

By Rebecca Oliva, Associate Editor

**T**abletop is taking on new shapes. In some circles, traditional, round dinnerware is considered passé and being replaced by oval, square, triangular and avant-garde shapes. Accent pieces resemble abstract works of art rather than tableware. Flatware and glassware follow this trend with intricate textures and vibrant colors.

Influenced by fusion and ethnic cuisine, the new shape of tableware offers a multicultural approach to presenting food. "We went from round to triangular to everyone having Asian-style dinnerware," says Clark Wolf, president, Clark Wolf Company, New York, a food, restaurant and hospitality consultancy. "Now we need things that have a design profile but are less obviously one culture or another."

Tabletop manufacturers have responded to this trend. Modern cuisine allows hotels the freedom to experiment more with tabletop design.

The white factor is another reason the eclectic shapes are so appealing. "One force that is strongly driving this trend of differently shaped tableware is

## FORM

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pes in tabletop.

## Follows Food

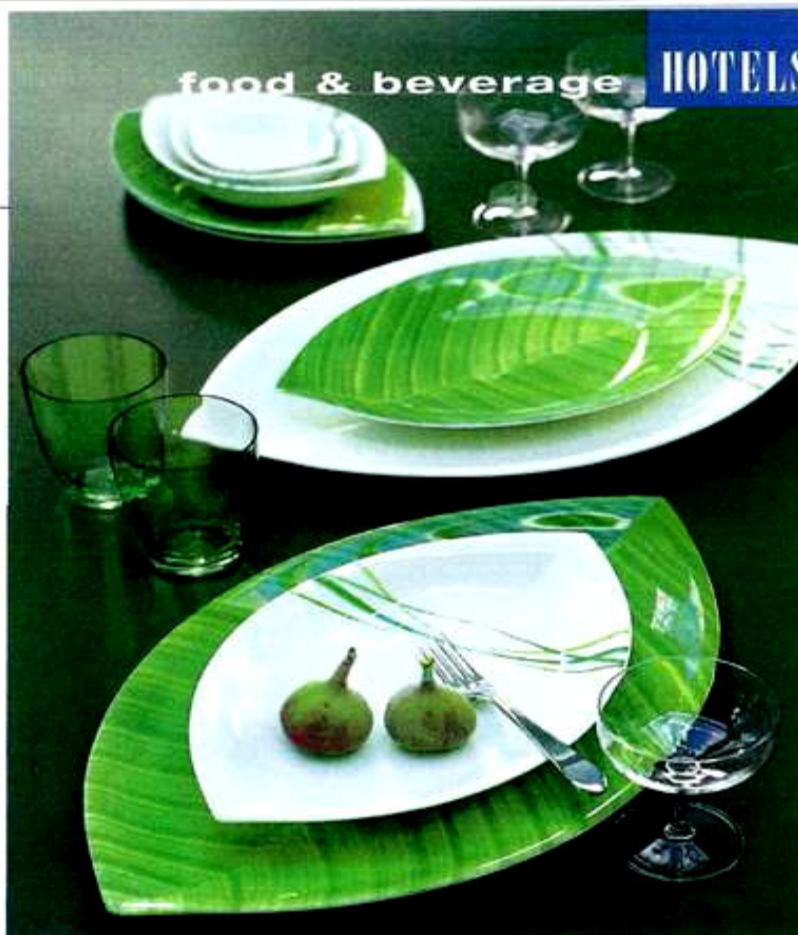
that chefs still want food on white because it looks best," Wolf says. Chefs can showcase their cuisine on white dinnerware while the unusual shape intrigues guests.

Chefs like John DeLucie, executive chef at SoHo and Tribeca Grand Hotels, New York, still favor a crisp presentation on white plates, bowls, platters and trays. "I like simple white plates," he says. "In my mind it shows off the food, but you have to be competitive, and the 'wow factor' for the guests is more important."

That doesn't mean that the entire table must follow the white mode. Wolf says colored glassware adds a nice touch to liven the atmosphere. With its range of colors, textures and unusual shapes, glassware has become a popular choice in place settings as accent and serving pieces. For linens, many hotels choose vibrant underclothes for a pop of color, according to Wolf. In more casual restaurants, quilted, pressed European paper is more durable than most paper table covers.

Aside from the unusual shape of tableware, the size of dinnerware has changed to accommodate smaller portioned courses. As the tasting menu gains popularity, F&B directors have to modify their approach to tabletop to fit in with what is going on in the kitchen, Wolf says. The smaller size allows chefs more versatility in serving because the pieces can be used for anything from appetizers to desserts.

More than a trend, the geometric shapes show a whole new way of looking at dinnerware as an important element in the dining experience. As foodservice continues to be a differentiating factor in the hospitality industry, tableware helps operators create the kind of engaging, memorable experience they want for their customers. ▶



### Villeroy & Boch's

HotPalm series (above) takes its inspiration from the tropical appeal of natural leaf shapes. The new patterns Palm Leaf Hotel and Palm Garden Hotel add an exotic touch to the table. Accent plates in delicate green enliven the plain white background. The series was made to resemble individual blades of grass that appear to have been placed at random on the porcelain leaf.