

Title:

Discover Thailand's Priceless Beauty

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Summary:

The Benjarong is Thailand's priceless contribution to Asian pottery. Once the prized possession of royal palaces and upper-class Thais, it is today, the pride and perfection of ancient Thai craftsmanship.

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Article Body:

The Benjarong is Thailand's priceless contribution to Asian pottery. Once the prized possession of royal palaces and upper-class Thais, it is today, the pride and perfection of ancient Thai craftsmanship.

But what exactly is the Benjarong and why does it possess such magical qualities with sheer beauty and serenity? Read on to unravel the history and making of this ancient masterpiece.

## History of the Benjarong

During the early Ayutthaya period (1350 - 1767), Thai craftsmen made a somewhat crude multi-colored earthenware known today as the Benjarong - a term based on the Sanskrit words panch, meaning five, and rang, meaning colors, thus literally referring to the 'five-colored.' The style of painting multi-colored enamels on a white porcelain base was influenced by the Chinese Ming dynasty, and by the 17th century, the Benjarong became an exclusive household possession of rulers and high nobility - marking a period where high quality Benjarongs with unique Thai designs were produced. Colored enamels added over the glaze were fused to the surface in a descending scale of temperatures. The Benjarongs were also decorated with swirling flame-like motifs and Thai-style thepanoms, or celestial beings. These were made exclusively for the royal household as utilitarian items, such as rice bowls, stem plates and covered water jars. Shortly after, artisans applied 12 or 18 carat gold onto Benjarongs to enhance their appearance.

## The Making of a Benjarong

The making of the Benjarong is a long and arduous process requiring great patience and complete dedication. A prolonged heat treatment is required after the object is made, and once again after the hand painting is done. The drying process of the hand painting cannot be accelerated by using a fan or blower, as this prevents the colors from fusing into the ceramics.

The process:

- 1.The ceramic ware is hand made into the specific size and shape desired.
- 2.The ceramic ware is heated at over 500 degrees for over 6-7 hours.
- 3.A few hours is spent on polishing the baked ceramic ware to smoothen the surface.
- 4.A thin layer of glaze is applied onto the smoothened ceramic ware.
- 5.The ceramic ware is heated once again to give it a glazed and polished surface.
- 6.A craftsman then hand paints some designs onto the polished ceramic ware.
- 7.Every color needs to be completely dried in order to apply a new color, taking from hours to days to complete.
- 8.The finished hand painting on the ceramic ware is left to dry for another 6 hours.
- 9.The painted ceramic ware is heated once again at over 500 degrees for 5-6 hours, as this ensures that the colors are fused into the Benjarong.

The Benjarong today is one of the most popular types of ceramics in Thailand. Known to be the most exquisite for its hand painted designs, it is of little wonder that these masterpieces are exclusively produced by only the most talented and highly skilled of Thai artisans.