

Navajo Artists Use Silver, Turquoise in Jewelry to Honor Heritage, Tradition

New navajoturquoisejewelry.net takes look at rich history of Navajo turquoise jewelry.

Navajo turquoise jewelry, long a symbol of status among the native peoples of the Southwest, was "discovered" generations ago by travelers from the East, and Native American craftsmen produced a series of designs, including beads, cuffs and rings for the popular tourist trade. The popular Squash Blossom design, favored by buyers as an example of traditional Navajo art, became well known throughout the country and has retained its popularity.

"The beauty of Navajo turquoise jewelry only increases with wear," according to navajoturquoisejewelry.net spokesman Phil Lorson, who represents a consortium of artists dedicated to continuing their ancestral traditions of crafting fine silver and turquoise jewelry. "Many of these artists," Lorson notes, "learned their skills alongside their fathers and grandfathers, perfecting the artistic expression and adapting their styles to the changing times."

Jewelry-making among the Navajo of Arizona and the American Southwest was formerly a male-dominated craft, although that has changed somewhat, he notes. "Today, young women artists are producing fine pieces of jewelry, just as young men are exploring other native arts, including weaving and pottery." It's a changing world, as he notes, but the honored "family traditions of pride and artistry" remain strong among the Native Americans who pursue family crafts.

Today, much traditional "Old Pawn" Navajo turquoise jewelry is available through dealers and galleries, as well as at auction. One can see that many of these pieces were well-worn, says Lorson, and that history of use has added a patina and an appeal that cannot be duplicated in a new piece.

Newly-produced jewelry, including those pieces made in traditional styles, have much to recommend them Lorson insists. "To craft a fine new bracelet," he explains, "the artist must utilize the same hand tools, employ the same materials, select the appropriate stones, and meld the pieces together flawlessly," in order to create a beautiful piece of wearable art. Just as in the past, today's Navajo turquoise jewelry is meant to be worn.

Tiny scratches in the silver will add to its luster; slight changes in the color of the turquoise testify to its authenticity, and silver hallmarks, as well as artist's signatures, add to the value. Whether an artist works in an urban studio or in a family dwelling on the Navajo homeland is immaterial. The art represents a long and continuing heritage, and each piece is an original, meant to be cherished.

For additional information, please visit Navajoturquoisejewelry.net