1. Vault 1 at the Indian Arts Research Center.
Santa Fe Secret

SCHOOL FOR ADVANCED RESEARCH gives Native American Art magazine exclusive access inside its breathtaking campus and vaults filled with Native art.

By JOHN O’HERN Photography by DANIEL NADELBACH
Amelia Elizabeth White (1878-1972) and Martha Root White (1881-1937) were two of the three daughters of Horace White (1834-1916), a wealthy New York publisher and former editor-in-chief of the *Chicago Tribune*. He had accompanied Abraham Lincoln as a reporter on Lincoln’s 1858 senatorial campaign against Stephen Douglas.

The administration building of the School for Advanced Research. Built in 1923 and modeled after the mission church at Laguna Pueblo, it was the home of Martha Root White and Amelia Elizabeth White.

3. The Dobkin Board Room at the School for Advanced Research, formerly the living room of the White sisters’ home. The paintings are *Untitled* and, from left to right, are by Awa Tsireh (Alfonso Roybal) (San Ildefonso Pueblo), 1933, oil on canvas, Cat. no. SAR.1978-1-216; Oqwa Pi (Abel Sanchez) (San Ildefonso Pueblo), 1933, oil on canvas, Cat. no. SAR.1978-1-214; and Awa Tsireh (Alfonso Roybal) (San Ildefonso Pueblo), 1933, oil on canvas, Cat. no. SAR.1978-1-215.

4. Shelves holding Zuni pottery. The majority of these pieces date from circa 1890 to the late 1920s.

The White sisters served as Army nursing assistants during World War I. On a trip West in 1923, they bought a parcel of land in Santa Fe and proceeded to build a home and to raise Irish wolfhounds. William Penhallow Henderson (1877-1943) designed their home, modeling it after the mission church at the Pueblo of Laguna. The sisters called it *El Deliro* (“The Madness”) after a bar that served as a landmark whenever they got lost walking...
Elizabeth and Martha became real estate developers, and Elizabeth served on Santa Fe’s first planning commission. Their love of Pueblo life and the Native arts of the Southwest led to their opening the first gallery of Native American art in New York City. Elizabeth assembled a collection to be shown at an exposition in Seville, Spain, in 1929. In their book *El Delirio: The Santa Fe World of Elizabeth White*, Gregor Stark and E. Catherine Rayne recount an anecdote about the exposition:

“At such exhibits, it was the custom of the Spanish king and queen to select an object apiece for themselves. ‘They chose two of my best pieces,’ Elizabeth later told Catherine. ‘He took a beautiful Plains Indian war bonnet, and she took a large squash blossom necklace.’ Elizabeth asked for a photograph of the king, Alfonso XIII, wearing the war bonnet, but her request was never fulfilled.”

Martha died in 1937 and Elizabeth lived on at El Delirio until her death at 94 in 1972 when she bequeathed the estate and other property to what was then the School of American Research.

The government of New Mexico Territory gave the new institution the Palace of the Governors on the Santa Fe Plaza as its home. In 1909 it established the Museum of New Mexico to be housed along with the school. Hewett was named head of both institutions.

Over the years, the school’s programs developed and broadened. In 2007, its name was changed again to the School for Advanced Research (SAR). Its mission...
Brian D. Vallo, a member of the Pueblo of Acoma, was appointed director of IARC in 2015. He is a former Lt. Governor, Director of Historic Preservation, and Founding Director of the Haak’u Museum at Acoma. “My first experience with this collection was when...
I came with my grandmother and her sister and a few other potters from Acoma who were invited to come see the collection. I was overwhelmed,” he recalls. “I wondered, ‘How can all these materials be here in one place?’ The women were picking up the pots and looking at them, handling them the way they were accustomed to. Lucy Lewis was here and Marie Z. Chino. My grandmother encouraged my interest in art but I was discouraged from making pottery because it was a female art. I always helped in gathering the clay and processing the clay. When I was a sophomore in high school, though, I made a dough bowl. My grandmother brought it to market and it sold!”

IARC’s literature states that its goal is “to bridge the divide between creativity and scholarship by supporting initiatives in Native American studies, art history and creative expression that illuminate the intersections of social sciences, humanities and the arts. This is accomplished by providing fellowship opportunities for artists to engage in uninterrupted creativity; fostering dialogue among artists, researchers, scholars and community members through seminars and symposia; nurturing future
art and museum professionals through experiential training; and promoting study of the IARC collection of Native American arts.”

Vallo explains that IARC hosts researchers from all over the world. “It could be someone interested in the Santa Fe Indian School and Dorothy Dunn’s Studio School; something associated with how contemporary tribal communities maintain traditional arts within their community or are working toward revitalizing them; or Native American artists using the collection as a means of informing themselves of the history of a particular art form.

“Sometimes the research goes far beyond the object,” he continues. “UNM architecture students engage with the collection to study form. Others studied Acoma storage jars to learn about space allocation within homes, water storage and where they were located within the house block. And others look into the materials, the source of the clay, the paint source and the gathering of the wood to fire the pottery.”

There is also an ongoing collaboration with indigenous communities. In collection reviews with tribal experts, “we are revisiting our existing documentation associated with the objects or the archival documentation that came with the objects,” Vallo explains. The experts inform us whether or not the record we have is correct—is the material relevant, does it support the object, should it be made accessible to researchers, or does it have cultural significance and cannot be shared.”

A number of “pseudo-ceremonial pots” in the collection were identified during the Zuni collection review by tribal experts. “The pots were sold to collectors as pieces used in ceremonies,” Vallo said. “However, the makers made them for sale. We are reclassifying some material because we have found that information in the scholarly material is erroneous.”

The study collection of objects at IARC is complemented by the 9,000-volume collection of
books in the Catherine McElvain Library as well as an archival collection of papers relating to early-20th-century New Mexico.

Dotted around the property are studio residences for the three annual recipients of Native Artist Fellowships, post-graduate interns and for the various resident scholars and seminar attendees.

One resident scholar, from the 1988-89 season, has returned to become president of SAR. Dr. Michael Brown came to SAR in 2014 from Williams College, where he was Lambert Professor of Anthropology and Latin American Studies. His areas of research have included magic and ritual, indigenous intellectual property rights, the New Age movement, and the native peoples of Amazonia.

Brown’s office had been the White sisters’ dining room. The prominent feature of the room is an altar screen rescued from an earthquake-damaged church in Guatemala. Apparently, the White sisters thought that its crucifixion scenes would be too much for their dinner guests and asked Gustave Baumann to paint over them with images of angels playing lutes. Although we admire Baumann’s work and look humorously at the motivation in this case, it’s ironic that an ancient artifact of another culture that has been whimsically altered is housed at an institution dedicated to conserving objects and assuring the accuracy of their interpretation.

In an article, “The Possibilities and Perils of Heritage Management” in the book Cultural Heritage Ethics: Between Theory and Practice, Brown wrote, “For cultural heritage to survive, it must be cultured by its proper stewards.”

From the preservation of objects to the nurturing of creative thought, SAR is an exemplar of proper stewardship.

Daniel Usner Jr., Holland N. Mctyeire Professor of History at Vanderbilt University, recalls, “My seven weeks as a summer fellow at SAR proved to be one of the most fruitful experiences in my 30-year career.”

13. Vault 2 at the Indian Arts Research Center. The bowls on the table are (l. to r.) Zuni Pueblo stew bowl, maker unknown, 1880-1900, clay, paints, Cat. no. IAF.1361; and Zuni Pueblo stew bowl, maker unknown, before 1924, clay paints, Cat. no. IAF.249.