

P U C K E R   G A L L E R Y   .   B O S T O N



# TRANSFORMATION AND USE

*New Works by Ken Matsuzaki*



# Taking Friendly Fire: Ken Matsuzaki and the Yōhen Challenge



**MK283** Natural Ash Glaze Yōhen Shino Teabowl  
4 x 4 1/2 x 4 1/2"



**MK285** Tetsu-Shino Teabowl  
4 x 4 1/2 x 4 1/2"

*"In a time of political and economic uncertainty, with a leader struggling to impose adherence to his vision of order and progress, discerning artists emerge to point a way out of the chaos toward a new realm where creativity fuses the spirits of man and nature."*

A hopeful speculation on cultural life at the beginning of America's new millennium? No—rather a description of what took place during Japan's Momoyama period, roughly 1575-1625, widely considered to be a golden age of Japanese culture. After a century of military unrest during which central authority was weak and warlords battled each other for territorial gains, in the late sixteenth century a series of authoritarian rulers sought to bring the country under control. It was during that era that *chanoyu* (the tea ceremony) reached its philosophical apex, and Japan's ceramic art attained its greatest heights of innovation and energy.

Although he has mastered a wide variety of techniques, formats, and styles during the course of his long career, Ken Matsuzaki today seems most at home among the textures, colors, and forms that were first seen four hundred years ago. This is in no way to imply that what Matsuzaki creates are simply his own versions of Momoyama period wares; rather, it is the power of that age that emanates from the products of his kiln. In fact, only a few of Matsuzaki's ceramic shapes have clear antecedents in the wares of historical kilns, and even these have been altered to match his conceptual goals.

What truly sets Matsuzaki apart from other potters is the extreme care he gives to the form and finish in the construction of his pieces – and his willingness to risk the potential ruin of what has been so carefully built in the highly volatile



environment of his kiln. His unfired pots can be likened to soldiers sent to the front lines, destined to return home as either heroes or corpses. But Matsuzaki knows well that the risk of his extreme firing method is necessary to give birth to works that vibrate with energy and strength.

The ability to “let go” of his pots and allow the fire to do its work over a period of days in a wood-fired kiln did not come quickly or easily for Matsuzaki. He built his first wood-burning kiln 28 years ago, and created his unique climbing kiln with two fire mouths nearly two decades after. His current kiln was created with a chamber designed specifically to fire unglazed pieces so that they were covered with large quantities of kiln ash during the course of the firing. Depending on the interaction of a variety of factors, including fuel type, draft, distribution of pieces, length of firing and changes in kiln temperature, the silica in the ash that collected on the pots vitrifies and forms a patchy, “natural” ash glaze. In addition, the draft that moves the flame through the kiln can create flashes of reds, browns and blacks on the exposed surfaces of the pots. These effects are known in Japan as *yōhen* (kiln-change), because they occur strictly as a result of the firing itself.

*Yōhen* works are subject to increased risk because they entail firings of three days or longer (Matsuzaki fires for seven days) and because reliance is placed on the incidental movement of flame and ash in the kiln to complete the pieces. If an unglazed item is placed in a position where it

is not reached by ash or flame, it comes out of the kiln as simply a bland, monochromatic ceramic piece with no glaze – not very exciting, and in the potter’s eyes, often a failure. The challenge of a *yōhen* firing is to position the pots and carefully manipulate the course of the firing so that the maximum variety of color and desired ash effect are achieved. This takes tremendous effort for Matsuzaki, who has to keep a close eye on the firing for an entire week. (Of course, he has a number of assistants to feed the kiln and allow him to catch a wink or two now and then!)

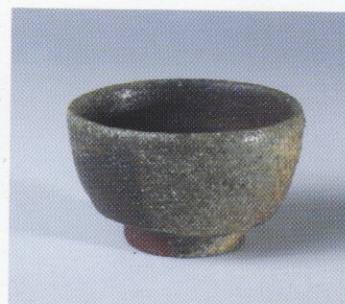
In 2001, Ken Matsuzaki at last took a step that he had been contemplating for seven years. He was determined to try Shino ware in the *yōhen* chamber of his climbing kiln, and thereby create a new type of ware – *yōhen* Shino. He wrote about his reasons for this decision:

*Just firing Shino ware in a Yōhen manner doesn't necessarily mean that the Shino pieces will come out with yōhen effects. More than making Shino simply for the sake of making Shino, what I really wanted to do was achieve my own Shino... By firing Shino without protective saggars in the oguchi (yōhen-firing chamber) of my climbing kiln and allowing the lovely kiln ash to fall on the pieces, I was able to create Natural Ash Glaze Yōhen Shino, which has brought me even closer to “my Shino.”*<sup>1</sup>

Now, five years later, Matsuzaki has succeeded in making *Yōhen* Shino one of his signature wares. The luscious, frosting-like glaze often bears the marks of the maker’s fingers, frozen for all time like waves in a glacial sea (MK261, MK285).

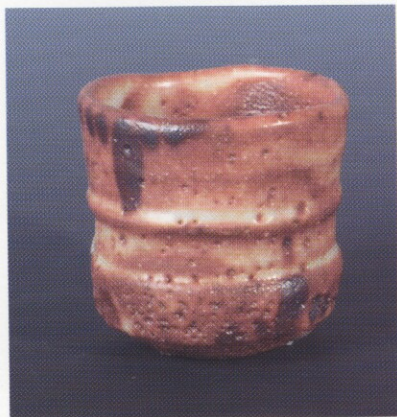


**MK276** Oribe Bowl with Handle  
4 1/2 x 13 x 10"



**MK309** Natural Ash Glaze Yōhen Sake Cup  
1 3/4 x 2 1/2 x 2 1/2"





**MK316** Shien Shino Sake Cup  
2 1/2 x 2 1/2 x 2 1/2"



**MK313** Natural Ash Glaze  
Yōhen Shino Sake Cup  
2 1/4 x 2 1/4 x 2"



**MK254** Natural Ash Glaze Yōhen Water Container  
6 1/2 x 8 x 6 1/2"

Depending upon the concentration and distribution of iron pigment, the highlight coloring in these pieces can range from deep maroon to pink to gold-tinged (MK265, MK272, and MK283). The *Yōhen* Shino wares that have been subjected to significant amounts of natural ash during firing display even more varied characteristics (MK258, MK263).

As his confidence in firing *Yōhen* Shino has increased, so has Matsuzaki's skill in creating unique and evocative pieces adorned only by natural ash glaze. His bold and masculine shapes are suitably matched with the reds, browns, greens, golds, and grays created by flame and wood ash (MK240, MK245, and MK255). To facilitate the development of the desired colors and textures, Matsuzaki manipulates his pots in the kiln, knocking over some of them several days into the firing so that they will be covered with ash on all sides. Just how and where that ash accumulates, however, depends as much upon the forces of the fire as upon Matsuzaki himself. Although he uses different types of wood during the course of the firing, adds charcoal at certain stages, and shifts the pots' position to influence the accumulation of ash, ultimately it is the kiln and its flame that determine the end results. And what results have been achieved!

Firing in other parts of the kiln, Matsuzaki has achieved fine results with his Oribe style wares as well. The beauty of this copper green glaze led to his selection as one of several contemporary potters working in the Oribe style who were featured in the Metropolitan Museum of Art's 2003 exhibition *Turning Point: Oribe and the Arts of Sixteenth Century Japan*. Matsuzaki's carefully considered forms match well with the Oribe style food dishes and sake cups he creates (MK276A, MK318), but the bright yet deep quality of his green glaze complements larger pieces too (MK274).

On many of his larger works, Matsuzaki uses texturing to add further sophistication and interest. Perhaps this technique comes from the influence of his teacher, the Living National Treasure Tatsuzo Shimaoka, who uses rope impressions of various types to decorate the exteriors of his ceramics. In any case, Matsuzaki's textures endow his pieces with fascinating and unique qualities (MK241, MK254). Another excellent example of Matsuzaki's use of surface effects can be seen in the diagonal linear pattern found on his Vase With natural ash glaze, featured in the recent Boston Museum of Fine Arts exhibition *Contemporary Clay: Japanese Ceramics for the New Century*.<sup>2</sup>

Despite their outstanding sculptural aspects, all of Ken Matsuzaki's ceramics are fully functional. I have whisked up powdered green tea in one of his *Yōhen* Shino teabowls and found that it suited the task perfectly. I have also seen

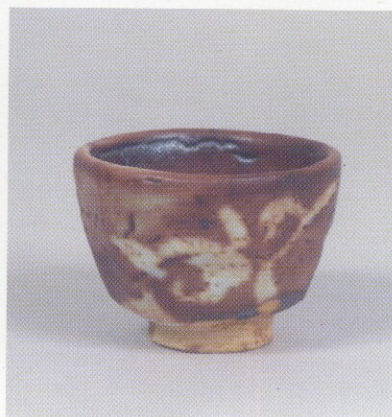




**MK240**  
Natural Ash Glaze  
Yōhen Vase  
16 x 14 x 14"

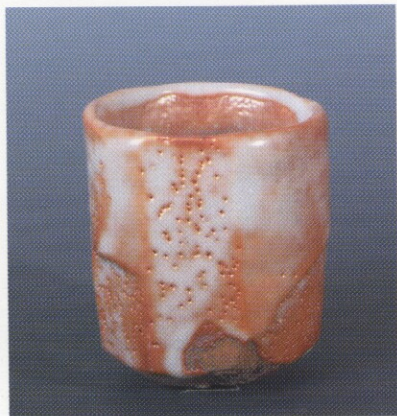


**MK318**  
Oribe Sake Cup  
2 1/4 x 3 x 3"



**MK220**  
Tetsu Shino Sake Cup  
2 1/2 x 3 x 3"

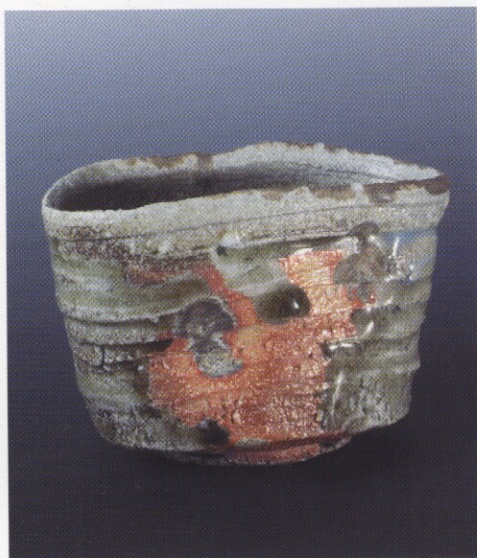




**MK314** Yōhen Shino Sake Cup  
2 3/4 x 2 1/4 x 2 1/4"



**MK319** Oribe Sake Cup  
2 1/4 x 2 1/2 x 2 1/2"



**MK281**  
Natural Ash  
Glaze Yōhen  
Teabowl  
4 x 5 1/2 x 3"

beautiful flower arrangements created using his large, ash-glazed pieces. Matsuzaki's sake flasks are easy to hold, and his *yunomi* tea cups and *guinomi* sake cups are pleasing to the touch of both hands and lips.

The functional beauty of Matsuzaki's works reflects his understanding of the nature of the creative process and artistic innovation. He knows that original work is not limited to art that has been conceived entirely in the maker's imagination. He understands that every artist is indebted to those who came before; not only to teachers, but to those who have left works of inspiring quality. As Matsuzaki has proven, there are limitless discoveries to make, even within the realm of functional ceramics. As a friend of the fire, Matsuzaki has developed the perfect relationship to carry forward his exploration of the possibilities of clay and flame in the spirit of Japan's great Momoyama ceramics tradition.

—Andrew L. Maske  
Medford, Massachusetts  
January 2006

<sup>1</sup> Matsuzaki Ken, *Haikaburi Yōhen Shino: Kamabe Goroku* (Statement from the Vicinity of the Kiln: Ash Glazed Yōhen Shino) in Hankyū Department Store, *The 23rd Matsuzaki Ken Ceramics Exhibition*, Osaka: 2002).

<sup>2</sup> Illustrated in Joe Earle, *Contemporary Clay: Japanese Ceramics for the New Century* (Boston: MFA Publications, 2005), p. 85.



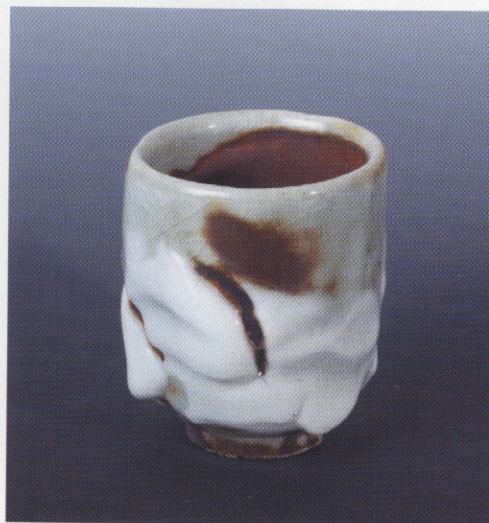
**MK272**  
Natural Ash Glaze Yōhen Shino Vase  
8 3/4 x 7 x 2"



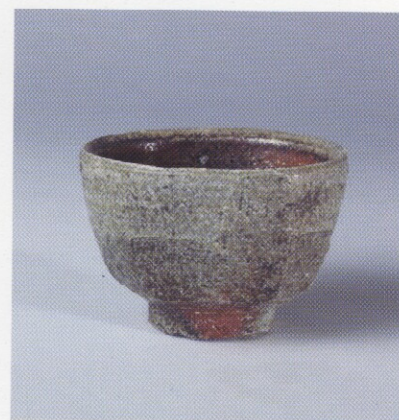
**MK255** Natural Ash Glaze Yōhen Water Container  
8 x 6 x 6"



**MK296** Natural Ash Glaze Yōhen Shino Cup  
4 x 3 x 3"



**MK262** Natural Ash Glaze Yōhen Shino Vase  
12 x 11 x 4"



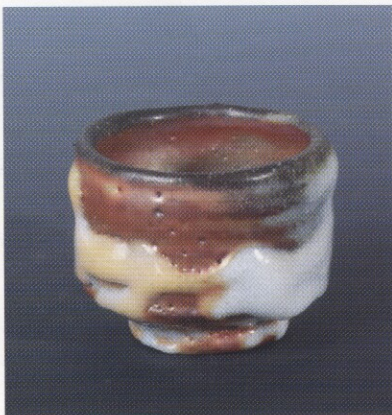
**MK308**  
Natural Ash Glaze Yōhen Sake Cup  
2 1/4 x 3 x 3"



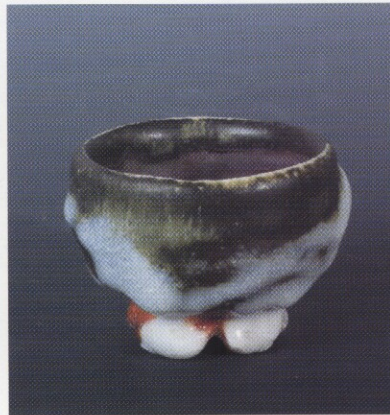
**MK206** Natural Ash Glaze Yōhen Shino Vase  
 13 1/2 x 5 3/4 x 6 1/2"



**MK243** Natural Ash Glaze Yōhen Rectangular Vase  
 12 x 9 1/2 x 2 1/2"



**MK310** Natural Ash Glaze Yōhen  
 Shino Sake Cup  
 2 x 2 1/2 x 2 1/2"



**MK311** Natural Ash Glaze Yōhen  
 Shino Sake Cup  
 2 x 2 1/4 x 2 1/4 "



**MK287** Natural Ash Glaze Yohen  
 Sake Bottle  
 6 x 3 x 3"



**MK244** Natural Ash Glaze Yōhen Vase  
12 x 7 x 7"



**MK256** Natural Ash Glaze Yōhen Vase  
8 1/2 x 6 1/2 x 2"



**MK253** Natural Ash Glaze Yōhen Water Container  
7 x 5 1/4 x 5 1/4"



**MK208**

Natural Ash Glaze Yōhen Vase

11 1/2 x 9 x 2 1/2"



**MK288** Natural Ash Glaze

Yōhen Shino Sake Bottle

6 1/2 x 3 1/2 x 3 1/2"



**MK246**

Natural Ash Glaze Yōhen Vase

10 x 5 x 5"

(left)

**MK245**

Natural Ash Glaze Yōhen Vase

11 1/2 x 6 x 6"

(right)

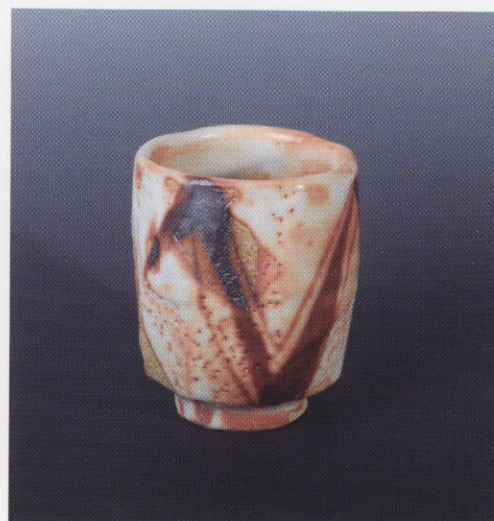




**MK274** Oribe Vase  
11 x 12 x 4"



**MK264** Natural Ash Glaze Yōhen Shino Teoke Vase  
10 x 8 1/4 x 9"



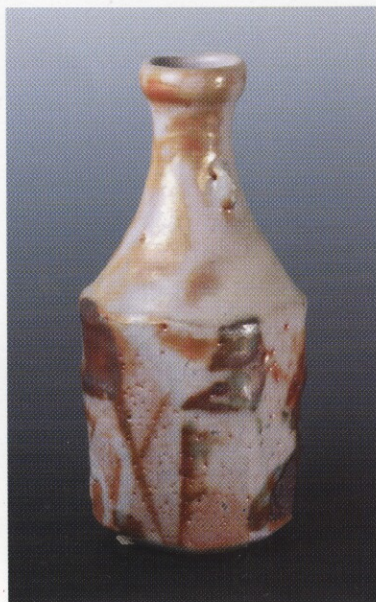
**MK300** Shino Cup  
4 x 3 x 3"



**MK266** Natural Ash Glaze Yōhen Shino Rectangular Vase  
10  $\frac{3}{4}$  x 5 x 3"



**MK299** Natural Ash Glaze Yōhen Shino Cup  
4 x 3 x 3"



**MK289** Shino Sake Bottle  
6  $\frac{1}{4}$  x 3 x 3"



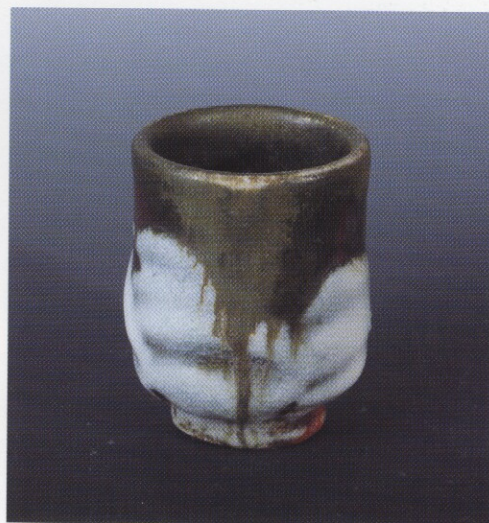
**MK275** Kakewake Oribe Rectangular Vase  
10  $\frac{1}{4}$  x 10  $\frac{1}{2}$  x 5  $\frac{1}{2}$ "



**MK242** Natural Ash Glaze Yōhen Rectangular Vase  
 10 1/4 x 10 1/4 x 4 1/2"



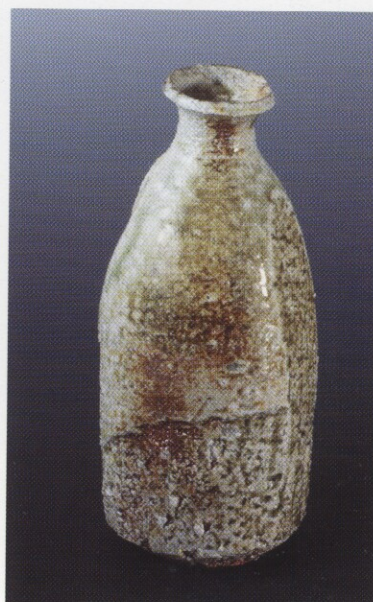
**MK312**  
 Natural Ash Glaze Yōhen Shino Sake Cup  
 2 1/4 x 2 1/2 x 2 1/2"



**MK298** Natural Ash Glaze Yōhen Shino Cup  
 4 x 3 x 3"



**MK248** Natural Ash Glaze Yōhen Teoke Vase  
 10 x 8 1/2 x 7 3/4"



**MK286**  
 Natural Ash  
 Glaze Yōhen  
 Sake Bottle  
 6 1/2 x 3 x 3"



**MK265** Natural Ash Glaze Yohen Shino  
Rectangular Vase  
10 x 5 x 4"



**MK268** Natural Ash Glaze Yohen Shino Square Vase  
10 x 4 x 4"



**MK259** Natural Ash Glaze Yohen Shino Rectangular Vase  
10 x 10 1/2 x 4"



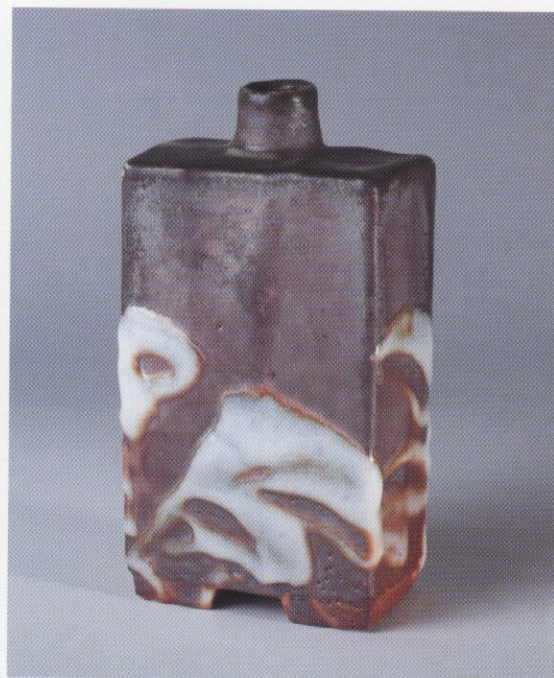
**MK271** Natural Ash Glaze Yohen Shino  
Water Container  
9 1/2 x 6 x 6"



**MK210** Natural Ash Glaze Yōhen Water Container  
9 1/2 x 8 1/2 x 6"



**MK269** Natural Ash Glaze Yōhen Shino  
Teoke Water Container  
9 1/2 x 8 x 7"



**MK273** Natural Ash Glaze Yōhen Shino  
Rectangular Vase  
7 x 3 1/2 x 2"

**MK205** Natural Ash Glaze Yōhen Shino Water Container  
12 x 7 1/4 x 10"



**MK209** Natural Ash Glaze Yōhen Rectangular Vase  
9 x 8 1/4 x 4"



**MK257** Natural Ash Glaze Yōhen Vase  
9 x 2 x 6 1/2"



**MK270** Natural Ash Glaze Yōhen Shino Water Container  
6 1/2 x 8 x 8"

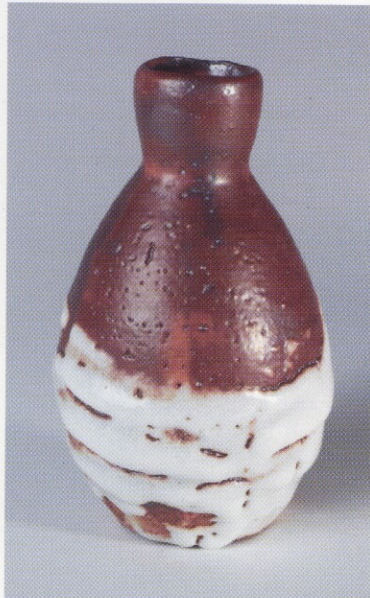
**MK247** Natural Ash Glaze Yōhen Vase  
12 x 6 x 6"



**MK260** Natural Ash Glaze Yōhen Shino Rectangular Vase  
10 x 9 1/2 x 3 1/2"



**MK290** Tetsu-Shino Sake Bottle  
6 x 3 1/2 x 3 1/2"



**MK267** Natural Ash Glaze Yōhen Shino Square Vase  
10 1/2 x 4 x 4"



**MK252** Natural Ash Glaze Yōhen Pot  
10 x 10 x 7"





**MK226**  
Natural Ash Glaze  
Yōhen Sake Bottle  
5 1/4 x 3 x 3"



**MK291**  
Yōhen Oribe Sake Bottle  
5 1/2 x 3 x 3"



**MK278** Oribe Bowl  
4 x 10 x 10"



**MK294** Natural Ash Glaze Yōhen Cup  
4 x 3 x 3"



**MK277** Oribe Square Bowl with Handle  
5 x 10 x 10"

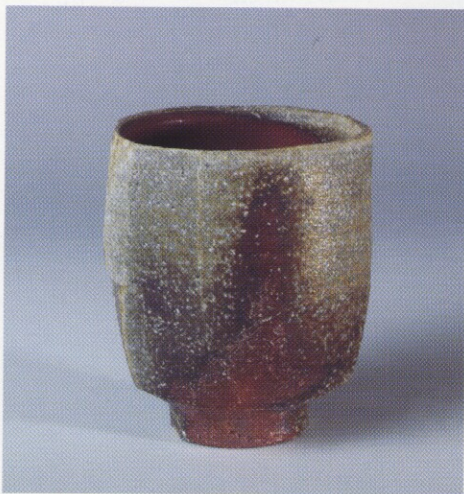




**MK279** Oribe Bowl  
3 x 9 1/2 x 9 1/2"



**MK282** Natural Ash Glaze Yohen Teabowl  
4 x 5 1/2 x 5 1/2"



**MK295** Natural Ash Glaze Yohen Cup  
3 3/4 x 3 x 3"

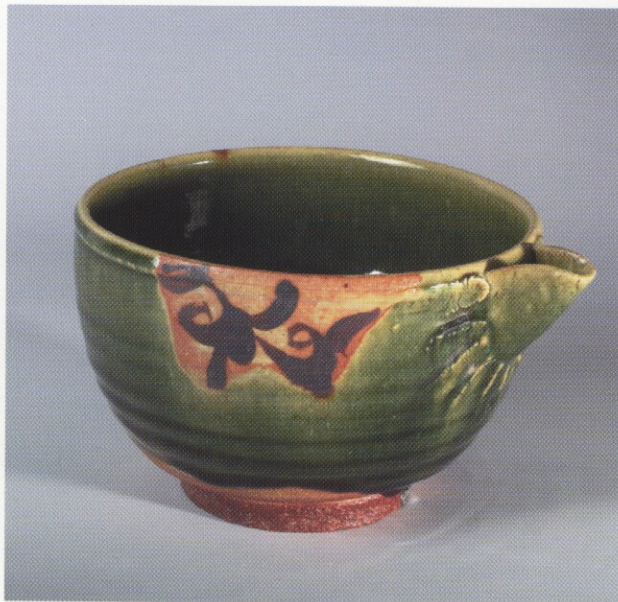


**MK207** Natural Ash Glaze Yohen Shino Square Vase  
10 1/2 x 4 1/2 x 4 1/2"



**MK284** Shino Teabowl  
4 x 4 1/2 x 4 1/2"





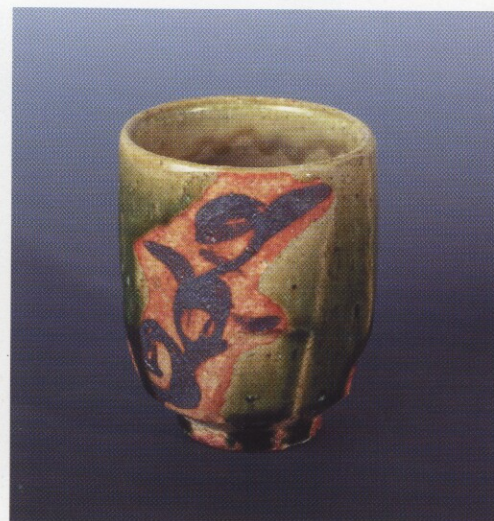
**MK280** Oribe Bowl  
5 x 7 x 8 1/2"



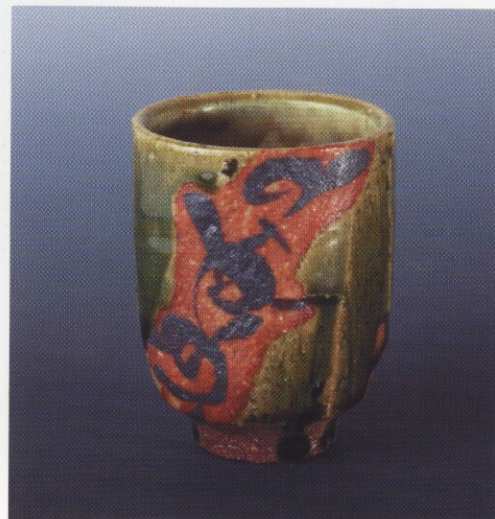
**MK303** Tetsu-Shino Cup  
4 x 3 x 3"



**MK241** Natural Ash Glaze Yohen Vase  
12 x 8 x 8"



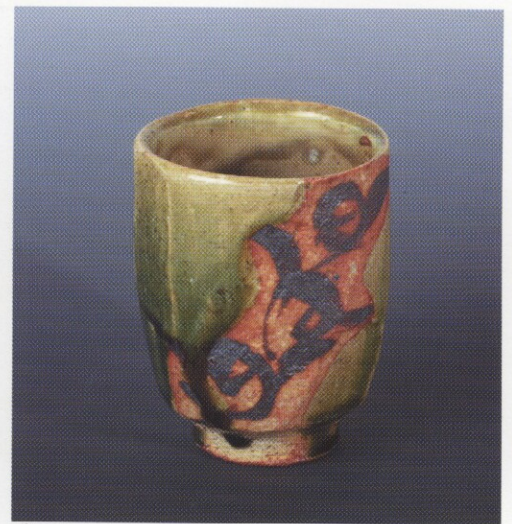
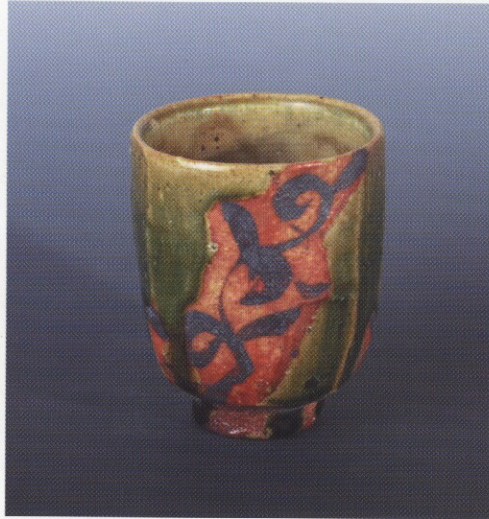
**MK304** Oribe Cup  
4 x 3 x 3"



**MK305**  
Oribe Cup  
4 x 3 x 3"



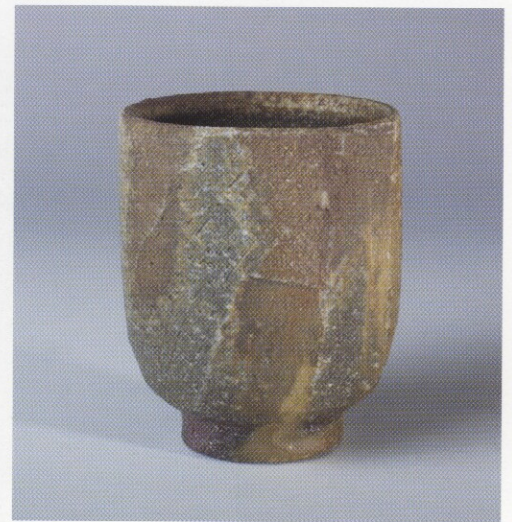
**MK306** Oribe Cup  
4 x 3 x 3"



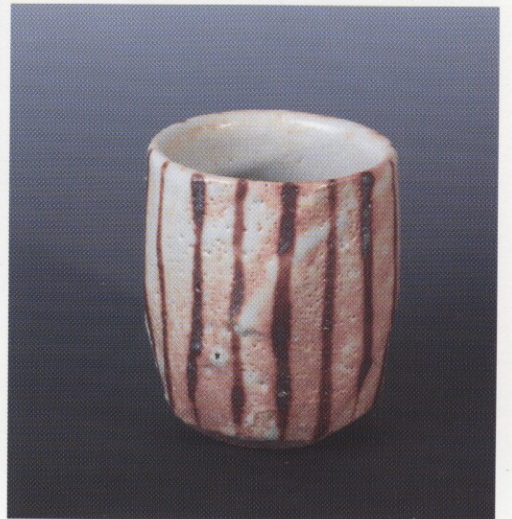
**MK307** Oribe Cup  
4 x 3 x 3"



**MK261** Natural Ash Glaze Yōhen Shino Vase  
12 x 10 x 3"



**MK292** Natural Ash Glaze Yōhen Cup  
4 x 3 x 3"



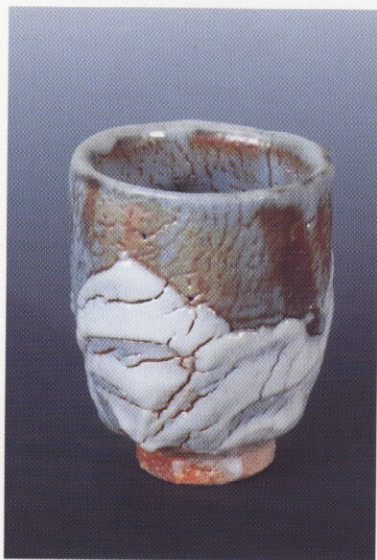
**MK301**  
Shino Cup  
4 x 3 x 3"



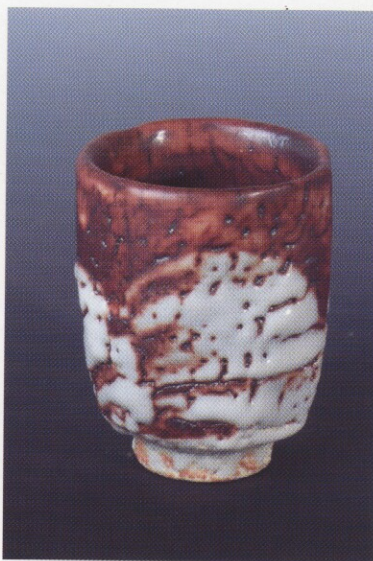
**MK263** Natural Ash Glaze Yōhen Shino Vase  
11 x 7 x 7"



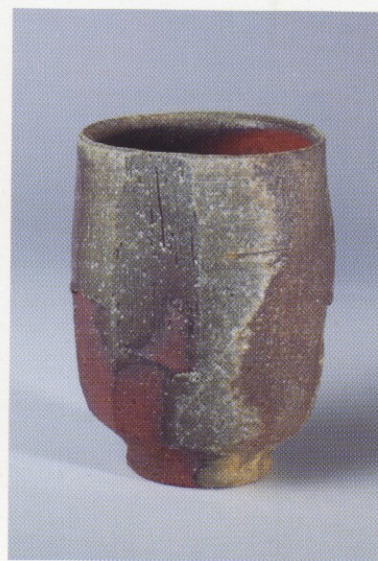
**MK250** Natural Ash Glaze Yōhen Square Vase  
11 x 4 1/2 x 4 1/2"



**MK297** Natural Ash Glaze Yōhen  
Shino Cup  
4 1/2 x 3 1/4 x 3 1/4"



**MK302** Tetsu-Shino Cup  
4 1/2 x 3 1/4 x 3 1/4"



**MK293** Natural Ash Glaze Yōhen Cup  
4 1/4 x 3 x 3"



# Ken Matsuzaki

## BIOGRAPHY

- 1950 Born in Tokyo, Japan, the third son of Nihonga Painter Matsuzaki Shuki
- 1972 Graduated from Tamagawa University, School of Fine Arts, ceramic art major  
Began a pottery apprenticeship with Tatsuzo Shimaoka, Mashiko (Tochigi Prefecture)
- 1977 Built a kiln and established a workshop in Mashiko, where he presently lives
- 1980 Received the Kokugakai Arts Association *Nojima Award*
- 1982 Became an associate member of the Kokugakai Arts Association
- 1984 Received the Associate Members' *Prize of Excellence Award* from the Kokugakai Arts Association
- 1986 Became a full member of the Kokugakai Arts Association
- 1993 *Modern Japanese Ceramics* Exhibition, Elysium Art, New York, NY
- 1995 Group Exhibition, Gallery Dai Ichi Arts, New York, NY  
*Six Master Potters of the Modern Age* Exhibition, Babcock Gallery, New York, NY
- 2001 Solo Exhibition, Rufford Gallery, Nottinghamshire, England
- 2002 *Tradition Today* Exhibition, Pucker Gallery, Boston, MA
- 2003 *Turning Point: Oribe and the Arts of Sixteenth-Century Japan* Exhibition, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, NY
- 2004 *Elemental Force* Exhibition, Pucker Gallery, Boston, MA

- 2005 Solo Exhibition, Ruthin Craft Center, Ruthin, Wales, United Kingdom  
International Ceramics Festival, Aberystwyth, Wales, United Kingdom  
Solo Exhibition, Rufford Gallery, Nottinghamshire, England
- 2006 *Transformation and Use* Exhibition, Pucker Gallery, Boston, MA

## EXHIBITIONS IN JAPAN

- Fukuya Department Store, Hiroshima  
Hankyu Department Store, Osaka  
Keio Department Store, Tokyo  
Takashimaya Department Store, Yokohama
- Group exhibitions with Tatsuzo Shimaoka
- Matsuzaki Family Exhibitions with father and two brothers (painting, ceramics and lacquer ware)

## MUSEUM COLLECTIONS

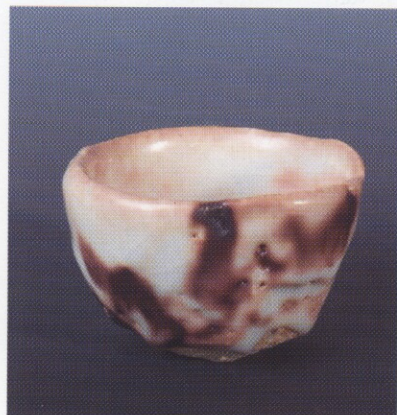
- Cleveland Museum of Art, Cleveland, OH  
Israel Museum, Jerusalem, Israel  
Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, NY  
Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, MA  
Peabody Essex Museum, Salem, MA  
Sackler Museum of Art, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA  
Tikotin Museum, Haifa, Israel  
Victoria and Albert Museum, London, England



**MK251** Natural Ash Glaze Yohen Square Vase  
9 1/2 x 4 x 4"



**MK317** Tetsu-Shino Sake Cup  
2 1/2 x 2 1/2 x 2 1/2"



**MK315** Shino Sake Cup  
2 x 3 x 3"



# TRANSFORMATION AND USE

## New Works by Ken Matsuzaki



**MK249** Natural Ash Glaze Yōhen Rectangular Vase  
9 1/2 x 7 x 3 1/2"

### Dates:

17 June 2006 to 12 July 2006

### Opening Reception:

17 June 2006, 3:00 to 6:00 PM

The artist will be present.

The public is invited to attend.

CREDITS: *Design:* Maritza Medina

*Editor:* Destiny McDonald Barletta

*Photography:* Will Chiron

**COVER: MK258** Natural Ash Glaze Yōhen Shino Vase  
14 x 9 x 9"

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### GALLERY HOURS:

Monday through Saturday 10 AM to 5:30 PM;

Sundays 1 to 5 PM.

This catalogue and other catalogues  
featuring Gallery artists can be viewed  
at [www.puckergallery.com](http://www.puckergallery.com).

This exhibition is presented under the Honorary  
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available in the lot on the corner of  
Newbury and Dartmouth Streets.

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