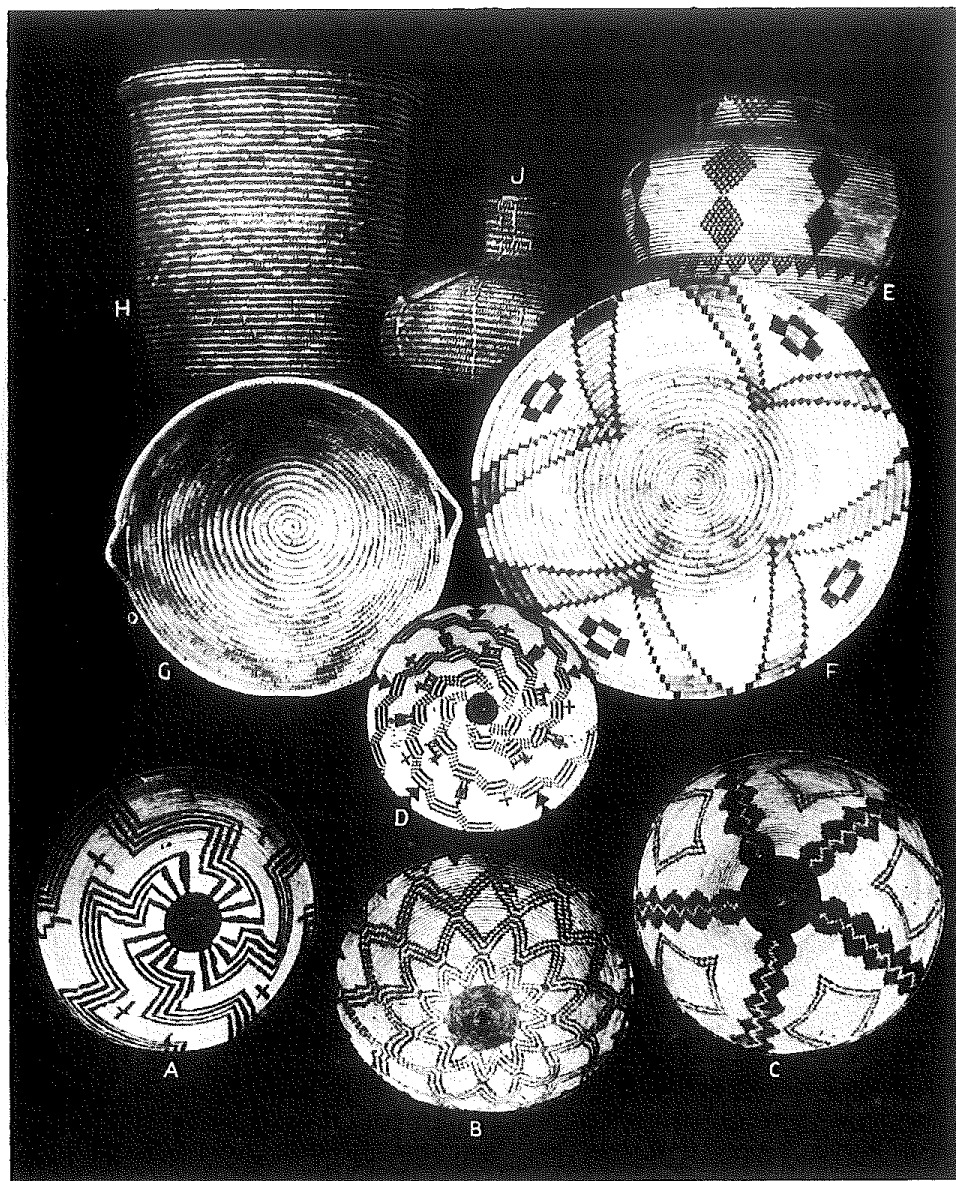


DENVER ART MUSEUM

1300 LOGAN STREET, DENVER, COLORADO

DEPARTMENT OF INDIAN ART

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APACHE INDIAN COILED BASKETRY

LEAFLET 64

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1. **THE APACHE INDIANS** belong to the Athabaskan linguistic stock and are its southernmost members. The location and population of those bands which make baskets are as follows. The several bands of the western Apache live on the San Carlos, Fort Apache and Camp Verde reservations in east central Arizona and number about 6,000. The Jicarilla (He-ka-rée-ya) band lives in north central New Mexico and has about 600 members. The Mescalero (Mes-ka-láir-o) band lives in south central New Mexico and numbers about 450. For further details about the tribe see Leaflet 16.

2. **TOOLS.** The steel or iron awl set in a wooden handle is the principal tool. It is used by all groups. Formerly awls were made of bone. Steel knives are used to prepare material, split sewing splints, cut off loose ends and wherever cutting is necessary.

WESTERN BANDS

3. **FORMS.** Bowls with sides flaring at various angles range from 2 to 10 inches in depth and from 4 to 30 inches in diameter (A, B, C, D). This is the oldest form. Jars with the general form of a smallish bottom, sides flaring to a high, rather flat shoulder, constricted neck and fairly high rim are common (E). Some forms show a constricted mid-section. Jars range in size from 6 to 40 inches in diameter and from 10 to 50 inches in height. The very large examples are quite rare, the average being about 18 by 24. A good many other forms have been made in recent times, all showing white influence. It is impossible to list them here. They may be recognized by their appearance as outlined in this leaflet.

4. **USES.** The variously shaped bowls are used for household utensils, "holding meal, winnowing grain, parching corn, boiling food, mashing berries, serving stews, and holding water for cooking, washing and laundry" (Ref. 1, p. 166). Bowls are used in ceremonies for holding sacred meal, clay paint and seed corn, but there are no exclusively ceremonial bowls. The jars are for the storage of any dry materials, though many are made only for sale.

5. **MATERIALS.** The split and peeled twigs of 2 varieties of willow (*Salix nigra* and *lasianhra*) and of cottonwood (*Populus fremontii*) are used for the sewing splints which form the outer surface of the baskets. Peeled but whole twigs of the same kinds are used for the foundation rods. Willow is by far the most common material. Mulberry (*Morus*) was once much used. It ages to a silvery grey. The black is the covering of the seed pod of the devil's claw (*Martynia proboscidea* or *louisiana*). The red rarely seen on modern baskets is the root bark of the yucca (*Yucca elata* or *baccata*).

6. **PREPARATION OF MATERIALS.** Twigs are usually gathered in the spring, when the sap is flowing, though sometimes they are cut in the fall. They are peeled and those to be used for sewing splints are split into 3 sections, the teeth being used to hold one section. The splints are given an even size by scraping, tied in coiled bundles, and stored for future use. The devil's claw pods are gathered in the fall when dry, split and tied in bundles.

7. **TECHNIC.** Baskets are made by women. Before being used the materials are soaked in water or wet sand to make them pliable. Three unsplit rods are placed in a triangular formation. They are wrapped for a short distance with a sewing splint. This wrapped section is then bent back on itself. The awl is used to pierce the wrapped section. The sewing splint is passed through this hole, around the unsewed section, and back through another hole by the side of the first, thus fastening the unwrapped section to that already bound. This process is repeated until the basket is done. New splints and rods are inserted as needed.

Coils move from right to left unless made by a left-handed worker. Shaping is done by sewing the new coils at various positions between the top and side of those already done. The finished side of a basket is that facing the maker, hence jars are sewed on the edge nearest the worker from the outside, while the bowls are worked from the inside on the far edge. The rim is bound over and over with black. The herring-bone rim finish is rarely used. Black sewing splints are introduced to form the designs according to a plan previously worked out in the worker's mind.

8. DESIGN. Western Apache basket design (A-E) is marked by the presence of vertical, zigzag, or diagonal patterns starting from a black circular center and made up of combinations of small black blocks. The zigzag designs are often made with several parallels. These classes of designs are characterized by great vitality and animation. More static designs are the common all-over networks, horizontal circles—rare on bowls but common on jars—and many small isolated figures, either conventionalized humans and animals or geometric abstractions such as crosses, diamonds—either single or in chains—chevrons and terraced figures. These small figures are often placed at random, with no relation to the general design plan. As such they serve to relieve the tension of the highly dynamic main designs. These elaborate designs are rather modern, perhaps since 1890. The older designs are much simpler. About 1903 a native religious cult introduced star and crescent designs.

9. SYMBOLISM of a religious or mythological nature seems to exist, but when and where are questions which cannot be answered. Certain design elements have names, such as "lightning", "spotted", "measure of grain", "cloud" or "trails", but these seem to be merely for convenience. Certain combinations of elements may illustrate a myth or religious idea. But there is no universal practice in these matters, so that the proof of the existence of symbolism, let alone its interpretation, are practically impossible. Ref. 1, p. 197 ff. discusses the matter quite fully.

10. APPEARANCE. Western Apache basketry may be distinguished by its black-and-tan color, the animation of its designs, and by the small, round corrugations of its coils. The stitches are fine and even.

MESCALERO

11. FORMS. Shallow bowls with widely flaring sides are the most common shape (F). Bowls range in size from about 3 to 8 inches in depth and from about 12 to 24 inches in diameter. The tribe also makes a very few more or less cylindrical shapes with a sloping shoulder and rather small mouth with quite high neck.

12. MATERIALS. The sewing material is made of the split leaves of the narrow-leaved yucca. When unbleached these are a greyish green, partly bleached, a yellow, and wholly bleached, a creamy white. The root of the same plant produces a brown-red. No information is available about the twigs and bundle material used in the foundation.

13. TECHNIC. The coils have for foundation either 2 rods and a bundle of split leaves, 3 rods and a bundle or a wide slat and bundle, all of which are arranged vertically, not triangularly as among the western bands. This gives a thin, wide, and transversely flexible coil, one of the main characteristics of this basketry. The general method of manufacture is the same as for the western Apache.

14. DESIGN. Mescalero design is very simple. Large single stars, terraced pyramids, diamonds and squares make up most of the designs. A common arrangement has a green background and a single star in a light shade edged with the brown.

15. SYMBOLISM. Information on this point is limited to one statement that there is a possibility some of the designs may be in the nature of prayers or charms for the benefit of the maker. The designs are named.

16. APPEARANCE. Mescalero coiled baskets are unique and cannot be mistaken for any other type. Their mottled surface of soft greens, yellows, creams and browns, their thin, flat and loose coils, their coarse irregular stitching and their large simple designs make up a combination not found elsewhere.

JICARILLA

17. FORMS. Rather deep bowls from 10 to 30 inches in diameter and from 4 to 8 inches in depth represent the most common form (G). A peculiarity of these bowls is the making of loop handles on the rim, either in pairs or in a continuous series all around the rim. These handles are not extra pieces added to the basket, but are made by pulling the outer coils out of line. Deep cylindrical forms are the next most common (H). They range in height from about 10 to 36 inches in height and from 10 to 24 inches in diameter. They

often have lids. Some of these deep baskets are shaped like wash boilers, with straight sides and rounded ends. Jug-shaped water bottles (J) and fish creels are also made. All but the bowls and bottles are probably due to white influence.

18. MATERIALS. Both sumac and willow are used for foundation rods and sewing splints. Sumac is more characteristic of the Jicarilla. It has a sheen that the willow lacks, and turns into a medium yellow-brown.

19. TECHNIC. 3 or 5 rods are used for the foundation. This makes the coils heavier than in other Apache types, a determining point in identification. The rods are arranged in a mass, as by the western bands. The general method of manufacture is as outlined for the western Apache. The rims usually have a braided finish, though over-and-over stitching is used.

20. DESIGN. Massive simplicity characterizes Jicarilla design. Large single stars, crosses with little blocks on the corners, terraced diamonds, zigzags and large, conventionalized animals are common elements. All elements are large and only a very few are used on each basket. They are often made up of several narrow bands paralleling each other, giving a rainbow effect. The fact that they are colored makes the identification of Jicarilla basketry easy. Formerly native dyes were used, but for many years brilliant anilines have been all too evident. They age, however, into pleasant hues.

21. DYES. The old native dyes were red from mountain mahogany bark and yellow from barberry root.

22. SYMBOLISM. The very scanty available data indicate that the designs are named, but give the impression that there is no symbolism. Too little is known, however, to justify any statement.

23. APPEARANCE. Jicarilla basketry may be distinguished by its heavy, oval coils, its rather coarse stitching, the loop handles on bowls, the large simple design elements and especially by the bright dyed colors standing out against the somewhat shiny brown background of the sumac. Even where the white willow is used, the other features make identification possible.

Compiled from the following sources by F. H. Douglas:

AMERICAN MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY, NEW YORK

1. Basketry of the San Carlos Apache—Roberts. *Anthropological Papers*, vol. 31, pt. 2, 1929
2. *Indians of the Southwest*—Goddard. Handbook No. 2. 4th Edition, 1931

UNITED STATES NATIONAL MUSEUM

3. *Aboriginal American Basketry*—Mason. Annual Report, 1902

AMERICAN ANTHROPOLOGIST MAGAZINE

4. Problems in the study of ancient and modern basket-makers—Weltfish. *New Series*, vol. 31, no. 1, p. 108, 1932

UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA, PHILADELPHIA

5. An Apache basket jar—Sapir. *Museum Journal*, vol. 1, no. 1, 1910

All but 4 have many photographs. 1 and 3 are especially valuable.