

LA MERIDIANA

INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL OF CERAMICS IN TUSCANY



WOOD FIRING

Lately there has been a consistent increase in the number of potters firing with wood, particularly within the last generation. Wood firing is the process in which wood is used as fuel to fire pottery kilns that have been specifically designed for this purpose. In an age where technology has produced kilns capable of attaining high temperatures in a matter of hours, it is perhaps remarkable that many potters choose to build and fire kilns that are labour intensive and require constant attention throughout the entire period of the firing, which may last several days.

For the wood-firers of today, the process represents a way to achieve a particular aesthetic expression that involves personal choices in both materials and techniques. Some seek the quiet touch of the flame accentuating a glazed surface or giving subtle ash effects on unglazed surfaces. Others combine wood firing and salt or soda glazing to achieve specific effects. Yet others want their work to look wood-fired, meaning that it should bear evidence of the intensity of fire. What wood-firers all have in common is an attraction to the process of firing.

The nature of woodfiring can be compulsive. Submitting work to the whim of flame and wood ash demands counterbalance, and in fact, a certain control can be gained through observation and constant learning. Every firing is an attempt to extend the knowledge of this elusive process. There will always be the fear of an accident, the expectancy of scorch marks, the unintended fusions that can become fascinating. Woodfiring can be taken to the edge of chaos and often the beauty resides in the unexpected itself that therefore becomes unique.

The placement of the pieces within the kiln also greatly affects the pottery's final appearance. Pieces closer to the fire may become immersed in embers and ash, while ash effects may only lightly touch those further from the flame and, if added, soda or salt.

A most favourite aspect of the woodfiring process is that it tends to foster community and create a collective atmosphere. It allows participants to work together where they need to trust and rely on each other so to complete the process successfully. During the long hours together bonds tighten, stories as well as experiences, ideas and techniques are shared, creating a sense of a common creative goal that can last for years.