



The tableware that changed the hospitality industry:

10 YEARS OF CRAFT

A look at the past, present, and future of Steelite's Craft tableware

Ten years ago, the first seeds were sown in the creation of Steelite's now world-famous Craft tableware range.



Did you know?

Steelite International's history dates back almost 150 years. Our reputation for 'toughness with elegance' goes back to 1875, when Thomas Wood Bennett, who invented the reinforced edge, created his hotel porcelain factory in the heart of the UK's famous pottery region. Today, our core range is still proudly made in Stoke-on-Trent.



In the small English town of Burslem in Stoke-on-Trent, the Craft design started a quiet revolution. A revolution that changed the global tablescape, with Craft becoming the number one selling decorated hospitality pattern in the world.

From independent restaurants to multi-units and chains, everyone wanted a piece of Craft. The launch, designed to bring stability and comfort to diners in a post-recession world, went beyond a trend to evoke an emotional response.

For the first time in history, major restaurant chains switched from white plates to Craft, which was a significant investment for them – and an endorsement for Craft. Besides the plate's beauty, the performance and durability of the Steelite body allowed restaurateurs to use an artisanal, beautiful piece of ware that could also withstand the rigours of volume usage.

One of Craft's first major conversions came in 2014 when Asian restaurant group P.F. Chang's converted their Steelite whiteware to Craft. The move marked the first significant chain to invest in colour on such a vast scale. Already purchasing Steelite whiteware, they were confident in the product's performance and durability and began to roll it out to their restaurants nationwide across the US.

The Craft collection has grown over the years to include 8 glazes, and although the colours may be different, the range is designed for mixing and matching.

Today, almost every single dinnerware manufacturer has duplicated the Craft design, cementing its importance across the globe: after all, imitation is the highest form of flattery. And while there may be copies, there is only one original.

And so ten years on, Steelite is still at the forefront, and this month the company is proud to introduce the next evolution of Craft – the soft pink hues of Craft Raspberry.

Over the next few pages, we take a trip through the Craft story and explore the inspiration and technical prowess behind the range before taking a closer look at Craft Raspberry and the opportunities that brings.



The Craft story

Craft is the 'perfect storm' of an example of the right design at the right time.

Craft's story began shortly after the last global economic downturn. The whole economic system seemed broken to the point of collapse, and people lost trust in it. When society goes through that kind of shift, people reassess what is important. Consumers started looking for things they trusted or added meaning to their lives and personal experiences.

Our industry ushered in a revival of traditional and heritage menus and interiors, farm-to-table going mainstream, and the growth in interest in a rustic style of tableware as part of this mindset. The trend for familiarity also made gaining an emotional response from design even more critical. People were looking for a personal attachment to things they wanted to keep and look after. Handmade and hand-decorated, individualistic pieces were resonating with people.

With Craft, Steelite demonstrated to the industry that a range doesn't have to be white to show that the food is serious. Craft showed that plating food on the right colours and textures could enhance what the chef is trying to achieve.

The range is inspired by hand-crafted, simple country wares and features lustrous glazes applied by hand. The simple forms and shapes produce a unique and individual appearance, with muted colours that provide a rich canvas for presenting food.

When Craft was launched, it pushed so many of those emotional buttons for people. It is individual, traditional, authentic; it has got a handmade element to it, making food look great and wholesome. And being the first of its type in the hospitality market means the product has integrity.

From small independents to four and five-star properties, Steelite's Craft has graced the tables at the Four Seasons Hotels, Mandarin Oriental, Montage, Fairmont Hotels, Shangri La, Ritz Carlton and St. Regis properties all over the world.



Shane Schaibly,
Vice President of Culinary Strategy – First Watch Restaurants

“ We brought Craft in during the transformation of our brand in 2015. We had just developed a new menu, décor, and uniforms, and we wanted to lean in a different direction when it came to the traditional breakfast and lunch presentation. Plateware means so much in your presentation, and coming from a background in luxury hotels, I wanted to bring a great canvas to First Watch. Craft was one more piece of the puzzle that brought our vision together for our 400+ chain. ”



The importance of Craft dinnerware to the hospitality industry

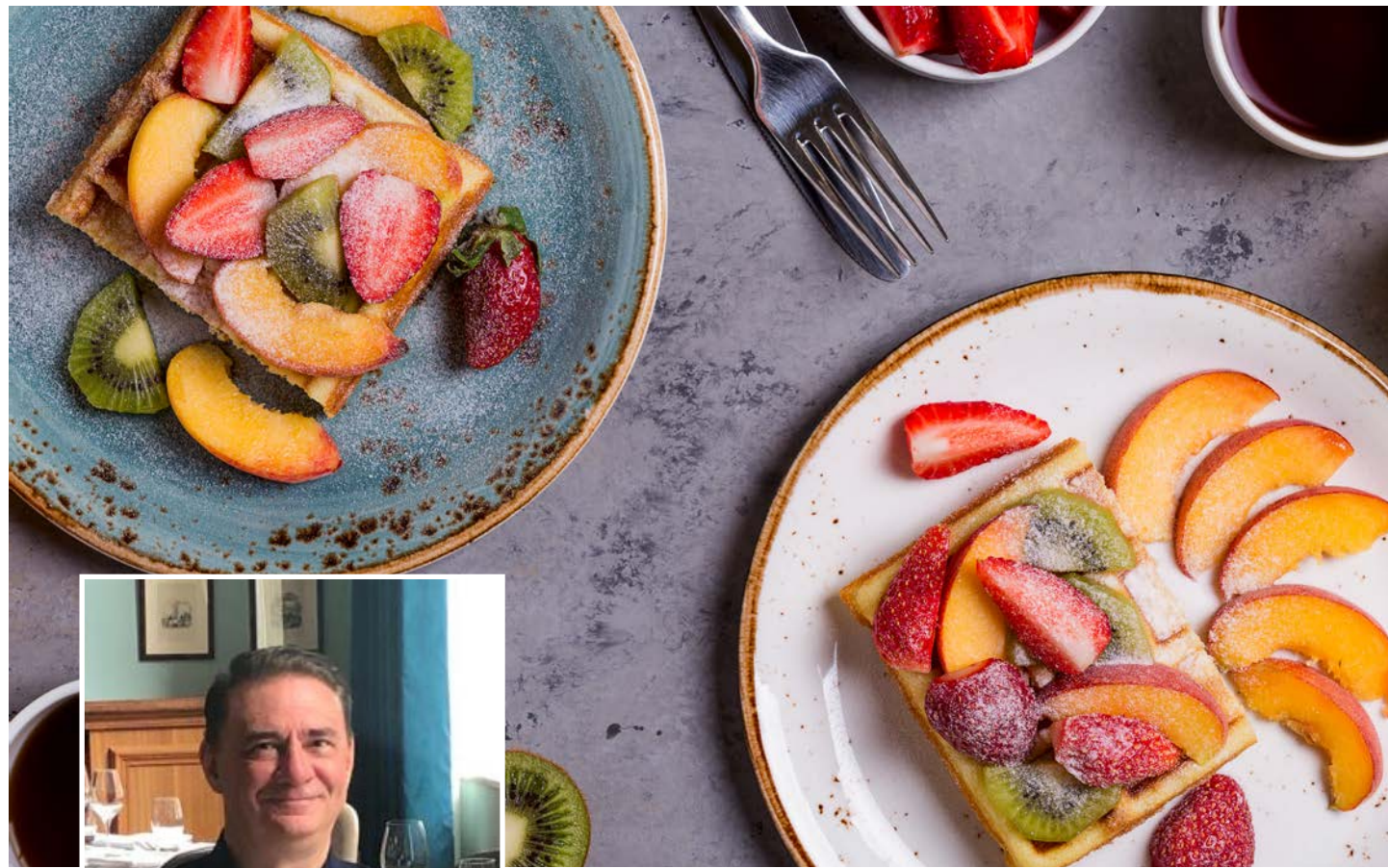
Dave Turner – Chief Evangelist/Editor, Tabletop Journal

The Craft dinnerware design from Steelite International came onto the hospitality dining scene 10 years ago, when white dinnerware was omnipresent. Craft immediately became one of those “paradigm-shifting” designs that change the way participants view a particular category. Successfully designed products go beyond the design, change the thinking, and ultimately create a better overall user experience. The Craft dinnerware design was/is one of those products.

The Craft design also allowed chefs to better connect their food presentations with their dining guests in such emotional terms that price became a secondary, or even a third-level, consideration. The emotions stirred by Steelite’s Craft are those of heritage, comfort, and the authenticity of quality ingredients, prepared well by an artisan chef. With its design details of soft, flowing curves, overall organic shapes, and the colours of nature all coming together, Craft delivered a subliminal message of comfort and safety from good food, made well.

In addition, while being revolutionary in design for its time, Craft also quietly and purposefully delivered on its promise of practicality in service by being a product made by professionals for use by professionals.





Craft Work: A chat with Andrew Klimecki

Andrew Klimecki has been responsible for all aspects of design at Steelite International since 1993. Among many other things, his work to develop the Craft range in the late '00s and early '10s has changed tableware forever.

How has the Craft range evolved?

The range has grown to encompass several more colours. It hasn't evolved aesthetically as it hasn't needed to. It was conceived from the start to be sympathetic with long-term trends, including heritage, authenticity, hand craftsmanship, individuality, and eclecticism. These are as important now as they were back then. Probably more so.



What food trends have inspired the Craft range over the years?

Craft was developed to best showcase menus that extolled the virtues of a more honest and respectful approach to ingredients. Farm-to-table, organic, plant-based, and vegan trends all contributed, but I wanted to develop a range that made the food the hero, whatever the type. I wanted a range that would be easy to use at all levels of the market but also said something to the diner about the quality of what it was they were about to enjoy, whether it's a simple sandwich or a complex signature piece connected to a Michelin Star (or three).



How does tableware set the tone at a venue and what does Craft say about a place?

I always aim to design products that elicit a positive emotional response. I find this engages a dialogue between the product and its user, whether through comfortable familiarity or the surprise and delight of the 'new'. Tableware is obviously incredibly important to the message the venue is trying to get across and can often make or break a menu.

The success of Craft lies within its ability to say different positive things about a place depending on its usage and implementation. In practice, this can be everything from, 'the coffee in this Craft mug is deep, rich, warm and satisfying', to 'the chef has taken great skill and pride in preparing this dish from the very best locally-sourced ingredients and wants you to enjoy this as much as they possibly can'.



What does the future hold for the Craft range?

Craft continues to be incredibly successful and popular. It is still loved by restaurant operators and their customers alike. A ten-year run is a long time in hospitality for any product, and it shows absolutely no signs of abating.

Craft resonates as much now as it did when we first launched it. I guess being the originator and early into the hospitality market with a range that was destined to redefine how best to present food at any level means it has ultimate integrity. No one else can claim that (even though they try).

Obviously, we have broadened its appeal by adding new colours as trends shift and merge, and this will continue. We may also add new shapes as menus change, and requirements alter. The new Raspberry colour is an excellent example of this. Throughout the development of Craft, we have been extremely careful. We have taken great pains to ensure that the colours we use to amplify and enhance the presentation of a wide variety of cuisines

Introducing Craft Raspberry

“We have been experimenting with pink for quite a while, but haven’t felt that the glazes we developed had quite the affinity for food that we know chefs enjoy with all the other colours in the Craft range,” explains Andrew. “That is until now.”

Andrew and the team at Steelite have finally found a pink glaze that they feel is worthy of inclusion into the Craft glaze family. The key to this is twofold: The chosen pink colour is very close to a natural raspberry juice hue and therefore has a great affinity with other natural ingredients. The other element is the ‘fine speckle’ throughout the glaze.

“This pools and congregates within the contours of the piece and adds tone and depth to the brushstrokes used to apply the glaze by hand,” explains Andrew.

Andrew says the new pink shade adds more warmth and playfulness to the Craft range. And it is an exciting way to celebrate Craft’s 10th anniversary by pointing to the future.

The dessert opportunity

Craft Raspberry naturally lends itself to desserts, which is excellent news as consumers continue to look to treat themselves during moments of uncertainty.

Over the course of lockdown, the concept of self-care evolved beyond health & wellness to include permissive indulgence. Desserts-focussed chain Creams, for example, saw a 35% lift in year-on-year sales during the month of August. Creams co-founder Adam Mani was widely quoted in the press after the announcement as saying: “Now, more than ever, people need a little sweet relief and a touch of escapism, and I think that’s exactly what we provide at Creams, and that’s the reason our sales have been so exceptionally strong.”

Wider consumer interest in baking during lockdown has also given the category a push as ingredients flew from supermarket shelves and home baking-related hashtags took over social media.

Speaking of social media, the Raspberry range is set to be a hit on Instagram as venues look to entice consumers with comforting, indulgent, and playful treats. The #dessert, for instance, has been used more than 58 million times at the time of writing this report, with #chocolate over 86 million and #cake over 90 million.

My favourite dessert to enjoy from a Raspberry plate - Andrew Klimecki

“ I am blessed (or cursed) with having a very sweet tooth so this one’s an easy one to answer: Chocolate – fondant, soufflé, cake, tart, ice cream, truffles, or in a bar. As with the berry, the slightly acidic pink colour cuts through and enhances the dark richness of the chocolate and enhances the entire experience. ”



The Yard Brush Story - told by Andrew Klimecki

“ I experimented with all kinds of ways to get the finish I was after, and nothing was quite right. One day I found a battered old yard brush in the factory warehouse that had been kicked into a corner. Immediately I knew it was potentially the perfect tool for the effect I was after. We used it to dab on the second-process pigment, and Craft was born. And to this day, we use specially designed brushes to the same specification in production. The reactive second-process pigment was something we used in print form dating back to the 1960s. This same pigment is also the basis for our Dapples ranges. ”



John Miles
President & CEO, Steelite International

“ Continuous innovation and new products are the lifeblood of Steelite. In 2009 we became intrigued by the unique glazes and textures available in the Japanese marketplace. We organised a trip with a group of chefs to further explore Japan’s rich history of pottery and sent samples to Andrew Klimecki, who was already in the process of developing Craft. The samples from Japan confirmed the aesthetic direction for Craft as being in sympathy with the simple hand-made country wares developed and in use over many centuries. The final result was Andrew’s inspirational design combined with the rich history of texture and glazes along with Steelite technology and technique. ”

Glaze Innovation

Glaze Research and Development has been a significant focus at Steelite International

In 2009 when the natural and earthy Terramesa collection was launched, the company sensed that the market was changing and that there would be much more interest in coloured glazes, particularly those that had an artisan look and feel.

Terramesa was developed using translucent glazes in combination with a hand-applied reactive dappled edge. This was our ‘toe-in-the-water,’ and the reaction to it was extremely positive, even though our competitors at the time thought we were a little brave (or crazy).

From the Japanese-inspired Koto glaze to Craft white’s clean rusticity and the city aesthetic of Urban Smoke, Steelite’s approach to glazes has enabled the Craft range to move forward while maintaining its core identity. An identity that now includes playful sibling Raspberry.



What is glaze?
Glaze is the thin, glassy layer formed on the surface of a ceramic product by firing-on an applied coating. Glaze is also the name used to describe the coating itself which consists of a suspension in water of finely ground glass, together with a relatively small amount of clay.

Glaze Timeline





One of the most Instagrammable collections



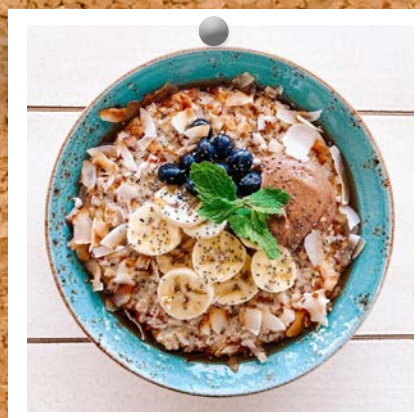
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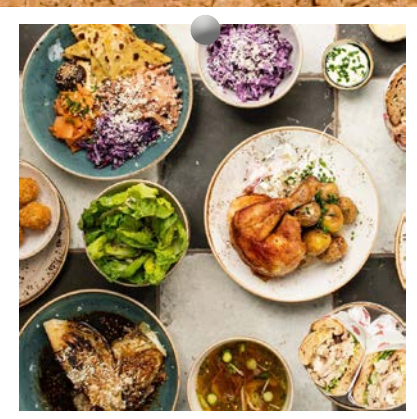
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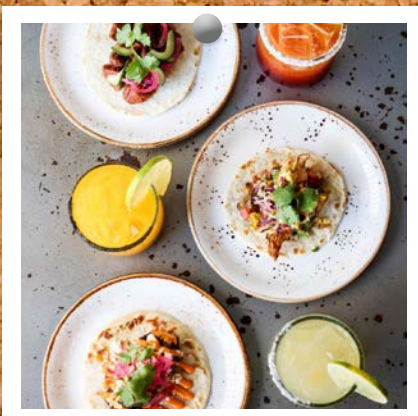
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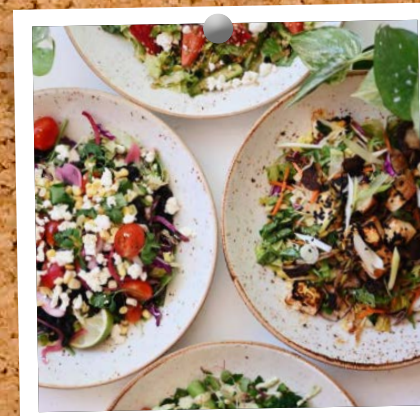
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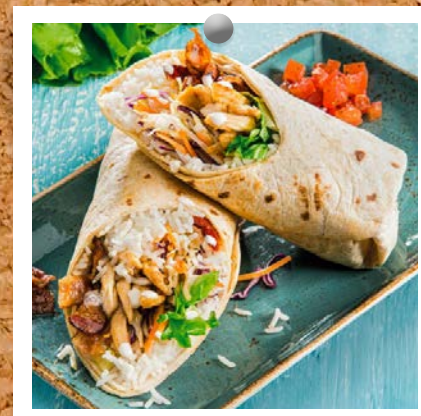
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