

Afghan Ceramics in High Demand

Author: [Ahmad Lodin](#)

Craftsmen and traders say that business is booming.

His hands and clothes covered with clay, 70-year-old Deen Mohammad sat behind his potter's wheel. His craft, he said, had not only provided him and his family with a reasonable standard of living but was still satisfying after decades of practice.

"It's a very good profession," he told IWPR. "I loved it from my childhood years - from the outset really - and I still do.

"I first picked it up from my father and since then I've trained many other potters."

Despite the ongoing insurgency, the ceramic industry in the southern Afghan province of Kandahar has continued to thrive.

Potters and traders said that the sector had remained largely immune from the economic uncertainty affecting so much of the country. The only real threat to the trade, they claimed, were cheaper imports of similar products from neighbouring Pakistan and China.

Afghanistan has a proud history of traditional craft making, and potters still use many of the same methods they have done for millennia.

Noor Mohammad, a 50-year-old potter, described the process of making plates, pots and other ceramics.

"First we look for good soil because not all soil is suitable for producing quality pottery," he said. "Then we filter and strain the soil through a sieve in order to remove unwanted materials such as stone and small sticks.

"After that we begin to form the clay out of the soil by smashing it and pressing it until it's smooth. Then we simply use our hands, a potter's wheel and our skill to shape the clay into a pot or drinking vessel before drying it in the sun.

"Finally, we fire the pots in a kiln for a day and then decorate them with different colours and designs before selling them at the market."

One small town called Istalif, north of Kabul in the foothills of the Hindu Kush, has long been synonymous with ceramics due to its unique turquoise, ochre and green potteryware

The Taleban sacked the town in 1996 following the withdrawal of Northern Alliance fighters, but following the fall of the regime in 2001 the craft once again began to flourish.

Like Istalif, Shahpur Darwaja, a small town in Dand district in Kandahar, is also famous for its pottery. Dozens of ceramic factories produce much of the province's potteryware, including tiles to decorate buildings.

"We don't only focus on making ceramic pots," potter Khwaja Mohammad told IWPR. "We also accept orders to create designs and decorative work for buildings."

He added, "Potterywares such as urns, plates, flowerpots and hookah bowls are still very much in demand here."

Nazar Mohammad, who owns a ceramic shop in Shahpur Darwaja, said that business was booming.

"I sell anywhere from 50 to 100 pieces of pottery a day here. My customers say they prefer eating and drinking out of ceramic products much more than glass or nickel dinner sets," he said.

"I'm really pleased with my business as I make between ten and 20 US dollars a day."

Local resident Gul Mohammad said that, in the absence of refrigeration, ceramics were particularly good for keeping food and drink cool.

"We always use a particular type of large clay pot at home in order to keep our water cold," he said. "It's a traditional item here."

Kandahar elder Haji Mohammad Hussain agreed that the local climate made pottery ware especially useful.

“The province has a semi-arid climate and the weather here is usually very hot in the summer,” he said. “Because there’s no electricity and people are poor and don’t have fridges, storing food in pots which can keep produce cooler is very important.

“Cooking using ceramics can also [make food] taste delicious, while buying ceramic plates rather than glass is much cheaper.”

Mohammad Nasir Hewad, head of arts at Kandahar’s department for information and culture, said that local potters had been honing their skills for some 5,000 years.

He agreed the industry was thriving but warned against complacency as cheaper imports from Pakistan, India and China remained a threat.

“We don’t have enough help from the government to strengthen and promote our ceramics industry,” he argued.

“But in the near future I promise to hold an exhibition here in Kandahar with the aim of bolstering the work of potters and encouraging more people to buy their products.”

This report was produced under IWPR’s Supporting Investigative Reporting in Local Media and Strengthening Civil Society across Afghanistan initiative, funded by the British Embassy Kabul.

Location: Afghanistan

Topic: Economy

Life

Focus: Afghanistan: Supporting Investigative Reporting & Civil Society

Source URL: <https://iwpr.net/global-voices/afghan-ceramics-high-demand>