

Kiln Corner

How to Master a Digital Kiln Controller

by Arnold Howard

Photography Courtesy of Paragon Industries, LP.

Though Arnold Howard works for Paragon Industries, L.P., the information here applies to all brands of glass kilns. Feel free to send questions for this column no matter what brand of kiln you own.

Be-coming familiar with the inner workings of your kiln's digital controller is important to ensure success in your kiln work. Sometimes that may seem like an impossible task, but following a few simple steps will help you to master this essential part of the optimal use of your kiln.

Know Your Kiln's Features

Start by sitting down in front of your kiln with the controller instruction manual and become familiar with the basic controller features. Take your time. Enjoy discovering what the controller is capable of doing. Take notes. Mark important sections of the manual.

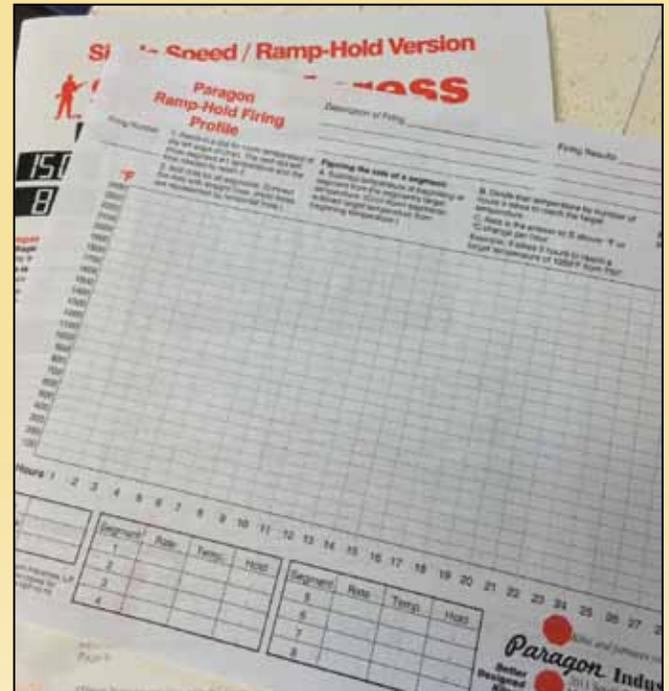
A temperature controller can still seem daunting after only reading the manual, so find several firing schedules, also called programs, that you can enter into the controller. If the manual for your kiln does not include them, find a dozen sample schedules online or make up your own. Then practice entering the schedules. After entering a schedule, make sure you press the "Stop" key to prevent the kiln from firing. Your confidence will grow as you practice entering firing schedules.

When you are ready to actually fire your kiln, start with simple projects such as glass pendants. They are easy to fire and can survive even very fast heating and cooling rates. Fire more challenging projects as you gain experience. Watch the glass through a peephole or kiln window to become familiar with the appearance of the stages of glass fusing.

Experiment with New Schedules

A new firing schedule is only a starting point. If the results are imperfect, modify the firing schedule the next time you fire the kiln. Some artists change a firing schedule every time they use it, because they constantly try to improve the firing results.

When someone gives you a firing schedule, try to figure out the reason for each segment. What is a bubble squeeze? Why is a full rate needed before the annealing segment? You can find this type of information in the kiln instruction manual and glass fusing books as well as at seminars. Understanding the reason for each segment will eliminate the mystery behind a controller and will help you to design your own schedules.



Use a firing profile sheet to create a firing schedule. The profile sheet will help you to visualize the steps of a firing. Each step requires a separate segment.



If you fire your kiln often, the controller will feel as simple to operate as a microwave oven.

Arnold Howard writes instruction manuals and advertisements for Paragon Industries, L.P. His hobbies are glass fusing and karate. He also enjoys studying history and watching classic movies. You can reach Arnold at ahoward@paragonweb.com with questions for future columns. Sign up for his kiln newsletter at www.paragonweb.com.

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