

BACKYARD OVENS

Bake pizza on your back patio

BY CAITLIN MCKIMMY

What happens when a community of potters, already having mastered the art of kiln-fired ceramics, delves into pizza? It's completely logical: They build ovens in their backyards and soon have pizzas with perfect super-heated crusts.

Jessie Jones, a local ceramicist and civil engineer, has been collaborating with friends to build wood-fired brick pizza ovens on lawns and patios across the Willamette Valley. His passion for backyard ovens stems from his love of good friends, good food and the outdoors.

When *EW* contacted Jones to set up an interview, he was in the middle of firing up his oven for a dinner party. "We made three pizzas that night and there weren't any leftovers," he said. "It's a great way to feed a ton of people, since the pizzas cook in 3 to 4 minutes."

The oven design that Jones developed is meant to be simple and economical — any moderately handy person with a backyard and \$400 can build an oven in a weekend. "You basically need tools, materials and some friends and then you've got an oven," Jones said.

Unlike the oven you have in your kitchen, wood-fired ovens heat to more than 1,000 degrees and rapidly cook

pizzas to slightly blackened perfection. The thick brick radiates heat back into the pizza resulting in crust that is crisp on the outside and soft on the inside.

And pizza isn't the only thing that can be cooked in a

wood-fire oven — breads of all kinds are possible, along with casseroles and cookies. "We recently tried making banana bread with great results," Jones said.

Jones has also been experimenting with unconventional pizzas. "Some of the most popular toppings are caramelized red onions and Gorgonzola cheese," he said, "but we've also been having a lot of fun with dessert pizzas."

The potter-turned-pizza-artist loves to slather his crust with Nutella or ricotta cheese. Then he decorates his sweet pizzas with pinwheels of fruit and nuts. "We're always tweaking things and trying out new seasonal ingredients," he said.

Although Jones makes and uses simple brick and mortar wood-fire ovens, there are many different kinds of stoves that can be installed in the backyard of a budding pizza enthusiast. Beyond brick, stoves are built from stone, adobe, cob (a material similar to adobe) and even cast iron. They can be straightforward and functional, or they can be elaborately engineered to flow with a certain domestic aesthetic.

When friends gather to make and eat pizza, it's a time of community, food and fire. "It's a very social cooking style," Jones said. "Everyone's in the kitchen together preparing toppings and rolling out dough."

According to Jones, a backyard stove is completely accessible to anyone dreaming of creating gourmet pizza in her backyard. He has written an e-book detailing the stove construction process, and he sells the instruction manual to the general public for \$10. "I'm helping my friends build ovens," Jones said, "and they'll help their friends build ovens and hopefully they'll spread like wildfire."



A Jessie Jones backyard oven

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Jessie Jones can be contacted at pizzaovenmanual@gmail.com for additional information or a copy of his e-book.

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