

A Dinner Table Like No Other

Entirely bespoke place settings are the clue you're in exclusive company
By Mark Ellwood
Photograph by Ted + Chelsea Cavanaugh



Swedish chef Fredrik Berselius draws inspiration, and ingredients, for his two-Michelin-starred Aska from the Catskills in New York. When his Brooklyn restaurant outgrew its original site six years ago and needed to move, he decided to use the time to refine every aspect of his operation. One element in particular Berselius wanted? Custom crockery.

Much like he'd want to know the family making the wines he serves or the farmers who grow his produce, "I wanted to know the person behind the vessels and have a dialogue about them," he says. "And what I was looking for I could not buy in a store: clean, white vessels that were a canvas for the food we were cooking but still felt handmade."

It was natural then to work with Stephanie Theado, who'd left a corporate banking job and New York City to become a full-time ceramicist in the Catskills. Together they workshopped the range of items for Aska, finessing sizes and shapes and often stumbling on happy accidents, such as subtle patterns in glaze caused by an overheated kiln. "Then we had to work out how it went wrong and how to replicate the mistake," he says, laughing.

Their collaboration has continued since Aska's move, and Theado now works with other chefs, including Noma co-founder Mads Refslund at the Shou Sugi Ban House in Watermill, N.Y., as well as private clients. "My process for dinnerware is flexible," she says. "I've worked purely through photographs, and I've also made house calls to allow the customer to hold pieces before deciding."

Theado isn't alone, of course. A cadre of high-end firms, like Eamonn O'Sullivan in Ireland and Africa's Shanga collective, has carved out a discrete niche by producing bespoke tabletop wares, from linens and mats to bowls and bread baskets. It's the ultimate decadence for a host who wants to throw a dinner party that's literally unlike any other. We've collected the best from around the world, showcasing pieces made in places ranging from Southern California to north-eastern Tanzania.

INVISIBLE COLLECTION

Isabelle Dubern-Malleveys, a former creative director of Dior Maison and adviser to Diptyque, co-founded this high-end homewares company four years ago. It collaborates with more than 80 designers to sell one-of-a-kind work directly to consumers, including centerpieces like this mistletoe candelabra (1) handmade by Goossens Paris, the haute jewelry maker owned by Chanel. From \$6,350; theinvisiblecollection.com

GEORG JENSEN

The Danish silversmith, beloved for its elegant line of gift items

found in high-end department stores, has its own atelier outside Copenhagen. Clients can work with Jorgen Jacobsen, who oversees all the company's silverwork, to develop custom flatware made on-site. This spoon (2) and fork and knife set (16) is the Blossom pattern, designed by Jensen himself in 1905. It's a terrific example of the brand's patternwork, with a hand-hammered surface that catches and reflects light. From \$1,500 per piece; georgjensen.com

INKORPORATE

Best known for producing quirky custom barware for the

world's top cocktail joints, the company's designers are fluent in a range of mediums, whether a wood plate (3), a water glass (21), or a drink topper (5) to keep your martini glass (9) chilled. (It can also do double duty as a cookie holder.) The cut crystal bowl (18) was inspired by sake glasses reimagined to serve a cocktail at London's Artesian bar, while the pewter goblet (12) is a nod to medieval feasts, custom created for Savoy's American bar. Fifty glasses start at \$8,800; inkorporate.co.uk

SHANGA

This socially conscious, for-profit enterprise in Arusha, Tanzania, is owned by safari specialist Elewana Collection and employs more than 30 local people with disabilities. Every item is handblown from recycled glass and named for the workers there, from its Vincent shot glass (4) and orange Juma tray (6) to its Kyalo wine glasses (11), William Champagne flutes (19), Monica cocktail glasses (20), and Cleophas vases (23). Clients can even co-design, and name, their own. From \$10 (glasses) and \$14 (vases and trays); shanga.org

STEPHANIE THEADO

Handmade doesn't have to mean intricate. Theado applies a clean, white palette to dinner plates (7), serving bowls (10), and dishes small (14) and large (15). All are made from porcelain and finished with a fresh snow glaze. From \$50; stephaniecharlene.com

EAMONN O'SULLIVAN

The self-taught Irish woodworker learned to carve largely by watching YouTube videos and has earned a cult following among chefs for his made-to-order novelties. Jordan Bailey hired him to hew multiple pieces for his two-Michelin-starred Cliff at Lyons in County Kildare. Each of O'Sullivan's pieces, like this wooden spoon (8), is carved from Irish-grown hardwoods and produced using

nothing but an ax and two knives, then sealed with linseed oil and beeswax. From €45 (\$51) each; hewn.ie

KIM SEYBERT

The New York designer has earned particular acclaim for specialized items earmarked for private jets, whether glassware for the Saudi royal family's plane or petite place mats to fit onto an NBA player's aircraft. This place mat (13) is a riff on the Dahlia bloom, which Seybert produced for a client who loved the flower but was hosting an event in the winter. From \$120 per piece; kimseybert.com

GAYLE WARWICK

Inspired by one of her grandmother's tablecloths, Warwick started her U.K.-based soft-furnishings company over 20 years ago. More than 70% of its work is bespoke projects. For a beach house in the Hamptons of New York, she created linens to echo the architecture of the Diller Scofidio & Renfro-designed home. The Les Vignes tablecloth or Filigree napkin (17) can be customized in any precision-matched color, like the hand-embroidered, golden yellow here. From \$50 per piece; gaylewarwick.com

COREY ALSTON

Fifth-generation Gullah weavers in Charleston, S.C., Alston and his sister Carlene use traditional techniques to painstakingly weave natural sweetgrass into bread baskets (22). He accepts private commissions; each takes from a week to a month to complete. \$360 (as shown); corey.alston@comcast.net

RON DIER

Half of Dier's business comes from custom orders. This 18-inch ceramic bowl (24) is built using the coil style, half an inch at a time, so each is unique. The white glaze is mixed in the studio, and the exterior is 22-karat gold. \$2,800 (as shown); rondierdesign.com