

Chapter 7

Finishing Options

Stone, brick, tile, stucco, and Kachelofen traditions

The exterior finishing material of your masonry heater is more than aesthetic. The outer facing is part of the active thermal mass of the heater. A minimum of 4 inches of solid masonry on all sides is required by code and for performance - this mass absorbs heat from the core during firing and radiates it slowly into your space over many hours.

Natural Stone Veneer

Full 4 to 5.5-inch natural stone veneer is the finishing material our clients choose most often. Natural stone has outstanding thermal mass properties, ages beautifully, requires essentially no maintenance, and creates a heater that looks like it has always been part of the home. Minnesota fieldstone, quartzite, granite, limestone, and sandstone all work well. Local sourcing is often possible in rural areas.

Thin stone veneer at 1 to 1.5 inches is not appropriate - it does not provide adequate thermal mass and is not code-compliant as a heater facing.

Brick Veneer

Common face brick at 4 inches is the second most common finishing choice. Brick is somewhat more economical than stone in most markets and available in a wide range of colors and textures. The mortar color selection is as important as the brick color - a gray or buff mortar with a warm red brick is very different from the same brick with a dark charcoal mortar.

Concrete Block with Stucco or Thin Veneer Stone

CMU construction with a stucco or thin real stone veneer finish is the most economical finishing approach and is well-suited to contemporary, Scandinavian, or farmhouse aesthetics. Thin real stone veneer at 3 to 4 inches applied over CMU combines the economics of CMU construction with the warmth and texture of natural stone.

Limewash and Stucco Finishes

Lime-based finishes - traditional lime plaster, natural hydraulic lime stucco, and limewash - are among the most historically authentic finishes for masonry heaters and are experiencing a strong resurgence in contemporary design. Lime finishes are vapor-permeable, working in harmony with the thermal cycling of the heater. Traditional portland cement stucco can develop hairline cracks over time due to the repeated heating and cooling cycles; lime-based finishes are more flexible and more forgiving.

Tile: Accent Use Only

Standard floor tiles are not designed for the thermal cycling stress that a masonry heater surface experiences. Even a small differential expansion between the tile and the setting bed can cause grout

cracking and tile failure over years of daily firing. If tiles are used as the primary facing, use soapstone tiles or purpose-made refractory tiles from a masonry heater supplier. Standard ceramic or porcelain tile is appropriate for accents only - a tile inset around the firebox opening, a decorative band above the oven door, or a tile sill on the heated bench.

Kachelofen and Kakelugn Tile Stoves

For clients who want a heater that is as much a work of art as it is a heating appliance, we build custom tile stoves in both the German/Austrian Kachelofen tradition and the Swedish Kakelugn style. Kachelofen tiles are purpose-made ceramic tiles - typically hollow-backed for thermal performance - available in hand-painted antique reproduction styles, smooth glazed contemporary styles, and everything in between.

The Swedish Kakelugn is typically taller and more slender, often white with minimal decoration, well-suited to the clean lines of Scandinavian interior design. Both traditions are relatively rare in North America because of cost - hand-made or imported European tiles combined with calculated design services make these projects premium investments. We build one to two per year. Contact us to discuss options.

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solidrockmasonry.com | 218-343-2978 | eric@solidrockmasonry.com