

CONSIDERATIONS OF FORM AND FUNCTION

by Lindsay Oesterritter

Ceramics Monthly: What is your process for designing and making tableware pieces, including your spice servers?

Lindsay Oesterritter: In creating and refining my forms, I start with sketches. I am always sketching form ideas, different versions of lines and shapes intersecting. I always consider the daily landscape around me, whether intentionally or unintentionally. With both these elements in play, a stronger idea or intention is conceptualized, and then sketched in perspective from all sides. While sketching, I consider which technique to use to make the form.

By the time I leave the sketchbook, I have an idea how to build something and its general size. Typically, my next step is to make a series of two to five prototypes. Usually within that range I come to a more definite scale, proportion, and weight that feels right. Then I can begin producing and fine-tuning the form. I leave the process marks of making and consider them part of the overall aesthetic.

With the spice servers, I wanted the hollow in the vessel to be mirrored on the underside, and to be reflected on the exterior somehow. I made the diagonal seam on the side to show how the spaces on both sides are engaged with one another. The cut that forms the spout also serves as a clue, prompting the user to turn the piece over and look at the underside. These spice servers are the beginning of a larger body of work that I am exploring that employs symmetry to promote investigation of how an object can be oriented in use and display.

CM: In what ways do your own cooking preferences inform the pieces that you make to serve food?

LO: Cooking definitely influences the decision-making that goes into some forms. For example, the batter bowl is made with a pronounced foot, at a size that one can easily grab the back rim



Spice server with kosher salt on kitchen counter.



Top left: Juicer, in use. **Top right:** Salt cellars used to plate small food courses at Nodoguro. **Middle:** Spice servers, to 4 $\frac{3}{8}$ in. (12 cm) in length. **Bottom:** Spice servers filled with (left to right): Piment d'Espelette, empty, nigella seeds, sriracha sea salt, kosher salt, and celery seeds.

and foot with one hand and pour. The juicer is made so you can remove the reamer without getting your hands wet with juice, and then easily pour the juice into a measuring spoon if needed. The small dessert bowls are made slightly heavier than necessary. This gives them a presence in the hand and insulation so that they are comfortable to hold when filled with cold ice cream.

For the National Council on Education for the Ceramic Arts (NCECA) conference in Portland, Oregon, in 2017, I was invited to show as part of a fine-dining dinner event. The event was part of the collectors' tour, and included three potters and two chefs. I supplied five dishes as part of a larger fifteen-course meal. Seeing my wares get plated in a fine-dining setting has opened my eyes to a whole new way of thinking. I had the chance to collaborate with one of the chefs to create my wedge dish. He beautifully plated it with thinly sliced Kobe beef, lightly steamed asparagus, and several bright drizzles of sauce. This is something I would have never imagined in my own culinary investigations.

One of the chefs bought my salt cellar forms to use in his restaurant. The salt cellar is one of my favorite forms that I make, partly because I use it every day in the kitchen. The chef uses it for plating small courses. I had never before considered it being used with such rich ingredients in such a beautiful and delicate way. It has opened me up to a whole new consideration of form and function. The experience also got me started thinking about further collaborations with chefs in a restaurant setting.

CM: What draws you to working with an unglazed, reduction-cooled, wood-fired surface for your work? Are there any surprises or nuances that you've observed over time in the way that these surfaces interact with the food presented on them?

LO: I really appreciate the subtlety and individuality of the surfaces that are developed in the kiln with wood firing. The darker surfaces that develop when my clay body is reduction cooled continue to motivate me to focus more on the design of the forms. I rely on the firing and process marks left on the bare clay for the decoration.

If there is one thing that has surprised me, it is how the wood-firing process has contributed to what I make. I do think consciously about (and enjoy) how the dark surface of the pots contrasts with the colors of the spices and salt, the brightness of the lemons and limes being used with juicers, the pastels of ice creams in the dessert bowls, and vibrant greens in salad bowls. On the other hand, I have never made a dinner plate. My surfaces are drier and when I think about my favorite plates to use at dinner, I think a smoother surface works better with a knife and fork.

Spice Servers

The spice servers are made in a two-part press mold. I made the original by carving and refining a solid piece of clay, and cast the mold from the leather-hard original.

To make each spice server, I first brush a light dusting of cornstarch over the mold (1). This helps the mold release, especially where the clay is thicker in the mold. I then press coils of clay into the mold (2). Where I want to make sure the clay gets firmly pressed for a crisp contour line, I use a thin bamboo tool (3), ensuring the clay is making full contact with the mold. One of the aspects I like about this process is the visible variation you can get depending on how you press the coils into the mold, but I want to make sure my form is relatively consistent. I finish by scraping the clay surface even with a metal rib just above being flush with the mold (4). I repeat this process with the second side of the mold (5),

lightly wet the exposed clay surfaces, and then score both sides (6) before pressing the mold halves together.

Freeing the Form

After 20 minutes, I lightly but firmly pull the mold sections apart, keeping in mind the angles on both halves of the form (7). Once the form is free from the mold, I refine the spout by carving a slightly deeper angle (8). After the piece has dried some, I soften the seam edge on the sides of the server where the two halves were pressed together by breaking off any large pieces of clay and compressing it slightly.

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