

Instructions for use

Before being used for the first time the cookware should be thoroughly cleaned with washing-up liquid and a sponge to remove any residues left after the firing process. Each piece should then be filled three-quarters full with water and placed in an oven for 30 minutes at 200°C or Gas Mark 6. This usually seals the cookware, although a complete seal is generally achieved only after it has been used several times for cooking. Boiling milk in the vessel may help if it is still found to be too porous, but is rarely necessary.

All of the cookware and tableware can be used over any direct source of heat, including an open fire. For best results pieces with a rounded base should be used over a gas ring or open fire.

As it is ceramic, the cookware should not be subjected to excessive thermal stress. Very cold liquids should not be poured into a very hot vessel. A vessel filled with cold liquid may, however, be heated rapidly over a high gas flame. The cookware takes longer to heat than metal vessels and correspondingly longer to cool down. A dish which is boiling when taken off the heat, may continue to boil for several minutes after being placed on the table and, if a lid is used, can remain hot enough to eat an hour later.

The slight porosity of the surface serves to enhance the flavour of cooked foods after the vessels have been used several times. It is recommended that wooden cooking implements be used rather than metal ones.

The cookware may be used for holding liquids but as it is slightly porous it is best placed on a saucer, especially in cold climates. In hot climates it is ideal for storing water as the water which seeps out evaporates and keeps the water inside cool.

Cleaning

The cookware may be cleaned with a sponge and washing-up liquid or in a dishwasher. However, **tierra negra™** does NOT have a non-stick surface. It is important during cooking to check if stirring or the addition of more liquid is required. Baking will require the surface to be well greased beforehand. If food sticks to the surface after cooking, the vessel should be soaked in warm soapy water for half an hour before washing.

Severe overheating may result in some foodstuffs, especially sugars, being reduced to carbon, which is difficult to remove from the surface. Metal scouring pads should not be used in this case as they may scratch or tarnish the surface; it is better to leave the most stubborn deposits which, being black, will not show up very much against the black surface of the vessel. It is generally important, however, to clean your **tierra negra™** properly and quite vigorous scrubbing may be necessary to ensure this.

Storage

After washing **tierra negra™** should always be allowed to dry thoroughly before being stored away, especially in humid environments. As the product is slightly porous, water on the surface is often absorbed and the vessel may appear to be dry when in fact it is not. If relative humidity levels are persistently above 60%, mould can sometimes grow on the

surface of vessels stored in a confined space. This only happens, however, if mould spores are present and the vessel contains sufficient water and particles of food to allow the mould to develop.

Proper washing and drying prevent this from happening but if vessels are washed in a dishwasher, particles of food are sometimes baked onto the surface and if the vessel is then stored in a confined space without being allowed to dry properly, moulds sometimes develop. To avoid this, the vessels should either be allowed to dry properly in the open or, if time is short, in the oven for 10 minutes. Alternatively, they should be stored in a well-ventilated space.

Appearance

One of the most attractive features of **tierra negra™** is that no two pieces are ever exactly the same. Each of the potters making the product has a slightly different style and this can be seen in the form of any curved parts and particularly of any handles. Variations in size also occur and are a natural consequence of the fact that the product is handmade.

The black satin finish is the result of careful polishing with semi-precious stones and a special firing technique. Again, slight variations occur and, because the original colour of the glaze before firing is terracotta, small reddish-brown patches are sometimes visible. These often add to the attractive appearance of the product. They are not a flaw but further confirmation that the product is handmade.

After cooking over intense heat for prolonged periods, the outer surface of a **tierra negra™** product will sometimes revert to its original terracotta colour. This is the result of localised oxidation, a reverse of the reduction process by which the surface acquires its black colour in the kiln. It is entirely natural, almost unavoidable and not an indication of a flaw in the product.

The clay used in the making of **tierra negra™** sometimes contains small flecks of a gold-coloured crystal. This is Fool's Gold or Iron Pyrites and not, sadly, gold. It is a natural component of the clay and almost impossible to remove completely when the clay is prepared. It also tends to rise to the surface during the firing process and so may not be evident before firing. Sometimes, the crystals fall out and leave behind a very small hole. Most pieces, however, contain no visible sign of the crystal.

Handling

tierra negra™ is a ceramic product; because of this it can be broken or cracked if dropped or banged against a hard surface. The same is true for most ceramics but the weight and appearance of **tierra negra™** makes some people think that it is more durable than it is. On the other hand **tierra negra™** has enormous resistance to thermal shock compared to other ceramics. This means that it is impossible to break through rapid heating on the hob or in the oven. Any cracks that may appear or develop in use will be the result of physical rather than thermal shock.