

Form *and* Function

Potter Erin Hupp's elegant work lives at the intersection of fine art and practicality.

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Although Erin Hupp's career trajectory has taken more than one detour, today the artist is back where she started: creating pottery.

The Oakland resident began her professional life at a production pottery studio, but ceramics took a back seat when she decided to pursue degrees in law and city planning. She practiced land-use law, then pivoted to the emotionally demanding work of serving as a legal advocate for children in foster care. "It was hard, but incredibly rewarding," she says. "After five years, I hit a wall of emotion and needed to step back."

That is when she returned to ceramics. "I live in the Bay Area, so it's no surprise that I'm a foodie," she says. "I reached out to some of my favorite chefs and designer friends, and I started a very collaborative kind of art." To create her custom wheel-thrown tableware, Hupp first eats at a restaurant to learn about a chef's food and presentation style. Then it's back to the studio to develop signature pieces for specific dishes.

The potter works with chefs like Alex Hong at Sorrel and designers like Noz Nozawa. When Nozawa designed the vibrant breakfast restaurant Hilda and Jesse, she partnered with Hupp to craft a specific plate for their soufflé pancake stack. "When I'm working with restaurants, my art is not complete until the chef's food is on the plate," the artist says. "I get to make something that's interesting on its own, but it's also hosting something else."

She likes this "middle ground," as she calls it—the place where utility meets one-of-a-kind conceptual pieces—and embraces ceramics that are meant to be both used and admired. "It's form and function," she says. "Working collaboratively is the path less traveled, but I intentionally chose that space."

Along with her commissioned lines, Hupp makes time for a purely creative practice. "I had this idea that my pieces were like little people, and I should put jewelry on them," she says. The idea evolved into a series of vases—some adorned with ceramic rings, others with bracelets—which can be found at Métier in San Francisco.

You could say that, despite the circuitous route she took to get there, living in a creative space where there's room for ceramics both utilitarian and purely artistic is Hupp's happy place. "These works are the opposite of identical, mass-produced objects," Hupp says. "The more standardized our world is, the more important this niche becomes." ■



Potter Erin Hupp creates work such as the Orbit Ring vase (previous page, left) in her Oakland studio. It joins pieces in her Ring and Bracelet collection (opposite and bottom, right). The artist also makes tableware, like her Ink Texture plates (left). Ceramics in progress include Ink Texture table vases (below) and rings for vessels (bottom, left).

