



The kiln at the Bosener Mühle

Comeback of the Bosen Woodfire Kiln

stoked by Frans Ingenhut and Berthold-Josef Zavaczki

The happiness of meditation with wood, fire and lemon yellow flames

HEIDE M. ZAVACZKI

You recognize what is good when it's in front of you and in this case it doesn't primarily mean the kiln. A catenary arch kiln, rusty, dusty and yielding to gravity. At first glance it wasn't exactly promising, it had been dormant for 5 years and yet it aroused my curiosity and seemed to whisper to me Come on, light my fire!

In the wooded Hunsrück region, the Bosener Kunstmühle in Germany, a former mill, now an arts centre, is located It has developed a focus on ceramics and sculptural design over the years under the direction of Carmen Becker. Idyllically located by the lake, there is a large gas kiln, two raku kilns and three electric kilns. The wood burning kiln area in front of the mill is evidence of a culture of firings, protectively fenced in, with two sheds for wood and sawdust.

Woodfired teabowl



It was fired again for the first time in October 2023 and even in advance and quite apart from the expected results, this firing was enlightening, inspiring and captivating. About 30 years ago, the wood-fired kiln was constructed on the initiative of the ceramics legend Maria Geszler, in cooperation with kiln builders from Kecskemet and a master kiln builder from La Borne. Ms Geszler said the refractory bricks had come from disused brickworks in the area. The kiln was ideal particularly for large porcelain sculptures as a zigzag wall protected the ware from the flames.

Frans Ingenhut and Berthold-Josef Zavaczki were waiting in front of the kiln in the pouring rain. They had agreed to plan this firing together and they both brought a lot of experience with them. Frans, whose love for wood firing is clear to see, has been firing with wood for 18 years and it was him who fired up the kiln. It had taken the two of them two and a half hours to lay the kiln floor - pioneering work. The two were firing together for the first time; when the tea was brought out you could see how well the two of them worked together. They reconsidered how the fuel was to be introduced into the kiln. Frans was happy to accept Berthold's invitation and they both immediately fell under the spell of the kiln.



Frans I. and Berthold Z.



Heide Zavaczki stoking the kiln

We laughed when Frans talked about his firings and that the ceramics should be nicely toasted and exposed, by which he meant that it should stand well in the path of the ash. These translations from Dutch were charming, transforming the special properties of wood-fired ceramics into poetry. Examples of different varieties of Shino were examined over dinner and various kinds of kiln construction were discussed.

Frans explained with great clarity that firing a wood kiln is an act of concentration and involvement - entrusting yourself to the process of firing the moment the kiln is ignited.

The main characters are the flames and the rhythm that arises when you put on more wood. The kiln must remain in balance and you can only work with it, you are not in control, there is no routine to follow.

Everyone has their own style when it comes to stoking with wood, and I had to find this out this the hard way because I couldn't stop Berthold's wood kiln from losing temperature. Nevertheless, the magic of wood firing prompted me to suggest reviving the Bosen wood kiln and to put this idea in my husband Berthold's head - irresistible for a man who was given the control of fire since childhood. When he was nine years old, his parents' barn burned down. I see firing as part of his DNA and Frans is very obviously of the same ilk.

The meditation and becoming engrossed, which in the process of firing banishes everything that is irrelevant, repels all consumerism and distractions and captures one's full attention, is framed by a wall of rain. Frans has certainly given this firing a new face and is a patient friend of the Bosen wood-fired kiln. We thank him and his wonderful cooperation!



Frans Ingenhut, Facet Spheres, woodfired saltglaze

I am pleased that with Berthold Zavaczki a new tradition of wood firing at the Bosener Mühle is starting and that in 2024 the first course with him will be able to give an understanding of the tradition and techniques of wood firing to anyone interested. Zavaczki has traditionally fired in combination with salt and soda for years and will also be testing different forms of salting in the Bosen kiln.

Wood firing and its highly complex, Japanese-influenced aesthetics are to be given the space needed to set out on the path to Wabi and Sabi via a practical example.

May the lemon yellow flames be with you! The kiln has proved itself and has seen a variety of new works in the rain. I am amazed by the beauty and envy the wood-firing potters for the intensity of how they can merge with their kiln.

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