



Ceramic artist Claire Thibodeau, right, of Thibodeau Ceramic Design and Mottoform founder and designer Elizabeth Salonen work on their line of ceramics at Thibodeau's home studio in Ferndale on Sept. 7. The duo partnered with the West Village restaurant Marrow during Detroit Design Month to host Tablescape, a dinner that merges art and food. RYAN GARZA/DETROIT FREE PRESS

Local artisans create tableware collection for Detroit Month of Design

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Throughout the month of September, thousands of artists, design journalists and visual arts enthusiasts descend upon the city for Design Core Detroit's Detroit Month of Design.

As the first American destination designated a UNESCO City of Design, Detroit's rich art scene becomes a backdrop for events that celebrate existing talent and the innovative ideas that move the industry forward.

In the Islandview neighborhood, guests tour Michigan's first 3D-printed home.

In New Center, attendees are guided through buildings designed by legendary architect Albert Kahn.

In downtown Detroit, members of the Shiloh Hotel team sit on a panel discussing curation of immaculate hospitality design.

And in West Village, guests are treated to dinner.

A marriage of two crafts

With Tablescape Detroit, diners immerse themselves in the intersection of culinary and ceramic arts. The collaboration involving multi-disciplinary artist-designer Elizabeth Salonen of Mottoform, ceramic artist Claire Thibodeau and four-time James Beard Award-nominated restaurant Marrow, brings to life a 16-piece collection of tableware with a six-course meal.

In a basement cellar at Marrow, a community table is set for a preview of Tablescape Detroit. The lights are low, casting a glow on the rows of wine bottles lined up against a brick wall. White ceramic slip casting molds of Salonen and Thibodeau's designs and glossy globular dishes holding tealights function as décor.

The artist duo turned to Marrow in the collaboration for its own craftsmanship.

The restaurant and butcher shop, which is recognized for its commitment to sustainable and ethical sourcing and whole-animal butchery, aligned with Salonen and Thibodeau's own values.

"I could really see the craft in what they do, which is important to us, and so there's this marriage of two different crafts coming together," Salonen says.

The two worked together to limit waste, recycling much of the clay used for the collection and glazing any extra material to create new pieces.

"We were conscious about creating a clean environment for this material," Thibodeau says. "We used electric kilns and ethically conscious methods to make sure we weren't being wasteful in any way."

The intimate dinner is a true partnership involving Salonen, Thibodeau, Marrow partner and executive chef Sarah Welch and chef de cuisine Eddie Moreau. Even bones from the restaurant and butcher shop were utilized in the artist's designs.

"We discussed food waste and what we could do to make that into art as well," Claire says. "We took bones and muscles that they



Kiana Wenzell, 42, is co-executive of Design Core and director of Detroit Month of Design. SARAHBETH MANEY/DETROIT FREE PRESS



Charred octopus was plated and served to guests during Tablescape on Sept. 8. SARAHBETH MANEY/DETROIT FREE PRESS



Mottoform founder and designer Elizabeth Salonen is seen through a window cleaning a ceramic dish. RYAN GARZA, DETROIT FREE PRESS



Lizz Cardwell, 31, of Detroit, left, and Ben Dreith, 30, New York at dinner. SARAHBETH MANEY/DETROIT FREE PRESS

had butchered in the shop, and we took that back to the studio and generated prototypes off of that."

As an extension of this idea, they curated a neutral, all-white collection that would remain timeless for years to come. "A way of working with sustainability is not being so trend-focused that things go out of style," Salonen says. "Hopefully, these are items that you'll buy and keep and pass on from generation to generation."

Welch, who dabbles in ceramic design on her own time, calls the collaboration an incredible opportunity.

"To try and see our food through the lens of this craft that I feel really passionate about was really cool," she says during the dinner preview. "What they made is just so tactile and beautiful and every plate is unique."

There's minimal silverware at the table setting for Tablescape Detroit, just the occasional soup spoon or dessert spoon when needed. Welch encourages guests to use their hands throughout the meal.

"We're trying to get you to experience the physicality of the work that they've done," she says, adding that the intention is to highlight each dish as an individual work of art, but also to show its functionality.

To start, a large plate of Hillside Hearth

rosemary fougasse, a tough bread made in the shape of a steering wheel with "Marrow" etched across the horn, cascades over the edge of the artist's Stone Platter, a simple white dish in the shape of a dinosaur egg.

Atop the bread are two halves of the bone castings filled with a delicious, silky, savory butter infused with bone marrow and sour cream that tastes like steak trimmings coated in herb butter.

Other bone castings are filled with dry-aged beef tartare flecked with electric purple edible flowers and Parmesan shavings.

Thin slices of scallop crudo rest in a puddle of brown butter in the divot of the Pillow Plate, a matte white bowl that sits high on the table. Welch encourages diners to taste the crudo on its own before making crudo ssam with three nearby lettuce wraps filled with basil, shiso and a dollop of dashi aioli in the shiny Triad Plate.

The most artful dish, though, is the charred octopus. A single crisp tentacle is plated on the Oyster Plate, a round dish that resembles a wax seal stamp on the tabletop the way it lies flat, its edges imperfect like a spill.

Across the plate is a brush stroke of black squid ink, and the accompanying Bubble Platter is filled with what Welch calls, "an adventure of sauces." Inspired by a painter's palette,

Moreau fills the dish with sweet and spicy sauces and pungent mustards meant for dipping pieces of the tentacle.

Beautiful things, every day

Salonen, a Windsor-based artist with an industrial design background, brings to the table a minimalist aesthetic that draws upon her Finnish roots.

"The Nordic way of living has influenced my work and my philosophy of design," she says. "You can have beautiful things every day in your life, not this idea of having things in your cupboard that you only take out for a special occasion."

Thibodeau, on the other hand, brings a playful perspective to the partnership. The Ferndale-based ceramicist, who Salonen calls "the kiln and glaze goddess," specializes in works that incorporate, patterns, colors, and black-and-white themes.

Together, the duo has created a line that fuses their skill sets within one neutral scheme.

"The whole theme of Detroit Month of Design is 'United by Design,' so uniting Claire's background, my background, and Marrow's background and doing something with food and ceramics fits the theme," Salonen says. "Ceramics are functional, but they can be so sculptural, and they are meant for food, so we're bringing it all to life and then seeing how Sarah and her team interpret the designs."

Tablescape Detroit is just the most recent collaboration between fine arts and culinary arts.

Locally, artist Mike Han partnered with Eleven Madison Home, the homeware arm of the famed three-Michelin-starred restaurant Eleven Madison Park, to launch a limited-edition House of Han Salt Cellar and Sea Salt and ceramic artist Debbie Carlos' pieces are often seen on the tables at James Beard-nominee Spencer Ann Arbor.

In New York City, the reputable Roman and Williams Guild partnered with a team of chefs and pastry chefs to debut Bloesem Haus, the Guild's latest tableware collection. Fruitstands filled with Japanese pastries and plates topped with delicate meringues decorated tables at La Mercerie, the James Beard Award-winning French restaurant adjoining Roman and Williams Guild this summer.

Salonen and Thibodeau's designs totaled around 300 pieces over the course of the nearly four-month process of creating the line for Tablescape Detroit.

"We're probably the only two people that are crazy enough to actually make this happen," Thibodeau says.

Visit mottoform.com and thibodeauceramicdesign.com to shop the Tablescape Detroit collection. Items are priced at \$40-\$350.

A full schedule of Detroit Design Month events is available at designcore.org/month-of-design/calendar-of-events/.