



HERITAGE NEW ZEALAND  
POUHERE TAONGA

Press Release

29 August 2023

## Celebrating the legacy of Mirek Smíšek.

Two significant beehive pottery kilns at Te Horo, on the Kapiti Coast, built by Mirek Smíšek, New Zealand's first professional studio potter, between 1971 and 1973, have been listed in the New Zealand Heritage List/Rārangī Kōrero as a Category 2 historic place.

Miranda Williamson, who prepared the listing report for Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga, says the kilns represent the centrality of studio pottery to New Zealand's craft scene in the 1970s and provide an insight into the studio pottery practice at the time.

"Mirek Smíšek, (1925-2013) a Czechoslovakian-born potter, gained fame for his mastery of the technique of salt glazing, and his output was recognised by being awarded an OBE in 1990. Pottery dominated craftwork in New Zealand in the 1970s and Smíšek found a ready market for his elegant salt glazed teapots, casseroles, bowls and cider-jars," says Miranda.

His two domed brick kilns have a striking appearance. They are 2.25 metres high. Both are of uniformed dimensions and have openings with voussoirs (a wedge-shaped or tapered stone used to construct an arch) on their southern side. An external brick flue originally connected both to provide ventilation to the kilns. A red shed (formed from an 1880s cottage) and the former Te Horo Railway Station, both relocated on the property by Smíšek, also formed part of his pottery centre and are included in the heritage listing.

Smíšek passed away in 2013, but other potters have continued to live and work at the property.

Unfortunately, the two beehive kilns sat directly in the path of the new Peka Peka to Ōtaki Expressway. In 2021, Waka Kotahi (New Zealand Transport Agency), undertook to relocate the kilns 20 metres east of their original location, but still on the same land parcel.

Potter, Duncan Shearer, and master brick layer, Rick Meade, worked together to dismantle and rebuild the kilns and flue. The rebuild is an indication of the esteem in which the kilns are still held.

Jamie MacDuff, from Waka Kotahi, says the new shared path between Peka Peka and Otaki runs past the site and interpretative signage will inform passers-by about the site's significance.

"The Mirek Smíšek Arts Trust/The Kilns at Te Horo that has been formed aspires to develop a new arts centre with the kilns at heart," says Jamie.