WADING IN: MADE IN FLA

By Maddy Zollo Rusbosin

TURNING TABLES

MEET THE DESIGN DUO RAISING THE BAR ON LUXURY LIVING.

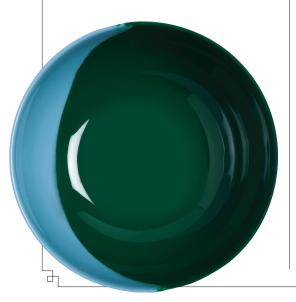


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₹ hose who know Thomas Fuchs and Michou Mahtani know that a dinner invite from these two fabulous entrepreneurs is rarely run-ofthe-mill. One December night in 2018, guests at the pair's Miami apartment were met with a floating—yes, floating—dinner table (thanks to a little industrial-strength chicken-wire magic). It was impeccably set with the couple's melamine collection from their luxury home accessories brand, Thomas Fuchs Creative. The reason behind this gravity-defying soiree? It was their inaugural "Tavolo" gathering, a quarterly fine-arts dinner that Fuchs and Mahtani conceptualized to bring South Florida creatives together. This particular night honored Brazilian sculptor Frida Baranek, who had recently returned from a "zerogravity" flight excursion.

"When we moved to Miami, I was like, 'Oh my God, how are we going to meet people?'" Mahtani says about Tavolo's origins. "I decided we needed to promote Floridians and Florida so I created a dinner series where we highlight artists."

Each dinner is dedicated to a different local maker, and Mahtani and Fuchs let the artist transform their home to match his or her vision for the night. Past artists of honor





Above: The 1/2 and 1/2 collection's new colorways are inspired by the Sunshine State. **Below:** The green and blue melamine bowl from the 1/2 and 1/2 collection

include Tom Criswell and the late Chuck Close.

"What we do is set the table with our collection, matching their art of the evening, and then Thomas makes a whole meal influenced by their art," he says.

While the Tavolo series is just one piece of the Thomas Fuchs
Creative whole, it's a telling example of how collaboration and innovation are at the heart of the company. Their emphasis on partnerships, whether it's their suppliers across the globe, or the people they surround themselves with, only makes sense since the brand was brought to life after the co-founders' own personal relationship blossomed.

"Fifteen years ago, I met Thomas on Match. com," Mahtani says. At the time, he was working as the global brand director at Rémy

Martin for Louis XIII. Before they met, Fuchs studied fine arts at The George Washington University's Corcoran School of the Arts & Design and was the design director for Donghia, a renowned luxury design company.

As the men's relationship progressed, Mahtani was in awe of Fuchs' keen eye for craftsmanship, so when the economy crashed in the midaughts, Mahtani suggested they

start a company together. Soon after, Thomas Fuchs Creative was born.

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"Think about meeting somebody online, especially way back then when online dating was just first happening, and then all of a sudden you're starting a company with somebody you met online," Mahtani says. "It's

a cool story, but the reality is, how often does that really happen?"

With Fuchs taking the reins creatively and Mahtani helming press, communications and marketing, they launched their first collection—one focused on high-end barware.

"Our first vendor was Barneys New York," Mahtani says. "They sold out of the collection eight times before it even got to the floor." Beyond the pieces' striking aesthetics—

including a champagne bucket carved from a solid piece of marble—a major part of the appeal is the attainable price points. "We're bringing that genre previously only attainable to the trade [industry]—meaning to designers and architects—now everybody can access that price point," Mahtani adds.

This was partly thanks to their handson approach in choosing the right production partners. Mahtani, who is Indian and Lebanese, reached out to contacts he had in India to ensure they worked with factories that deliver quality, yet ecofriendly products. The duo also sought out top-notch creators all over the world in Africa, Italy, Egypt, France and beyond. The couple, who married in 2013, used to split their time between Manhattan and Miami,

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but in 2018, they decided to permanently fly South, fully leaning into the Floridian lifestyle. Beyond turning their apartment into a chic ode to the Sunshine State by reupholstering all their furniture with palms, painting walls flamingo pink and incorporating orange trees into their bedroom, their shift to a sunnier state of mind was

also apparent in their work.

When Mahtani and Fuchs moved to Florida full time, they started designing their ½ and ½ collection based off the colors of Miami and Florida. "It has a double entendre because not only is it called ½ and ½ because half of one plate is one color and the other half is another, but we're also half Floridian, half New Yorkers," Mahtani says.

Additionally, these bright, two-toned trays, bowls, plates and cups are all made of biodegradable melamine.

"Our [melamine] is actually mixed into the resin—the color—so that's why it has organic shapes, and it will never wear off," Mahtani explains. "Plus, it has the weight of an actual ceramic plate." The melamine's popularity (and practicality) for alfresco dining naturally lends itself to a coastal lifestyle, and the latest additions to the line include wine glasses, cups and pitchers—aka the ideal accessories for pool-party season. These new color waves even have Florida-inspired names like Miami Spice,

Key West Blues, Sarasota Summer and Naples Nice. Other state-inspired products include napkins adorned with brightly colored Florida bugs.

"Now that we're Floridians, what we make is influenced by where we are," Mahtani says.

Fuchs is also the creator of Otium, a Murano glass lighting company offering chandeliers, lamps and vases; and Foxware, a line of hand-blown and hand-carved drinking glasses.

While there are design couples all over the world, Mahtani and Fuchs' goods shine because they're unapologetic.

"A lot of people get so carried away with trying to be somebody, whereas we're just who we are," Mahtani says. "We love entertaining. We love what we do. We're in constant gratitude of everything—now more so than ever.

We wake up every morning, and we're like, 'Is this even real? How lucky are we?'"

Left: A blue and navy cup from the 1/2 and 1/2 collection

Above: A Thomas Fuchs Creative orange and navy melamine bowl

