

# An ancient kiln is brought back to life

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By Annette Chrysostomou

A newly restored traditional kiln in Kornos is likely to remain the only one of its kind which can be used to produce pottery in Cyprus.

A project aimed at getting the disintegrating kiln ready for pottery production again brought the Kornos women's cooperative and European scholars together this week. The kiln was restored some weeks ago but it was not until on Tuesday that a group of Romanian and British scholars and students fired it up with wood and burned some ceramics under the watchful gaze of the few local potters who still know the procedure.

The project was organised by the European Archaeology Skills Exchange (EASE) which is funded by Erasmus + and is led by Martin Clark from Grampus heritage UK. Since 1996, about 1,000 students have been able to learn traditional Cypriot skills under the programme. Every year since then, small groups of students from European countries have been coming to the island to learn about local skills from villagers.

"There are not enough jobs in the villages," Clark told the Sunday Mail. "A range of skills is lost because the young are encouraged to study subjects like business and live in the towns. There is a serious break in traditions where so many skills are abandoned. We want to convey the message that it is important that people are sustainable. Everybody is creative. It is also a link to our past."



Some of the pottery made the Kornos' women co-operative

Over the years, the Kornos furnace was fixed many times but gradually fell into disrepair, and had been used at all for at least five years. Instead the cooperative borrowed €30,000 to buy a modern one which runs on gas.

“The old one is more sustainable as it uses wood,” Clark said. “The new one is more efficient but expensive and the pots are uniform but you lose the social side of it. In the old days the kiln was part of the social landscape. You had the kiln and there were a lot of village houses around it.”

Pottery has been part of village life since ancient times and definitely since the Bronze Age, and designs follow the Neolithic style. “The design and the technique absolutely belong here,” Clark explained, adding that the design used is a sign that Cyprus was prosperous at the time.

“The decorations are not handled and are not necessary for the use. This shows that people had the time and inclination to decorate the pots, which one wouldn't if one was at war or starving.”

They are also not glazed. This means each one is just a little bit porous.

“It is not that water leaks, but a bit of water is retained in the material. This keeps water inside cool, very useful before there were refrigerators,” he said.

The aim of the project is not to go back to the old ways altogether; the new kiln will continue to be used by the co-ops' employees for commercial production. It is to keep the old traditions alive. Clark suggests the restored furnace can be used at times, for example at festivals.

It is the only one now left in the village, whereas before there were about 10 to 15 in Kornos.

According to the oldest and most skilled craftswoman, Anthoulla Tryfonos, who's in her late 70s, half the village was once involved in making pottery, both men and women. Nowadays only three women are left who have the necessary skills, she says.



Group celebrating the firing up of the kiln

It is very difficult to get young Cypriot people interested in these traditions, the women of the village confirmed. Currently the youngest potter is in her 50s.

Yet, there is some demand for their products. People like to use the Tavvas pots to prepare the traditional dish, for example. It is also a way to work casually. Each of the craftswomen gets paid a proportion of the money from the sale of her pottery. The money is not easily earned, however.

In Kornos, potters traditionally build the pots from the ground instead of using a wheel. This takes time, and each person can produce just three to five pieces a day, depending on the size and design.

After that, the items have to be stored in a dark place to dry for three to four months before being fired in the kiln. The heating takes approximately 12 hours and an expert is needed to judge when the pottery is ready.

Asked how you know, veteran potter Tryfonos said it's a combination of things. The colour of the clay changes, but this alone is not conclusive. The colour of the oven also changes, and the fire has a different quality.

"I just know," she said by way of explanation.

The way things are going, soon there might be nobody who can utter these words with such conviction.

For more info on the projects <http://www.grampusheritage.co.uk/archaeology/ease/>

<http://cyprus-mail.com/2016/05/15/ancient-kiln-brought-back-life/>