

JUANITA FRAGUA



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JEMEZ POTTERS STOPPED MAKING THEIR TRADITIONAL BLACK-on-white pottery after the Pueblo Rebellion in the 17th century. In the years following, they often traded with nearby Zia Pueblo for decorated ceramics, their own being simply utilitarian. But when Indian pottery became commercially lucrative in this century, the Jemez people once again began fashioning pottery, this time for the burgeoning market. Since their own design tradition had long ago been lost, they felt free to create new designs. Juanita Fragua is one of a number of Jemez potters who have developed their own unique styles.

Although she designed and painted pottery for their mother Rita Casiquito from the time she was thirteen, it was not until she moved to San Francisco in 1967 that Juanita began making her own. "At that time, Indian arts got so popular," she recalls. "I used to come back in the summertime and make pots, then take them back to San Francisco." Although she shaped her pots using the traditional Pueblo coiled method, her pots were far from traditional. She painted them with bright acrylic paints after they had been fired in a commercial kiln. However, when she moved back to Jemez Pueblo a few years later, she finally turned to traditional Pueblo methods and materials. "I experimented with anything I got hold of – rocks, slips, earth paints. I did all of it," she says.

Juanita experimented with the local grey slip, and it was

her use of this material that eventually became her trademark. "One day, I decided to polish the grey slip. We'd been using it for a long time, but I guess no one ever thought about polishing it," she explains. Today, her pots gleam with a rich buff tone—the color the slip turns when fired.

Before Juanita begins a pot, she first talks to the clay. "I mother Earth," she says simply, "and I tell her I'm going to work on you again, and I'm going to make you pretty people can like you." But sometimes Juanita finds that the clay won't cooperate. The pot becomes uneven or collapses while she's working on it. Then she quits for a while; she knows better than to fight with the clay. "That clay is just tired like I get tired," she says.

Juanita's time-consuming process of shaping, sanding, polishing and painting a pot involves at least ten steps. After forming the pot with coils, she allows it to dry, then sands to perfect the shape. Next, she wipes the pot with a damp sponge to remove the sandpaper scratches and, again, allows it to dry. For her wedding vases, she draws a round circle

the front of the pot and covers the areas outside of the circle with four or five coats of red or grey slip. She polishes each coat with smooth stone until it shines. Then she follows the same steps inside the circle, sketches out her design and finally paints it. The pot is now ready for natural firing.

Juanita taught her two daughters to make pots, and now each has her own style. The older, Glendora Daubs, carefully incises her pots with sgraffito-style carving. B.J. Fragua, her youngest, used to create pots similar to Juanita's but has recently developed her unique "wave bowls." "They both have very different looking pottery," says Juanita. Then she adds, laughing, "And I'm getting jealous, too!"



All photos by Murrae Haynes