

Forbes

Wine, Dine, Shop: Restaurants Now Inviting Patrons To Take Home The Dishes

DEC 21, 2017 [Pamela N. Danziger](#)



La Mercerie Restaurant

Today a new concept in experience retail is opening in NYC's Soho district. Interior design firm and home furnishings store, [Roman and Williams Guild](#), in partnership with Starr Restaurants, are launching La Mercerie, a fine dining restaurant with a Parisian-inspired flair, where everything on the table will be for sale, including the dishes, glassware and flower centerpiece. An illustrated card showing the items on offer complement the menu with dining selections.

Husband-and-wife design team, and owners of the design store, Robin Standefer and Stephen Alesch, bring years of restaurant-design expertise to the venture, having designed some of Starr Restaurants locations, as well as The Breslin, Lafayette, and The Dutch. With the designers curating the product selections, and Starr providing the kitchen expertise, under chef Marie-Aude Rose, La Mercerie is said by the [New York Times](#) to take the

crossover concept of restaurant and retail the farthest in this emerging trend.

Dining and shopping have long gone together hand-in-glove. What's a trip to Ikea without a visit to the café for a taste of Swedish meatballs or a road trip without a stop at a Cracker Barrel?

But what is unique about the La Mercerie offering is its combination of fine dining and high-design tableware. In this day of selfies where taking a picture to preserve the memory of a restaurant experience is de rigeur, giving patrons the opportunity to take home a place setting as a memento of the experience is an idea whose time has come.

Tiffany and Company is doing it uptown at [The Blue Box Café](#) where its Tiffany Blue dinnerware is offered alongside the food, so guests can wine and dine and shop. And at [Blackbarn's](#) new Chelsea Market store, dining is as much an attraction as its furniture and home décor selections for visitors to shop.

Like La Mercerie's owners, the design team behind Blackbarn, Mark and Kristen Zeff, also have experience designing restaurants and hotels as well as residences. These entrepreneurs understand what consumers want in fine design for their homes, as well as the essential role that design plays in the fine dining experience.

More such dining-led shopping experiences, or as RH Chairman & CEO Gary Friedman calls them "integrated hospitality experiences," are sure to follow. [Starr Restaurants](#), with its 34 fine-dining establishments in 6 premium markets, could be on the vanguard of this trend.

A trend to reboot the flagging tabletop industry

This restaurant-retail trend comes none too soon for the tabletop industry which has seen its channels of distribution evaporate, along with diminished demand for its goods. Traditionally founded on the wedding market to fill department store bridal registries, fine tableware brands have fallen on hard times.

"Weddings were historically the driver of over 50% of tabletop sales," says Marsha Everton, currently principal at [AIMsights](#), a marketing consulting firm serving the home furnishings and retail industries, but previously president and CEO of The Pfaltzgraff Co., a tabletop company and former president of the National Tabletop and Giftware Association. "Department

stores were the prime beneficiary with young brides and grooms choosing to register at the stores where their parents shopped.”

All that has changed, however, with the millennials. The average age of marriage has risen from 22 years in 1980 to over 27 now, Everton notes, and “The ages for the higher-income consumers, typically college educated, are even higher.”

These more mature, more educated and more affluent bridal couples are also more knowledgeable and sophisticated. “They know what they want for their new lives together,” Everton says, as they increasingly turn to the more refined curated assortments and superior service offered by specialty retailers.

And, she adds, “Tableware has a feature role in the food-centric world of Instagram and Pinterest, so click-to-buy models are critical.” The new restaurant-retail models, like those of La Mercerie and Blackburn, make fine dinnerware relevant again to the next generation consumers and gives them a personal and meaningful reason to buy.

“The most important over-arching trend is storytelling,” Everton says. “Give the consumer options to tell the story about the fabulous restaurant meal they had, combined with giving them the opportunity to serve an Instagram-perfect meal at home, and a meaningful connection is made.”

This can be a solution for tableware companies which are plagued by slow turning and obsolete merchandise. “Inventory has always been a challenge in tableware,” Everton relates, “Frequently with less than two turns per year for major retailers.”

Restaurants selling tableware have both a rich history, Everton conveys, but is also an emerging trend that these new iterations exemplify and a way forward for the tabletop industry.

Tabletop brands need to make their fine dinnerware relevant today to consumers highly engaged in dining, but who also want a story, or reason to buy, building on the tradition passed on from their mothers and grandmothers, while customizing the experience to be more meaningful to their lifestyles.

Everton explains, “The formula is still ‘food = family = love.’ The emotional content of food – and tabletop products – continues to have a very high ‘heart tug’ quotient.”

Chefs tell their story on a plate and increasingly they want to tell that story *through* the plate too. “Restaurants and chefs want unique product to showcase their culinary creations,” Everton explains. And home chefs want to recreate the same restaurant experience at home. They already can cook the same restaurant-quality food on their restaurant-inspired kitchen stoves.

Now, restaurateurs are beginning to extend their fine-dining experience beyond the door of their restaurants by selling their patrons sophisticated high-design tableware to set their tables at home.

My book, "[Shops that POP! 7 Steps to Extraordinary Retail Success](#)," reveals how to make shopping an experience for your customers. Connect via [Twitter](#), [LinkedIn](#), [Facebook](#).