

Cob Oven Workshop with Tom Trout





Dan Givens from Alaska prepares a base for the oven. The oven is temporary and will be dismantled after the workshop.



Tom Trout has brought a load of local clay from an excavation site mixed with straw.



The hearth is recycled firebrick laid dry. Tom spots the door plug in place with cob.



The oval shape of the oven is sketched out on the hearth. The oven shape is based on the traditional Quebec oven, and can be described as a "crouching groundhog". In Quebec it is described as a beaver.

Scaled drawings for a slightly larger shape can be found at the [2003 French Oven Workshop](#)



Damp sand is used to form a mold for the clay oven shape.



Sand is packed in place.



Firebricks are used to shape the edge of the sand. John Rousseau wets the sand.



John and Tom prepare cob. Water is added and the mix is worked into bread loaf shaped lumps that are laid on the form



Additional firebricks.





Preparing cob. Footpower is fun.



Preparing cob lumps ready for placing on the sand form.











The goal is to get approximately a 4 - 9" thickness. In a more permanent oven, the first layer would be adobe (clay and sand) instead of cob (clay and straw). This is described in thorough detail in Kiko Denzer excellent book [Build Your Own Earth Oven.](#)



As the layers are placed, finger holes are added to provide a key for the next layer.





The oven is built on Tuesday - total time, about 2 hours. There will be a pizza party on Thursday, so we need an accelerated drying schedule.

Patrice Dupont lights a fire immediately, in order to burn out the door plug and start drying the clay. After the plug is gone, sand is gradually removed and the fire is pushed inside the oven



Patrice Dupont and Pat Manley check for warmth as Scott Goodman looks on.





Decorative touches are added as the oven dries.





The fire progresses inside the oven.



Sand is gone, and the front of the oven is dry.



Note the dry patch at the front (left) top.



Various air systems were tried to speed up the burn. Air is entering at the bottom, and smoke is exiting at the top.



Fire is hot enough to ignite smoke that is leaving the oven.



A torch test on the clay. This particular local clay does not fire very hard. The surface is still quite water absorbent, but abrades somewhat less.





Pizza time. William Davenport and Tom Trout display their skills.





Loading pizza.

Note the different colour spots from the torch tests on the oven side.



Baking pizza. Floor temperature is around 600F and dome temperature 700F. Hearth is cooler near the door, where cold air rushes in. Pizza in a wood oven is baked by radiation from the dome and conduction from the hearth. Cool air is streaming over the pizza itself.



Post mortem.

The area around the door is quite soft, and abrades easily.



Norbert Senf slices the oven with a diamond blade.







Note the redder fired layer on the inside, and the darker intermediate layer where there is charred straw.



Overall thickness is around 3" - 4".






