



horse tales

weaving stories in horsehair

by Efraín Villa
photographs by Gabriella Marks

LUXURIANT TAILS WHIMSICALLY emerging from Jane Chavez's vibrant, horsehair baskets lend a touch of fragility to her bold creations. The Fulbright scholar and former ecology teacher takes two weeks to a month to weave and embellish each basket with organic materials and hand-stamped silver.

Her trademark designs begin with lengths of horsehair she obtains from a Washington company which sources it from Mongolia. For commissioned pieces, Chavez collects horsehair, photographs and personal stories from the horse owner. "The horse's story informs the basket," says Chavez. "Sometimes if someone had a special horse for 20 years and it dies, they want something to remind them of the horse." Her commissioned pieces can commemorate live horses, as well, without harming the horse.

For the center foundation of the basket, Chavez cuts a medallion from a sheet of sterling silver and adorns it using a large collection of jewelry stamps, including some she fashions herself out of nails. "The sterling silver puts everything into perspective," says Chavez. "There is always something fascinating to look at in the inside of the basket; you can see everything about the work from that angle."

Above: Jane Chavez in her studio. Above right: *El Coralino*, the largest basket she has made so far, measures 5 x 9 1/2". Tiny coral embellishments gave the piece its title. It took Chavez over three months to complete—"Forever," she says.

Below: Each basket has a story to tell. The piece on the right was commissioned by an old friend of Chavez's to commemorate her mare, Jazz. The horse's name is inscribed on the silver medallion at the basket's bottom.





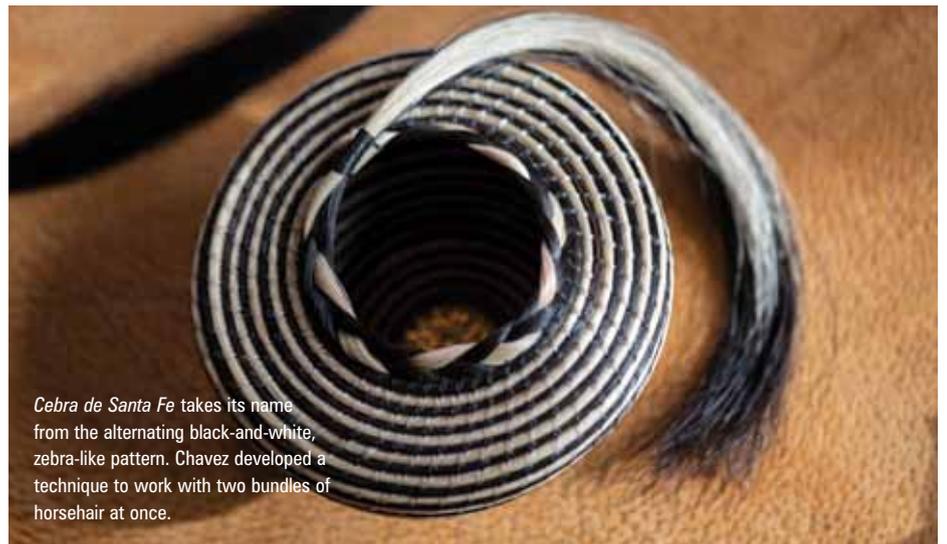
Above: Chavez starts each basket by making a silver medallion, then winding the horsehair around it. She always weaves clockwise.

Left: Chavez's stock of Mongolian horsehair, in multiple colors.

She begins coiling the horsehair and multicolored sinews in a clockwise pattern around the silver. "Traditionally, Native Americans coil their baskets counterclockwise," Chavez says. "This is the way I have been doing it since 1992 and my Native American weaver friends respect my technique and I have a lot of admiration for theirs."

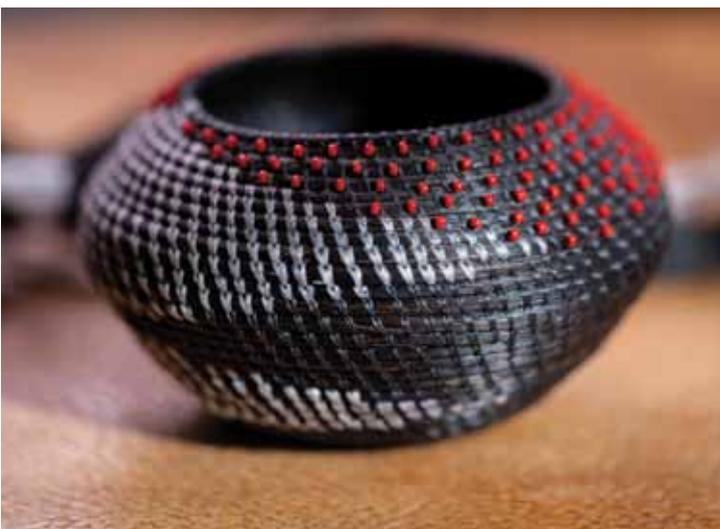
She finishes each basket by embellishing it with coral, beads, feathers, bone, and fetishes attached with fishing line. Every piece is given a Spanish name according to its "personality," a bow to the artist's Argentine upbringing. 🇦🇷

Jane Chavez, Sage Creek Gallery, 421 Canyon, sagecreekgallery.com



Cebra de Santa Fe takes its name from the alternating black-and-white, zebra-like pattern. Chavez developed a technique to work with two bundles of horsehair at once.

Below: *Celaje* (The Color of Clouds), 2 1/2 x 4 1/2". The white sinew and red seed beads represent the color of clouds at different times of day. Chavez notes that going outdoors each and every morning and evening to feed her horse deepens her appreciation of the New Mexico sky.



The affection between Chavez and her mustang, Remington, is clear.