

## Building an Earth Oven at the Anderson Wells Farm

*“Life asks us to participate—to watch, to learn, and to create. To be either artist or craftsman is no more and no less than it is to be human: to engage hands, head and heart in the genesis of form and relationship; to celebrate and renew self and world; to be whole and wholly involved; to offer communion and to build community; or just to make a mud oven so you can bake your own bread.”*

—Kiko Denzer, *Build Your Own Earth Oven*

Kiko Denzer’s beautiful words get to the heart of what it is we’re aiming to do in everything we undertake at Vermont Family Forests. And Denzer knows better than most that few activities engage hands, heart, and head better than the process of bringing together stone, clay, sand, fiber, and water to form an earth oven.

This summer we built an earth oven at VFF’s Anderson Wells Farm. We finished it just in time for an inaugural firing in July during a gathering we held for all the neighbors whose lands border the three VFF Anderson properties. Some mighty tasty pizzas emerged from that gathering, flavored with basil from the garden. We expect the earth oven to be the inviting hearth around which many future VFF gatherings coalesce—baking pizzas, bread, and whatever else is placed within its heated dome.



*The oven’s foundation is a little like an iceberg--much lies below the surface. We dug down 4 feet, then laid in a rubblestone-and-concrete base up to ground level. Above, Dylan Weinick uses stones from the Anderson land to build the base upon which the oven sits.*



*An arch of bricks creates a durable opening for the earth oven.*



*Photo 1: One of the many pleasures in building an earth oven is designing the decorative outer layer. Since the brick opening reminded us of teeth, we decided that the oven should be a head, and that the head should be that of the Hindu goddess Durga, goddess of the Universe. Lester and Monique Anderson owned a beautiful statue of Durga, which still makes a powerful presence in the farmhouse on the Anderson Wells land. In this photo, the very first pizzas await firing in the oven. It takes about two hours of wood firing for the oven to heat up fully for pizza making.*



*Once the oven was fully fired, we pushed the coals back, swept out the central space on the fire bricks, and slid in the first pizza.*