

BALANCING UNIFORMITY AND *Liveliness*

BY JANE HEROLD

Ceramics Monthly: When did you start working with restaurants?

Jane Herold: The first inkings were in 1985, when a Welsh couple opened a coffee shop, Bunbury's, in Piermont, New York, near my pottery in the Hudson River Valley. There's a tradition of using handmade pottery in the UK and the coffee shop's proprietors asked me to make them some mugs and plates. Some of those mugs are still in use! That durability proved important, because it wasn't until 2011 that a young chef from Brooklyn, out for a bicycle ride, happened to stop at that coffee shop and drink out of one of my mugs. He liked it. A proponent of locally sourced food, he immediately recognized the potential for serving it on locally

sourced dishes, and tracked me down. He also liked the fact that I would custom make things to suit his food. Because this chef is a very talented guy, his restaurant received a lot of attention, and word began to spread among other chefs that there was someone north of the George Washington Bridge who would make handmade dinnerware to order. Thus it began.

CM: How does the collaboration with chefs work?

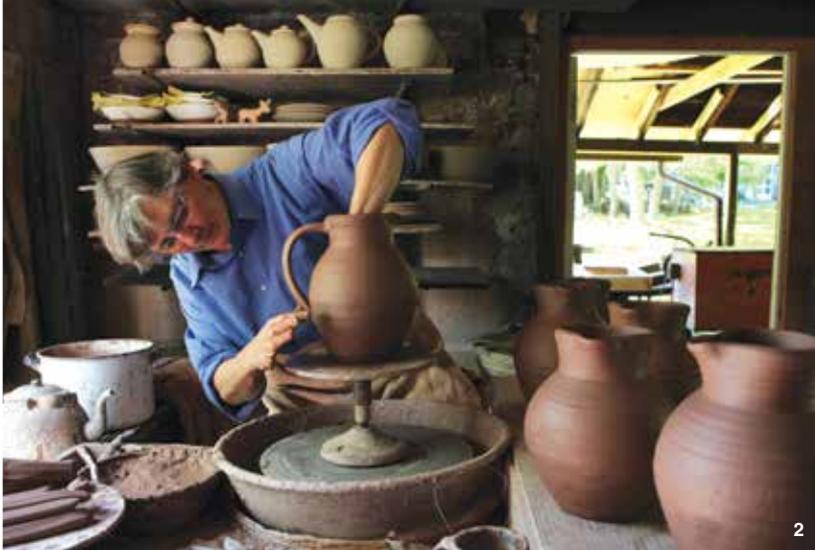
JH: In most cases the chefs come to me here at the pottery, where we look at a lot of samples and discuss what they are after. Sometimes they come with specific ideas, sometimes they'll see something here that we can adapt for their food, some have sketchbooks and drawings, all of them have photos on their phones. On occasion, I will sit down at the wheel and throw various shapes until I'm sure I understand what they want. The final decision is always mine—I have to like what I make—but we work it out together.

If chefs can't visit the pottery, we talk on the phone while looking at the catalog of dishes on my website. It's harder to come up with new designs this way, or to explain all the ways shapes and sizes could be adapted, but we seem to manage. Occasionally we'll start the conversation with an emailed sketch or photo. I rarely have time to make and send out samples, so most chefs have to trust that I will come through with what they want. I haven't had any complaints yet.

CM: Has working with the chefs led to new insights?

JH: I have come to appreciate quite a few shapes that I would not have come up with myself. Many chefs plate food on flat surfaces, but still want a curved edge to hold a sauce or frame the food. This has led me to make some fairly wide, flat-bottomed

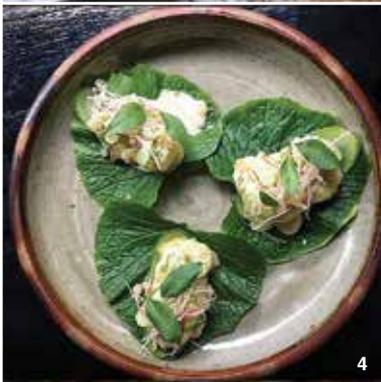




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1 Betony Chef Bryce Shuman's salad served in Herold's stoneware bowl. 2 Herold working in the studio. Photo: Susan Stava. 3 Herold's dinnerware for The Dutch restaurant, handbuilt and wheel-thrown stoneware. 4 The Dutch Chef Jason Hua's Wasabi Leaf Catfish Tacos, served on Herold's wood-fired deep plate. 5 Chef Shuman's Butternut Squash Velouté, Pumpkin Seed, and Cultured Cream, served on Herold's plate. 6 Chef Shuman's Cold Buckwheat Soba Noodle Salad, served on Herold's ash-glazed plate. 1, 5, 6 Photos: Signe Birck. 7 Herold's dinnerware (plates, bowls, and a box), to 10½ in. (27 cm) in diameter, wheel-thrown stoneware, 2015.

bowls. I've also made what I call boxes—round dishes with perfectly straight sides, some with lids. Some chefs now order just the lids, using them as small pedestals for single bites of food. These are both shapes I would not have come up with. I tend to like rounder pots, curved lines, not straight ones, and generous amounts of food, but these pots work in certain settings.

CM: How do you design work for restaurant use?

JH: I take durability and practicality into consideration. I try to talk chefs out of pots that won't stack, or that are hard for servers to handle. I sometimes angle the lips of bowls in slightly, so two bowls colliding will hit at the shoulder and not at the lip. Chefs tell me that my stoneware outlasts commercial high-end dinnerware two or three times to one.

If there's one thing I've learned by making a great deal of restaurant dinnerware, it is that rushing does not pay. Chefs almost never plan far enough in advance to allow the time I'd really like to develop ideas and make pots. While it's wonderful to have my work in such demand, I make pots because I enjoy it, so I want to keep it alive for myself, to have the time to give each pot enough care and attention. I'm learning to let chefs know how long I need. I don't want to become a small factory, with other people making the pots; I still throw each one myself, although I have help with mixing glazes, packing, and shipping.

CM: Has the restaurant ware influenced your other work?

JH: Aesthetically my views have shifted over the last few years.

I've always loved decorating and done a lot of it, such as simple rhythmic swipes of my fingers through slip. I've come to see that there is quite a difference between making beautiful objects that are lovely in themselves and making really good dishes for serving food. This is a hard admission for me to make. I always thought my decorated dishes were both lovely and useful, and they are, but I see that very plain pottery sets off food better than most decorated pots. Yet, these plain pots are not as obviously lovely in themselves, sitting empty on the shelf. If I really believe in making useful pottery, I have to accept this limitation.

I also search hard for the right balance between uniformity and life in each pot. I don't want to produce pots that emulate machine-made things. I enjoy the subtle variations in form and surface that come with my touch, and resist cramping that touch with rigid measuring. Of course the pots have to stack and be uniform enough, but that is all.

I try to accept that my work is complete when in use. Sitting in a restaurant where the servers are carrying my dishes back and forth, and everyone around me is enjoying their food from my plates, I feel an incredible sense of satisfaction. This is what potters used to do, make pots for lots of people to use and eat from. It feels very good to be part of that long lineage and to add an element of something humane, alive, and beautiful to so many meals through the use of my pots.

the author Jane Herold maintains a studio at her home in Palisades, New York. She graduated from Sarah Lawrence College, and apprenticed with Michael Cardew in England before setting up her own pottery. To learn more, visit <http://janeherold.com>.



CELEBRATING SKILL, ELEVATING ENJOYMENT BY CHEF BRYCE SHUMAN

Ceramics Monthly: How did you first learn about Herold's work?

Bryce Shuman: Eamon Rockey, the current general manager at our restaurant, Betony in New York, formerly worked at a restaurant that Herold supplied with dinnerware. When Rockey came to Betony, he introduced me to her work.

Social media posts by restaurants are also a great resource for finding new dinnerware or thinking about designs. You'll notice that most food photography today is being taken as overhead shots, straight down on the food with the dinnerware, creating an almost two-dimensional feel to it.

This style of photography found popularity after Chef René Redzepi of Noma restaurant in Copenhagen, Denmark, used it in his cookbook *Noma: Time and Place in Nordic Cuisine* in the late 2000s. Redzepi has one or two potters in Denmark who supply his restaurants with pots, so these handmade pieces were seen in that book as well.

CM: Why do you use handmade dinnerware for the restaurant?

BS: I grew up in the Chapel Hill, North Carolina, area, close to Pittsboro, where there are a lot of pottery studios. So I grew up being around and using handmade pots. I thought they were cool and interesting. If the shift to using handmade dinnerware had not happened as a trend, I might have come to the conclusion to use them on my own due to my background; they make sense to me.

It feels like Herold's handmade pots have life, and that adds another dimension to working with them, as well as to the guests' experience of a meal. Everything that comes from her hands is individual and has a voice. She uses a kick wheel, ash glazes, and fires in a wood kiln, which adds another dimension of life. The pots stand on their own regardless of human interaction.

In the past, the plates in restaurants were used as a neutral ground, and the food was left to speak by itself. Today chefs look for plates and bowls that interact with the food, and they discuss this with the potters they work with. Chefs are communicating with food, and are looking at how food is interacting with the plates, and how the dinnerware is playing a supporting role in serving a dish for the enjoyment of guests. I will always seize the opportunity to increase enjoyment of the guest, and handmade tableware is a way to do this.

I appreciate and relate to ceramic artists, as much of what I do is also based on being creative using carefully honed skills

and knowledge of specific tools and materials. The human touch, practice, and experience are the origins of skill and art in any field.

The crafts are also similar; as a chef, I am in service to someone else. The creative aspect is a part of it, but the end result, the meal, has to function as intended. If the food isn't delicious, then who cares? For potters, making dinnerware is creative, too, but it also has to function to be successful.

CM: On a creative level, has working with handmade dishes inspired or influenced the menu?

BS: Herold's process for making her ash glazes ended up inspiring at least one dish at the restaurant. She takes ash from her wood kiln, rinses and dries it, then adds it to the glaze. The ash rinse water is full of potassium, carbonates, sodium, etc., that make for a very alkaline solution. Herold likened it to a lye solution when talking with me. Lye solutions are great for making pretzels, lavash, noodles, etc. Alkaline solutions are used in Japan to make ramen and soba noodles because they add to the strength of the noodles, keeping them from breaking down in liquid.

So, realizing that the ash rinse water was basically like a lye solution (and is free of metallic contaminants because she doesn't add those to her firings) we decided to try straining, filtering, and using the ash rinse water at the restaurant to make buckwheat noodles, and it worked. Now, we serve a buckwheat soba noodle dish on one of her dark, ash glazed plates, building a direct relationship between the materials and craft of making the food and the craft of making the pot, which adds to the depth of the collaboration.

CM: How did the process work for creating the dinnerware designs with Herold?

BS: It's a combination of collaboration and choosing existing forms. I will send Herold sketches, and she will respond and give feedback. I'm not sure how many times she has said, "It's not going to work because the sides will fall," or explained that something else would happen due to the design. She is willing to push the limits, find a different clay or glaze to make something viable, and to explain other options or alterations to the design when things don't work.

If something is against her philosophy, she lets me know, because she doesn't want to make pots that she doesn't love, and she wants to find joy in making the work.

Sometimes I have an idea, and when visiting Herold's studio, we draw it up, then she sits down on the wheel and throws forms. We evaluate them as they're on the wheel, then if they're not right, she starts over. If she feels it may work, she sets the form

aside, then, by the next time I visit, she'll have a few fired examples to discuss. Sometimes the prototypes work well. And sometimes they may look cool, but Herold explains, "Well, I don't think you can eat out of it."

CM: What similarities have you observed between the field of studio pottery and working as a chef?

BS: There is a balance to working as a chef that is like making pots. You have to apply your hands to the ingredients in order to create the dish, just like a potter has to apply his or her hands to clay and use a kiln to create a pot.

In my food, I try to accentuate things that are beautiful in nature while applying my own hand. I am inspired by artists like Andy Goldsworthy, for example. The coleslaw dish (background image) is an example. Coleslaw is at many food gatherings across the country, it seems to be everywhere, but it never gets heralded. So I do that with this dish, using natural pickling, dressing them lightly, cutting and stacking every stick perfectly to celebrate skill, in the same way a potter does in the studio. I want to create food that endures, that is not forgettable, as well as being delicious.

CM: Do you instruct the staff at the restaurant to handle the handmade ware in specific ways?

BS: The staff and I are talking constantly about handling pots. I try to use sound as something specific that people can be aware of when handling them, by saying the goal should be to avoid the sound made by two plates banging together. If people think about avoiding that sound, they're more careful with the pots. Lots of restaurants put pads between pots, but our restaurant has too much volume to do that. We have 30 of each plate, and we are going through them 2–3 times per night serving 5+ courses per meal to 140 guests.

I prefer to train staff to treat pots with the respect that they deserve. I have a number of videos of Herold working on my iPad. When someone breaks a pot, I show them a video where she's making a plate at the kick wheel. After they've watched the video I say, that (broken) plate right there will never exist again. Then they understand.

I take sous chefs to the studio to talk with Herold, then they try to throw pots on her kick wheel, and they see how tough they are to make, and learn first hand about the skill that's involved. Herold's place, with the garden and studio is such a cool, creative, magical space that people understand the importance of her and of her work after they've visited.

the author Bryce Shuman is the executive chef at *Betony* in New York, New York. To learn more about the restaurant and see more images of the menu items, visit <http://betony-nyc.com> and follow the restaurant on Instagram @betonynyc.

Background Photo: Signe Birck.

DILIGENCE AND PRIDE

BY CHEF JASON HUA

Ceramics Monthly: When did you start using Herold's pottery at The Dutch restaurant?

Chef Jason Hua: Patrick Collins, our former sous chef (who is now opening Senia in Honolulu, Hawaii), first took me to her studio. Ironically, her studio is located where I often rode my bike.

CM: What do you look for in dinnerware for the restaurant?

JH: Each piece should be unique and not completely uniform. It's fun to notice the details of Herold's dinnerware as we plate each dish.

CM: How does the menu affect the tableware you use?

JH: We like to have variation so that any given table can have a mix of dinnerware that visually stimulate the guest. We aim to keep the experience fun, so the same table might have some dishes served in cooking vessels while another may be on a wooden board and yet another on Herold's pottery.

CM: How does the creative process work when discussing new tableware designs?

JH: I always like to speak with Herold in person. Her studio is outdoors and secluded so I enjoy going there on my day off. I bring plates we use at the restaurant so she can visualize what we already have and where she wants to go with the idea. I put a lot of trust in Herold and she always comes through.

The rectangular, and rounded square plates and platters that Herold created for The Dutch came about when we were looking for service pieces that would make a bold statement but eliminated the rim spacing. They gave us a lot of options whether plating snacks or larger format dishes.

CM: What similarities have you observed between your field and the field of studio pottery?

JH: I have always admired artists who specialize in a craft with diligence and pride. Herold is someone who always exceeds any concept I have for a dish whether it be on a practical or aesthetic level. What she does takes a lot of hard work and passion. It always pushes me to be a better version of myself as a cook when I know other people are also pursuing their craft with a desire to be their best.

the author Jason Hua is an executive chef at *The Dutch* restaurant in Soho, New York. To learn more, visit www.thedutchnyc.com and follow the restaurant on Instagram @thedutchnyc.

