



Title of Book: Indian Baskets of Central California, Art Culture, and History: Native American Basketry from San Francisco Bay and Monterey Bay North to Mendocino and East to the Sierras.

Author of Book: Ralph Shanks and Lisa Woo Shanks, Editor

Year of Publication: 2006

Summary:

Indian Baskets of Central California focuses on basketry in three geographic areas of California. It is organized into three chapters. Chapter one begins by examining basketry in Native California generally and then continues with basketry of San Francisco Bay and Monterey Bay. Chapter two describes basketry of the interior coast range mountains. Chapter three describes the basketry of the Sierra Nevada and the Delta. This book is interesting because each chapter covers the basketry of a specific group of people. This book is written for a general audience. It contains a lot of pictures and illustrations that enhance the accessibility of the text. This book is interesting because it gives a history of basketry in the geographical areas mentioned and ties the history together with highlighting artists who have continued the basket weaving traditions in their communities.

About the Text:

Indian Baskets of Central California is a book that is necessary for any person that wants to learn about basketry and understand it as more than an art form. The author emphasizes the fact that California Indian basketry is much more than just “exceptional local art.” Native California basketry is unique. It is utilized for specific purposes and the book tells us which baskets are used for what tasks. The



chapters are grouped together based on how the cultures are related in regards to their basketry. The chapters interrelate just as the lives of the different groups of people were related. This book is probably the most detailed account of Ohlone/Costanoan and Esselen basketry ever presented.

Make sure you read

Make sure you read the first section of the book starting on page 1. This section reminds the reader of the importance of basketry in California.

“It is valuable for understanding daily life, cultural change, cultural values, art, history, belief, settlement patterns, migrations and the transmission of ideas.” (p1)

Essentially, a person can't fully understand California Indians without knowledge of baskets and basketry. The baskets are like a road map to traditional California.

The sub-section titled “Understanding California Indian Basketry: The Technical Features” starting on page 11 is also very important to read. This section explains the key features of each type of weaving method and how those features are culturally determined. This section is important because it is very difficult to understand California basketry without an understanding of these technical features.



Did you know?

Quick Facts from *Essential Art*:

1. Ohlone twined basketry seems largely adopted from the Esselen. Page 27.
2. In terms of complexity, creative technical features and design techniques, the U-shaped Ohlone/Costanoan walaheen winnowing basket is perhaps the most amazing basket in California. Page 36.
3. No documented ethnographic Esselen baskets exist in museum collections. There is, however, one known basket that clearly has Esselen characteristics. It is an undocumented walaheen winnowing basket in the Monterey County Historical Society collection in Salinas. Page 42.
4. The beauty of Pomo baskets was elaborated and elevated to a high art by individual Pomo artists themselves. Page 51.
5. The Wappo, Lake Miwok and Huchnom were inspired by Pomoan weaving and largely adopted it. No people in California had richer, more varied basketry than did the Pomo. Page 69.

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Review provided by Melissa Leal, Ph.D. (Esselen-Ohlone). Elk Grove Unified School District- American Indian Education Program

Melissa received her Ph.D. in Native American Studies from the University of California, Davis. Her research focuses on contemporary forms of cultural and linguistic revitalization and empowerment. Her career has been dedicated to working with youth in the Sacramento region.

