

CERAMIC CANVAS

RESTAURANTS CREATE ARTFUL FOOD BY USING CUSTOM POTTERY.



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WHEN

it comes to incredible food, it's no secret that presentation matters. Chefs pore over their creations, crafting each detail to perfection. Not only must flavor profiles jibe seamlessly with various textures, but also colors, shapes and dimensions must reflect the unique character of the dish. As the adage goes, we eat with our eyes first.

A growing number of chefs in Jackson Hole are pushing their presentation even further by getting creative with the plates on which their culinary creations take shape. Some are teaming up with local potters to create custom bowls, plates and other tableware for their restaurants. These partnerships have produced stunning results; some of Jackson Hole's most talented clay-workers have designed pieces that reflect the distinctive menu, personality and aesthetic of some of the valley's best eateries.

Nearly three years ago, chef Joel Hammond from The White Buffalo Club reached out to local potter Jenny Dowd. Immediately enamored of her rustic, elegant and slightly whimsical style, Hammond commissioned plates for the restaurant. And not just a few of them — all in all, the collection was around 300 pieces. With well more than a decade of ceramics experience, Dowd loves working with chefs like Hammond to design the pieces that help

SWEET TOOTH: Dowd's pottery shown off with Persephone Bakery marshmallows and graham crackers, left, alongside ice cream from Cream and Sugar.

WHEELY GOOD: Jenny Dowd is one of a few local potters who make custom pieces for area restaurants.





PRETTY PLATES: The White Buffalo Club's Joel Hammond works closely with Dowd on the look for his restaurant. At the Wild Sage, shown here, they order specialty pieces to add to the look of the space bowls for the bread service.

them showcase their food. “Everyone has a different vision,” she explains. “It’s so cool working alongside a chef and making the plate itself a part of their vision.”

The exchange of ideas and designs flows back and forth between them, resulting in unique pieces on which Hammond plates his award-winning dishes. “Plates, to me, are like a blank canvas for an artist,” Hammond says.

Hammond visits Dowd’s studio during the design process to give input as to the stylistic details of each piece that she creates. Recently, Hammond requested deep, flat-bottomed pasta bowls from Dowd and joined her in the studio to fine-tune the design. In a moment of inspiration, Hammond reached out to the soft clay and carefully slumped one side in. “It just added the perfect character to the bowl,” Hammond recalls. The stylishly slumped bowls are one of Dowd’s favorite examples of their collaboration.

Dowd’s artistry is showcased on other tables around the area, as well, including the Wild Sage restaurant in the Rusty Parrot Lodge. “My goal for the restaurant is to try and keep things as local as possible while still being world-

“I love food, and I really want these dishes to be used, not just [to be] decorations.”

-JENNY DOWD

class quality,” explains chef Travis Catanzaro. “Jenny’s style fits well with the rustic yet refined feel that we are trying to create here.”

Unlike Hammond, however, Catanzaro had a specific dish on the menu that he struggled to find the perfect vessel to serve it in. So Dowd created exactly the plate he was looking for. “We’d been using local wagyu beef from

Circle H Ranch, and the best way we came to sell the brisket was as a macaroni and cheese. At the time, we really didn’t have anything that presented it nicely, so I contacted Jenny,” he explains. Inspired by his vision, Dowd made individual-sized braising pans called staubs. Catanzaro says they were ideal: “They were just more perfect than I ever expected.”

More custom requests for the Wild Sage menu followed: pitchers to serve hot soup tableside, ramekins for desserts and, most recently, ceramic bread baskets. Catanzaro treasures his relationship with Dowd and sees many parallels in their efforts. “For us as cooks, we try to produce things that are delicious and consistent, but there is always an individual’s touch to everything we do. It’s the same for Jenny — each piece that she does is a bit different, and I really hope that folks who dine with us recognize that what we do is

LOOKIN’ SHARP

Jackson’s New West KnifeWorks (also now found in St. Helena, Calif., and soon in Park City, Utah) is known for making high-end knives that use the best materials but also come together to be a functional piece of art. The often colorful handles are made of a lightweight, durable material that is water resistant called G10, which is classified as a “super material.” But more important, they are pretty.

A few local restaurants have incorporated the company’s steak knives into place settings to further customize their tables. New West KnifeWorks can laser a logo (or almost anything) into the blade, and Snake River Grill and the Four Seasons have custom ordered their steak knives, making their table settings even more distinct.



both craft and art. The training that it takes to produce items of exceptional quality with a distinct touch takes years. It’s really a synergistic partnership.”

Across town, Healthy Being Cafe and Juicery serves its tantalizingly vibrant salads in custom bowls from Dowd. “For us, ceramics match the atmosphere of Healthy Being Cafe and Juicery. The process of crafting pottery utilizes natural materials from the earth to set the foundation and one of our most ancient and useful tools, fire, to bring the process full circle. The art of going back to the roots and having an intimate relationship with nature is what we are always striving toward,” explains Hannah Koivu, general manager of the restaurant.

“We believe serving our dishes on ceramics gives the customer a unique and wholesome experience,” Koivu says. “The natural hues and texture of Jenny’s pieces combine magically with the vibrancy of the food that we create.”

A few blocks away, King Sushi showcases some locally crafted ceramics in its collection too. Potter Shane Barnhart has made an eclectic blend of bowls and serving dishes



that the tiny Japanese-inspired restaurant uses for rolls, sides or soups. “I definitely enjoy working in an Asian style,” Barnhart explains. This inclination leads him to rely on rich earth tones and craft details into his pieces, like chopstick holders. The chefs at King Sushi felt that Barnhart’s distinctive dishes reflect the ambiance of the restaurant. “They have this deeply rustic appeal, which really matches the appeal of the cabin,” says co-owner Kaylan Fullerton.

At Cowboy Coffee, your locally roasted beans are served in locally crafted mugs.

Potter Ben Blanton makes a series of colorful mugs all the drinks are served in, and also sells them at the downtown hangout. Blanton even sources the clay from nearby Montana.

While custom plates come with a higher price tag than what generic tableware sells for, chefs don’t seem to mind. All are all dishwasher safe and, the chefs say, hold up very well. The custom dishes become more than simple vessels to deliver food; they reinforce the values, philosophies and

distinctive personalities of chefs and the menus they present.



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