

Served in Style

BY LAINE BERGESON | PHOTO BY ERIC MOORE



Julia Knight knows your secret: You like to flirt with fun colors in the kitchen, but you're hesitant to commit. "I think people love color—it's like a fragrance that makes you feel wonderful," says the creative force behind Julia Knight America. "Yet a lot of us are afraid of color because it seems to really make a statement, and sometimes we are reluctant to define ourselves that way."

Luckily, the Orono designer is here to help closet color-lovers find their inner magenta. Knight founded her high-end tabletop, barware, and home accents company in 2001 when her own search for colorful yet stylish home designs left her empty-handed. Frustrated, Knight grabbed a glue gun and set out to create bold, sophisticated items. The first thing she created was a cowhide-covered tissue box for her home in Colorado; friends loved them—and a business was born.

Determined to breathe some life into the monochrome world of bar accessories, Knight designed a barware set in pink "Croco" leather. "I showed them to a few buyers and they were like, 'That looks really, er...different,'" she chuckles. "But when I introduced my first five pieces at Tommy Bahama stores, they sold something like 500 in a week! They couldn't keep them on the shelves. I learned that others must love color as much as I do."

Today, Knight's designs include more than 300 styles of bar and tableware in 11 colors. Though her primary market is independent specialty boutiques, such as Ampersand in Edina,

Knight's work is also sold worldwide in high-end stores such as Neiman Marcus and Saks Fifth Avenue. The pink "Croco" leather flask that jumpstarted her business even made an appearance in Academy Awards' presenters' gift baskets. Her designs were also spotted on the set of the recent Hugh Grant-Drew Barrymore movie, *Music & Lyrics*.

Knight credits her line's popularity to the way we eat and entertain. "[It] has changed—we do less formal entertaining today and more casual entertaining. [My] designs hit at the perfect time during this switch. They are fun accessories that make even a handful of pistachio nuts look like you had it catered."

Knight has steered away from using brightly colored leather in her work, and now incorporates hand-painted enamel, tiger's eye

horn, and mother of pearl on aluminum serving ware to create rhythmic surfaces and fluid, nature-inspired shapes. Knight describes her serve ware as having a "non-patterned pattern," which sets it apart from the competition. "A lot of tableware is covered with fleur-de-lis, or it's about the pattern," she says. "I wanted a 'pattern' that was more like a texture." At the same time, her designs have a lofty, architectural quality that is befitting for both formal dinners and a casual bowl of chips.

"Presentation is a huge part of the pleasure of experiencing food," Knight adds. "When people come into our home, whether they are fixing the screen door or coming for dinner, I like to whip up something wonderful and make people feel special. That's what entertaining is about—and this kind of serve ware fits really well with that. When food is on something great, it tastes great."

Before revolutionizing the American tabletop, Knight worked as a marketing executive, a freelance business consultant, and she founded a baby food company. But she's pretty sure that she's found the path she's going to stick with. "I love this business," she says. "I could do it for the next 50 years. It's really creative, and it's about people, entertaining, hospitality, food, and friends." Most important to Knight, however, is bringing color and beauty into people's everyday lives. "I believe in making ordinary, everyday things extraordinary—that makes life beautiful." **MH**

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