

Book Reviews of Making Native American Pottery.

1. "Looking for a means to fire pottery in his backyard, the author (who is part Cherokee) found not only Doris Blue, the last living full-blooded Catawba Indian, but a part of his past as well. 'Doris told me stories that taught me how to look to the earth for clay, to gather and purify it for use and to use the old methods to build traditional pots,' notes Simpson. 'She also showed me how to fire pottery in my backyard without a kiln.'

"In this guide, Simpson provides an overview of the methods he learned from Blue, as well as those of other tribes. 'I herein share my learning by expressing the traditional way fused with modern methods, materials, and means. I have expanded upon or altered the old ways only to update and simplify them, and to make them relevant and useful to all people.'

"After suggesting where to find local clay and how to prepare it for use, the author describes five handbuilding methods (illustrated by 'how-to' photos throughout) used by Native American potters: pinching, slab building, coiling, molding, and hollowing.

"Next, decorating, applying slip and burnishing are detailed. 'Designs commonly used by North American natives were derived from their surroundings, myths, and everyday life. Some of the earliest and simplest decorative designs represent mountains, mesas, and rivers. Stylized human and animal forms were occasionally used, but natural forms such as the sun, moon and stars, clouds, rocks, and life represented the world above and below.'

"For burnishing, 'any glassy, easy-to-hold object will do,' says Simpson. 'I have even used a spoon when nothing else could be found! You simply rub lightly on the surface of the clay, using horizontal or vertical strokes, or alternating with both. Burnishing in only one direction insures a consistent finish.'

"The final chapter describes the process of firing pots without a kiln. Necessary tools include a shovel, a hatchet, a rake, gloves, tongs or a long forked stick. 'It's best to dig and prepare your pit a few days before using it,' Simpson cautions. 'This way the exposed earth can dry out and the rim become settled and stable. Line the pit at this time with moist clay or ashes--or even charcoal briquettes--to prevent dissipation of the heat.' He goes on to describe the final steps of the process--finding wood, preheating and, finally, firing." (*Ceramics Monthly*, June-July-Aug. 1996)

2. "The author has attempted a 'How To' book for constructing coiled, pinched, and slab pots, which can be fired in your backyard. He has combined traditional techniques from Hopi, Catawba, and Cherokee, and added some of his own ideas.

Since Native American pottery is a centuries-old tradition, I would not expect a neophyte to have much success unless he has a feel for working clay. By the way, if you do decide to try backyard pottery, do not forget to obtain a fire permit! Cover title reads NORTH instead of NATIVE." (*Books of the Southwest*, no. 391, June 1991)