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# Southern Living

The heart of Southern life

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\$4.99US \$6.50CAN



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AOL Keyword: Southern Living



Chris Hastings, co-owner and chef of Hot and Hot Fish Club, uses Tena's pottery in his restaurant. "Everything had to be sturdy restaurant ware that makes a statement."

Tena and Wynn, a commodity trader, turned their artistic process into custom-designed ceramic manufacturing. Tena works with a small staff of artists and her son and daughter-in-law in the burgeoning business.

The company's headquarters houses Earthborn Studios, L.A. Pottery, and Cahaba ClayWorks, an interactive teaching program. The facility contains Tena's commercial production, a spacious community classroom, 15 wheels, and an ancient "treadle wheel." Tena partners with Larry Allen to offer classes. MAJELLA CHUBE HAMILTON

**Earthborn Studios and Cahaba ClayWorks:** 7575 Parkway Drive, Leeds, AL 35094; [www.earthbornpottery.net](http://www.earthbornpottery.net) or (205) 702-7055. ▶

#### COMMERCIAL POTTER: Tena Payne

For years, Tena Payne indulged her love of crafting pottery only on the side, selling pieces at art festivals and shows. In what seemed to be an unrelated venture, she and her husband, Wynn, began growing shiitake mushrooms. When they found themselves with a surplus, the couple decided to offer the produce to local restaurants.

While calling on Chris Hastings, co-owner and chef at Birmingham's Hot and Hot Fish Club, the subject of pottery came up. "He told me he was looking for unique and durable signature pottery to serve in the restaurant," Tena says. She offered to try her hand in designing pieces for Chris and his wife, Idie. "The dishes didn't have to be square or round or fit anyone's expectations. I'm grateful they gave me the chance to create something special."

Chris agrees, "We have always been able to combine our vision and Tena's distinct style." The key to success, he adds, is maintaining a candid dialogue for a food-safe product. "Working together, we've created stunning and practical pottery."

RIGHT: Tena Payne describes her pottery style as "randomness under control with a subdued sophistication." FAR RIGHT: Tena owns Earthborn Studios, based in Leeds.

#### Forming a Collective Operation

As the owner of Leeds-based Earthborn Studios, Tena works with an energetic staff to make custom styles of functional pottery. "Creating something out of nothing is very gratifying to me," Tena says. "I turn dirt into beautiful, functional things."

**"It's just different earth elements, mixed together in the right ratio and placed in the fire."**

Tena Payne, artist and owner, Earthborn Studios

