

### Firing the Hoggama – General Guidelines

If there is any greenware in the kiln, construct a small “fireplace” outside the kiln around the center lower air ports and build a small campfire directly against the front of the kiln. Insert enough burning sticks into the air ports to get a little bit of draft going through the kiln and up the stack to suck in the heat from the little campfire. When it starts happening, stop inserting sticks in the ports. After moving the fire inside kiln the next morning, start off with upper air ports closed off, and mid-level ports half closed. Regulate air ports in order to maintain good draft and a good fire, but avoid letting excessive cold air into kiln. As long as temperature is climbing, and as long as you can see good flow in the smoke exiting the stack, there is ample air supply. The upper air ports should be kept closed because air is always drawn in around the stoke door. Try to keep the bottom-most air ports (the mouse holes) at least partially open by occasionally working the stir rods in and out of these holes.

**Kiln Log** - Be responsible about recording information, because that’s how you get to know the kiln. For each entry, note the date, time in AM or PM, your initials, pyrometer temperature, condition of cones, and frequency of stoking, plus any other pertinent comments. You do not have to log every time you stoke, but make sure you log at least once per hour, plus whenever you make any changes in air port or damper settings, frequency and amount of stoking, or when you notice some change in the performance of the kiln.

**Cone Packs** – in order to take all the necessary cones it takes two cone packs, and there should be two in every location – one high and one low visible from the stoking door, and one high and one low visible from the side-stoking port. The front cone pack in each location faces right and contains **cones 010, 04, 1, 5, and 7**. The rear cone pack in each location faces left and contains **cones 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, and 14**.

**Frequency of Stoking** - As you might expect, the frequency of stoking increases through the firing. Initially, there will be no flames in the stack or at the crown ports, so simply maintain a fire, first in the temporary fireplace in front of the kiln, and then in the firebox, building up the heat very slowly. Once you reach cone 010, start breathing-cycle stoking, waiting until the smoke at the stack and crown ports subsides for a minute or so before stoking again. At that stage you will probably stoke every fifteen to twenty minutes. In the latter half of the firing, watch the flames in the passive damper port on the front of the stack. Through this stage of the firing you will increase the frequency of stoking, and when going for maximum temperature climb will likely stoke every five minutes. If you are having trouble getting the kiln to climb, increase frequency of stoking. However, with dry hardwood and pine, it is very unlikely that you’ll have any trouble getting the kiln to climb. Be especially cautious once the kiln gets up to highfire temperatures, because it’s best to maintain a very slow steady climb in the range from cone 9 to cone 11 or 12 through the last day and a half of the firing.

**Backstoking** - We usually start backstoking early in the evening of the second day when the pyrometer reads 1800 to 1900F, and increase the frequency of backstoking to bring up the temperature in the rear. From that point onwards, backstoking must be regulated to keep the temperature as even as possible front to back. When increasing intensity of backstoking, stoke the side port more frequently but with only a few sticks each time. The objective is to avoid building up an excessive coal bed in the back, because it serves no purpose and damages adjacent wares.

**What Wood to Use When** - Initially start the “campfire” in front with hardwood edge-trimmings and smaller chunks. Use up all scrap wood you can find at this time, including whatever is laying on the ground at the base of the woodpiles. When you move the fire inside the kiln in the morning (or when starting the firing with no greenware), continue to use small wood, gradually shifting over to small branches and split firewood, and by around noon on the first full day of firing you should be burning split firewood exclusively. As much as possible, burn a mix of hardwood and pine. You can tell the pine from the hardwood by the bark or the smell of the wood. The pine will release a big burst of energy and ash, but burns quickly.