

Pottery Kilns for Glass

Many people use pottery kilns for glass work. The most important difference is pottery kilns have only side elements whereas glass kilns rely primarily on top elements to provide even heat distribution. If you use a pottery kiln to fuse or slump glass, you have to take extra care to keep it a few inches away from the side elements and you have to ramp much slower than you would with a top element kiln.

Pottery fires much differently than glass. Basically, you just bring the heat up to the required temperature and turn the kiln off to cool. Glass requires radically more complicated schedules. If you use a pottery kiln, you must baby-sit it throughout the firing to ensure the necessary schedule is followed. Or, you can add a digital controller to operate it. Digital controller convertor kits are available that are simple to install. Just plug the convertor into the wall outlet, plug the kiln into the convertor - and the kiln is now slaved to the convertor.

Unless you plan to do tall castings or ring drops, the greater depth of a pottery kiln is more detriment than advantage. Glass is fired as a single layer. It takes longer and uses more power to needlessly heat all that extra space. Theoretically, you can fire multiple layers the same as potters do but in reality it works only for small pieces like jewelry. The only place in the kiln that is at the programmed temperature is level with the thermocouple. It's cooler below and hotter above. When you fire multiple levels, some will be too hot and others too cool. That's why glass kilns are intentionally built very shallow.

If you decide to use an old pottery kiln for glass you should carefully consider the possibility it has been contaminated with materials that could spread contamination into glass fired to be used for food.

Although there are many disadvantages to using a pottery kiln for glass, an increasing number of glass artisans are getting pottery kilns so they can make their own ceramic molds or to do deep castings. Plus, there are lots of used pottery kilns you can pick up for a fraction of the cost of a glass kiln.