

# Birmingham

smart living...savvy business

ULTIMATE INSIDERS GUIDE TO

## dining out

The skinny on the city's  
*real* restaurant scene.

## hot new restaurants

Kathy G. Mezrano opens G downtown

MAR 2001 \$7.50



PLUS: 99 Fabulous People, Places & Things at the Beach





## Tena Payne

A self-described "earthy person," Tena Payne declares that much of the motivation behind her creativity comes from childhood vacations to the mountains where she would observe the intricacies of huge rocks and boulders. This fascination evolved into what is today known as Earth Born Pottery, Payne's own venture in which she creates a variety of custom-made platters, dishes, glasses and bowls all with a look that screams, "I just excavated this from the ground."

A Samford University graduate, Payne first became interested in pottery as a student at Homewood High School after an art appreciation program visited there. Her curiosity then led her to take the school's potter's wheel home over holiday break where she practiced the pottery technique known as "throwing." Dipping her toes into the artistic water was enough to convince Payne she should jump in—the artist remembers it was there at the wheel that she "fell in love." While working in the editorial department of Southern Progress Corporation, Payne continued to make pottery and was asked by Dr. Lowell Vann, chair of Samford's art department and her self-described mentor, to become a charter member of Artists Incorporated, a collaboration of local artists who show at a cooperative gallery.

While also interested in a variety of artful venues such as textiles and glass bead and jewelry making, Payne settles into her niche with pottery. It is the fact that pottery is "natural and comes from the earth" that continuously draws her to the medium. It is also her philosophy towards dinnerware as an artform that makes her designs unique.

For example, she values time spent together at a table: "Eating is central to life, besides being a symbolic com-

munion, it is also an everyday event that is accessible and interactive." She adds that "art on the table such as pottery" is a good starting point to appreciation.

This outlook initiated her collaboration with area restaurants, most notably, Hot and Hot Fish Club. It was by chance, while Payne was promoting the sale of home-grown Shitake mushrooms to restaurants—one of her many hobbies—that she learned of Chris Hastings's goal of creating a relationship between artistic impression and an entrée. In 1998 she became the exclusive supplier of dishware for Hot and Hot and since has had her designs featured as props in *Cooking Light* magazine.

A modern day transcendentalist with a *carpe diem* attitude toward life, Payne continues to innovate her pottery. Like one of her favorite pastimes, white water canoeing, Payne believes pottery is a "never ending force...you are always re-mastering or improving your skill."

Payne's pottery can be custom-ordered by form and glaze at [www.earthbornpottery.net](http://www.earthbornpottery.net).

—RACHEL ANDERSON

