



For the team at Farmers & Distillers, the creation of their custom dinnerware was concurrent with the development of the menu. It was important for them to have a picture of the total customer experience as they established the restaurant's concept.



“Our restaurant represents the values on which this country was built. The fact that Homer Laughlin is an American company was very appealing to us. We knew we'd struck upon something special.”



As the Farmers & Distillers in-house design team developed their whimsical and historical custom patterns, they also relied on the expertise of Homer Laughlin designers. “We needed their guidance to understand which motifs would have longevity, and what level of detail would translate best,” said Dan.

It's rare that a restaurant's ethos can be summed up with a question, but Farmers & Distillers is guided by asking, “What would George do?”

That would be George Washington—respected general, first president of the United States, and colonial-era renaissance man. “He was a gentleman farmer, distiller, and an entrepreneur who was ahead of his time,” said Dan Simons, co-owner of Farmers & Distillers. “All the things we want to be.”

Simons' restaurant values authenticity above all, in the ingredients sourced from independent farmers, spirits created and distilled on the premises, handmade tables and chairs in the dining room, and, of course, handcrafted American-made dinnerware.

The pattern on the custom dinnerware at Farmers & Distillers was inspired by the time Dan and his team spent at George Washington's home, Mount Vernon, doing research for the restaurant. Working alongside Homer Laughlin's custom designers, their vision became reality. “There was a lot of collaboration back and forth, and they were a dream to work with,” said Dan.

“My partners and I consider this restaurant a tribute to and reflection of American craftsmanship,” emphasizes Dan. “So, custom dinnerware from an American company that's been around for a century and a half is a natural fit.”

Farmers & Distillers – A Farmers Restaurant Group Restaurant
Washington, D.C.
Co-owner Dan Simons

THE Avenue

— STEAK TAVERN —



The Avenue's stakeholders enjoyed collaborating with HLC's custom designers to arrive at dinnerware that was exactly right. The Avenue team brought photos and ideas to an initial meeting, HLC created several options, and refinements were made from there.



“ We felt like we hit the bullseye. This is an old-school steakhouse, and old-school steakhouses all had logos on the plates. So it fit the personality of the restaurant. These days, everyone takes a picture of their plate before they eat, so it also acts as a promotional tool every time a picture gets shared. ”



Chef Brian Hinshaw said no matter what entree they put on these plates, it looks fantastic. The color, shape, and design work with the Avenue's décor and fit the ambiance. Everything comes together. “It's just great dinnerware.”

A retro, neighborhood steak place; the kind of restaurant where dad liked to go. That's what the team at the Avenue Steak Tavern was going for ... and they achieved it in spades.

The Avenue is a place where service is something you do, but hospitality is something customers can feel.

Chefs Brian Hinshaw and Jamie Kline worked with their colleagues at Cameron Mitchell Restaurants to refine every facet of the establishment's menu and décor. Both men work for the larger Cameron Mitchell organization, with Hinshaw serving as senior vice president of food and beverage and executive corporate chef, and Kline as a regional chef with the company's catering arm. They knew from the start that custom plates would be an essential part of the recipe.

“The pattern we chose feels retro,” said Brian. “When we were testing out different patterns, everyone gravitated to this one.”

Jamie agrees. “The scalloped edge is eclectic, and the coloring has more of an antique look to it.”

The plates complement their surroundings, from the restaurant's ivory-hued stamped ceiling tiles and checkerboard marble floor to its candy-apple red banquettes inspired by dad's basement bar.

“We want you to feel special while you're with us,” said Jamie. “I think our dinnerware helps us accomplish that goal.”

The Avenue Steak Tavern – A Cameron Mitchell Restaurant
Grandview Heights, Ohio
Chefs Brian Hinshaw and Jamie Kline



Lil' Jon is classic American comfort food, and famous for cinnamon rolls "as big as people's heads." The HLC dinnerware chosen for the restaurant reflects similar simple, unpretentious values. "It's nothing fancy, and it's built to last. Just like we are."



“ People come in all the time wanting to buy our plates. They'll send a set with a child heading off to college, or give some to a relative who's moved away, or just use it at home. It reminds them of a happy place in their lives, and I love being part of that legacy. ”



Parker believes consistency is key to Lil' Jon's success. Customers have known they can rely on its homecooked grub and massive portions since Parker's great-uncle, Jon Sjolander, opened the place in 1967.

When a restaurant has been around for 50 years and is on its third generation of family ownership, details can get fuzzy. So, Parker Sjolander doesn't recall the conversation that initially brought logoed HLC plates to his family's diner, Lil' Jon, in Bellevue, Washington. He probably wasn't even born yet. But, at age 27, Parker knows exactly why the restaurant updated their custom plates with a special 50th anniversary logo.

"50 years is a long time, and we knew we wanted to mark the occasion. Over the years, our plates have become part of the legend of the restaurant, so we knew we couldn't radically alter the design." Adding a perfectly proportioned number 50 behind a rendering of the diner's iconic signpost, which can be seen for miles around, did the trick.

"It's one of the tallest structures in town. So tall that it's grandfathered in. If it ever falls down, we won't be able to replace it with one the same height."

Lil' Jon is a family place to its core. It starts with the family that runs it and the workers who have been there for decades, and continues with the customers, including a few who come in twice a day.

"We want people to feel at home here," said Parker. "I think the dinnerware we've chosen from Homer Laughlin helps us create that warm atmosphere."

Lil' Jon Restaurant
Bellevue, Washington
Owner Parker Sjolander

Yale University Dining Services



Homer Laughlin worked with a variety of Yale stakeholders representing hospitality, facility management, operations, supply chain, and design to finalize the dinnerware, which is used to serve approximately 15,000 meals each day.



“How do we acknowledge our rich diversity of arts, sciences, humanities, and other disciplines, but at the same time celebrate that we are one Yale University? Homer Laughlin helped us achieve that goal.”



In 2011, instead of each residential dining hall having its own custom designed dishware (see above), Yale moved to a standardized design. This helped unify the 12 existing colleges while making it easier to accommodate the two new colleges that opened in 2017.

“At Yale, our traditions are very important to us,” said associate vice president of hospitality Rafi Taherian in a bit of understatement. Existing for more than 300 years—longer than the United States has been a country—Yale has plenty of traditions to go around.

It was a big deal when the university upended decades of tradition and started using the same custom plate across its 14 dining halls. Why? Because each hall is tied to a particular college on the Yale campus. For generations, each one used its own plates adorned with a coat of arms or other design specific to that college’s identity. Switching to a new “One Yale” plate was not taken lightly.

Nevertheless, the time had come for change. Taherian wanted to phase out trays, but the existing 10-inch plates with two-inch rims left only six inches of space for food. He didn’t want students juggling multiples on their way to a table. A larger, more modern plate was in order.

“We also needed durability, stackability, and stain-resistance. The plates had to stand up to repeated washing. The bottom couldn’t scratch our antique wooden tables. There were so many factors to consider, even before we got down to talking about design,” Taherian emphasizes.

Homer Laughlin was with the Yale team all the way. “They have a remarkable history and tradition of their own,” Taherian said. “No matter what we threw at them, they were unfazed.”

As for those historical plates that used to be in the dining halls? They’re still around, now reserved for special events and ceremonial dinners. Because at Yale, traditions never die.

New plates let Yale ditch trays, cutting food waste and water usage. “Students don’t take more food just to fill the tray, and we no longer have all those trays to wash. It’s another step to a more sustainable future.”

Yale University
New Haven, Connecticut
Associate Vice President of Hospitality Rafi Taherian



Arnold Palmer fell in love with Bay Hill after winning a tournament there in 1965. Ten years later, he owned the course.



“The fact that we're able to reorder the same pieces and have them reproduced to exact specifications has been an asset to our establishment.”



Bay Hill has used this same design of Homer Laughlin dinnerware, personally approved by Palmer, for more than 25 years.

It is one of the most famous golf courses in the world and bears the name of a legend of the game. It is the home course for a player known as “the King.” And so it stands that every aspect of Bay Hill lives up to the man himself, who was at once known for his sturdy unpretentiousness and his demand for excellence in every pursuit.

“Mr. Palmer was a meat-and-potatoes kind of guy,” said Bay Hill’s executive chef Robert Lee, who was hired by Arnold Palmer personally and has been with the club for more than 25 years. “So our dinnerware has a traditional-looking design, very much indicative of the atmosphere at Bay Hill.”

Palmer wanted custom dinnerware made by Homer Laughlin for Bay Hill’s restaurant, and his wife, Winnie, had a hand in creating the design. She visited the plant several times, meeting with designers and potters to help bring her husband’s dream to fruition.

Palmer enjoyed a close relationship with The Homer Laughlin China Company, also engaging them to make custom dinnerware for his own home as well as special holiday-themed plates he sent out one year to everyone on his Christmas card list. Company leadership came to know Palmer so well, they even made a novelty set of salt and pepper shakers for him, poking fun at his love for pepper—the pepper holes were extra large.

“We strive to execute classic cuisine that is simple and traditional with some modern flair mixed in to keep things interesting for our guests,” said Lee. “We want our presentations using HLC china to be perceived as elegant, but not over the top. That was Mr. Palmer’s style, and we carry it forward.”

Arnold Palmer’s Bay Hill Club And Lodge
Orlando, Florida
Chef Robert Lee