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CLOCKWISE, FROM LEFT: Chinese porcelain dinnerware, a Riedel wineglass, a stoneware pitcher, and linens, all from the new Restoration Hardware tabletop collection. Chinese porcelain plates in an array of colors. Horn-handled flatware.



THE IDEAL SETTING

A quest for the perfect white plate leads to the first-ever tabletop collection by Restoration Hardware

BY INGRID ABRAMOVITCH



Restoration Hardware's first tabletop collection began with a search for the perfect white plate—a simple enough quest, but not for Gary Friedman. As chairman emeritus, creator, and curator of the home-furnishings brand, Friedman is legendary in his pursuit of perfection. "When there are so many people in the world selling tableware," he says, "you have to have a reason for being."

Friedman's goal was to design plates that were "beautiful and elegant, yet casual and relaxed enough to use every day." He spent more than two years in pursuit of this platonic ideal, with help from his team, including the designer Peri Wolfman (cofounder of the late SoHo housewares emporium Wolfman-Gold & Good Company, which was renowned for its white dinnerware). They tracked down one of the top porcelain makers in China and spent months working with him to test formulas for colored glazes.

When the first batch of plates was ready, Friedman—a former executive at Williams-Sonoma—put them to the test ("You bang them together and see if they chip," he says). As painful as it sounds, he rejected the whole lot. "The thickness was a little bit off," says Friedman. "I've been in this business for more than 30 years, >



Linen placemats.

so I know when something is not good enough. We wound up having to give away 50,000 plates."

Friedman's patience will have clearly paid off with the launch of the collection this spring. The extensive, well-priced porcelain dinnerware—including five sizes of plates, bowls, and a wide range of other pieces—comes in white and four other neutrals with names like *Prairie* and *Fog*. "Almost everybody who does colored dishware does it on earthenware and stoneware," Friedman says, "but those materials can easily chip. We're doing translucent colors on porcelain, which is much stronger because it is fired at a higher temperature."

The plates were just the starting point. The comprehensive collection includes everything from napkins, placemats, and runners in washed Belgian linen to a line of glassware inspired by French *pastis* glasses. The flatware comes in such finishes as brushed silver and tumbled silver, as well as with bone and horn handles. None of it would look out of place in Downton Abbey. Friedman also fell in love with vintage flatware from the *Titanic* ocean liner and had it recreated by Carrs, the 300-year-old English silverplate firm. Meanwhile, Spencer Peterman, a master woodworker in Massachusetts, was commissioned to create wood serving bowls crafted from fallen cherry trees.

Many pieces in the line were designed by Friedman's team or reproduced from antiques, but if the perfect object is already out there—such as wineglasses by Riedel, considered a maker of some of the world's finest stemware—he will incorporate it into Restoration Hardware's tabletop collection. There's no point in trying to reinvent the wheel.

"Shape, proportion, and symmetry are the keys to everything we do," Friedman says. "We've spent longer than two years now working on tabletop, and we think we're finally ready." Starting with the perfect white plate. ■



Porcelain nesting bowls.

A cast-aluminum champagne bowl.



European Stripe linen napkins and a Belgian linen placemat.



A cast-aluminum tray with 1912 Titanic and Blakes flatware.



Reclaimed-cherry serving pieces, bone-handled flatware, and a porcelain plate.

Chinese porcelain sugar bowl, creamer, and mugs.

