

The Kiln Corner— Starting Out with Your First Kiln

by Arnold Howard

Though I work for Paragon Industries, L.P., the information in this column applies to all brands of glass kilns. Feel free to send questions for this column no matter what brand of kiln you own.

Why did smoke come out of my ceramic fiber kiln the first time I fired it?

The smoke that came off of the kiln during the first firing is normal. It is from the binders burning out of the fiber insulation.

Do you recommend didymium glasses for viewing the kiln interior?

Paragon recommends green #3 safety glasses for viewing the glass inside the kiln. The manufacturers of safety glasses do not recommend didymium glasses for viewing the hot kiln interior.

I have just purchased a small digital glass kiln. What suggestions do you have for a beginner?

First, write the kiln serial number on the cover of the kiln manual, then fill out and return the warranty card. Read the kiln and controller manuals. You can skip over some of it, especially the digital controller options section, but do not skip the safety section. Keep notes on programming the controller and review the notes when you need to refresh your memory, such as when you have been away from the kiln for a month or so.

Second, feel free to adjust firing schedules. The firing schedules are only guidelines and can often be improved by tweaking.

Third, visually check the glass. Do not depend only on a firing schedule to turn off the kiln until you have gained experience with your kiln.

Will it harm the kiln to turn it off before it has fired to completion?

It is okay to turn off a digital kiln at any time. It will not harm the kiln or the controller.

I have a digital kiln. Do I also need a pyrometer?

You do not need a pyrometer, because the microprocessor on your kiln is itself a type of pyrometer. The pyrometer only reads a temperature. The microprocessor on your kiln not only reads temperature but also controls the firing rate to a specific temperature in both heating and cooling cycles. The controller can also hold the temperature for the period that you specify.

I don't intend to use all of the features in the controller. Am I missing anything important?

Some people fire their digital kilns regularly yet never learn much about the temperature controller. They fire the same program and merely press "Enter" twice to start the kiln each time. That is a perfectly acceptable way to use a controller. Use only the features that you need. As you gain experience, however, you will probably want to try out the advanced features. You will be surprised at how easy they are to use.

In a nutshell, how I can avoid programming errors?

Use "Program Review" every time you fire the kiln no matter how experienced you become. This is your assurance that you are firing the correct program. Check the program that appears in the display against a written program.

Why does my new kiln not have a cord set?

Some of the larger studio kilns rated to 208 volts are shipped without cord sets and must be direct-wired by an electrician.



Wear green #3 firing safety glasses whenever looking into the interior of a hot kiln.



Ceramic fiber kilns emit fumes during the first firing. This is the smell of the binders in the ceramic fiber.



A pyrometer measures the temperature inside a kiln and will alert you to begin watching the glass in a switch-operated kiln.

Arnold Howard writes instruction manuals and advertisements for Paragon Industries, L.P. His hobbies are glass fusing and karate. He also enjoys studying history and watching classic movies. You can reach Arnold at ahoward@paragonweb.com with questions for future columns. Sign up for his kiln newsletter at www.paragonweb.com.

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