



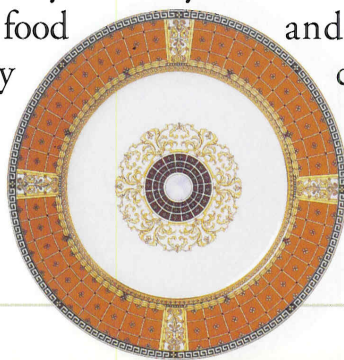
The Dish on Color

You may have already set up house together, but there's something bonding about registering for formal china that reflects your combined tastes. For some couples, that means patterns rich with deep and unusual tones, ornate with intricate design—a far cry from Grandma's white cake plates.

These days, china has become more of a fashion statement as couples are looking for new and expressive ways of setting their table. The days of having only one set are also over. Local retailers say that after getting married, couples come back for a new pattern to spice things up. And what they're coming for (sometimes a few pieces, sometimes a whole new set) is extravagant indeed: burnished shades of cinnabar, gold and black, seen in "Medusa" from Versace by Rosenthal; bold reds and oranges in Raynaud's "Cristobal"; as well as Matisse-like brights that include turquoise, yellow and green. The patterns—French antique reproductions, Italian neoclassical motifs and contemporary renditions of Art Deco style—are equally unexpected. * Tricia Merrill, merchandise manager of the Galleries of Neiman Marcus in downtown Seattle, which carries the extravagant Versace by Rosenthal line, encourages her bridal customers to go with their gut. "Some worry that they will tire of it, but we say that if you fall in love with a pattern, it's a pattern you'll love all your life. I don't ever want to push someone into buying something with a plain gold rim just because it's safe."

One conservative strategy that still keeps things interesting involves buying bits and pieces of an exciting pattern—say, a fabulous dessert plate or rimmed soup bowl—and coupling it with simple, banded dinnerware. "It's a very nice way to accent your china but not overpower the food and guests with an excessively colorful

OPPOSITE PAGE: Versace by
Rosenthal "Le Jardin
de Versace" dinner plate



THIS PAGE, FROM TOP: Ginori
"Amadeus Green" dinner plate;
Bernardaud "Grand Versailles" plate

table,” says Steve Lundh, president of Porcelain Gallery Inc. in Magnolia.

When shopping, keep in mind that a vibrant and dramatic pattern is one thing, but quality is another. Purveyors of the finest china—which can run from \$200 to \$650 and higher per place setting—will tell you to be sure to see where it’s made and who makes it. (Popular china companies, such as Waterford or Wedgwood—even Haviland, a very old and distinguished French company—have place settings that begin at \$125 and go up from there.) “Generally speaking, it’s best to look for the manufacturer’s name, like Bernardaud, Rosenthal or Meissen,” says Lundh. In fact, he says, these high-end manufacturers don’t usually label their plates as “fine bone china.” According to Lundh, the finest china—widely known as porcelain—comes out of France and Germany (“They’ve been at it the longest,” he explains). Next, inspect the details: Gold work is important, so make sure it’s smooth and uniform—but not too uniform. “If it’s absolutely perfect, it’s probably a decal and not hand-applied,” says Lundh.

Whether you go for something vibrant and super high-end or remain loyal to traditional designs, caring for china takes some TLC. To be on the safe side, stick to hand-washing—especially if the china you choose has metallic embellishments. “Metallics are vulnerable to dishwasher-soap abrasives,” explains Lundh. Though manufacturers won’t guarantee china if you opt for machine washing, some experts claim that if you rinse the dishes well, use a gentle cycle and a liquid—never powder—soap, your china will probably hold up. (Exception: Wide gold-banded patterns, which are heavy on metal, should always be hand-washed.)

Experts advise going the dishwasher route no more than, say, three or four times a year. They also recommend that you never take the china out until the temperature of the dishwasher has cooled down. Granted, caring for investment pieces means a little extra work, but considering the price of china these days, it’s worth it. If future generations are going to refer to your dishes as “Grandma’s old cake plates,” you may as well keep them in bestowable shape. *

Hillary Quinn, former copy director of Made-moiselle magazine, is an Edmonds-based freelance writer specializing in lifestyle topics.

THE CHINA MONOLOGUES

(THIS PAGE, FROM TOP):

Versace by Rosenthal

“Russian Dream” teacup;

Phillippe Deshoulières

“Toscane” plate; Wedgwood

“India” salad plate. OPPOSITE

PAGE: Royal Copenhagen

“Flora Danica” dinner plate

A China Primer

Registering for china is a personal task, so you probably don’t want to choose the same pieces that your mother chose 30 years ago. After all, her idea of entertaining might have been formal ladies’

luncheons, while yours might be a thrice-yearly family buffet. Today’s brides don’t necessarily register for all of the traditional place-setting components, either. They may not choose cups and saucers, focusing instead on salad and dinner plates and essential serving pieces. (A formal setting traditionally includes a dinner plate, a salad/dessert plate, a bread and butter plate, a teacup and a saucer.) The list on the right—you supply the number of place settings you want—will help get you started.

The Essentials

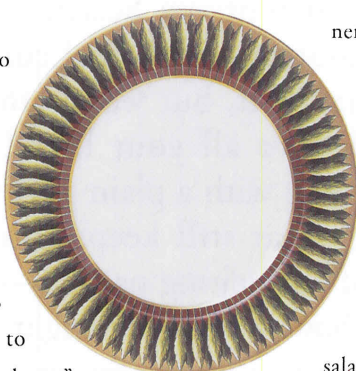
- * Dinner plate
- * Salad/dessert plate
- * Soup bowl (either rimmed or soup/cereal)
- * Teacup and saucer
- * Covered (or open) vegetable dish
- * Platter
- * Gravy boat
- * Teapot
- * Coffeepot
- * Sugar bowl
- * Creamer

Nice but not Necessary

- * Soup tureen
- * Cake plate
- * Compote
- * Butter dish
- * Salt and pepper shakers
- * Chafing dish
- * Candlesticks
- * Quiche dish
- * Cheese board

Out with the Old

- * Nut dish
- * Soufflé dish
- * Meat (well and tree) platter
- * Deviled-egg server
- * Asparagus dish





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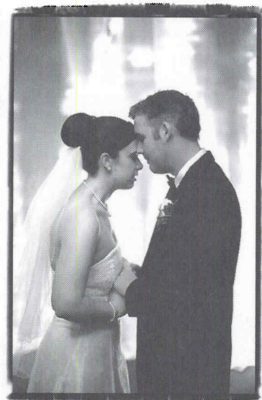
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What, Why and How to Buy

You'll feel a bit like a kid in a candy store—thanks to thousands of choices and a carte blanche registry form. But before you settle on a china pattern—and the various accoutrements that accompany such a choice—consider what you and your groom will really need down the road. Here are some tips to help you navigate the art of registering for china.

* Spend some time walking around fine china and crystal departments before you register. Chat with clerks and become acquainted with the latest patterns, prices and availability. Remember: If you need to add or replace a piece later on, you may not want to be the proud owner of a top-dollar pattern with a six-month wait list.

* Think about your entertaining style. Are you passionate about five-course dinners from soup to sorbet, or are you more of a help-yourself-to-the-buffet kind of couple? Nailing down your needs will save you from collecting pricey dishes that gather dust in your china cabinet.

* Start with the basics and consider adding novelty pieces at a later date. Decide, for example, if you'd like eight, 10 or 12 place settings, then look at various components. If you tend to entertain simply, you might not want bread and butter plates; on the other hand, if you adore formal dinners, you might want to spring for the demitasse cups.

* Consider registering for a few extra plates or soup bowls. No matter how carefully you handle china, accidents do happen.

* Visit replacements.com. It's one of several outfits that specialize in selling individual pieces from thousands of china patterns (perfect if you need to complete your set or add to your collection later on). A bonus: In addition to carrying regular merchandise, they also stock slightly "imperfect" pieces at a 25 percent discount. —H.Q.