



*“The great meal, the long session, where the guests are thoughtfully
tion of tradition, patience, and skill and the presence of the earth’s
divinity at the beginning and memorable conversation throughout.”*

Dining

by Nick Moen

*Nick Moen is currently a resident
at Odyssey Clayworks in Asheville,
North Carolina.*

236 Clingman Ave
Asheville, NC 28801
www.nickmoen.com
nsmoen@gmail.com
Instagram @nsmoen

ABOVE: Chef Bryan Kobesky plates
a course in bowls by Anja Bartels
during Pairing Elements at the
Bull & Beggar restaurant, Asheville,
North Carolina. Photograph by
Anthony Harden, Alt Media Produc-
tions.

invited, the table has been carefully set, where the food is a culmination of most delectable textures and tastes, where there is an invocation of

— Robert Farrar Capon, The Supper of the Lamb

... with Makers



The kitchen door swings open to reveal arms carrying handmade vessels presenting a thoughtful arrangement of food. As the plates are set on the table, an aroma fills the restaurant. Before the clink of utensils begins, the diners' eyes absorb the chef's composition of food placed within a vessel in front of them. Guests lift the food to their mouths to taste the layers of flavor and texture. The restaurant resonates with awareness in this moment: handmade tableware meets the finest cuisine.

Though we all must eat, we seldom take time to meet. By meeting to dine, we share the act of nourishing body and mind simultaneously through meaningful interactions, increasing our capacity for empathy. Dining together encourages us to be present and to celebrate the poetry of the meal. In this arena, handmade vessels act as catalysts for conversation and direct our attention toward the food and how we consume it.

For the past year, I have spent time collaborating with chefs and artists to create dining events incorporating handmade tableware. These dinners hold a personal importance to me because they define my relationship to



ABOVE: Nick Moen. Ice Tray and Bowl, 2013. Slip-cast porcelain.

1.5 x 9.5 x 6 in. Inset photograph by Anthony Harden, Alt Media Productions.

Large photograph by Nick Moen.

PREVIOUS PAGE: Nick Moen and Mimi McPartlan. Cheese Trays, 2013. Slip-cast porcelain trays, cherry boards, each 2 x 12 x 5 in. Designed in collaboration with Chef Nathan Allen for Cup & Plate at the Knife & Fork restaurant, Spruce Pine, North Carolina. Photograph by Wes Stitt.

art as a participatory practice; I make tableware for use. The generous gesture of serving food becomes illuminated in the moment when handmade tableware and culinary art converge.

As an artist, I have the opportunity to share my awareness of materiality in everyday tasks. Dining with the handmade necessitates the inclusion of visual and tactile senses that can easily be neglected when food is served on commercial tableware. I create objects that remind their users to slow down, to consider their environment and interactions with each other. By making pots to serve food, I challenge myself and my guests to implement handmade tableware when dining.

As do most makers of functional work, I collect the handmade and integrate thoughtful objects into my everyday routine. The ritual of bringing useful things out of storage and into use accumulates in our memory. The story of a pot, in particular, draws value from its repeated integration with the preparation and consumption of food.

The culture of the table has garnered attention because of an invigorated farm-to-table movement. The core ideals of sourcing local food parallel the essence of practicing craft. Both farmers and makers cultivate beauty



and anticipate an experiential enrichment from their labor. Both are aware of the interplay between humans and environments. Chefs share a similar mind-set when considering the source of their ingredients, especially when they choose to connect with local farms, and focus on defining the context in which their ingredients are presented. Their strongest compositions are a reflection of the thought and labor that they devote to their discipline.

The most cohesive collaborative dinners that I've organized have happened with chefs who are attentive to the craft of their culinary practice, who promote the ceremony of food, whose thoughtfulness about the meal begins with the raw ingredients to be prepared and transformed for the table. The table becomes the pedestal where the vision of the chef meets the canvas of the potter.

An effective theater for showcasing the performance of handmade tableware is a restaurant. The event becomes an orchestrated dining experience, involving the senses more fully than would a standard gallery showcase. The space has been designed to mediate the rhythm of the meal, and the mediation becomes intelligible and translucent when the handmade tableware brings food into focus.

My collaborators and I have composed dining events in a series of themed courses to provide a framework within which a chef and an artist have a conversation. At the most recent event, *Pairing Elements* at the Bull &



ABOVE: Plating the “earth” course of roasted marrow bone, mushrooms, olives, and black garlic at *Pairing Elements*, Bull & Beggar restaurant, Asheville, North Carolina. Photograph by Anthony Harden, Alt Media Productions.

Beggar restaurant in Asheville, North Carolina, the theme was the five elemental forces of nature. Six ceramic artists designed a serving vessel to correspond with an elemental force. The tablescape also included hand-blown glassware. Artist Kathryn Adams curated the array of glassware from stemless wine glasses to cocktail glasses. Each course was paired with a beverage that complemented the course's look, taste, and feel.

Our design conversations with Chef Matt Dawes of Bull & Beggar consisted of how to present each themed course with an appropriate yet unique interaction. We proposed new methods for tasting in each course, using the language of the objects created for the corresponding theme. My design challenge was how to serve a beet sorbet with the element of ice in mind. I chose to constrain the size of the portion to respond to the chef's desire to refresh the palette during the third course. I designed a small bowl, and a complementary pedestal, which acts as a resting place for the bowl when it is not in hand. The translucent porcelain bowl has a texture that stimulates the fingertips. When the bowl is lifted, the user feels the chilled sorbet through the thin vessel.

In contrast, Asheville potter Josh Copus responded to the element of earth, using a "wild clay" blend to create a deep and rich surface as a backdrop for a cow's femur, with a bed of finely chopped roasted olives that vaguely resembled soil. Tina Councell, of Iron Maiden Studios, forged spoons to scoop the marrow from the bone. To complement this course and showcase a Loire Valley Cabernet, Kathryn Adams and I created stemware with a clear glass top that reveals the color of the wine and a faceted white porcelain stem to elevate the drink from the tabletop.

Last December in Minneapolis, Chef Tanya Siebenaler of Sapor Café hosted five tableware makers for an evening of tasting cuisines from around the world. The highlight was David Swenson's curry service. Swenson stepped away from the single-plate model. Instead, each pair of diners shared a majolica-glazed earthenware set including a curry boat, naan server, rice server, chutney server, and two plates. Dining with the curry service was a progressive moment for me in understanding the possibilities of designing handmade tableware for a specific setting.

This opportunity for collaboration encourages makers to explore the potential for combining mediums to augment the chef's vision, while the chef is allowed the opportunity to experiment in unfamiliar culinary territory. The novel moment when the final arrangement of food and pots is complete is fleeting, but it creates a shared memory for all of the guests.

The first dinner that I was invited to participate in was *Cup & Plate*, at the Knife & Fork restaurant in Spruce Pine, North Carolina. Elisa Di Feo, of Two One Ceramics, started a conversation with chef and owner Nathan Allen, in which she shared her interest in bringing handmade pots to his restaurant. At our first meeting, Chef Allen proposed a theme of "foraging." He suggested vessel designs that presented food as if it came straight from the soil and soaking in the sauces of the earth. Di Feo used these cues to create large flat porcelain plates with tall walls to contain the saucy courses. I collaborated with ceramic artist Mimi McPartlan to create a tray for cheese, a softly contoured porcelain vessel that holds a cherry wood slab. Nathan Allen introduced a new vocabulary that inspired the creation of unique and unexpected objects.

Participants left the restaurant with memories enriched with the offering of food made potent by both the visual and culinary feast. This experience served as a platform to illuminate the conversation of conscious



THIS PAGE: Sorbet Dishes made by Nick Moen, 2014. Slip-cast porcelain. 1.5 x 9.5 x 6 in. Photograph by Anthony Harden, Alt Media Productions

OPPOSITE INSET: Nick Moen and Kathryn Adams. Stemware, 2014. Slip-cast porcelain stem from 3D printed model; glass-blown top from cherry blow mold, each 9 x 3.5 in.

OPPOSITE: Postcard designed by Marisa Falcigno of Open Door Design Studio. Top plate by Josh Copus. Bone marrow spoon by Tina Councell. Bottom plate by Lindsay Rogers.

dining in everyday lives. Writer and philosopher, Albert Borgmann states this idea most eloquently, “The dish and the cook, the vegetable and the gardener, tell of one another.”

Future events include a dinner at Dakota Bar and Grill in Minneapolis to be held on October 9 and hosted by Chef Derik Moran. Co-curator David Swenson and I are excited to work with Chef Moran, who has a background as a visual artist, in a setting where jazz music will also be incorporated. On September 10, Executive Chef Bryan Hunt and Chef Sisha Ortuzar will host a dinner at Riverpark Restaurant in New York City. Chefs Hunt and Ortuzar use fresh ingredients from Riverpark Farm, one of the largest and most urban farming models. Organizer Kathryn Adams and I are excited to introduce handmade tableware as a unique aspect of the farm-to-table movement. Events such as these will encourage cohesion between farm, table, and makers of the handmade.



PAIRING. ELEMENTS

an artful dining experience

MARCH 3
AT

