

ALFREDA FRAGUA

Contemporary Stone Polished and
Incised Jemez Pueblo Pottery

"The most important quality in any good potter is patience. First, you have to communicate with the clay and respect it...then bring out your own beauty."--Alfreda Fragua

When Native American art collectors add one of Jemez Pueblo potter Alfreda Fragua's hand-coiled, incised and stone polished pots to their collection, she hopes her work fills them with happiness, serenity and joy. With each twist and pinch of the clay, each brush of the smooth generations-old polishing stones against the natural red Jemez clay slip, and with each etched sgraffito design, Alfreda pays close attention to every detail of her work. Her goal is to ensure that admirers acknowledge her painstaking efforts and the remarkable beauty of the resulting pot.

"As I look at the piece, my hope is to not only manifest what the clay wants to become, but also to see it through the eye of its potential owner." After knowing she has put forth her best artistic effort, only then is Alfreda willing to send one of her pots off to a new home to "shine."

While she finds inspiration in the work of famed San Ildefonso potters María Martínez, Popovi Da, as well as renowned Jemez Pueblo potters Juanita and Glendora Fragua, Alfreda is a generational potter from a family known for its pottery as well. She grew up the only female sibling amidst a brood of brothers. At home, Alfreda jokingly says she "ruled the roost." She spent her early years watching her grandmother Loretta Cajero make pottery and figurines in the back room of the house alongside her aunt, mother and cousins. "It was always a group effort," she fondly recalls. "The room was so busy as they sat there making many small pieces at one time--consumed with sanding and painting the pottery they planned to sell." Her brother Gabriel Cajero is also an accomplished potter. Alfreda would also intently watch him as he made his pieces. When Alfreda was barely a teenager, Gabriel encouraged her to start learning how to make pottery. Both he and their grandmother taught Alfreda how to find, dig and mix the clay in the traditional way. Until her late teens, she had only ever painted pots, but it was Gabriel who taught Alfreda how to stone polish them. Experience has made her one of the best polishers and artists working with incised pottery at Jemez. Now, travelers along the main highway to Jemez Pueblo have the opportunity to see a larger-than-life picture of one of Alfreda's pots on a billboard for the Walatowa Visitors Center.

As a youngster, she could never understand why the village women would pray over their clay. To a child not fully familiar with the artistic spirit that is channeled from the earth through the hands and into the moist brownish Jemez clay, this practice seemed absurd. Once she began to work, it became infinitely clear how important it is to honor Mother Earth and respect the clay she has received. Any Pueblo potter will tell you that it is important to speak with the clay, listen, and wait for it to reveal what it wants to be. Today, Alfreda has her prayer posted near her pottery work area at home as a reminder of Mother Earth's gifts.

Alfreda's work is a reflection of her respect for Mother Earth. What separates her from other potters is her meticulousness. She quietly listens to the clay and carefully follows its instructions in every aspect of making a pot. Just like the raw Native earth from which she works, the artist's pottery is "talkative"--articulate. It speaks boldly of the mountains and the river flow near her Jemez homeland. Her work shines brightly with its natural hues and reflective polished red. The end result provides a way for Jemez to remain in the heart of its collector and serve as constant reminder of its unique beauty. Alfreda's designs and lines express the peace and gracefulness she feels as she works the clay and brings the piece to life. "When my hands are in the clay, I feel abundance, peace--the tranquility of my worries melting away. My body is relieved of all the chaos in the world," she says.

Alfreda graduated from Albuquerque High School in 1984 and later went on to attend CNM for business and Southwestern Indian Polytechnic Institute (SIPI) to study computer graphics. Along with her pottery, Alfreda currently works in the medical field. Her pottery has been regularly sold in galleries in Downtown Albuquerque and at historic Old Town. Over the last three decades, she has been a favorite on the Native American art show circuit, including SWAIA Indian Market in Santa Fe, Eight Northern Pueblos Indian Arts and Craft Show, and the Heard Museum Guild's Indian Fair and Market.

Commission Information:

Alfreda Fragua
P.O. Box 14
Jemez Pueblo, NM 87024
alfreda_fragua@yahoo.com
Cell: 505-269-8310



Stone polished etched vase.