

## Rim — Iterwik, Awatii

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### ASUM AWATHI GAGTUQ. – THE RIM OF THE POT IS COARSE.

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Photo: Clay cooking pot from Rolling Bay, Laughlin Collection, AM50:13.

The Alutiiq word *iterwik* literally means ‘it’s entrance.’ This term can describe many things, from a wind that blows into the mouth of a bay to the rim of a basket. Openings have symbolic importance in Alutiiq culture and artists often highlight them. Holes, commonly represented as circles, are passageways between the layers of the Alutiiq universe. They help animals move between the human and non-human worlds, ensuring the recycling of animal souls and future prosperity.

Look carefully at Alutiiq art and you will see decoration around openings. The circular mouth of a whistling mask has a red line painted around it. A grass basket has bands of elaborate woven designs along its rim. The collar of an Alutiiq parka has detailed embroidery following its edge. Even the clay cooking pots Alutiiq families set in their hearths had decorated openings.

Alutiiq pots were large, heavy vessels made from clay mixed with gravel. Most were conical, with a narrow base that widened to a broad collar. While decoration on the surface of a pot was rare, potters formed the rims of their vessels in many different styles. Some rims were flared, others pointed, notched, or even spurred. This variation probably identified the pot maker and the owner of the soup or seal oil inside. It was also part of an Alutiiq tradition of beautifying even common objects. Decoration showed respect for the natural world. It affirmed the place of people in a universe where human life depends on the careful harvesting and use of everything from plants and animals to clay.