

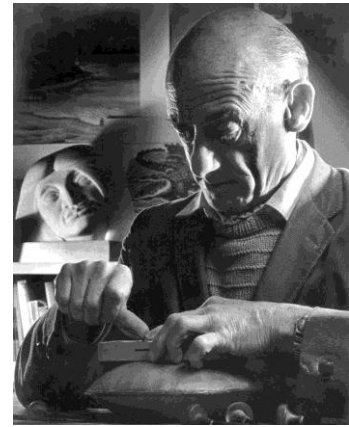
## Mervyn Taylor by Sarah Taylor



I never met my grandfather. He died before I was born. But I grew up in the house he lived and worked in, and his art was all around me. However as is often the case when you grow up with something all around you, you don't always notice or fully appreciate it. It was only when I left New Zealand to live overseas for a while that I really developed a true appreciation for, and love of, Mervyn's work.

What a talented man. Not just his wood engravings, for which he is best remembered, but also his illustrations, paintings, designs, linocuts, murals and sculptures.

Mervyn initially trained as a jewellery engraver, which gave him the skills he later used in his wood engraving. He attended Elam School of Art in Auckland before moving to Wellington in the 1930s and studying at Wellington Technical College's School of Art and working in the advertising industry.



***"As an artist I aspire to become a craftsman, and as a craftsman I aspire to become an artist."***



Just before the war, Mervyn started working as a freelance artist. He contributed numerous illustrations, woodcuts and engravings to the *School Journal*, and in the mid-1940s, he became art editor and illustrator for the School Publications Branch of the Department of Education, before returning to freelancing. He was passionate about indigenous subjects, particularly the New Zealand landscape, flora, fauna, and Māori life and legend.

Mervyn's work was exhibited widely throughout New Zealand and he was known and respected internationally. In the 1950s he was made a member of the Society of Illustrators in New York and a fellow of the International Institute of Arts and Letters in East Germany. He was the first New Zealand artist to be exhibited in New York and Moscow.

***"...those who know Taylor's work recognise a legendary artist and designer whose prowess across all manner of media, from tiny woodcuts to huge murals, was truly astounding."***

Douglas Lloyd Jenkins, *Home & Entertaining*, August/Sept 2003

Although Mervyn's talents were recognised while he was alive, it wasn't an easy life. He had a family to support, and in the post-war years, commissions were not easy to come by or well-paid. But he was one of the few artists in New Zealand at the time who managed to make a living from his art.

By all accounts, Mervyn was a modest and unassuming man. He was shy, but loved to have a laugh. And he was a family man. Despite his enormous output (he produced more than 200 wood blocks between 1944 and 1957), he would always have time for his wife, Teddy, and his kids, Terence (my dad) and Jane.

I love seeing people's reactions to the cards I've made – from those who are discovering Mervyn's work for the first time, through to avid collectors and those who recognise his work from when they were kids reading *School Journals* in the 1940s and '50s. Mervyn believed in making art accessible and affordable. He produced cards while he was alive and I like to think that I'm keeping that flame alive.



Mervyn with Terence and Jane



## Chronology

1906	Born in Auckland on 4 August, son of Emily Webber and Ernest Herbert Taylor
1912 – 1921	Attended Grafton School, then Auckland Grammar School for a year
1922 – 1928	Served as an apprentice jewellery engraver with the firm W. H. Worrall, manufacturing jewellers
1923 – 1935	Attended night classes at the Elam School of Art in Auckland
1929 – 1935	Undertook lettering and window display work for Godfrey Phillips (NZ) Ltd
1935	Moved to Wellington to work in the advertising studio of W. D. & H. O. Wills (tobacco company)
1936	Attended night classes in printmaking at Wellington Technical College's School of Art
1937	Married Edelweiss Yeoville (Teddy) Cooke in Whanganui on 15 December
1937 – 1939	Employed by Carlton Carruthers (advertising company)
1939 – 1941	Resigned from Carlton Carruthers to work as a free-lance artist, setting up a small studio in Willis Street with George Woods. Free-lance work included designing the Berlei stand at the New Zealand Centennial Exhibition in 1939–40
1940 – 1964	Contributed numerous illustrations, woodcuts and engravings to the <i>School Journal</i>
1942	Enlisted for war service. Served as a maps draughtsman and worked for the Army Education and Welfare Service., Mervyn and Teddy's son, Terence, born 16 September
1944 – 1946	Art editor and illustrator for the School Publications Branch of the Department of Education
1945	Mervyn and Teddy's daughter, Jane, born 2 August
1948	Produced more than 150 drawings along with Russell Clark to accompany the book-length feature about traditional Māori life, <i>Life in the Pa</i>
1948 – 1953	Art editor of <i>Design Review</i> , published by the Architectural Centre, Wellington
1950	Made a member of the Society of Illustrators, New York
1952	Awarded a scholarship by the Association of New Zealand Art Societies which he used by spending many months living in Te Kaha studying Māori life and mythology
1953	Made a fellow of the International Institute of Arts and Letters in Lindau, East Germany
1953 – 1960	Council member of the New Zealand Academy of Fine Arts
1954	Solo exhibition of Mervyn's work held at the American Museum of Natural History in New York (he was the first New Zealand artist to have a solo exhibition in New York)
1954 – 1956	Exhibited in Auckland, Wellington and various provincial centres, and was given a touring exhibition by the Community Arts Service
1957	Work included in the first International Graphic Arts Exhibition in Tokyo. <i>Engravings on Wood</i> published by Mermaid Press, Mervyn's own publishing company
1958	A solo exhibition of 102 of his works held in the Soviet Union as a guest of the Ministry of Culture (first New Zealand artist to be exhibited in Moscow). Also travelled to the United States (on a foreign leader grant), Czechoslovakia and England
1958 – 1964	Member of the National Art Gallery committee of management
1959	Work included in an exhibition of New Zealand art which toured Russia
1964	Died suddenly in Wellington on 7 June, aged 57 (heart failure)