

Functional Fires

1 Annika Svensson working on Yellow Tiled Stove, 1997 (Photo: Ulf Serral) 2 Green Tiled Stove, based on the theme of 'Forest Moss', hand-pressed tiles, red earthenware clay, white slip, green glaze, 2009-2010, H210cm



Petter Eklund tells us the history of Annika Svensson's tiled stoves.

'Put another log on the fire for me, I've made some breakfast and coffee...'

The first verse of David Bowie's song Oh you pretty things always makes you think of one of the most comforting moments: an open fire at home. However modern we are, such fires and their fireplaces attract us. We have all sat in front of them: by campfires, open stoves, and fireplaces, thawed our frozen limbs while staring into the secret world of the flames. Everyman once warmed himself, even in towns, by burning wood or coal in stoves or fireplaces, but then succumbed to central heating and electricity. Fireplaces became luxuries and only in the first decade of the present century were they rejuvenated as innovative sources of friendly warmth.

A SWEDISH ART FORM The fireplace is a work of art for Swedish ceramist Annika Svensson, who lives and works in Gothenburg. The Swedish form of the fireplace, called *kakelugn*, meaning 'a tiled stove', is often a large tiled object representing several centuries of Swedish tradition. Annika has made it into her ceramic specialty, for she has become fascinated by its expressive potential and now calls herself a *kakelugnsmakare*, a maker of tiled stoves.

'For me,' she says, 'a *kakelugn* is spatially unique and functional. Each has its own personality. When I create one I think constantly about its entirety and proportions, how it will fit into the space given to it – if it will adapt to it or dominate it.'



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3 White Stove, red earthenware, white slip, transparent glaze, 2003, H145cm (Photo: Olof Thiel) 4 Green Tiled Stove, based on the theme of 'Forest Moss', detail of fire

door, 2009-2010 5 Green Tiled Stove, hand-pressed clay tiles, terracotta natural clay from Horn in Sweden, white slip, 1999 (installed in 2008), H222cm



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We drive in her vintage Volvo to her studio in an industrial area in a suburb of Gothenburg, where she has been working for ten years in a former print shop, under a bakery, and beside neighbours who include a mechanical workshop, a flea market, and a motorbike club. She is inspired by travel, music, memories of pictures, other images, and colour; a further inspiration is her other work in clay. She has always worked in sculptural and utilitarian forms: cups, dishes, pots, and flowers, which she offers for sale in shops and galleries run cooperatively by groups of other artists.

FINDING THE STOVE FORM Her first tiled stove was her master examination work at the Ceramics Department at the School of Design and Crafts at the University of Gothenburg in 1997. Earlier she had worked mostly in stoneware and porcelain, but finally longed for earthenware's colours. 'I also wanted to work in a larger format, and also spatially.'

A key event was a lecture on the history of the tiled stove. Including a picture of an Austrian tiled stove with a female form, it showed that a tiled stove could be art, so she decided to build one. Being a Swede, and living in a house built in 1900, she was already close to these stoves.

'I have three in my present home. Two work well, and we use them often. I can remember the marks in the floor of my childhood home from tiled stoves that were torn down in the 1950s to make way for oil-fired heating. Their remains were turned into a brown-tiled fireplace that we never used.'

HISTORY Annika Svensson is renewing a proud Swedish tradition. The first tiled stove was created in the eighteenth century when forests were being razed to feed iron ore furnaces. A government enquiry in 1767 led to the presentation of the Cronstedt & Wrede stove: its vertical smoke flues directed the smoke and heat through its interior. By storing the heat, more than half the energy was saved. The apertures admitting air to the fire were reduced in dimension and were kept shut while the fire burned – and its logs



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6 **Naples Yellow Tiled Stove** with green looping ornaments, red earthenware clay, white slip, green and Naples yellow-tinted glazes, 2008, H1.5m **7 Sculptural Tiled Stove – Mora Clock**, white earthenware, slip made from terracotta Swedish natural brick clay, 2001-2002, H236cm (Photo: Lisa Brännström)

Exhibition Galleri Anna H, Gothenburg, Sweden, 2012
Commissions Annika is currently working on a round tiled stove for an experimental building project near Stockholm, and a commission by the National Public Art Council, Sweden, to make several ceramic sculptures for the entrance of Skatteverket
Stockists Konsthantverkarna in Stockholm; Nääs Konsthantverk close to Gothenburg

– both in Sweden. The tiled stoves can be ordered directly from the artist
Email info@keramik-kakelugnar.com
Web www.keramik-kakelugnar.com
Petter Eklund is a freelance writer living in Stockholm, Sweden. He has written books on twentieth-century artists at Gustavsberg and Rörstrand, and modern Swedish artists, including Eva Hild and Mia E Göransson
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Images of climbing plants wrap themselves sensuously around the bodies of stoves with legs like those of small plump pugs

were shorter. These arrangements were so good that they have remained largely unchanged; they appear in Annika's stoves.

Eighteenth-century stoves in palaces and larger country houses were handmade luxury items. Those from the Rörstrand and Marieberg factories (founded 1726 and 1758 respectively) are now historical masterpieces of Swedish ceramics. Urban growth in the nineteenth century made tiled stoves a standard utilitarian product but, embellished with makers' names and consciously decorated with art history motifs – neo-Renaissance, neo-Gothic, majolica, even National Romantic Nordic myths and Viking themes – they could also modishly indicate bourgeois status.

The mid-nineteenth-century ceramics industry comprised hundreds of factories that supplied tiled stoves, but after World War I they died out, as urban domestic heating came from hot water radiators. Architects, including Ferdinand Boberg (1860-1946), Gunnar Asplund (1885-1940), and Sigurd Lewerentz (1885-1962), made attempts to renew their design, but in vain: they faded out of use and were still being torn down in the 1970s: some can recall the heaped remains of tiled stoves outside buildings being

modernised. Only in the 1980s and 1990s did they become symbols of status and of climate-conscious technique and innovative heating, while also being valuable antiques.

IN THE PRESENT Annika's first creation had the form of a jukebox or fantasy beetle of art deco vintage, 2.65 metres high in shiny sunny-yellow tiling. The Swedish media loved it and it also won first prize for the best work by a student at the seven Swedish schools of design. Finding a buyer has been another matter: this tiled stove, which should grace a palace throne room, is still in store. In fact, it took eight years before Annika sold a tiled stove, a beautiful sinuously green stove.

'My work was something altogether novel and unprecedented, besides being done by a young woman. People were a little suspicious and wondered whether these stoves could really be used to make fire in.'

Annika markets her stoves at trade fairs, museums, and the like, and her reputation spreads from stove to stove, between friends, and from her homepage. Orders began to appear, but a price of 100,000 Swedish crowns or more (less than half the Swedish price of a small Volvo) puts off potential buyers, although she has made at least a stove a year during the past decade, and since 2007 she has produced only for firm orders. The United Kingdom has two: one in a house in Kilmelford, south of Oban, and the other in an ecological house in the New Forest.

These exotics seem to attract people who think innovatively. In an environmental experiment near Stockholm, Annika integrated a cylindrical stove into the water system of a low-energy house; one

of its owners is from India and wished its tiles to be glazed in a dramatic lilac. A hospital has a green tiled stove but the regulations constrain its use to that of a purely artistic object with heating elements and an artificial fire.

'In this hospital waiting room the stove is newly significant as an icon of security, which gave meaning to this commission.'

TECHNICAL ASPECTS Annika manufactures her stoves as experiments, trying for technical resolutions and novel expressions. Using brushed-on shellac, she applies patterns in relief derived from what she saw in China. Images of climbing plants wrap themselves sensuously around the bodies of stoves with legs like those of small plump pugs; the wrought-metal parts of air intakes and regulators are humorous additions; they are also coloured blue.

Made in 2001, and named *Moraklocksugnen* or 'The Mora Clock Stove', this handmade work has the form of a haughty buxom female form, inspired by Annika's memories of a traditional upright clock in her paternal grandmother's home.

She makes her stoves with earthenware tiles with an addition of grog; to build a stove takes from three to five months, depending on how complicated it is, or whether the commission is for a wholly novel form or a variation of an existing stove. Over the years Annika has worked out how to form tiles by hand and then to ornament and decorate their surfaces. Each of her stoves is nevertheless unique, not least through the design of its handmade wrought-iron details. Her stoves are heat-spreading prima donnas, eye-catching but uncompromisingly lovely in their modern mixture of styles, functions, and imaginative playfulness. ■

Tiled Stoves



TURQUOISE TILED STOVE, CREATED BY ANNIKA SVENSSON IN 2007
 This turquoise stove was inspired by a trip to China and by maritime elements. The appeal of the rich relief, clad in heaps of seeds (*Koelpinia linearis*), is enhanced by the glaze and creates a sense of movement. The relief pattern is created in shellac on white earthenware. The metalwork is blue-fired iron. Its height is 1.5m, base 0.47m², and the upper part is 0.36m². The stove incorporates two internal flues; its body retains heat for about four hours after the fire has burned out. The stove is a smaller alternative to a tiled wood-burning stove; from the centre of its back, smoke is directed through a horizontal pipe with a damper and smoke hatch to the chimney. The fire door has a draught vent that can be regulated. The stove has been shown in Stockholm at the Furniture Fair and at Arkitekturmuseet, in Gothenburg at Röhsska Museum, at the EU-nique in Karlsruhe, Germany, and at *Swedish Love Stories* in Milan, Italy.

1 When all the handmade tiles are ready and leatherhard, I set them together and draw the pattern by hand. Each tile has its given place and position.
2 When the tiles are quite dry, I brush shellac onto the design I have drawn.

I let the shellac dry and then wipe it with a damp sponge. This leaves a slightly raised surface. I repeat the process and add the thorns. This further level gives the effect of depth.
3 I mix and colour my own glazes. I repeatedly brush layers of earthenware glaze onto the bisque-fired tiles to emphasise the form of the relief.
4 A recently emptied glaze firing in my 500-litre trolley kiln, in which fit all the tiles for a single stove. It is an oxidation firing of up to 1055°C.
5 Wrought iron details are made to order according to my drawings, patterns, and models; they are then blue-fired. A connecting duct from the back of the stove is fitted with a smoke hatch and a draught regulator in the form of a flower (*Koelpinia linearis*).
6 The 28cm x 20cm fire door has a draught vent that can be regulated with a lateral movement; the mica window or peep-hole, which gives a sight of the fire, is in the form of a seed in silhouette.
7 The entire stove assembled and ready for use: it is 1.5m high, occupies a floor space of 47cm x 47cm, and weighs 300kg. During three months in 2006-7, I spent eighty hours on the relief and a further 360 hours on the rest of my work.

CUSTOM-MADE TILED STOVE WITH OAK LEAF DECOR

Made to fit the site and the niche, this twenty-first-century stove is placed in one room of the main building of Fullersta Gård Konst & Kultur, Huddinge, Sweden. Stoves in the three other rooms derive from three earlier centuries.

Rolled white earthenware is carefully pressed into a plaster mould with a relief of oak leaves, twigs, and acorns. The tile is labelled, a lattice is affixed to its back, and it is marked with name, place, and year. The next day, it is taken from the mould and polished.



Wedging and rolling out clay to 1cm thickness



Precise placing of clay into plaster mould



Pressing into place and using a special roller



Brushing slip onto the clay



Affixing a lattice onto the back of the tile



Carefully positioning the frame of the mould



Marking with name, place, and year



Emptying the plaster mould the next day



Carefully lifting the tile out of the plaster mould



Outer surface of the tile, showing its relief



Checking the size of the fire door vent



Arranging all the leatherhard pieces