

### The Floor of the Kiln

The main problem in the construction of the kiln is placing and supporting the floor, for which specially made sun-dried bricks of three different sizes are used. First of all, the potters erect the upright pillar which will support the floor. The pillar is made of eight round bricks placed near the middle of the cylinder of the kiln. The off-centre position of the pillar helps in distributing the fuel evenly during the firing. At the centre of the eighth brick a round stone is placed, smaller in diameter than the bricks.

The potters dig hollows on the inside surface of the cylinder, which they call "nests". One end of a couple of oblong bricks each rest in a nest, while the other two ends meet, forming a triangle, the apex of which is counter-supported by a single longer brick resting on the pillar. The point where the three oblong bricks meet is higher than the "nests" and the top of the pillar, and so an arch is formed. Three men are needed to join the three bricks, each lifting one oblong brick on his shoulder. All three of them balance the three oblong bricks, while a fourth man fixes the joint with some clay mortar. The men go on placing bricks in this way all around the cylinder of the kiln. As the men raise the bricks on their shoulders to make the framework for the floor, they determine the height of the fire-box, which should be as high as a man's body with his head bent. The potters believe this to be the right height for the kiln to draw well. Then the men place shorter bricks across those already in place. There are now no large gaps left, only small ones. All joints are secured with a little clay mortar. The frame work of the floor is now finished.

### The "Fire-eyes"

Now the men fill in the smaller gaps left in the framework of the floor with a kind of hard stone mixed with wet clay. As they build, they level off the top surface on which the wares will be set for firing. The underside of the floor is arched. At the centre, it is 50 cms. thick and at the circumference about 70 cms. thick. While making the floor, the men also form the "fire-eyes", openings through which the flames will pass from the fire-box to the kiln. With the help of a twig which they place erect or aslant in the wet filling material, they keep spaces for the "fire-eyes" open. When the material has dried they pull the twigs away; they also finish off the upper surface of the floor with a thick layer of a special kind of clay which is resistant to the heat of the kiln. The larger fire-eyes, which usually number from 32 to 35, go all the way round, flush against the wall of the kiln. The fire-eyes made round the pillar are smaller in diameter and cut obliquely so that they guide the flames towards the centre of the floor, where the pillar does not allow for such openings. The remaining fire-eyes, about 120 in number, are still smaller and cut vertically; their position was determined by the construction of the floor, without the use of rules or compasses. It is reckoned that between each of the above stages of construction an interval of half a day or of a whole day is needed for the clay mortar securing the joints to dry. The inside of the kiln is built with stones from the floor upwards. No mortar is used. The men cover the surface by merely applying a coat of the special fire-proof clay on the loose-knit stone wall, on the

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### Smaller jars drying

vaulted surfaces of the floor and on the pillar, as they did with the floor surface. Then they go on building the cylinder above ground level. And so the kiln reaches its final height, which should be equal to that of a man with his hands raised up. After that they shape the kiln-door, which is about one metre wide.

### Setting the wares in the kiln

All men have a hand in setting the wares in the kiln. The Master and the Kiln-man are inside the kiln. They take one jar at a time from the others through the kiln-door. The first jars are turned upside down onto the floor of the kiln and the kiln is filled up in a circular fashion. A second layer of jars is packed right way up on top of the first, that is "bottom to bottom". The jars never touch the floor of the kiln directly, or the bottom of another jar, but are balanced on shards; the flames pass over the whole of each jar's surface, so that it is heated evenly. As soon as the kiln is set, the kiln-door is bricked up and sealed with slurry.

### Firing the kiln

Early in the morning the Carrier brings the wood for firing. He heaps his bundles around the kiln. The Kiln-man lights a few twigs, passes them through the fire-hole and lets them flare-up. As soon as the flame abates, he adds some more twigs, which he pushes with his fork towards the pillar, and right in front of the fire-hole. He keeps this small fire burning at the same point for about an hour and a half with twigs that flare up easily, such as those from cypress trees, because the space in the kiln and its walls are still cold, and so are the clay wares placed in it. Then the Kiln-man begins to add more twigs, more quickly. The fuel used now is bushes, which produce a smaller flame, but more cinders. Then the kiln-man spreads the fire, pushing the burning twigs now to the right, then to the left of the fire-hole. This lasts about two hours. Thick black smoke now comes out of the kiln, followed by the first flames. The shards become black. Now the Kiln-man throws in whole bundles of bushes, one after the other. The whole kiln is aflame, the yellow fire creaks and quivers, the flames flare up wildly.

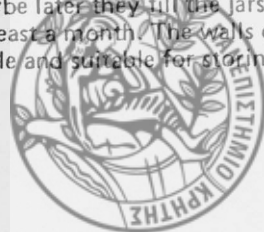
The smoke is now white and thin, the inside of the kiln has turned yellow and the jars are bright red; the whole kiln is bathed in a haze of light and heat. The length of the firing depends on the size and how densely it is packed. The first firing of a newly-built kiln tends to take longer, because the construction itself is being fired as well as the pots.

### Emptying the Kiln

At dawn next day, the kiln is emptied. It takes about half an hour to demolish the kiln-door, take away the iron sheets and the shards and empty a kiln holding 24 jars. The Master-Potter and the Kiln-man are inside the kiln and carry the jars to the kiln-door, after which they are rolled away by other members of the guild.

### Slaking the jars

The day after the potters empty the kiln, they rinse the jars with water. The next day or maybe later they fill the jars with water and let them stand for at least a month. The walls of the jar gradually become impermeable and suitable for storing oil.



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