

Pottery

Santa Clara Pottery

Santa Clara is best known for polished blackware, a style of pottery with ancient roots back to at least the 12th century. Polished and unpolished pots were made for daily use. Contemporary Santa Clara pottery includes red, black-on-black and polychrome finishes in shapes ranging from large vases to small figurines. Each piece is formed by coiling ropes of clay, and then scraping the surface smooth. After the pot has dried, a mixture of fine clay and water called a “slip” is applied, and the piece is polished with a smooth stone to achieve a high gloss finish. Blackware comes from firing in a smothered, oxygen-deprived atmosphere that changes the chemical makeup of the polished clay and the paints. It’s not a finish that can be scratched off.

Zuni Pottery

Zuni pottery has long been known for its beautifully painted designs in black, brown and red on a white or red slip. Zuni pottery often depicts rainbirds, flowers, feathers, rosettes, scrollwork and cross-hatching. Pots may have a brown base and usually have black or red rims.

Navajo Pottery

Navajo pottery has been produced for hundreds of years, primarily for personal and ceremonial purposes. Several clay types are collected and mixed and the coil and pinch technique is used in its creation. Surface decorations are minimal, with more focus let on the “fire clouding”, or black smoke marks resulting from the firing process. Navajo pots are then sealed with a hot pinon pitch, which allows their pots to be waterproof and serve utilitarian purposes.

Acoma Pottery

Traditional Acoma pottery is made from natural clays, minerals and plants found within their homeland. Many inherit family clay beds where they pray and sing songs to Mother Earth. Some collect many different types and colors of clay for paints and slips. Their main clay is naturally grey. Acoma clay artists are known for creating the thin-walled, intricately painted white ware that is representative of this western New Mexico pueblo. Once the pot is completed, it is painted with intricate designs that represent natural phenomena and tribal symbolism. The pots are then fired and made ready for use in ceremony or for sale.

Hopi Pottery

Contemporary Hopi pottery is produced in the villages of First Mesa. Potters form their creations using the coil and scrape method. Hopi pottery assumes a wide range of tones, from light buff to deep oranges. There are a limited few that will use a white slip or a red slip. Designs reflecting Hopi symbolism are painted on with mineral pigments before firing. Hopi potters use the traditional method of firing where they use sheep dung as fuel. The outcome of the firing is always a surprise.