Ceramics instructor to create pottery with Japanese-style kiln

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Ceramics Professor Jerry Horning will use wood into a “giant” Japanese-style kiln this summer and hope for what he calls a “happy accident.” Horning will teach a summer class in Flagstaff and take part in the firing of a kiln called a noborigama.

It is 60 feet long, 30 feet wide, has chambers and is housed in a tin shed. It can hold 2,000 pots and takes 12 days to reach the desired temperature of 2,500 degrees.

“It takes 27 cords of wood to fire it,” Horning said. “It gets so hot in front of the fire box. You throw six pieces of wood in, stand back for a minute, and then do it again.”

The “happy accident” occurs as ashes from the wood glaze on the pots and the clay melts to form different patterns, Horning said. Because the heat is intense, the pots are limited to fall colors.

The pots nearest the furnace completely melt and others look like “they have been on the bottom the ocean for a couple of hundred years,” Horning said.

The process takes 20 days, Horning said. It takes three days to load it with wood, 12 days to fire it up, four days for it to cool and another day to unload.

Horning and Arts senior Paul Klein will contribute some of their utilitarian and double wall pots to the noborigama this summer, he said.

This will be Horning’s second summer helping to fire the kiln. Northern Arizona ceramics Professor Don Bendel invited him to participate last summer.

The designer of noborigama, Yukai Yamamoto, will come from Japan to take part in the firing.

“The Japanese treat the kiln as a living thing,” Horning said. It is almost like a religious ceremony to start the kiln. They will sprinkle salt and sake and ask for a good firing, he said.

“Everything is very spiritual in a way,” Horning said.

Yamamoto is a respected artist, Horning said. He is coming to Omaha in September to do demonstrations at Creighton and the Bemis Foundation.