

INDIAN ARTS & CRAFTS ASSOCIATION

SINCE 1974



THE WORLD'S LEADING
AMERICAN INDIAN ARTS ALLIANCE



The IACA Mission

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

What to look for:

- The shape of a pot – traditional handmade and contemporary handcrafted pottery has a variation of shape, whether symmetrical or asymmetrical.
- Decorated Greenware is molded, so more than one pot can have exactly the same shape and size. This is considered contemporary Southwest pottery, not traditional Southwest pottery.
- Feel inside a pot to check if thoroughly finished. Check the surface and rim for cracks and blisters.
- Has the pottery piece been carefully and artistically painted.
- Ask who the potter is. Most potters today sign their work on the base.
- Select what is most appealing to you.

Care of pottery:

- Handle as little as possible to prevent paint wearing off.
- Avoid wearing jewelry, especially bracelets and rings, when handling pottery as hard metals and stones can leave marks or cause damage.
- Lift larger pieces near the base using two hands.
- Dust gently.
- Do not put water in pots – it may mar the surface and cause deterioration.
- Ask the potter or dealer for specifics in care.



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Indian Arts and Crafts Association
Education Fund
is a 501(c)3 Corporation. Tax ID: 43-1964917

COLLECTING PUEBLO POTTERY



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AMERICAN INDIANS IN THE

Southwest have been making pottery for around 2000 years. Until the 1930s, pottery was primarily functional and made for everyday tribal use. With the growth of tourism, potters gradually added decorative forms and designs. Today, artists working with clay produce many different varieties and designs of pottery, made almost exclusively for sale to collectors as pieces of art.

Even so, many potters still use traditional techniques and materials, and reproduce old-established designs. Clay is often gathered locally within the borders of tribal lands and ranges in color from white to yellow, orange, red and dark grey, and is referred to as Native clay. Preparation of Native clay can be a lengthy process and is often a spiritual experience for the potter.



Some potters purchase their clay from a professional ceramic business where clays may come from anywhere in the world. This clay is mixed by hand or machine and is referred to as commercial clay. It is all natural and may contain minerals and pigments similar to local clay. These contemporary clay preparations can also be a lengthy process.

Traditional potters do not use a wheel but begin the form by pressing clay into a rounded shape such as a bowl, then add hand rolled clay ropes to the molded base in the bowl, and hand turn the form while coiling upwards. Where the coils meet, they are pinched together and then molded and scraped to make it even. Some contemporary potters use a potter's wheel as a turning table, which holds the clay while it is being turned and formed by hand. Others do not create their own forms but purchase pre-molded pottery forms from a ceramics store. The resulting pieces are commonly referred to as Greenware.

After drying, the pots are sanded down until smooth and then a slip is applied to give a uniform color. At this point, the pottery is carved, painted or polished, depending on what decoration the artist wishes to create. Traditional paints are made from natural materials, plants and ground stone, and painted with a brush made from the leaf of the yucca plant. Many potters today purchase commercial paints and tools.

If the pot is to be polished, the surface is rubbed with a smooth stone. This is a lengthy, painstaking process, but creates a wonderful shining surface without the use of a glaze. The final stage is firing. Traditional outdoor firing techniques use sheep dung or wood as combustibles. However, many potters now use commercial kilns or indoor contemporary firing, where the results can yield greater variety, depending on the clay.

Designs vary in each tribe, but generally follow traditional lines or use stylized versions of old designs. Many contemporary potters use pictorial designs of people, animals, plants and birds, and some incorporate stone and metal into their designs.

American Indians in the Southwest put many hours of labor into their handmade and handcrafted pottery to create a work of beauty, ingenuity, and which incorporates the spirit of cultural significance. 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.

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