

Andrea Fisher

Fine Pottery

Santo Domingo Pueblo



Santo Domingo Pueblo Mission Church

Santo Domingo Pueblo is located on the east bank of the Rio Grande about half-way between Santa Fe and Albuquerque. Historically, the people of Santo Domingo were among the most active of Pueblo traders. The pueblo also has a reputation of being ultra traditional, probably due, at least in part, to the longevity of the pueblo's pottery styles. Some of today's popular designs have changed very little since the 1700's.

In pre-Columbian times, traders from Santo Domingo were trading turquoise (from mines in the Cerrillos Hills) and hand-made heishe beads as far away as central Mexico. Many artisans in the pueblo still work in the old ways and produce wonderful silver and turquoise jewelry and heishe decorations.

Like the people of nearby San Felipe and Cochiti, the people of Santo Domingo speak Keres and trace their ancestry back to villages established in the Pajarito Plateau area in the 1400's. Like the other Rio Grande pueblos, Santo Domingo rose up against the Spanish oppressors in 1680, following Alonzo Catiti as he led the Keres-speaking pueblos and worked with Popé (of San Juan Pueblo) to stop the Spanish atrocities. However, when Spanish Governor Antonio Otermin returned to the area in 1681, he found Santo Domingo deserted and ordered it burned. The pueblo residents had fled to a nearby mountain stronghold and when Don Diego de Vargas returned to Nuevo Mexico in 1692, he attacked that mountain fortress and burned it, too. Catiti died in that battle and Keres opposition to the Spanish crumbled with his death. The survivors of that battle fled, some to Acoma, some to fledgling Laguna, some to the Hopi mesas. Over time most of them returned to Santo Domingo.

In the 1790's Santo Domingo accepted an influx of refugees from the Galisteo Basin area as they fled the near-constant attacks of Apache, Comanche, Ute and Navajo raiders in that area. Today's main Santo Domingo village was founded about 1886.

In 1598 Santo Domingo was the site of the first gathering of 38 pueblo governors by Don Juan de Oñaté to try to force them to swear allegiance to the crown of Spain. Today, the All Indian Pueblo Council (consisting of the nineteen remaining pueblo's governors and an executive staff) gathers at Santo Domingo for their first meeting every year, to continue what is now the oldest annual political gathering in America. During the time of the Spanish occupation Santo Domingo served as the headquarters of the Franciscan missionaries in New Mexico and religious trials were held there during the Spanish Inquisition.

Today, the people of Santo Domingo number around 4,500, with about two-thirds of them living on the reservation. The pottery traditions of the pueblo almost died out after the railroads arrived and many Santo Domingos went to work laying tracks. Even today many Santo Domingo men work as firefighters for the US Forest Service in fire season and ply their artistic talents during the rest of the year.

Potter Robert Tenorio began working to revive the Santo Domingo pottery tradition in the early 1970's. His influence can be found among many of today's Santo Domingo potters, even if they say he stimulated them to learn on their own.

While today's Santo Domingo pottery is known for designs described as simple geometrics, another outstanding feature is boldness: the lines are thick and well-defined.

As religious leaders forbid the representation of human figures as well as other sacred designs on pottery made for commercial purposes, birds, fish and flowers are common design motifs. Depictions of mammals are rarely seen. Another typical Santo Domingo style is to paint in the negative, meaning cover the pot in panels of big swatches of black and red so that only a few lines of the cream slip show through.

For more info:

Santo Domingo Pueblo at Wikipedia

Santo Domingo Pueblo official site

Pueblos of the Rio Grande, Daniel Gibson, ISBN-13:978-1-887896-26-9, Rio Nuevo Publishers, 2001

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