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Wood-fired kiln to be fired April 19-22

Summary: The seventh firing of UMM's wood-fired kiln will take place April 19-22 at the kiln site just north of the UMM horse pasture. About three cords of dead or dying wood found around the campus will be used over the approximately 60-hour firing process.

(April 10, 2007)-“Wood firing requires you to turn over control to the wood firing process – you make the best pots you can, load and fire them the best way you know how, and then hope for the best” said Kevin Flicker, Ceramics Teaching Specialist at the University of Minnesota, Morris. The seventh firing of UMM’s wood-fired kiln will take place April 19-22 at the kiln site just north of the UMM horse pasture. During the three-day firing the kiln will be continuously "stoked" with wood by Flicker and his students, along with UMM alumni and others who have helped in past firings. About three cords of dead or dying wood found around the campus will be used over the approximately 60-hour firing process.

The inaugural firing of the kiln took place in the fall of 2003. The project began with a summer school class, "Wood-fired Kiln Design and Construction," taught by Flicker. UMM alumnus Sam Johnson '96, who had extensive experience designing and building wood-fired kilns, served as a consultant for the class. (Johnson now is an assistant professor of ceramics at St. Ben's/St. John's University in Collegeville, Minn.) For five weeks students took part in the laborious construction of the UMM kiln, beginning with only a 10- foot by 20-foot by five-foot deep hole in the ground.

UMM’s woodkiln is a special asset to the UMM experience. “Not every undergraduate university has a wood kiln,” said Flicker, “In fact, most schools don’t. It’s unique because students get to be directly involved in the actual firing process. With a gas or electric kiln the pots are typically loaded and fired by the teacher the students role in the process is minimal.” The UMM woodkiln, which was built the summer of 2003, will eventually reach around 2,400 degrees Fahrenheit as it is stoked around the clock from Thursday evening to midday Sunday. The cooling time of the wood kiln takes at least seven days, but is well worth the wait to potters: “You can actually see the path of the flame on the pot, along with deposits of melted wood ash from the firing. With a gas or electric kiln, you can’t see that.”

Theresa Novak, the author of this story and a current student in Flicker's Advanced Ceramics class, will fire her work for the first time in the woodkiln. "As a ceramics student, I have been around long enough to realize how special it is that UMM has a woodkiln, and how lucky I am that I get to fire some of my pieces in it. I don't know a single one of my friends at any other school who will ever have this opportunity. I'm really excited to see how everything comes out!"

The kiln, like other kilns, has an approximate 10-year life span before repairs will need to be made. UMM’s kiln was funded through an Educational Development Grant along with thousands of dollars worth of donated firebrick and other materials by various suppliers. The kiln took approximately eight weeks to construct. “It’s never one person’s wood firing,” said Flicker. “The results depend on the efforts of everyone involved.” Preparing for a wood firing takes several months to make enough pots to fill the kiln (200-400 depending on their size), and usually about a month before the actual firing to cut and split enough wood and to prep the kiln.

Members of the Morris community are encouraged to stop by during the firing and see what draws so many ceramic artists to this ancient firing tradition. Questions can be directed to Kevin Flicker at [Kevin Flicker](#).

Photo: Wood-fired kiln's first firing in 2003

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