



ROB LICHT CUSTOM SAUNAS

ROBLICHT1@GMAIL.COM • WWW.ROBLICHTCUSTOMSAUNAS.COM • 607-342-0234
24 BALD HILL RD, BROOKTONDALE NY 14817 • A DIVISION OF ROB LICHT STUDIO, LLC
CUSTOM BUILT FINNISH STYLE WOODBURNING, ELECTRIC, AND MOBILE SAUNAS

Using and Maintaining Your Wood Fired Sauna

Getting the sauna ready- gathering the wood and water, lighting the stove and tending the fire are as much a part of the sauna ritual as the actual sauna. It is a time to step away from the house, leave technology behind and slow down. While the sweat itself can be done in thirty minutes, you should give yourself over to the entire process for a few hours- time that you lose track of as you revert to "Sauna Time".

Firewood

When selecting wood to burn think "sticks", not logs. The sauna stove is meant to be fired fast and hot—old pine boards and scrap wood works great with a little bit of harder wood such as oak, cherry or locust once the stove gets going. A short sauna will take only one armload of wood. For longer saunas with more people coming and going plan on reloading as the fire goes down. Hardwood will keep a fire burning longer than softwood. The sticks should be about the diameter of your finger to start off, working up to the thickness of your arm- no big logs! If you are buying cordwood, ash is a good wood that splits easily and burns hot.

Firing the stove

Before you start, make sure that the damper control (in the sauna room on the stove pipe on some installations) is in the fully open position. The axis of the handle should be vertical. If your stove has the water tank you will want to fill it before the stove gets really hot. Empty the ash drawer if it is full while the ashes are cold. Some ashes in the pan will help insulate and preserve the bottom of the ash pan.

Start with several sheets of DRY newspaper- avoid those glossy ad pages heavy with ink, use only the black and white sections. Wad them up tightly and place them directly on the grate. Next place the smallest sticks— about the thickness of



ROB LICHT CUSTOM SAUNAS

ROBLICHT1@GMAIL.COM • WWW.ROBLICHTCUSTOMSAUNAS.COM • 607-342-0234
24 BALD HILL RD, BROOKTONDALE NY 14817 • A DIVISION OF ROB LICHT STUDIO, LLC

CUSTOM BUILT FINNISH STYLE WOODBURNING, ELECTRIC, AND MOBILE SAUNAS

your fingers –on the newspaper. Continue stacking up the wood – criss-crossing it to leave spaces for the fire to breathe—with the sticks getting larger as you go. Next light it from the bottom and close the door leaving the air holes open fully. On particularly damp or down-drafty days it helps to light a wad of newspaper and shove it up into the top of the stove just prior to lighting the paper underneath the fire– this heats up the stove pipe and gets the draft going. For the first ten minutes you should open the ash drawer a few inches to help increase the draw of the fire. Now is a good time to fill the buckets, get the towels in order, make sure the window is shut tight, etc.

Once the fire is really going (after about ten minutes) you can close the ash drawer and leave the damper control and the air holes in the door fully open. If the chimney is really smoking, leave the ash draw open until it burns clean. You should add a few more sticks now, filling the stove. This will be enough for a good sauna. Once you are confident of your fire-building skills you should be able to walk away at this point and come back in 30-45 minutes to a hot sauna. Experience will tell you if need to close it down a little bit or leave it fully open. Check the stovepipe inside the sauna to make sure it's not firing too hot: it might be a lot hotter than your typical wood stove –but don't let the stovepipe get red hot. To close it down close either or the air control on the door or the damper on the stovepipe or both. The type of wood and the wind and weather outside will affect the firing. For the first few saunas I recommend just hanging out in the dressing room while things heat up so you can learn how the stove operates.

Taking the sauna

If you are expecting a lot of people, let the rocks get really hot before getting in the sauna. You'll want this reserve of heat to maintain the temperature as people come and go. Think of the people as the ice cubes in a drink—the bodies are actually absorbing the heat and taking it away. The optional water tank also acts as a heat reserve. Be careful handling the water as it can get boiling hot. Always mix it with cold water to bathe.



ROB LICHT CUSTOM SAUNAS

ROBLICHT1@GMAIL.COM • WWW.ROBLICHTCUSTOMSAUNAS.COM • 607-342-0234
24 BALD HILL RD, BROOKTONDALE NY 14817 • A DIVISION OF ROB LICHT STUDIO, LLC

CUSTOM BUILT FINNISH STYLE WOODBURNING, ELECTRIC, AND MOBILE SAUNAS

Never bring candles into the sauna- even an unlit candle will melt in there! The "candle window" is so that you can light the sauna room from the dressing room. I don't recommend using actual candles—they can easily cause a fire, use simple battery operated LED lights, instead.

Normally the sauna is fairly dry but not uncomfortably so (public electric units are notorious for being too dry). You can add essential oils to the löyly water for a therapeutic effect—but don't put them straight up on the hot rocks- they will burn and smoke. The high point of the sauna is the löyly- pouring water over the rocks to make steam. Start with a ladle full and go from there. Be careful of the hot steam as you pour- it can burn your hand. Use a long handled ladle.

How hot is hot enough? 180° Fahrenheit is a good starting point, 200° is pretty darn hot and some go even hotter. Usually the sauna is done in rounds—two, three or more ten to twenty minute sessions with a cool down in between. Be sure to drink plenty of fluids in between. Listen to your body and don't overdo it!

Bathing

If you have the water tank, the last phase is washing up. Mix a bucketful of the hot water (careful—it may be scalding) with some cold and really scrub yourself clean as you sit on the lowest bench or bathing stool. You will never feel cleaner because your pores are fully open when you are hot. If you lucky enough to have a birch tree nearby you can make a *vitah* from the branches (or buy them online—imported from Finland!) and gently thrash yourself with it to really stimulate your skin. You can rinse off with a bucketful of warm or cool water in the sauna or outside.

Cleanup

Since the sauna is really a bathhouse, it is important to keep it clean. After every sauna you should scrub and rinse off the benches with water, open the windows and door to let it air out, hang up all the towels and leave the buckets to drain.



ROB LICHT CUSTOM SAUNAS

ROBLICHT1@GMAIL.COM • WWW.ROBLICHTCUSTOMSAUNAS.COM • 607-342-0234
24 BALD HILL RD, BROOKTONDALE NY 14817 • A DIVISION OF ROB LICHT STUDIO, LLC
CUSTOM BUILT FINNISH STYLE WOODBURNING, ELECTRIC, AND MOBILE SAUNAS

Every couple of saunas you should sweep out the sauna, rinse out the water tank (there is a drain in the bottom) and clean out the floor drain if one is included (the cover lifts off). In freezing weather always drain the water tank so the water in the valve doesn't freeze. If it does, the expansion may crack the metal tank. Some benches may lift out or slide back for easier cleaning.

Maintenance

With the exception of the floor and thresholds, none of the surfaces are treated. I recommend yearly cleaning of the wood with mild soap and warm water—or a light sanding—but in no case should you use any chemicals. Every year or so you may want to re-treat the floors. I use water-based *Valspar* or *Thompson's* concrete and wood sealer. This is a wax in an aqueous solution that can mopped on the floor with a rag or sponge. The stove, except for the stainless steel heat shield and rock basket, is untreated and will rust- but is so thick it will last many years. It would be ok to put stove polish on the front of the stove but keep any toxins such as stove polish or paint out of the sauna room. The interior stovepipe may need replacing in about 3-5 years. Check it twice a year. The stovepipe should be cleaned annually - be sure to use a nylon stove brush as stated in the instructions provided with the triple-wall pipe. You can easily do this from inside the sauna. Generally, creosote build-up will not be a problem if you fire the stove hot enough and use dry wood.



ROB LICHT CUSTOM SAUNAS

ROBLICHT1@GMAIL.COM • WWW.ROBLICHTCUSTOMSAUNAS.COM • 607-342-0234
24 BALD HILL RD, BROOKTONDALE NY 14817 • A DIVISION OF ROB LICHT STUDIO, LLC

CUSTOM BUILT FINNISH STYLE WOODBURNING, ELECTRIC, AND MOBILE SAUNAS

WARNINGS

- Direct body contact with the sauna stove or heater, sauna rocks, steam, stove pipe, heat shields and/or other metal objects in the sauna may cause serious injury; this includes metal jewelry worn in the sauna, which can get very hot and can burn the skin.
- Prolonged exposure to the high temperature in a sauna may cause your body to overheat. Limit yourself to a maximum of fifteen (15) minutes at a time and allow your body to cool down to normal body temperature in between sauna rounds. Overexposure to high temperatures can be dangerous to your health. Exit immediately if nauseous, uncomfortable, dizzy or sleepy.
- Check with a doctor before using sauna if pregnant, diabetic, in poor health and/or under medical care.
- Do not use the sauna if you have recently consumed drugs, alcohol, or medications.
- The area outside the sauna, including any steps or decking, may become wet or icy and very slippery, care should be taken when entering or exiting the sauna to avoid slipping and falling.
- If the sauna is wood fired, take care in tending the fire: Use leather gloves when loading the fire, do not leave stove door open while unattended, quickly extinguish any embers that fall out of the stove, and empty ash drawer only when ashes are cold. Keep a fire extinguisher nearby.
- Wood fired saunas should be located away from other structures and materials including the main house, garages, storage sheds, storage piles and wood piles to minimize the risk of fire spreading.