

Want a superb way to heat your house that does not depend on electricity, fossil fuel or a HUGE woodpile out back? Look into masonry heaters—the generic name for tile stoves, kachelofens, heat-storing fireplaces, ceramic stoves, grundofens. Russian or Finnish fireplaces and fireplace-furnaces. Non-polluting, safe and cost effective, they use less fuelwood per heating season than your ordinary stove or fireplace. The surface is never too hot to touch, the warmth they radiate has been likened to sunshine, and they originated in “the old country.”

For many centuries peasants and princes of Europe warmed up hut and palace alike with massive masonry and tile stoves. These ranged from the simplest of white-washed clay stoves to the ornate, tile-clad masterpieces of the wealthy.

Stove masons of the day spent many years learning and perfecting their skills. Theirs was a craft whose secrets were carefully guarded, often handed down from father to son for generations.

The basic designs for most of the masonry heaters in use today were developed during Europe’s 300-year-long “Little Ice Age” from 1500 to 1800, when wood was in extremely short supply and fossil fuel not yet widely available.

They are still the heating system of choice for many people in Sweden, Finland, Denmark, Germany and Russia. Introduced into North America in the late 70’s, they have gained a strong foothold in both the U.S. and Canada.

Masonry heaters rely on

wood’s capacity to give off tremendous heat quickly and the ability of masonry materials to soak up that heat and release it slowly over a 12-to-24-hour period. One hot fire a day is often all that’s needed.

I know one stove mason who built a concrete-block house, insulated the exterior and laid up his masonry heater at its center. He and his wife can leave for two days in the dead of a Quebec winter and return

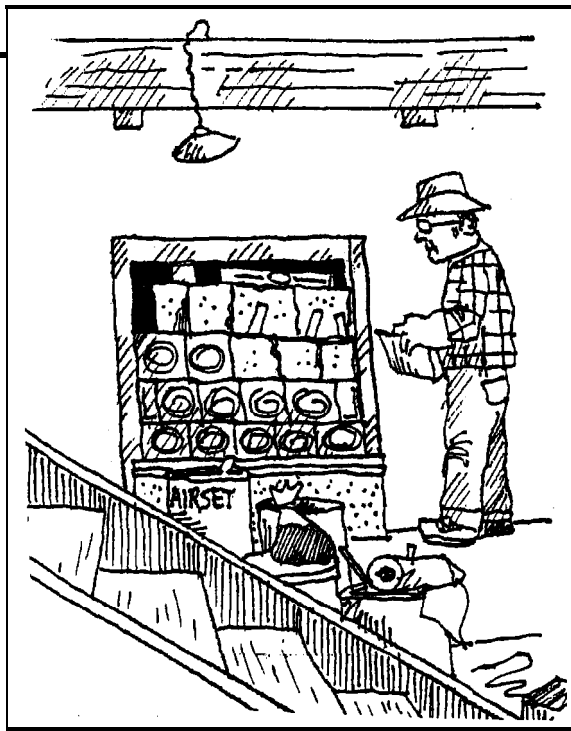
to a house that is still warm.

Masonry heaters require a footer and a suitable chimney. They work best in a house with an open floor plan.

In those early years of their introduction into the U.S. and Canada, workshops held in Maine, New Mexico, Washington and elsewhere acquainted a number of masons with this age-old technology. A small corps of converts formed the

Drawing by Kyle McQueen

U.S. and Canadian stove masons build these heat-storing woodburners on site, finishing them to suit the customer.



The masonry stoves of Europe gain a strong foothold in North America

A technology as old as the hills brings us the safest, most environmentally friendly heating system in the world. (Go for it!)

the Masonry Heater Association of North America (MHA).

Many of these craftsmen have become fine craftsmen who build masonry heaters on site for their customers. Several have designed modular heater kits with components a skilled mason can set up, finishing with the tile, stone or brick of the customer’s choice.

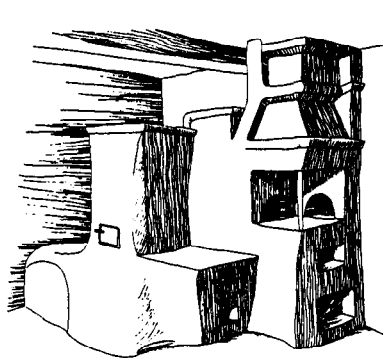
As the demand for masonry heaters grows, core kits may become the norm, as there are too few stove masons. So, just order the kit and hire a local mason to build it with instructions and technical support from the kit manufacturer.

There are also factory-made heaters available for delivery and set-up.

Heater building is an exacting discipline, with much to learn concerning expansion joints, wood-heat technology, venting dynamics, thermal stress, and more. Craftsmen learn from each other, from the “old country” stove masons, and through MHA workshops and seminars.

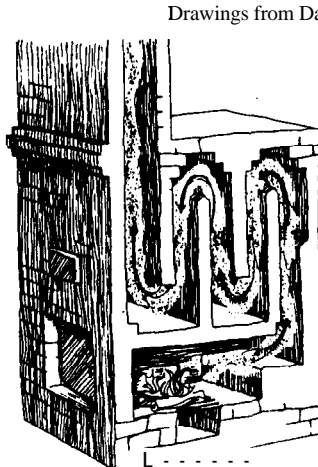
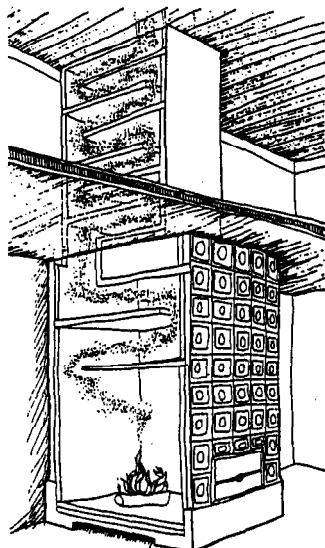
MHA sponsors testing of the basic masonry heater designs to document their exceptionally clean burn. In 1998 they put in place a rigorous heater-mason certification program.

Log onto www.mha-net.org to learn more. Or call (802) 728-5896. Excellent books on the subject are David Lyle’s *The Book of Masonry Stoves* and Albie Barden’s *Finnish Fireplaces, Heart of the Home*. —Jay Hensley, editor emeritus of SNEWS magazine.

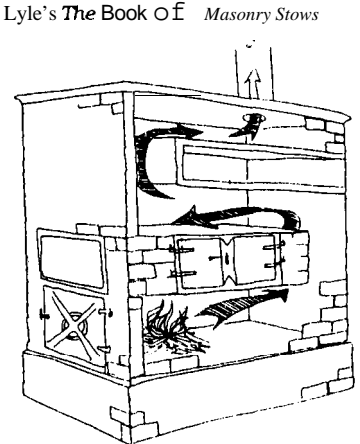


A massive white-washed clay stove used for heating, cooking and baking. (Poland.)

Right: Cutaway of a two-story Austrian-style stove with a tile surface on the first floor, plastered masonry above. (Designed and built in U.S. by Gustav Jung of Vienna.)



Brick stove of a type pioneered in Maine, based on old East European designs. (Basilio Lepuschenko).



In the 1870’s Mennonite farmers from Russia’s Black Sea region settled in Nebraska, where trees were scarce. They heated with their traditional grass-burning stoves made of brick.

Drawings from David Lyle’s *The Book of Masonry Stoves*