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Kachelöfen Go Global*
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KRAFTWOMAN:

Jessica Steinhäuser's Kachelöfen Match Local Talent With Global Demand

by Chris Tiessen

Locally, Jessica Steinhäuser is known in a number of capacities. Owner of **Stonehouse Pottery**. Founder of the **Guelph Potter's Market**. Wife of acclaimed local photographer Dean Palmer. Runner. Mother. Mentor. Friend.

Jessica Steinhäuser with Mario Zauner installing a Kachelöfen in the home of Julia & Aspen in Guelph



Further afield, it's another story altogether.

Internationally, Jessica has emerged as a leading authority of the *Kachelofen*: a type of masonry stove originating from fifteenth-century Germany that functions to warm a home efficiently, and – no less important – *gorgeously*. Indeed, one only has to lay eyes on a single example of Jessica's work to see how energy efficiency and aesthetic brilliance are not necessarily mutually exclusive categories. And recent solo shows at the **MacDonald Stewart Act Centre** here in Guelph and **The Canadian Clay & Glass Gallery** in Waterloo bely the fact that Jessica's *Kachelöfen* (*the plural of Kachelofen*) are more about form walking hand in hand with function than merely following it.

Vail, Colorado. Cairn Valley, Scotland. Santa Fe, New Mexico. Easton, Maryland. Cambrils, Spain. Jessica's functional art has blessed these exotic locales, and more. And these days there's no slowing down. Indeed, an upcoming commission in New Plymouth, New Zealand is further proof that Jessica's *Kachelöfen* are a hot commodity on a global scene. As Jessica notes: 'Up to the end of last year, I had designed and helped install only eight ovens in ten years. Yet within the last two months, I've been commissioned to complete another eight ovens with a further eight requests for consultations.' Jessica continues: 'Truth be told, I haven't had time to make mugs or bowls in two years. My days are filled with *Kachelöfen*.'

It wasn't always this good, though. As Jessica reminisces: 'When I built my first *Kachelofen* back in 2005 as a sort of 'floor model' to entice potential clients, it sat gathering dust for over two years.' She adds: 'For years finances were tight as I tried to balance roles as mother, wife, production potter *and* *Kachelofen* maker. That's why I'm not taking my recent successes for granted at all. And I especially don't take for granted the support of my kids and amazing husband, Dean, who have put up with me for far too long.' She concludes: 'It's because of my struggles that I am able to so fully relish every moment of my accomplishments.'



'Energy efficiency and aesthetic brilliance are not necessarily mutually exclusive categories..'

And every moment of each commission, too, which are hardly 'quick jobs'. Consider this: the design process alone – *creating precise drawings, calculating shrinkage, making prototypes and molds, testing glazes, etc.* – can take up to half a year. Add another three weeks for the creation of each individual piece (which can range from 140 to 300 pieces per commission, depending on the size of the oven); time for drying so the pieces don't lose their shape or crack; days to weeks for shipment and delivery to the build site (which, as noted above, can be anywhere around the world); and a final week for the install (which Jessica compares to *'playing Lego'*).

While it might at first seem likely that Guelph – *recognized internationally for its green energy initiatives* – would be home to the majority of Jessica's ultra energy-efficient Kachelöfen commissions, the truth is that installing in our community has proven extremely difficult. As Jessica remarks: 'I've only *just* installed the first legally-permitted Kachelofen. And it certainly wasn't easy,' she continues, citing a year-long process to gain the appropriate permits which included added layers of extra costs both to herself and her clients. 'Now that the first one's been completed, though, I'm hoping that the next dozen here in Guelph are a breeze!'

If jaw-droppingly gorgeous form, utterly efficient function, and internationally-recognized talent are any indication, they certainly will be!



Photo by Dean Palmer