

## CARE OF AMERICAN INDIAN JEWELRY:

- Clean silver and metals with a soft silver polishing cloth.
- Chlorine, salt and chemical household cleaning products can seriously damage American Indian jewelry; dealers usually recommend water and a little soap.
- Clean with care – constant cleaning may damage a unique item.
- Store in small cloth bags, or at least inside a jewelry box.
- Glass and clay beads are fragile and will fracture and break if handled roughly.
- High humidity damages glass beads and will affect the threading material.
- Handle beadwork as little as possible as dirt will stick to oily deposits left by your skin.
- When storing beaded items, avoid folding; store larger items rolled in cloth.
- Always ask the artist or dealer about the best way to care for your item of jewelry.



# INDIAN ARTS & CRAFTS ASSOCIATION

SINCE 1974



## THE WORLD'S LEADING AMERICAN INDIAN ARTS ALLIANCE

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### The IACA Mission

To promote, preserve and protect authentic  
American Indian arts and crafts.

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# »»»»«««« COLLECTING AMERICAN INDIAN JEWELRY



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# COLLECTING AMERICAN INDIAN JEWELRY



## AMERICAN INDIAN JEWELRY

comes in an almost infinite variety of colors, materials, and designs. Individual pieces are primarily rings, earrings, bracelets, necklaces and pins. American Indian jewelry usually reflects the cultural regions and history of its tribal artisans but, over the years, tribes have borrowed designs and crafting practices from all over the world.

Traditional jewelry is made from natural materials such as metals, hardwood, fossilized wood, clay, precious and semi-precious gemstones as well as animal materials such as feathers, quills,

bone, antlers, teeth, shells and coral. Beadwork and other forms of personal decoration are also very popular.

Like other pre-historic cultures around the world, American Indians began adorning themselves thousands of years ago, using shells, bones and antlers to make beads and pendants. Each tribal region has its own styles and designs but for centuries has traded materials with one another.

Tribes of the Northeastern Woodlands area made a variety of beads. Some were barrel-shaped, made from shell, and are now called “wampum” from the Wampanoag word referring to a particular species of white shell. Others were made of deer bone, clay and coins. Glass beads were introduced around 1700 by European traders and are now considered part of the tradition.

In the Southeastern Woodlands region, beads made from clay, stone and pearls were worn. Shell gorgets (ornamental throat or neck decorations) were very common and are still carved today.

Plains Indians are most well known for their porcupine quillwork and beadwork. For hundreds of years they would trade to get shells from California and the Gulf coasts to make beads, as well as using bone and natural minerals. When colorful glass beads were introduced they combined these with quills and animals hides to form the basis of their designs.

Northwest Coast tribes originally used walrus ivory for carving bracelets and then later changed to stone. Copper and fossilized bone were also used. Glass beads and foreign coins were later imported by traders and used for jewelry making.

In the Southwest, Navajo and Hopi jewelers have been working with silver since the 19th century. They melted down coins, flatware and ingots from European-American traders, and used punches and stamps from Mexican leather workers to create designs. Turquoise eventually became one of the dominant materials in the Southwest.

There are many contemporary American Indian jewelers who work with gold and precious gems as well all the traditional materials. American Indian jewelry, whether a hundred years old or just made this year, is a wonderful collectable – and wearable – art form. There is something for every taste and every price range to wear and enjoy.

All Native Made art and craft, whether ancient or contemporary, carries with it the spirit of purpose. The shapes, colors, textures and designs each have meaning to Native people. It is from this purpose that creativity thrives.

