

# Tena Payne

## EARTHBORN POTTERY



Like the food that graces the dinnerware she creates, the art of Tena Payne is born in the earth. The city's renowned potter has grown her business, Earthborn Pottery, from a hobby in a spare room of her house to artisanal workshop that creates signature dinnerware and pottery for some of the world's greatest chefs and restaurants.

It is in the unexpected place that art sometimes shines most brightly and that is certainly the case with Tena Payne. Fine dining can be a living gallery for culinary art, but Payne's creations enhance that experience by turning the vessel that holds the food into a piece of art in its own right. The synergy was perfect, chef and potter in harmonic unison.

Tena Payne came to pottery early. As a teenager searching for a place in a spiraling world, she discovered pottery through the help of a teacher at the potter's wheel. Through the years, Payne continued to refine her craft into an art, experimenting with glazes and different clay types. In her free time, in between having children, working and raising her family, Payne continued making pottery, always wondering how she could make a living doing what she loved. And one day, she stumbled across the answer, quite by accident.

Shittake mushrooms. Seems an unlikely key to what has become a very successful business. Her family, in their spare time, grew shitake mushrooms on their acreage. With a banner crop, Payne sought out Chef Chris Hastings at Hot and Hot Fish Club. The connection was instantaneous with Hastings becoming interested in Payne's pottery craft and commissioning her to create dinnerware and serving pieces for his restaurant. That was back in 1997, and the rest—as they say—is history. Earthborn Studios was born.

From that origin, Payne has grown her culinary business to include some of the biggest names in the hospitality business among her client list. Along with Hot and Hot Fish Club, she creates pieces for marquee names such as Mandarin Oriental Las Vegas, The Bellagio Resort and Casino, The Lodge at Torrey Pines, Tangerine in Philly, Caesar's Palace in Atlantic City, and two new restaurants in London.



Fine dining can be a living gallery for culinary art. Payne's creations enhance that experience by turning the vessel that holds the food into a piece of art in its own right.

In addition to serving the hospitality community, Payne sells pottery to retail stores, produces several custom lines including a collegiate line, produces awards for corporations, and even makes a line of bathroom sinks. Earthborn Pottery has grown, expanded, and now has become the sole employer for Payne, her husband and her children; she finally gets to make a living doing what she loves every day.

She has been actively involved in the

leadership of the local clay community and is a charter member of the prominent co-operative fine-art gallery, Artists Incorporated. Payne also serves as the alternate Alabama representative to the American Craft Council. In 2009 Payne was selected as a *Forbes* magazine Boost Your Business, National Small Business Competition Top 5 winner for Earthborn Studios, Inc.

