



Topoware: A Landscape for Your Table

by Alexandra Deschamps-Sonsino

Karola Torkos and I developed our Topoware Dinnerware Collection when we were working on ideas for the Milan Furniture Fair. The collection is tableware that illustrates and questions people's relationships to food and space in the dining experience. It may sound funny to start with dining furniture and end up with dishes, but perhaps that is the magic made possible by coming at the project with backgrounds in jewelry design and interaction design.

The concept for Topoware developed from the expression "landscape of dining," a term often used in the design of cutlery. We first experimented with sketching furniture and retractable tables as puzzle pieces. Before long, we became interested in the sense of space in the dining experience. We sketched lines on furniture that reminded us of topographical lines, lines most often used in maps to show the height of landscape above sea level.

Topographical lines determine a particular space and attach meaning

to it with a label, and we started to think of these lines as having several symbolic meanings, depending on their context of use. On a china bowl, these lines suggest portion sizes and their labels explore the social, psychological, and cultural implications of someone who might have a large portion of food on their plate. One plate reads "father, mother, child." Another reads "greedy, moderate, modest" while a bowl reads "very hungry, hungry, full." In the relationship of space and social etiquette, the amount of food on your plate or in your bowl labels you and your habits as a diner.

For the placemats, the lines act as dining guides for the etiquette of a multi-course meal. From a modest salad in the middle to the main course, each dish, or "layer" of the meal, can be taken out from the main container, which acts as a tray.

A multi-layered puzzle, the Topoware pieces fit together to create a complete setting. The lines on the

tablecloth highlight the placement of a person at a table by a dark circle. As the lines move away from the diner, they fade and undulate, emphasizing the diner's level of individual activity and involvement in the meal.

Part of this collection's power is that the simple topographic lines project the metaphor of space onto a diversity of concepts, creating a conceptual richness that belies their minimal aesthetics. We wanted to challenge the diner and make the action of a family dinner something that was almost less comfortable, less predictable. Will people use these lines as guidelines? How will someone respond to them? How will someone change their behavior, if at all? Topoware became a journey where table manners and etiquette intertwined with social commentary on eating habits.

For more information visit <http://www.topoware.org>