

THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

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MUSEUM OF MODERN ART SHOWS NEW CHINA IN MODERN DESIGN

The first translucent china dinnerware, modern in shape, to be produced in the United States will be placed on public view Wednesday, April 17, when the Museum of Modern Art opens its exhibition Modern China, designed by Eva Zeisel and produced by Castleton China. The project was initiated in 1942 between Castleton China and the Museum's Department of Industrial Design when Eliot Noyes, Director of that department, proposed to Louis E. Hellmann, President of Castleton, the development of a completely new set of shapes in fine china and recommended Eva Zeisel as the designer.

From then on, during the entire process of design development and the many stages of production at the factory, Mrs. Zeisel and Castleton were in constant consultation with the Museum, every sample being closely watched and discussed. The technical experimentation and the design work involved much time: each item was made up not only in plaster but often in china, and even in china the shapes were frequently changed before being accepted.

The exceptional quality of the material permitted Mrs. Zeisel to draw the edges out to a thinness that emphasized the clear translucency and fineness of the china, while placing more weight in the bases for the greater stability of certain pieces such as cups and bowls. This drawing from thickness to thinness, while provocative and delightful to the eye and expressive of greater dignity than an all-thin piece, is extremely difficult to accomplish.

The exhibition--and the subsequent sale--of this modern dinnerware may well provide a landmark in American ceramic industry. Heretofore, modern shapes in dinner service have been interpreted only in earthenware, which, because it is opaque and non-vitrified, is less expensive and simpler to produce.

The china, ivory in tone rather than cold white, depends upon its form and fine surface quality for its beauty. Although it has been produced without ornament as a solution in its own right, it is hoped that the still unsolved problem of decoration on modern china will be explored later on these same shapes. Most of the pieces, such as plates, cups and saucers are round. To give a play

of form against these regular shapes, variations have been introduced in the bowls and platters whose rims are flowing and modulated while retaining a disciplined regularity. To give an effect of lightness, the centers of saucers are slightly lifted, with an indentation to secure cups against the usual sliding. The small cream pitcher, pleasant to grasp, is without a handle. The larger one has a handle. Salts and peppers are spherical with a heavy base which prevents spilling.

The china is a complete dinner service with additional pieces including cream soups, bouillon cups and saucers, entree plates, square salad plates, two sizes of square salad bowls, two sizes of vegetable dishes, a chop tray, covered casserole, gravy boat and ladle, salts and peppers, a teapot, coffee pot, hot water pot, two sizes of sugars and creamers, and after-dinner coffees.

While the exhibition is on at the Museum, the china will also be shown in the following New York stores where orders may be placed for future delivery: B. Altman & Co., John Wanamaker, Black Starr & Gorham, Inc., and Georg Jensen, Inc.

EVA ZEISEL has designed other household articles in glass, aluminum, plastics and such materials, as well as china and pottery. Her work was first shown in the 1926 Exhibition at Philadelphia and later at the Paris Exposition of the World's Fair.

The Museum of Modern Art included her wartime utility ware in its Fifteenth Anniversary Exhibition. For the past seven years, in addition to designing, Mrs. Zeisel has been teaching at the Industrial Design Department of Pratt Institute.

CASTLETON CHINA is produced in one of this country's largest potteries manufacturing china, in New Castle, Pennsylvania. Two men, unknown to each other, worked separately for years in the hope of producing a fine American china unlike any made in this country. They met in 1939 and, within a year, in May 1940, formed Castleton China, the culmination of thirty years' separate endeavor by its two founders. One was James W. Smith, Sr., a pioneer American potter. The other, Louis E. Hellmann, was widely known both in this country and abroad for his long association with fine china. In 1942 the firm commissioned fifteen contemporary artists including Milena, Elsie Shaver, Ching Chih Yee, Ludwig Bemelmans, Salvador Dali, Marcel Vertes, and others, to create designs for reproduction on Castleton China. This collection was shown in leading cities throughout the country. The progressive record of this young company is especially notable among the few producers of fine American dinnerware.