



Earth TONES

From the first time she saw the clay of the earth smoothed and shaped in someone's hands, this Leeds, Alabama, potter knew it would be her life's passion.

BY KATHLEEN JOHNSTON | PHOTOGRAPHY BY MARCY BLACK SIMPSON

Like so many artists before her, Tena Payne's defining inspiration sprang from the art of another. However, it was an artist working in an entirely different medium that helped her find direction. A fortuitous meeting introduced her to the chef and co-owner of Birmingham, Alabama's Hot and Hot Fish Club, and almost immediately, Tena traded in 10 years of study and work in raku to develop unique clay serving pieces that would complement the restaurant's acclaimed cuisine.

For Tena, the unlikely match made perfect sense. "Chefs and potters are kindred spirits," she explains. "We take our ingredients out of the ground, we rearrange them, we put them in the oven, and then we offer them up to someone else." It's a comparison she continues to muse on as her clientele expands to include establishments across the country, all of them looking to serve their five-star fare on custom works of art.

The well-received restaurant lines further encouraged Tena to create her own signature collection of functional pottery through her company, Earthborn Studios. Platters, plates, mugs, and bowls in a range of sizes and hues feature free-form edges and expressive splashes of accent color that make each piece one of a kind. In fact, Tena's specially developed glazes, vivid earth tones meant to resist chips and scratches, react differently to the studio's

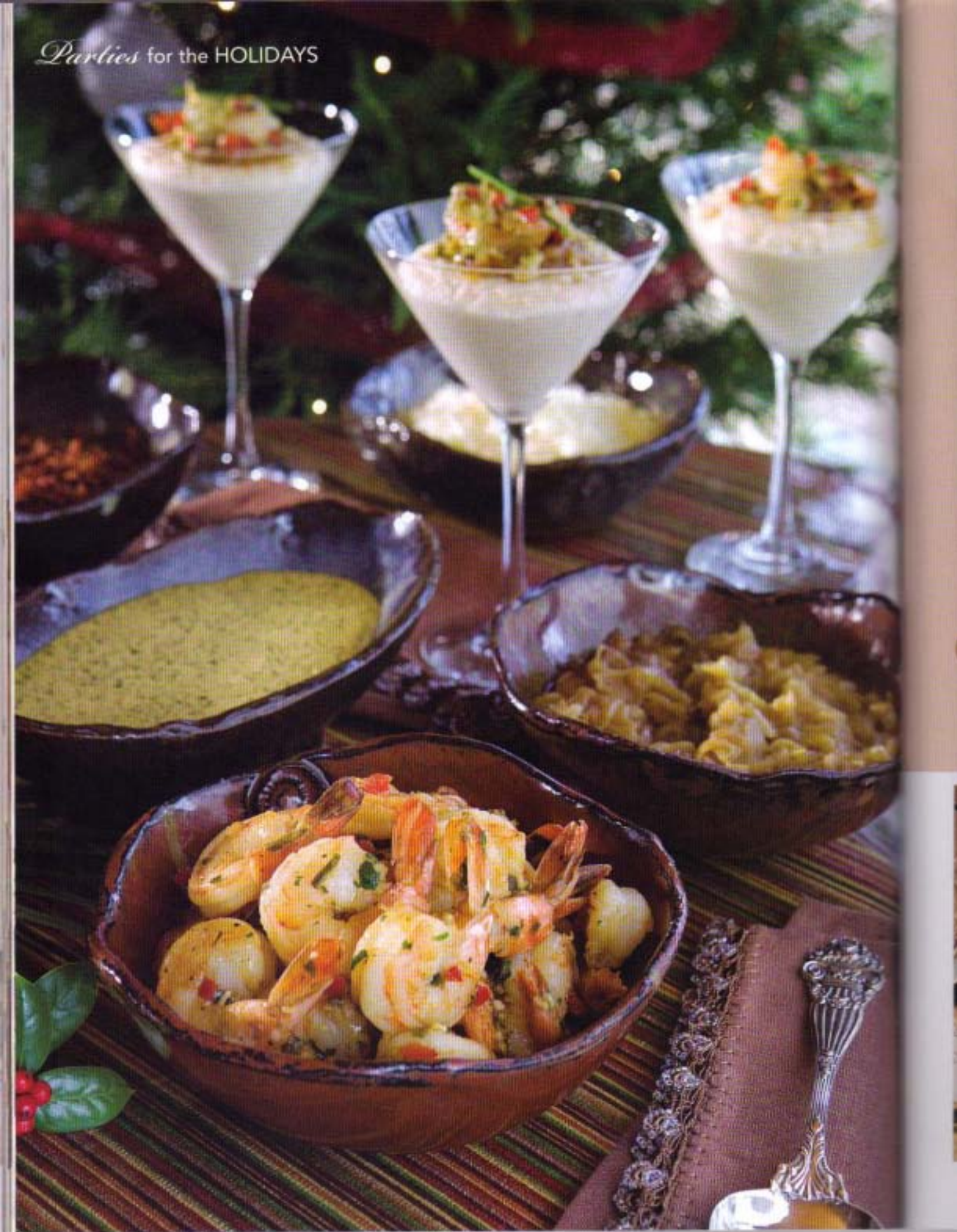
eight kilns. While others in the servingware industry view such variance as a problem to be corrected, she embraced the nuance as another way to make the individual pieces, and her work overall, distinctive.

This line of thinking also helped Tena devise a creative solution for another frequent problem: separations in wet clay. Instead of simply patching and smoothing cracks, she called upon her love of geology and began using an ammonite fossil purchased at a gem and mineral show to press the clay back together. The unusual fix became an important Earthborn design element, and now nearly all of Tena's pieces bear the decorative detail.

"I believe mistakes are opportunities waiting to be developed," says Tena, who also fully appreciates "the little miracles along the way," including the chance encounter that started it all. "In some sense, it seems like I haven't planned, but I can still remember talking with my husband about the concept of working with chefs," she says. And now that her dream is a reality, she can savor the simplicity of the art with which she first fell in love. Says Tena, "I like taking dirt and turning it into something beautiful." ■

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For information, contact Earthborn Studios at 205-702-7055, or visit earthbornpottery.net.

Parties for the HOLIDAYS





HOPPIN' JOHN EGG ROLLS WITH SPICY PEACH DIPPING SAUCE

Makes 15 egg rolls

- 2 tablespoons bacon drippings
- 1 cup chopped onion
- 1/2 cup chopped red bell pepper
- 2 teaspoons minced garlic
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 1/4 teaspoon ground black pepper
- 1 (8-ounce) package diced cooked ham
- 1 (15.8-ounce) can black-eyed peas, drained
- 2 cups cooked rice
- 2 tablespoons chopped fresh parsley
- 1 (1-pound) package egg roll wrappers
- 1 large egg, lightly beaten
- Oil for frying
- 1 recipe Spicy Peach Dipping Sauce (recipe follows)

1. In a large skillet, heat bacon drippings over medium heat. Add onion, bell pepper, garlic, salt, and pepper; cook for 3 minutes, or until vegetables are tender. Add ham, black-eyed peas, and rice. Cook for 2 to 3 minutes, stirring constantly. Add parsley, stirring to combine. Remove from heat and cool slightly.
2. Spoon about 4 tablespoons filling on bottom one-third of egg roll wrapper. Fold the lower corner over filling, and roll it up about one-third of the way. Brush the left and right corners of wrapper with beaten egg; fold corners toward center of filling. Brush top edge with egg and roll up tightly; repeat for each roll.
3. Fill a Dutch oven with 2 inches of oil; heat to 350°.
4. Fry egg rolls, in batches, 2 to 3 minutes, or until golden brown. Drain on paper towels. Serve with Spicy Peach Dipping Sauce.

NESTING INSTINCT

Combine items you have on hand, such as wooden birdhouses and glass containers, with outdoor treasures, such as twigs, plants, and berries, to create nest-style vignettes.

Spicy Peach Dipping Sauce

Makes 1 2/3 cups

- 1 tablespoon butter
- 1 teaspoon minced garlic
- 1 jalapeño pepper, seeded and minced
- 1 (18-ounce) jar peach preserves
- 2 tablespoons fresh lemon juice
- 1 tablespoon Creole mustard
- 1/4 teaspoon salt

1. In a small saucepan, melt butter over medium-high heat. Add garlic and jalapeño pepper; cook for 2 minutes. Reduce heat to medium-low. Add peach preserves, lemon juice, mustard, and salt, stirring to combine. Simmer for 5 minutes, stirring frequently.



