



Wood firing with Bandicoot Pottery



Pottery created by the ancient, wood-fired method which we use at Bandicoot Pottery is believed to be the finest pottery firing technique. The artistry behind wood firing pottery lies in the meticulous arrangement of objects and packing within the kiln. The strategic placement invites flames while hot ash and salts create unique colours and textures on each piece.

Safety in and around our studio

The kiln is fired to high temperatures around 1300'c so it is best to take all necessary precautions to reduce the hazards whilst firing. Protective equipment we use for wood firing includes

- Heat proof long leather Welders gloves
- Small leather gloves for moving wood
- Leather apron for top temperature – protection against the heat on your body
- Face shield – protection against heat on your face. Alternatively, a cotton scarf can be used
- Didymium glasses for protection against glare and enhance the view in the kiln. Wood firing and looking in kilns is hard on your eyes. We use didymium glasses to protect against the glare – yellow light between 1000-1300' c. The glasses provide enhanced eye protection and extra safety; UV protection, blue-light filtering, and over 95% blocking of wavelengths of invisible infrared radiation emitted by kilns.
- It is recommended you wear warm natural fibre clothing when firing kilns – long sleeves – long pants
- Bring your sunglasses
- Always wear closed toe leather shoes



Smoke and wood firing

Smoke is a by-product that's created when wood firing. Long slow wood firings like ours last for about 100 hours. We are using a mix of pine and wattle wood that has been recycled since the bush fires. Our experience is the pine wood is more smoker than wattle. The kiln firing technique is to oxidise and reduce the kiln over the firing. The body reduction cycle is smoker, it produces lots of smoke. Reduction is achieved with more fuel than air and brings the colour out of the clay body.

It is recommended after stoking the kiln, it is best to move away from the smoke and stand outside the kiln area to reduce the smoke hazard and impact.

Know your clay

The type of clay will determine the glazes you can use and the firing temperature. I like to collect my own clay so it is unique to me and my studio. My 'wild clay' is a mix of white Mayfield clay from Braidwood and earthenware clay from my property. Using wild clay reduces the costs of purchase, freighting and provides a unique clay body. I enjoy the process of harvesting and refining the clay – some clay is sieved and others are used with more sandy grog.

Commercial Stoneware clays are suitable and can be used as well just look for clays that reach 1300'c.

- Walkers No 10 stoneware, Fine white stoneware or superior white porcelain
- Keanes stoneware no 5 or 5B
- ClayWorks fine white stoneware
- Porcelain clays

If you want to discuss clay please contact us.

Using slips

The use of slips enhances flashing effects over your clay and the surface colour. The slip can be an iron enriched and used with a low iron clay body or use of porcelain slip can provide porcelaneous effects. Be careful of shrinkage mismatch slip/clay on leather hard works – bisque works.

Slips can be used for decorating either painted, sgraffito or slip trailing. Your clay can be used as the base for slip and oxides or stains for stoneware can be added.

Making and creating for wood fire

I like to raw glaze all my works as this reduces firing costs. For works that are being transported I recommend bisque firing first. My kiln has three areas - trolley shelves, two fireboxes for pots that can handle the force of the fire and inside kiln shelves to pack. It takes about 800+ kilos of clay to fill and pots of all sizes and shapes are welcome.

- Shelving

Work sizes can vary but my prop sizes remain consistent. On the shelving one brick high 24 cm down to 20 cm, 12 cm half a brick high.

- Fire boxes - bottle forms, tall forms, large forms up to 40-60 cm
- Top of trolley - bottle forms, tall forms large, forms up to 40 cm and lower temp pieces because that is a cooler location. Middle photo: some of my pots are stacked rim to rim
- Plates and flatware can be accommodated but require a lot of kiln shelving and are prevalent to warping
- Robust strong shapes work best in wood firing.



Glazing your works

Glazes for stoneware temperatures and corresponding to the clay body are great. I use a dolomite glaze as a liner glaze so the wood firing effects are seen on the outside and shino glaze for other works. In the kiln there are cooler spots at the top of trolley and beside trolley door so work of a lower temperature can be accommodated there. You can use a commercial stoneware glaze or make your own glaze.

Packing the kiln

The kiln pack takes about 10 days because we are trying to place pots in the kiln to get the best effects. Each piece is separated from the shelf with a wad of fire clay. Sometimes a sea shell is also used which gives a salty glow and leaves a fossil imprint of the sea shell on the pot. Manipulating the flame starts when you are designing the kiln pack and placing the pots in the kiln and pot shapes will inform how you pack the kiln. There are other factors that may also cause effects to the firing atmosphere – weather – wind – wood are all variables.

Firing the kiln

Throughout the firing, the kiln is tended on a regular basis perhaps once every 10 minutes for 100 hours. There will be three teams led by experienced wood firers and helpers. There are 3 kiln shifts which we like to roster teams of 3 people on to – they are

- 1: 5am-1pm usually run by Daniel Lafferty
- 2: 1-9pm Su Hanna
- 3: 9pm-5am Kirk Winter, Siena Hyland

Things to consider: are you a night or a morning person? Some people like to try a couple of shifts but remember changing from morning to evening can be hard to adjust to.

The fire starts outside of kiln – a couple of logs lie on the ground and the kiln draws the heat into the firebox. The heat gradually builds up and the logs are moved inside the firebox on day 2. Top temp at day 4 & 5 listening and watching the kiln to observe its performance, sound and how the charcoal is built up in the firebox.



Wood firing process

Throughout the firing, the kiln is tended on a regular basis for 100 hours. The job is to feed the wood carefully into the fire boxes in order to raise the temperature. The wood in the fire boxes needs to burn away before the next stoke.

Adding wood at the correct moment is crucial. If you add too much wood the kiln may get overwhelmed and clog the kiln which may cause the temperature to drop. Naturally the kiln temperature rises and falls. As the wood burns it creates gases and smoke that burns off throughout the kiln. We monitor the temperature with pyrometric cones in the kiln. We are using recycled dead and fallen trees – pine and wattle that have been collected since the bush fires. It is all split ready to go. Pine and wattle burn faster and have finer wood ash which burns hotter.

Relaxed wood firing

We enjoy many interesting conversations and share meals during the firing. We provide assorted food and simple dinners will be catered as best we can. If you have special dietary needs some extra supplies might be good to bring. Most people bring some food to share with the crew.

Pots from the kiln

One of the markers of wood fired pots are the glossy – darkened spots and marks of the flame passage which is different and unique to each firing. For all the works in the kiln to gain results and special effects there must be a flow path for the flame within the kiln.



Left: shows paddling texture, shell imprints and ash dribbles

Middle: feldspar/shino glaze

Right: Shino glaze with shell imprint

Finishing your work

Some pots from wood firing process may require additional work to make them ready for sale/exhibition. Works may need to be cleaned up with a Dremel or wet and dry sand paper to remove any rough or sharp edges.

About our area

Bandicoot Pottery is located 4 kms from Cobargo along the Bermagui Road. Cobargo was devastated in the Black Summer Fires so we recommend a visit to the remaining shops! The Lazy Lizard Art cooperative which we are members, Cobargo Creators, CoCo Café and the pub.

Bermagui is less than 20 kms away and provides an inspiring and beautiful coastal experience. It's a charming coastal town with the Blue Pool: a natural rock pool perfect for swimming. Camel Rock, a unique rock formation on the beach, is also worth a visit. Fisherman's Coop is great for fish & chips! Plus, it has the Shop 7 featuring local art & crafts. Mimosa Rocks National Park offers peaceful settings for exploring.

Other destinations include Spiral Gallery Cooperative Bega, SECCA Regional Gallery and Tathra Wharf – Essential Object is definitely worth the visit if you have time. Local potters include: Sarah Ormonde, Jana Ferris, Barry & Goshe Jackson and the Bega Valley Potters. If you want to visit other potters that could be arranged.

We Look forward to meeting you soon
Daniel Lafferty & Gabrielle Powell Bandicoot Pottery
<https://www.bandicootpottery.com.au>

Short film: After bushfire destroyed his studio, potter Daniel Lafferty's firing in 2022.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BDUOtIVc4UM>