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BALDWIN

# Julie Burbridge

## *A New Beginning*

By Amy Stavis



*Burbridge at work in her design studio in Laguna Beach surrounded by "We Miss You, Carmen Miranda!"*

**T**ableware designers come from a number of different fields of design. It's probably a safe bet that Julie Burbridge is the only model home interior designer to gravitate to the tableware field. Burbridge owns the successful Burbridge Design Group of Laguna Beach, California. When she found it increasingly difficult to locate the right tableware to complement

the model homes' interiors, Burbridge, like so many others who stray to tableware design to fill what they see as a void, decided it was time to design her own product. "It was a natural outgrowth of designing interiors," Burbridge says. "It was something I thought I could do and it

was something I thought would be fun." Burbridge was right on both counts. Her dinnerware designs blend a myriad of styles — at once whimsical and light as well as classical and stylish. All styles, as a matter of fact, that embody the designer herself.

Burbridge was born and bred in Iowa, although her cosmopolitan manner and sophistication belie her Midwest upbringing. She studied foreign languages at Indiana University, but that didn't last long. "I was so bored," she says in a soft-spoken voice. "I realized that it wasn't going to work for me." On an instinct, Burbridge decided to transfer to art school. "As a child I always did well with creative things although I never thought of myself as creative," she says. Burbridge studied ceramics and calligraphy and quickly discovered a natural affinity for the arts. "I was intimidated by the talented people in the class, but I was able to rid myself of the fear that design was something I couldn't do," she says. "My education provided the chance to experiment with techniques and that was very valuable."

Burbridge took advantage of opportunities to ply her craft. She traveled to Italy and England where she frequented museums and galleries and developed a feel and joy for art. Soon an interest in interior design blossomed and she and her husband moved to artsy Carmel, California where Burbridge opened a design studio that specialized in model home interiors. Fueled by the building boom of the '80s, Burbridge was ecstatic to find her business prospering all along the California coast.

During the Christmas season of 1991, Burbridge jumped at the chance to work with Ubaldo Grazia, scion of the Grazia pottery



*Burbridge is continually adding pieces to the well-received "We Miss You, Carmen Miranda!"*



Two patterned salad plates aptly called Abstraction.

family which traces its heritage back to 15th century Italy. "Before I sat at the drafting board, I went to every store to see what was in the market and what the Grazia factory was doing. What I saw was a lack of products geared toward the American market." Burbridge's idea was to combine the typical Italian fruit design with a contemporary, stark pattern, opting for bold black and white grids. The result is "*We Miss You, Carmen Miranda!*", one of the more memorable pattern names in the tabletop industry.

"*We Miss You, Carmen Miranda!*", as well as a number of Burbridge's other designs find their influence in the casual entertaining style typical of California. "These patterns bridge a gap," Burbridge says, "and have a fun, contemporary feel." All of the pieces in the collection sport a different design making for great opportunities for mix

and match on any of the dinnerware or accessory pieces. Burbridge says that working on the pattern hooked her on the prospect of tabletop design. "Designing tableware is an absolute dream to me. As soon as we returned from the factory, the Macy's buyer



Exotic floral salad plates, produced by the Grazia factory, feature different flowers including halliconia, tigerlily, bird of paradise, antherium, orchid, and iris. The dinner plate is the Africana pattern.

bought our first platter. That was very exciting for me. I was bit by the dinnerware bug," she enthuses.

Burbridge's portfolio is among the best of any fledgling tabletop designer. Her dozens of designs offer fresh dinnerware concepts in a myriad of styles, but all offer the mix and match concept with a variety of salad plates that makes for great tabletop wardrobing. "A whole new effect is created simply by changing salad plates," Burbridge says. "The flexibility of these designs allows the owner to completely change the look of the table without making a major investment."

For example, *Laurelton* is a richly detailed pattern with a tapestry like quality. The architecturally-based leaf motif in taupe, ivory and black accents complements salad plates with a braided rope rim. *Adelphi* is inspired from ancient Egyptian architectural elements. The dinner plate is banded in black with pyramid shapes of burnished gold encompassing a wide mica-toned border and a thin interior border of malachite. *Byzantine Odyssey* is comprised of two different dinner plates of classic design which can be combined with one of three salad plate designs. "I tried to use colors with a broad range that would mix with peoples' homes," says Burbridge, drawing on her interior design expertise. "I've developed statements that are as flexible as possible with color schemes." Burbridge's strength of mixing colors, patterns, and textiles have served well in her pursuit of tableware design. She is now looking to take her portfolio to manufacturers and looks forward to working with porcelain. So far, Royal Doulton, Gorham, and Fitz and Floyd have worked with Burbridge on developing patterns. "I have a good ability to design a product to fit a certain niche," Burbridge says. "Working in the tabletop industry is the next natural step for me and I can't wait."