

# What to consider when buying a kiln?

There are a lot of factors to consider when purchasing a Kiln. Below are some of the various questions you should ask yourself before choosing the right kiln for you. Regardless of your choice we always recommend buying the kiln that will last you the longest. By that we mean, think about your future project needs not just your current. Buying a slightly larger kiln now will cost less money than buying a second kiln when your needs change.

- **What kind of projects would you like to do?**

The type and size of the projects you will be doing has a large impact on the type of kiln you will need. This affects whether you need a top fire, side fire or both. It also impacts the type of controller you may need or prefer. Additionally, it helps to determine the size and depth of the kiln you want. Keep in mind that the number of projects you fire at one time does not significantly impact the energy you use, so you may want a larger kiln to enable you to fire more than one project at a time.

- **Where will you be locating the kiln?**

The location of your kiln has an obvious impact on the size of kiln you will need. You must have the proper space and electrical requirements for the kiln you decide to purchase. You should allow at least 12 to 18 inches of space between the kiln and any walls, keep in mind that there should also be plenty of space for you to access the kiln if it requires any maintenance. Your kiln should not be near any flammable or combustible materials in your workspace. Finally, you should be sure the area can be well ventilated, this will add considerable life to your kiln. Remember to read your owners manual and follow any specific instructions from the manufacturer.

- **Type of Electrical**

The size of your kiln will dictate the type of electrical connection you will require. The larger the kiln, the more power is required for it to operate correctly. You must have the proper outlet and breaker needed in order for the kiln to operate in the manner it was designed. An incorrect connection can be hazardous and damage your kiln. You can consult an electrician to determine if you have ample room in your main panel to add the required electrical connections for the kiln you are considering.

Much progress has been made in the way kilns are made and there are many medium size kilns now available that do not require 240 volts as in the past. Smaller kilns (under 13") typically run on household 120 volt, 13 amp household current. This means you can plug the kiln into almost any outlet in your home. As the size of kiln increases it requires more amperage required to function correctly. These higher amperage requirements will dictate the need to install a dedicated circuit of 20 amps to be installed. This means that the only thing plugged into this circuit is the kiln you are running.

Larger kilns will require a dedicated 240 volt circuit with the amperage specified by the kiln manufacturer. If you are purchasing a kiln for your shop you need to find out if the voltage is 240 or 208, it is imperative that you order your kiln with the correct voltage or it will not operate correctly once installed. Also, some larger kilns may need to be wired directly without an outlet or plug. Again, always consult the manual supplied by the manufacturer to ensure you are hooking your kiln up correctly.

Now on to the kiln itself, meaning what shape, size and depth will work best for you. Keep in mind, your skills will increase and your needs may change so you will want a kiln that provides you flexibility as you grow.

- **What shape do you want?**

Most people think that the size of the kiln is most important, but actually it is the shape of the kiln that offers the most flexibility. Square and rectangular kilns offer more options than circular or octagonal shaped ones. Why you ask? Math once again provides the answer, a 13" square shelf will allow you to make a 12 1/2" circle and a 12 1/2" square. A 13" round shelf will allow you to make a 12 1/2" circle, but the largest square you could make is 9". As you can see this is a substantial difference, not only for individual works, but also for laying out more work in one firing.

- **What size do you want?**

When it comes to kilns, size does matter. As we mentioned earlier you should always buy the largest kiln you are able. You will continue to learn and grow and you will be amazed at how quickly you will outgrow a smaller kiln. The most important factor when choosing the size of your kiln is the size of the shelf that will fit inside. This is what you will be limited to when working so be more concerned with the interior dimensions than the exterior ones.

- **How deep should it be?**

The depth of the kiln is every bit as important as the size. Are you going to be doing drapes? Deep bowls? Do you want to be able to stack several shelves in one firing? You may not know all these answers now but they are important to consider when deciding which kiln is best for you. Ask around to some other artists and get their suggestions, they can help you avoid the mistakes they made already. Remember, spending a little more now will save a lot in the future.

- **What kind of controller is best?**

Now you need to decide which controller is best for you. There are two types of controllers, manual controls and digital controllers. The difference is quite simple, manual controls are just that manual. There is a switch to turn the kiln on and off and a dial to adjust the amount of heat the elements produce. These types of controls have a very limited use require constant attention if you are using them to fuse a piece and do not allow for ramp holds that are needed for metal clay and glass.

A digital controller will allow your kiln to fire automatically through multiple segments, and then will turn off the elements after your firing is complete. The digital controller is programmable and you can set different programs for different types projects including, metal clay, glass and ceramics. Digital controllers give you an incredible amount of control and options for a variety of fusing projects. Digital controllers vary in their complexity, but for the most part, each controller comes stocked with a wide array of diagnostic tools and information delivery options. Many digital controllers come pre-programmed with firing schedules preloaded at the factory. Some digital controllers even have options to add a connection for use with a computer program interface. Digital controllers are a must for long annealing cycles.