

A Wood-Fired Look

by *Richard Busch*



Bowl, 2½ inches in height, thrown and faceted stoneware, with brushed stain and layered glazes, fired to cone 6.

Like most people who take up pottery, I was limited at the beginning of my career to firing my pots to cone 6 in an electric kiln. This was at the local community center where I lived in northern Virginia. I say limited, but for the first year or so it didn't seem like a limitation. Just learning to center, make simple forms and digest a lot of basic information about the pottery process was enough to keep my focus pretty narrow. But it wasn't too long before I began to notice the differences between oxidation- and reduction-fired pottery.

A few years later, I took a wood-

firing workshop with McKenzie Smith at Baltimore Clayworks. Out of that kiln—which we fired to cone 10 in about 14 hours, throwing in some salt around cone 8—came some of the warmest, toastiest, most wonderfully earthy and handsome pots I'd ever seen. It was inspiring. It changed my outlook. I was hooked on the whole idea. But then, not seeing any possibility of doing wood/salt myself on a regular basis, I grew frustrated.

If, as they say, necessity is the mother of invention, I would suggest that frustration can also be that

CAUTION

Health risks are associated with metal oxides, particularly manganese. Handle carefully and fire in a well-ventilated kiln.

mother. At least it was for me. Out of that sense of frustration came the desire to develop a cone 6 oxidation glaze that would yield the wood/salt-fired look that had become something of an obsession.

So I started playing around with glaze recipes and, after awhile, came up with something that filled the bill—until I finally built the salt kiln I'd been planing for a long time.

Not only did my ersatz wood/salt-glazing technique keep me happy for years of electric-kiln firing, it also fooled a lot of people, including some pretty experienced potters—at least at first glance. Of course, when they picked up a pot and looked at the bottom, they could see that the unglazed clay body had not been reduced. Nevertheless, the illusion was good enough for me. And over the years, I've had a number of people ask me for the recipe, which I've always been happy to give.

The recipe is actually a combination of two glazes that I mix in different proportions, depending on the result I want. One of them is called White Satin Matt, and the other is the one is called Nutmeg:

Most of the time, I mix the two glazes together in a ratio of two-thirds Nutmeg to one-third White Satin Matt. This gives me a light toasty color. For a darker, more quintessential wood-fired appearance, I decrease the proportion of

White Satin Matt to about one-quarter or less.

On many of these pots, I also added some black brushwork. An oxide stain was applied with a long, thin brush made from deer bristles. This recipe was passed along to me by my former teacher, mentor and good friend, Sybil West.

To enhance the look of the black brushmarks, I first applied a fairly thick—roughly the consistency of heavy cream—swash of White Satin Matt over the main glaze combo, using a wide brush. This lightened the area behind the black, and made the brushwork really pop out.

I also discovered that I could alter the surface texture by varying the kiln temperature. Pots fired to about cone 5 tended to produce a drier surface, while those fired to cone 7, or even a little higher, came out with a shinier, more salted appearance.

I would encourage anyone who wants a wood/salt look from cone 6 oxidation firings to experiment a bit with kiln temperatures and with layered glazes. With a few tweaks here and there to adjust for your own kiln and firing techniques, you'll likely find a combination of color and texture that suits your taste to perfection. And who knows, you might even wind up fooling your friends in to thinking you're actually firing with wood and salt—at least at first glance.



"Spaghetti Jar," 11¾ inches in height, stoneware, with stain and glazes, fired to cone 6.



Vase, 9 inches in height, faceted stoneware, with brush decoration on glaze, fired to cone 6 in an electric kiln, by Richard Busch.

Recipes

White Satin Matt Glaze

Cone 6

Gerstley Borate	31.6 %
Talc	14.0
Kona F-4 Feldspar	19.8
EPK Kaolin	5.0
Silica	29.6
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	100.0 %
Add: Zircopax	5.1 %
Bentonite	2.0 %

Nutmeg Glaze

Cone 6

Dolomite	23.3 %
Spodumene	23.3
Ferro Frit 3134	6.8
Kentucky OM 4 Ball Clay	23.3
Silica	23.3
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	100.0 %
Add: Red Iron Oxide	1.1 %
Yellow Ocher	3.2 %
Tin Oxide	4.8 %
Bentonite	2.0 %

Sybil's Black Stain

Black Copper Oxide	24.0 %
Cobalt Oxide	2.0
Manganese Dioxide	49.0
Nickel Oxide	5.0
Red Iron Oxide	20.0
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	100.0 %