The Story of Indian Jewelry

Most of the reservation-made Indian jewelry is produced by the Navajo and Zuni Indians. It is made from 980 fine coin silver which is distributed to the Indians in the form of "studs" which are one ounce squares of silver. The Indians melt these stugs in crude crucibles and pour the molten metal into equally crude molds of somewhat the approximate size of the article to be made. The silver is then pounded out by hand, generally with a machinist's hammer and using a piece of rail or hammer head embedded in a log for an anvil.

The Indians use crude tools—a few files, hammers, chisels and the dies which are used to make the symbolic designs are homemade from old files or old chisels. Soldering is done by means of a blow torch.

Wire is hand drawn with a draw plate and all twisted wire is made by hand methods. Beads are made in two pieces and soldered together by hand. Rain drop decorations are made on the grounds as are all other decorations used in the jewelry.

The turquoise comes mainly from Nevada and is considered the equal of any in the world. Much of this is cut commercially. However, the Indians, especially the Zuats hand-cut turquoise which is made into cluster rings and bracelets. The Indians mount this turquoise with bezels or boxings that are made of pounded silver as the sizes of the turquoise always vary.

The Story of Navajo Rugs

From Navajo land come the most interesting and the most famous of all native weavings—Navajo Blankets and Rugs. The Navajo themselves claim divine origin for the art of weaving. The Spider Man was the instructor, the warp was made of spider web, the upper cross pole was the sky-cord, the lower a sun halo. Historians insist that it was from the Pueblo Indians, Spanish taught, that the Navajos got their first sheep and learned the art of weaving. For quality work and originality of design, the Navajos excel all other aboriginal weavers. And not only is the Navajo weaver the best but she has preserved her art from white man's influence. It is the Navajo woman who chooses the colors for the loom, and she intends the color of the sheep that provide the wool, shears the sheep, spins the wool and dyes it for use in the famous Navajo rugs.

The rugs are made on crude looms and the blanket or rug is woven from the bottom with the weaver sitting on a blanket in front of the loom. The crudity of the loom does not mar its work on the weaving for the Navajo weaver is truly an artist. These rugs are made of the same color or as set pattern and the weavings are all different.

To the Navajo red is the color of the sunrise, white is the light of the morning in the East, grey is the cloudless South, yellow, or sometimes brown, is the sunset of the West and black symbolizes the North. Generally the background is grey with red, white and black or white with red, grey and black.

Navajo rugs wear for years, are easy to care for and popular both in city homes, for trophy room and in mountain cabins.