

# DINNER TABLE POTS



*Pottery Discussion #5*

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In the Southwest, they've been making things for the dinner table for a long time. The sugar bowl and cream pitcher on the cover came from a potter at Ohkay Owinge Pueblo. She made them about 1910, back when Ohkay was called San Juan.

As far as antiquity goes, a hundred years ago is nothing. They made perfectly recognizable things for the table fifteen hundred years ago. This 11-1/2" diameter Tonto Polychrome serving bowl was made by the Salado people in the mountains of central Arizona about 1350.



When they put the main dish in it and brought it to the table, the family could help themselves and put their portions on dishes a lot like the ones we use today.

When we started this exercise, we wanted to find out if the old pieces matched up with our current table settings.

They really do. Granted, it's no surprise that I found bowls like the ones we use today. They made a lot of bowls back then, and it stands to reason that a lot of them would look familiar.



Here, we have a salad bowl, a soup bowl and a cereal bowl. The salad bowl is 10-1/2" in diameter, an Abajo Black on orange made north of Hopi about 650 A.D.

The soup bowl is a 6-1/4" diameter Black Mesa Black on white. It came from the Four Corners area, where Arizona, New Mexico, Utah and Colorado meet, and dates from around 1150.

The cereal bowl comes from seventy-five years earlier. It's a type called Mimbres Boldface. The Mimbres people made it in southwest New Mexico a few years before they started making all those pieces with pictures on them. It's 7-1/2" in diameter.

When the ancients brought their bowls to the table, they could serve the food on dishes. Here we have a 10-1/4" diameter dinner plate and a 7" diameter salad plate. Both are Hohokam, from south-central Arizona. The dinner plate, at left, is a Sacaton Red on Buff from about 1050, and the salad plate next to it is Canada del Oro Red on buff from about 800. The dinner plate came from around Phoenix while the salad plate came farther south near Tucson.



They ancients also had pitchers, and they had them from the beginning. The cream pitcher below is 4-1/4" high, and the Ancestral



Puebloans made it in northern Arizona about 700. It's an example of Lino Gray, one of the earliest white or gray Anasazi pottery types.

They made pitchers in all the sizes we use today. Here's an elegant water pitcher from the Salado people in east-central Arizona.



It's 7-3/4" tall and would grace any gathering. It's a Salado White on red and it comes from around 1350, when pre-Spanish pottery making was at its peak.

Pitchers like these make me wonder what the Puebloans had to drink and what they drank it from. We suspect they knew the joys of an evening cocktail. Beer making goes way back in Mexico, and archeologists found evidence that they drank chocolate at Chaco Canyon.

We called the one on the opposite page a cream pitcher, but they probably didn't drink much milk. Cows and goats, the usual milk-producing livestock, came later with the Europeans. It figures that the usual beverage of choice was simply water.

From the beginning they had canteens, and they could fill them down at the stream and drink as they traveled about the neighborhood. However, those canteens weren't really suitable for the dinner table.

They didn't have glassware, but they really figured out how to make cups. They made them for all purposes.



The Puerco Black on white beer stein from 1200 on the left is 5-1/2" high, and the Chaco Black on white from fifty years earlier is 4-3/4" high, Its cylindrical shape was the fashion of the time. It's the kind of cup where we're told the Chacoans poured their chocolate.

Early cups were big, generous and surprisingly modern. Back in 1100 at Mesa Verde, they invented the office coffee mug.



Once the Spanish came, the Puebloans picked up European customs. Tableware quickly conformed to the new standards.

The sugar-and-creamer from San Juan on the cover foretold the full range of mealtime ware the Pueblos made for Santa Fe dinner tables. By 1900, Santa Clara potters were making so many cups and bowls with handles that Betty LeFree, in her *Santa Clara Pottery Today*, called the early 20th century Santa Clara's "Age of Handles."

They made bowls in all the varieties at Santa Clara, and so did all the other Pueblos. At next-door San Ildefonso, they also made some spectacular dinner dishes.

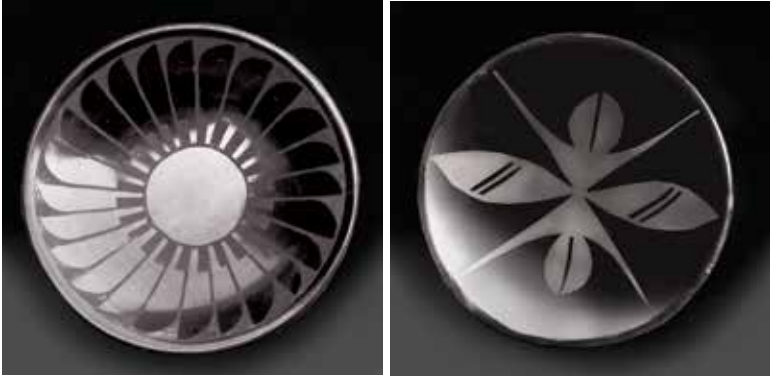
Maria Martinez and her husband Julian made this magnificent 13-1/2" serving platter in 1935.



On request, Maria would make full matched sets of dinnerware, and we can only hope the requesters didn't attack them with knives and

forks or put them in the dishwasher. Maria's blackware was low-fired and wouldn't stand up to dinner table use.

Practical or not, Maria and her family continued making dishware for years. Below, there's a 6-3/4" salad plate by Maria's niece Carmelita Dunlap from 1980 and a 5-1/2" butter dish by Maria and her daughter-in-law Santana from 1950.



Like their forebears, the Puebloans made a lot of wonderful pitchers. This stately 8-3/4" tall water pitcher is from Kewa. When they made it in 1930, the Pueblo was called Santo Domingo. This pitcher





saw a lot of use, as the chip in the rim makes clear. Potters made every conceivable pitcher for breakfast as well as dinner.



These two came from Acoma. The 7" high syrup pitcher would have covered a lot of hotcakes in 1920, and Mabel Brown's 7-1/2" tall milk pitcher would have brightened any breakfast table in 1965.

The ancestors may have had a lot of fun with drinking cups, but the moderns weren't above making cups exactly the way those new Europeans thought they should be made.

The Maricopa Indians in the Phoenix area made this coffee cup and its 5" saucer about 1940.



Arizona potters didn't confine themselves to standard cup shapes and made more than a few that you won't run across in your average china shop. More than a hundred miles west and twenty years earlier, a Mojave Indian potter made this graceful piece. Its 4-1/8" diameter gives it about twice the capacity of your normal coffee cup, so be sure you use it to drink something special.



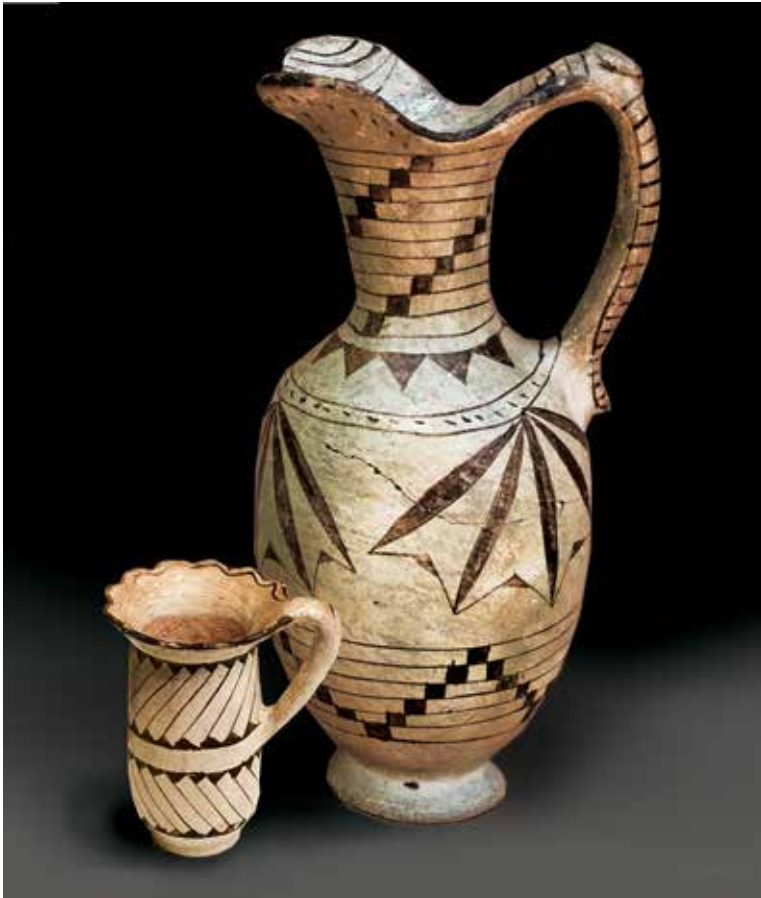
When she made it in 1920, the railroad ran through the Mojave reservation, and potters were more than willing to sell what they made to tourists who stopped off at the station.

It's not that the Mojaves were unclear about what constituted a proper coffee cup. From the late nineteenth century on, helpful traders and dealers told them exactly what Anglo tourists thought tableware should look like, and the Mojaves made lots of little pitchers shaped and sized exactly like the English china factories made them.

It's just that good artists want to do something else.

And other good artists want to beat the Anglos and the other Indians at their own game. Go back another forty years, to southern Arizona in 1880. The railroad still hadn't got that far, and tourists were rare. Those few who did come would take a horse and buggy over to one of the rare tourist attractions in southern Arizona.

Mission San Xavier del Bac, south of Tucson, is a magnificent eighteenth century creation, and a gifted Tohono O'odham potter went there and sold her wares. Anybody who carried around stereotypes of savage Indians and their crude artifacts wasn't ready for her.



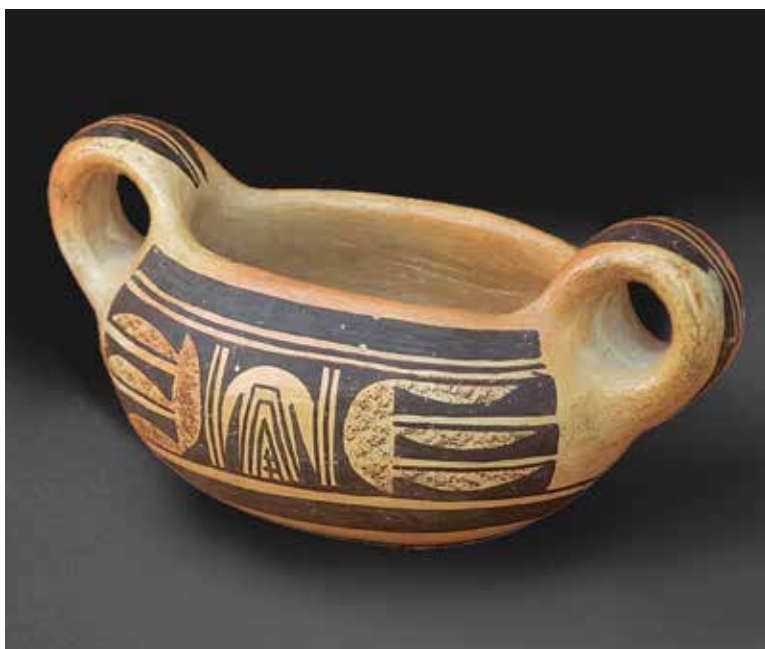
These are two of her pieces: a water pitcher and a demitasse cup for the fanciest Victorian dinner table. The Grecian-revival pitcher is 13" high while the dainty demitasse is 4".

Nobody knows her name today, but her work still demands full attention.

For Southwestern tableware, bowls, cups, pitchers and plates were just the beginning.

The Puebloans gave us everything we could wish for for our breakfast and dinner tables. They gave us candy dishes, relish dishes, bean pots and much more. Some of it was really just meant to be looked at, but some of it was useful, and some of it was made by high-end artists.

We hope that nobody ever actually put a meal on Maria Martinez's dinner plates, but this 7" wide nut bowl by Nampeyo could have served just fine, at least until somebody scrubbed the design off.



This was made in 1928 by Nampeyo—the world-famous Hopi pottery matriarch—and it's signed, which makes it a rarity. In 1928, dealers convinced the family that pieces would sell better if they were signed. Nampeyo was blind by then, and her daughters and her granddaughter painted the pieces she made. So whichever daughter painted it signed it simply "NAMPEYO." Almost immediately afterwards, the daughters adopted a signing convention that allowed them to get some recognition for themselves.

If Nampeyo made the pot, and daughter Annie painted it, she'd sign

“Nampeyo Annie.” If Annie made the pot, she’d sign it “Annie Nampeyo.”

Daughters Nellie and Fannie and granddaughter Rachel followed the custom. So a pot simply signed “Nampeyo” had to come from a really narrow time period, and it explains why we’ve never seen another.

We’ve seen a lot of table-friendly pieces from other potters in other places. In the beginning, potters at Santa Clara Pueblo led the pack. Here’s a teapot and a sugar-and-creamer made around the at the turn-of the twentieth century.



The little teapot (4" diameter) goes back to 1895. If you put it and the sugar-and-creamer from 1910 on the same Santa Fe breakfast table, they’d be perfect companions, and that’s why they were made. Once the Denver & Southwest “Chili Line” connected Santa Fe and Denver in 1880, Santa Clara potters could get whatever they made down to the city and into the stores.

They learned quickly that the biggest demand was for pieces like these. This well-fired blackware proved practical and launched Santa Clara into Betty LeFree’s Age of Handles.

The tableware market lost some momentum later on when Santa Clara potters started painting designs on redware. A painted sugar and creamer from 1955 that we show in our book is in pristine condition because it was never used. Even if it was fired at a high temperature, which it probably wasn’t, a few washings and the design on the creamer would be in trouble.

Other places joined the things-for-the-table party quickly, and a lot of them were useful. Some of them weren’t. Napkin rings from Hopi broke too easily and candlesticks from most places were too difficult to clean.

Salt and peppers were one of the few almost entirely useful things that a lot of Pueblos made. Some of them were silly and some were perfectly acceptable on a proper table. We’ve had San Ildefonso salt and

peppers that could have been made by Maria. Here, the ones at the left came from Hopi about 1925, and the ones on the right were made in 1940 by a Maricopa potter, Lena Mesquerre. She's largely forgotten today, but a writer in a 1920s book compared her skills to Nampeyo's.



Both sets are practical and their functions are clear and correct. The holes on the salt shakers are larger than the holes on the pepper shakers.

Some were less serious in their intent. At Tesuque in the 1930s, potters survived the Depression years by making little unfired curios and decorating them in poster paint they bought at Woolworth's. Those little pieces probably sold for a nickel back then.

The poster paint days at Tesuque were pretty well done by 1950, but a handful of potters kept making them at Jemez for a few more years. This Jemez pair might be as late as 1960.

It's easy to laugh at it today, but its ridiculousness factor can't touch the 1950s Acoma pair on the next page. They might manage to shake out salt and pepper, but I think they were inspired by rural water tanks.





For really practical Pueblo tableware, you went to Taos and Picuris. Anthony Duran of Picuris made this high-fired micaceous bean pot In 1990. It's oven-safe. You can cook in it and serve your beans at the table



from it. And they'd be excellent beans. It's said that beans never taste right unless they're cooked in a proper Pueblo bean pot.

Today, Jicarilla Apache potters near Taos make them as well, and Pasqual's, a major Santa Fe restaurant, cooks in them and sells the pots to customers. Beans taste right at Pasqual's.

For the opposite end of the practicality scale, consider this cup and saucer. It's one of those unfired Tesuque poster-paint pieces from about 1950. It's been suggested that we could use it as a piece of performance art. We could fill it with hot coffee and watch it dissolve into a pile of mud right before our eyes.



They made a lot of dinnerware over the past thirteen hundred years in the Southwest.

Some of it, you can actually use.

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