



SAN ILDEFONSO POTTERY

San Ildefonso Pueblo sits adjacent to Bandalier National Monument. In the Pueblo Revolt of 1680, San Ildefonso participated in the burning of Santa Fe. When Don Diego de Vargas returned in 1692 with the *Reconquista*, warriors from San Ildefonso defeated him and dictated their own terms of peace. Three years later, de Vargas gained the upper hand and San Ildefonso Pueblo was brought back into the Spanish fold. From that time until the mid-19th century, San Ildefonso potters concentrated on making “Powhoge Polychrome” wares. Later, they added red to their palette and “San Ildefonso Polychrome” became the standard. In 1900, San Ildefonso artists concentrated on black-on-red pottery. Polychrome and black-on-red dominated until 1920 when a young woman, Maria Martinez, and her husband, Julian, turned San Ildefonso pottery making upside down.

Maria Montoya Martinez (1888-1980) was already an accomplished potter at the turn of the century. In 1908, when Edgar Lee Hewett, the Director of the New Mexico Museum found black-on-black sherds in an excavation near San Ildefonso, he went searching for someone who could replicate the process in order to preserve this ancient style. Maria agreed to try. It was a long learning process, but, by 1920, Maria and her husband Julian were making black-on-black pieces. Soon, they were producing black-on-black pieces with a polished background and a matte finish.

Black-on-black polished pieces with matte decoration made Maria and her husband internationally famous. She began signing her work in 1923. The demand for black-on-black became so great that she had to teach her daughters and extended family how to make the pieces. Black-on-black dominates pottery from San Ildefonso today, but other potters, principally Russell Sanchez and Cowan Gonzales both do excellent work in polychrome.