



*Native American Traditions*

# **POTTERY FROM THE PUEBLOS**

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## **POTTERY STYLES**

Much of today's pottery is made the same way it has been for generations. The clay is dug from the earth, dried on sheets of tin, soaked in a tub for two to four days until it breaks down into a soupy mixture, and strained on a large screen. The fine material that passes through the screen is mixed with water to the consistency of a milk shake. Tempering sand, sieved until it is a fine powder, is added to the clay mixture. Pots are formed on a lap board or a table using natural shaping tools and spoons made of gourds or shell. Most pieces are fired in a pit, with the flames smothered by manure. Each piece is unique.

**Acoma Pueblo.** Acoma clay is dark and dense. The pots have thin, hard-fired walls, stone polish, and elaborate painting. Designs such as parrots, lizards, insects, and animals reflect the Mimbres style, from 950 and 1150 A.D.

**Cochiti Pueblo.** Early Cochiti pottery was painted with red and black on cream. Designs included birds, animals, and rain symbols. Cochiti Polychrome pottery developed from the older Kiva Polychrome tradition. Cochiti motifs are isolated decorations, often embellished with hanging arcs or triangles and sometimes complicated feather designs.

**Hopi Pueblos.** Hopi pottery is made at First Mesa villages. The pottery is formed, sanded, highly polished, and fired outdoors using dried sheep manure. The pottery is painted with natural vegetable dyes with designs and symbols that vary according to the pottery artisan. Typical Hopi designs include eagles, parrots, roadrunners, migration patterns, kiva designs, rain, lightning, and corn. Pottery can be beige, tan, white, or red.

**Isleta Pueblo.** Initially, Isleta pottery was very plain red ware. People from the Laguna Pueblo taught the Isleta potters how to use temper to create thin-walled pots, leading to the development of a Laguna-style white-slipped polychrome tradition with distinctive black and rust colors in bold, simple designs.

**Jémez Pueblo.** Jémez pottery designs often depict the link between the Jémez and the ancient Pecos people. Designs are painted on red clay pots with lead-based paint that melts to a shiny, brilliant glaze after firing. Polished red pottery and pottery with traditional designs etched into the polished clay surface are also typical of Jémez pottery.

**Picuris Pueblo.** Simple, unpainted pottery seems to shimmer because of the mica in the clay. Today's pottery is generally brown or reddish-orange in color, with a sparkling, bronze-like finish. Earlier, white or grey vessels were painted with black designs.

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*Pottery from the Pueblos: Pottery Styles (continued)*

**San Ildefonso Pueblo.** The water serpent is a typical San Ildefonso pottery design. These potters create two-tone red, polychrome, carved, matte black, and red and blackware pots. San Ildefonso's Maria Martinez, using matte black designs painted on high-gloss black pottery, is perhaps the most famous of all American Indian potters.

**San Juan Pueblo.** Old and new pottery styles are blended in San Juan pottery. The traditional pottery was plain, polished red or blackware. A shimmering polished slip of micaceous clay is applied in a band or on the upper two-thirds of the jars. The line between slip and paste is clear.

**Santa Clara Pueblo.** Like San Ildefonso, Santa Clara potters have created earth-fired, highly polished blackware for more than 300 years. Santa Clara pottery is decorated in earth tones of yellow, beige, red, white, gray, and matte black on polished black, using a variety of symbols and designs including bear paws, water serpents, kiva steps, feathers, and rain and rainbows.

**Santo Domingo Pueblo.** Birds, flowers, and simple bold geometric designs decorate Santo Domingo pottery. Religious rules prohibit the depiction of human figures or sacred designs on any pottery that is intended for sale. The polychrome jars are relatively tall; bowls are rarely made.

**Taos Pueblo.** Taos and Picuris pueblos are famous for their unpainted pottery made with micaceous clay. Plain pots with no or a single design are golden in color.

**Tesuque Pueblo.** Traditional pottery forms use simple designs in black and red on cream or white slip; the designs are applied before firing. Most of the pottery produced today is made for the tourist trade: novelties with bright colors, rain gods, and polychrome vessels painted with poster paint.

**Tigua Pueblo.** Non-traditional pottery is produced for the tourist trade using a potter's wheel, molds, commercial paints, and electric kilns. Designs are geometric in black and white on a red or orange background.

**Zia Pueblo.** Thin-walled pots are decorated with geometric designs and plant and animal motifs on white backgrounds. The Zia potters temper their clay with basalt, making a very hard pot that is stone-polished and painted. The state symbol of New Mexico, a stylized sun, was derived from a Zia ceremonial pot.

**Zuñi Pueblo.** The Zuñi did not make pottery after the 1930s, concentrating instead on jewelry. Zuñi pottery has recently undergone a revival, with intricate fine line designs and elaborate squash rosettes in black and red on an ivory-colored ground.