steps to ensure your pieces are ready for glazing and final firing. These steps include careful handling during unloading, cooling, and thorough inspection for defects. Once the kiln has completed the bisque firing, allow it to cool gradually to avoid sudden temperature changes. Rapid cooling can cause thermal shock, leading to cracks or damage. Open the kiln when the temperature falls below 150F to minimize risks. Use kiln gloves to handle the pieces to avoid burns and damage from oily residues on your hands. Place the bisqueware on heat-resistant surfaces and let it cool to room temperature before proceeding. Once the bisqueware has cooled, inspect each piece carefully. Check for cracks, warping, or other imperfections. Lightly tap the pots; a clear ringing sound indicates the piece is well-fired, whereas a dull thud suggests possible issues. Use a soft brush to remove any kiln wash or residue. Cleaning the bisqueware ensures a smooth, defect-free surface for subsequent glazing. Adjust or repair any minor damage if possible, or decide if the piece should be refired. This article will be your easy guide to bisque firing, giving you tips and tricks to make sure your creations turn out great in the kiln. We'll cover the basics of bisque firing, why it matters to get the temperature right, and everything you need to know, whether you're just starting or looking to improve your pottery skills.What is Bisque Firing?Bisque firing is a critical stage in ceramic production. The process converts raw, bone-dry clay into a resilient and porous ceramic form. This transformative process is essential for ensuring the piece's structural integrity during glaze firing, creating a stable foundation for safe and successful decoration.Related: What Can a Kiln Be Used For?The Stages of Bisque FiringBisque firing, a fundamental process in pottery crafting, encompasses several essential stages. Firstly, the clay objects must undergo thorough drying to eliminate moisture and avoid potential cracking in the kiln. Following this, a preheating phase gradually increases the kiln's temperature, effectively removing any remaining moisture and minimizing the risk of thermal shock during bisque firing. The main bisque firing stage involves heating the kiln to a specific temperature range, typically between 1650-1940F (900-1060C), for several hours. This critical step allows the clay to undergo chemical changes, resulting in hardened and durable pottery with a porous surface suitable for absorbing glazes.Once the bisque firing process is complete, the kiln is turned off, and the pottery is allowed to cool gradually. This slow cooling process is vital to prevent thermal shock and potential damage to the fired pieces. Once cooled to room temperature, the bisque-fired pottery is carefully removed from the kiln, marking the completion of this preparatory stage.Regardless of the desired peak kiln temperature for the initial firing, the commencement of the procedure remains consistent. It is imperative to maintain an oxygen-rich atmosphere in the kiln. This is naturally achieved in an electric kiln, but an abundance of air is essential in a fuel-fired kiln. Without sufficient oxygen, the combustion of organic and sulfur compounds cannot occur, potentially leading to defects in subsequent glaze firings. This emphasis on the kiln environment highlights its critical role in achieving successful ceramic outcomes.What Kind of Kiln Should You Bisque In?Choosing the right ceramic kiln for bisque firing is crucial to ensuring the proper transformation of raw clay into a durable, porous ceramic material. Here are some considerations when selecting a kiln for bisque firing:1. Electric KilnsElectric kilns operate using electricity to heat coils or elements embedded in the kiln walls, offering precise temperature control suitable for bisque firing and other ceramic processes.They come in various sizes and designs, from tabletop models to larger production kilns, making them adaptable to different spaces and workflows. Electric kilns are ideal for indoor use and do not produce harmful fumes, eliminating the need for extensive ventilation systems.They are energy-efficient, can maintain a stable temperature, and often come equipped with programmable controllers for customized firing schedules. While they typically have a lower initial cost than gas or wood-fired kilns, they still provide reliable and consistent results, requiring minimal maintenance. Widely available and accessible, electric kilns are a popular kiln choice for beginners and experienced ceramic artists, offering a practical and user-friendly option for bisque firing ceramics.2. Gas KilnsGas kilns burn natural gas, or propane, to generate heat for firing ceramics. These kilns offer advantages such as faster firing times and reaching high temperatures, making them suitable for various ceramic processes, including bisque firing. Gas kilns are often favored for their efficiency in achieving specific glaze effects through reduction firing. They come in different sizes and designs, providing flexibility for studio spaces and production needs.However, using gas kilns requires access to gas and proper ventilation due to the combustion process. While they may have a higher initial cost than electric kilns, the ongoing fuel expenses can be more economical. Gas kilns require periodic maintenance, such as checking burners and ensuring proper ventilation systems, making them suitable for those with experience or a willingness to learn about gas-fired ceramics. In summary, gas kilns offer versatility and efficiency, especially for those seeking specific firing effects, but considerations such as fuel availability and safety measures need attention.Related: Best Kilns for Home UseALL ABOUT the Bisque Firing Process With YOUR KilnBisque firing is an important step in the ceramic firing process. It involves firing THE clay objects in a kiln to a specific temperature to harden the clay and prepare it for glazing.WHY BISQUE FIRE? What Happens If You Skip the Bisque Firing Stage?The bisque firing deals with ALL THE unwanted stuff in YOUR clay, like water molecules and organic gases. Skipping this step can lead to bubbling or pinholes in the glaze, making your creation far from perfect. Moreover, the surface wont be porous enough for glazes to stick properly, potentially turning your project into a time-wasting letdown. Ultimately, even though bisque firing takes longer, its the key to a successful ceramic project, ensuring that your glazes and decorations stick just right and your hard work pays off. Skipping the bisque firing step and jumping straight to glaze firing might seem tempting, but its like building a house without a proper foundation. The bisque firing process is crucial because it prepares the ceramic for the high temperatures involved in glazing. Without it, your masterpiece risks cracking or falling apart.Bisque Firing TemperaturesDetermining the precise bisque firing temperature isnt a one-size-fits-all formula. The recommended range typically falls between cone 06 and cone 04, irrespective of the specific clay or glaze temperature.Choosing a particular firing temperature serves specific purposes. Opting for cone 06, for instance, induces clay shrinkage and porosity, creating an ideal surface for glaze adherence. On the other hand, firing cone 04 enhances the overall strength and durability of the pottery.A higher bisque firing temperature generally results in a less porous ceramic. If you aim to achieve a finished piece with increased porosity, facilitating better glaze absorption, opting for a lower bisque firing temperature is preferable. This nuanced approach to firing temperatures underscores the importance of tailoring the process to meet specific artistic and functional objectives in ceramic production.Related: What is Raku FiringHow to Reach the Bisque Firing Process With a KilnBisque firing is an important step in the ceramic firing process. It involves firing the clay objects in a kiln to a specific temperature to harden the clay and prepare it for glazing. Here's a step-by-step guide on the bisque firing process with a kiln:1. Prepare Your Clay ObjectsPreparing clay objects for firing involves several vital steps to ensure successful and durable results. First, ensure the clay is thoroughly dry to prevent steam from building up during firing, which can lead to cracking. If the clay is freshly made or too moist, let it air dry or use a drying cabinet to remove excess moisture gradually.Once the clay is adequately dry, inspect the objects for any imperfections or air bubbles. Smooth out any cracks or irregularities using the appropriate tools. It's also essential to bisque-fire the clay before glazing, which involves firing the objects at a lower temperature to remove residual water and strengthen the clay. After bisque-firing, the objects are ready for glazing, if desired, followed by a final firing to achieve the desired finish.2. Load the KilnLoading a kiln for bisque firing is straightforward but vital for good results. Raise the bottom shelf 1 inch above the kiln surface for proper air circulation, maintaining a 1-inch distance between your ceramics and the kiln's elemental walls to ensure even heat. Leave 1 to 1.5 inches of space between the ware and the top shelf, allowing for uniform heat distribution. Keep the kiln cover 1.5 to 2 inches away from your ceramics for effective firing. If stacking, maintain a 1/4 inch gap for side-by-side placement of pieces on a half shelf. This thoughtful loading process optimizes kiln capacity and consistent bisque firing for subsequent glazing or finishing.3. VentilationPay attention to the ventilation in your kiln for a successful bisque firing. Keep a small gap between the kiln lid and its body to release initial moisture and gases. Ensure any vent holes are clear for controlled gas discharge. Watch for excess smoke or strong odors during firing, adjusting ventilation as needed. Gradually close the lid gap to retain heat, avoiding quick closures to protect clay objects from thermal shock. Sustain some ventilation in the final cooling phase to control the process and reduce the risk of cracks. Always follow the manufacturer's guidelines for ventilation if you want to safely fire your kiln.4. Program the KilnProgramming the kiln ensures precise control over the firing conditions. It involves setting specific temperature parameters, typically between 1700 to 1900 degrees Fahrenheit (927 and 1038 degrees Celsius), and controlling the rate at which the kiln heats up, known as the ramp-up phase. This gradual increase helps prevent thermal shock in the clay objects, preserving their integrity. Additionally, programming includes holding or soaking at the peak temperature, allowing the clay to mature fully and burn off any remaining organic materials. This meticulous control of the firing process ensures consistency, repeatability, and optimal kiln operation.5. Ramp UpRamping up is a critical phase in the ceramics firing process and involves a controlled and gradual increase in kiln temperature. This deliberate ascent is essential to avoid thermal shock and potential damage to the clay objects. At the outset, the kiln temperature is raised slowly, allowing for the careful evaporation of any lingering moisture within the clay. This precautionary measure prevents the accumulation of steam, which could lead to undesirable consequences such as cracking or, in extreme cases, the explosive failure of the clay.Following this initial stage, the temperature is incrementally increased to reach the specific bisque firing temperature. The rate of temperature increase, known as the ramp rate, is tailored based on factors like clay type and firing requirements. This staged approach ensures that the clay undergoes the necessary physical and chemical transformations without excessive stress. Successfully navigating the ramping-up phase is crucial for achieving a well-fired bisque and preparing the ceramics for subsequent glazing processes, if desired.6. Hold at Bisque TemperatureAfter the kiln reaches the specified bisque firing temperature, typically between 1700 and 1900 deg