The Graceful Table

Margo Grant Walsh Twentieth Century Silver and Metalwork Collection

Mackinnon Gallery,

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The ritual of carefully measured tables and elaborate displays of silver, intricately planned menus, choreographed service, and hosting etiquette may seem like little more than a curiosity of the past or an engaging interlude in a period drama. At the heart of this pageantry, however, is an innate human appetite for beauty, order, community, and comfort. Traditions of dining service and etiquette vary across the world, but all cultures find common ground in acknowledging and elevating the essential experience of sharing a meal.

Two delineating categories are common in dining customs throughout Europe and North America. The intricate guidelines of formal and informal service provide instruction for everything from place settings and appropriate serveware; how, when, and by whom dishes are brought to and from the dining table; and how guests are greeted, served, and entertained.

Formal table service is a tradition rich in planning, formality, hospitality, and refinement. In the twenty-first century it is usually reserved for ceremonial occasions like weddings and anniversary parties, diplomatic or corporate banquets, and catered functions. Every variety of glassware, porcelain, and silver (polished to its finest sheen) graces each place setting. The at-minimum four course meal is prepared by a chef and served by a hired staff, allowing host and hostess to relax and converse.

An informal service may encompass everything from a simple four course meal to a buffet, potluck, or picnic. For elegant occasions, the host or hostess prepares and serves, assisted by guests when the occasion grants, or by a light staff. Good food and conversation are prized above elegance and propriety. Order of service, dining location, and harmonious place settings matter less than a shared spirit of cheer and togetherness.

Despite differences in complexity and formality, formal and informal dining services often observe similar structures. A main course of meat and vegetables is framed by a first course of hot soup or cold appetizer and a pre-portioned salad course. Dessert follows, and the evening ends with a coffee or tea service capped with an offer of liqueur and brandy.

In any multi-course meal, the table delights with a bounty of specialized objects. Two categories provide the basic makeup of any table setting whether formal or informal. Serveware encompasses all objects used for serving a meal such as platters and trays, large bowls and plates. Tableware describes the items by which food and drink are taken: plates, bowls, cups, glassware, and flatware.

The term flatware derives from the process of manufacture, which produces objects by cutting or stamping flattened sheets of metal. Traditionally it referred only to items without sharp edges (knives were reserved for the category of cutlery) but has come to encompass all types of eating utensils. Formal flatware may include up to three varieties of knives and a dozen specialized types of spoons or forks. Sets did not become commonplace in domestic dining until the nineteenth century, following the slow evolution from coveted personal belongings brought to the table by individual diners in the Middle Ages, and fashionable upper-class accessories in the eighteenth century.

Glassware and stemware provide vessels for refreshment. Glassware traditionally applies to all non-stemmed vessels such as tumblers and bar glasses, but also refers to glass plates and bowls. Stemware is specific to glass vessels of any size and shape that are raised on a stem and foot. Though most stemware is designed to hold liquid, some varieties cater to solid foods like eggs, jellies, and desserts.

Silver Purity & Hallmarks

The lustrous surface and malleable quality of silver make it an ideal medium for objects of both function and beauty. Pure silver must be alloyed with other materials, usually copper, to give it sufficient strength for practical use. Sterling silver is composed of 925 part silver per 1,000 parts metal (commonly designated as .925 silver).

Hallmarks have been used throughout western Europe since the thirteenth century as a means of guaranteeing the quality of silver objects. The term encompasses any mark stamped on articles of silver, gold, or platinum alloy. These may include silver standard (assay) marks designating the silver quantity – to assay is to test the content or quality of a metal ore; city marks specifying the location of the assay office, and date letters corresponding to the year an item is measured. Most countries and many major cities in Britain developed their own system of emblems corresponding to specific dates, locations, and silver purity. Makers' marks often accompany this suite of symbols. Simple initials are most common, but personalized pictorial logos are also used to specify the designer or workshop responsible for the piece. Beginning in the twentieth century, particularly in North America, hallmarks became passé for designers and manufacturers with trusted reputations and makers' marks expanded to include simple designation of material alloy, often just the digits 925 or the term "Sterling."

Lebolt & Company, Cake plate, ca. 1910-18
2014:39.21
Details: makers mark – Lebolt Lion (lion rampart), sterling assay with assessment number

Franklin Porter, Cucumber server, ca. 1924-35
2017:2.51
Detail: sterling assay with makers mark

The Kalo Shop, Pair of rectangular bowls, ca. 1925
2014:39.6a,b
Detail: makers mark with sterling assay, makers number (object number)

J.P. Sidel (Polish-American, 1875-1963)
Sauce boat, ca. 1930s
Sterling silver
Margo Grant Walsh Twentieth Century Silver and Metalwork Collection, gift of Margo Grant Walsh
2014:39.42

From the Middle Ages through the seventeenth century in Europe, sauce was served as a liquid seasoning akin to salt, primarily used as a digestive aid to cover the taste of food. As the culinary arts advanced, elaborate sauces became a significant feature of formal and informal dining service, establishing the need for specialized serving tools. This modern sauceboat from Polish-American designer J.P. Sidel bypasses the eighteenth-century innovation of a single spout and handle to revitalize the vessel's double-spouted, double-handled seventeenth-century origins. Sidel balanced ornament and utility with acanthus leaf handles and a pierced (*ajouré*) foliate foot, helpful for maintaining optimum temperature. The deep, flared hollow is ideal for a variety of sauce types, which may be spooned with a small ladle or poured from either spout.

Georg Jensen (Danish, 1866-1935)
Sauce ladle, 1929
Sterling silver
Margo Grant Walsh Twentieth Century Silver and Metalwork Collection, gift of Margo Grant Walsh
2014:39.11

Manufactured in a variety of sizes, ladles are specialized serving spoons intended for ferrying sauces, condiments, and soups from serving vessel to plate. The short handles and shallow bowls of small ladles such as this one by the Danish silversmith Georg Jensen are tailored for modest amounts of sauce or condiments like mustard and mayonnaise. Subtle decorative touches impart a restrained elegance to such compact functional specificity. The open-looped handle blossoms in a delicate flourish of ornamental beading and scrolling leaves that balances the simplified bowl and provides the ideal space for two fingers. Jensen frequently turned to nature for inspiration, developing an aesthetic of graceful utility that made him one of the most celebrated European silversmiths of the early twentieth century.

The Kalo Shop (American, 1900-1970)
Serving tray, ca. 1912-16
Sterling silver
Margo Grant Walsh Twentieth Century Silver and Metalwork Collection, gift of Margo Grant Walsh
2014:39.22

The Kalo Shop was one of the most important silver workshops in the United States during the twentieth century. Taking their name from the Greek word for "beautiful," kalos (καλός), the female proprietors were revered for their dedication to handmade objects and the Arts and Crafts legacy. They also distinguished themselves as a haven for female artisans. This simple monogrammed tray could serve multiple purposes in both formal and informal dining occasions, for example as a serving platter for entrees with minimal sauce, or a surface on which to transfer coffee and tea or dishes and utensils between the kitchen and dining area. A tray of this size could also be used to serve cold appetizers and desserts, or a buffet-style assortments of sandwiches, sliced fruit, crudité, and antipasto.

Allan Adler (American, 1916-2002)
Serving dish, ca. 1955
Sterling silver
Margo Grant Walsh Twentieth Century Silver and Metalwork Collection, gift of Margo Grant Walsh
2014:39.7

Trained by famed Arts and Crafts silversmith Porter Blanchard, Allan Adler produced a popular line of contemporary silver tableware inspired by the Scandinavian aesthetic of functional sophistication and formal restraint. This simple yet stylish serving dish adds refined elegance to both formal and informal dining services with a shallow base and elongated dimensions that are ideal for vegetable and meat dishes with minimal sauce. Adler's preference for clean lines and geometric shapes demonstrate his ideal of simple objects, inspired by his belief that "simplicity is beauty and a thing of beauty lives forever."

The Kalo Shop (American, 1900-70)
Pair of rectangular bowls, ca. 1925
Sterling silver
Margo Grant Walsh Twentieth Century Silver and Metalwork Collection, gift of Margo Grant Walsh
2014:39.6a,b

At home on the dinner table one hundred years after being made, these serving bowls embody The Kalo Shop's motto of objects that are "beautiful, useful, [and] enduring." The shallow, flat base and gentle sloping sides are perfect for serving firm food like roasted vegetables, fruit, and rolls. Simple rectangular feet add charm while preserving the temperature of the bowl's contents, which may remain on the table throughout the meal accompanied by specialized utensils for guests to serve themselves.

Frans Gyllenberg (Swedish-American, 1883-1974)
Two-handled Porringer, 1910
Sterling silver
Margo Grant Walsh Twentieth Century Silver and Metalwork Collection, gift of Margo Grant Walsh
2019:11.105

The porringer is a highly-specialized dish that evolved from shallow double-handed vessels known in France as écuelles (basin, bowl, dish). The shape derives from the ancient Greek kantharos, a two-handled drinking cup. Modern versions, which include loving cups (a shared ceremonial drinking vessel) and porringers, can be identified by their open-looped or flat perforated handles, which are made for sharing. Single-handled varieties are also common. The porringer was traditionally a vessel for soup and receives its name from two potential sources: the Latin porrata, a dish made of boiled oats, spices, and fermented alcohol; and the French potager (vegetable garden), a soup dish. In the eighteenth century, smaller, single-handled porringers were developed for American households to serve cereals to children.

Christopher Dresser (British, 1834-1904)
Bowl, ca. 1890
Silver plate
Margo Grant Walsh Twentieth Century Silver and Metalwork Collection, gift of Margo Grant Walsh
2014:39.15

In contrast to sterling, silver plate is not an alloy. Instead it refers to any base metal that is coated with pure silver through the process of electroplating. The base metal objects is suspended with the silver in a solution of potassium cyanide through which an electric current is passed, depositing (plating) silver ions to the base metal. The thickness of the silver coating depends on the length of time the object remains in the solution, up to twenty minutes (the limit in which base metals will accept silver). Because of its optimal weight and balance, a base of nickel silver (containing nickel, copper, and zinc) is common for tableware that receives consistent use and handling. The process of silver plating, however, renders objects less malleable than sterling, making the organic curves of Christopher Dresser's bowl remarkable.

Lebolt & Company (American, 1882-1944)
Cake plate, ca. 1910-18
Sterling silver
Margo Grant Walsh Twentieth Century Silver and Metalwork Collection, gift of Margo Grant Walsh
2014:39.21

Lebolt & Company was a pivotal force in translating the Arts and Crafts movement from its European roots to American soil. From humble beginnings as a jewelry workshop, the company become a dominant force in metalwork design and production, specializing in tableware and dining accessories that were fashionable choices for commemorative gifts. The stylish Art Deco monogram on this cake plate is an example of applied decoration – the most common form of monogramming for silver tableware – which is created by welding each individually cut letter to the plate's surface. Accessory serving pieces with a specific, typically formal use like cake plates were common wedding and anniversary presents, used in a variety of occasions including formal luncheons, high tea, and formal dessert service.

Duchess of Sutherland Cripples Guild (British, active ca. 1900-20)
Footed bowl, ca. 1900
Silver on copper
Margo Grant Walsh Twentieth Century Silver and Metalwork Collection, gift of Margo Grant Walsh
2016:12.149

Bowls with deep hollows are commonly used to serve soft foods such as mashed potatoes, rice, light soups, and creamed foods. The shape of this vessel is ideal for accommodating a small serving ladle, which can dip in without scraping the bottom. The elongated foot enables food within to remain at optimum temperature while providing an individualized design. British society maven, social reformer, and writer Millicent Leveson-Gower, Duchess of Sutherland, formed the Cripples Guild to support disabled children living in an industrial area of North Staffordshire (colloquially known as the Staffordshire Potteries). Endowed with an abundance of clay, salt, lead, and coal, the district became a center of ceramic production in the early seventeenth century and housed the workers and families for hundreds of companies.

N.G. Henriksen (Danish, active ca. 1875-1935)
Bowl, 1910
Sterling silver
Margo Grant Walsh Twentieth Century Silver and Metalwork Collection, gift of Margo Grant Walsh
2019:11.97

From the Anglo-Saxon word bolla (round vessel), bowls are an essential tableware item that come in a diverse array of sizes, shapes, and purposes to accommodate multiple cooking methods, food temperature, serving formality, and eating habits. Medium bowls like this one with a wide hollow and thin walls would likely serve cold salads and pastas or whole food such as fruit and bread, rather than soups or hot courses. The strawberry and vine motif decorating the rim was created with a repoussé technique, which hammers the design into relief from the interior, creating a protruding design on the exterior. Though effective for adding a touch of visual whimsy, the technique requires a thin sheet of silver, the density of which is lessened further through the process.

Heath & Middleton (British, 1886-1953)
Salt cellars and spoons, 1888
Sterling silver and glass
Margo Grant Walsh Twentieth Century Silver and Metalwork Collection, gift of Margo Grant Walsh
2014:39.49a-h

Salt has been vital to life for much of human history. Recognized as the first seasoning, it has also been used as currency, for spiritual protection from evil, as a symbol during sacrificial meals and oaths, and as a food preserve. Traditions going back to the Middle Ages place salt at the center of the dinner table, signaling social rank by where one sat in relation to the salt: above the salt indicated nobility and high standing. The first salt cellars were large ornate vessels, often used as decorative centerpieces that also protected the prized seasoning. The term “cellar” refers to the storage tradition in which salt was placed in locked household cellars to guard against theft. Miniature salt cellars accompanied by individual serving spoons are a consistent feature of formal dining service. Because salt is corrosive, it must be stored in and served from abrasion-proof surfaces; glass inserts like these are common in sterling silver sets that do not have gilded interiors.

Albert Edward Bonner (British, active ca. 1905-13)
Salt and pepper casters, 1908
Sterling silver with enamel cabochons
Margo Grant Walsh Twentieth Century Silver and Metalwork Collection, gift of Margo Grant Walsh
2014:39.51a,b

The caster, or shaker, originally developed as a container to protect salt from moisture while in storage – an evolution of the open-topped salt cellar. Salt and pepper casters are reserved for informal service and remain on the table throughout the meal. They are intended to stay as a pair, passed together when requested. Tradition places the salt caster to the right of the pepper because salt is used more frequently, and the majority of guests are likely to be right-handed. Though salt has multiple serving methods, casters are preferred for pepper because the spice loses its pungency when fully enclosed. This set showcases the handmade aesthetic of the Arts and Crafts movement with a hammered (martelé) surface. Collet-set enamel cabochons emulate John Ruskin’s preference for stone embellishment cut en cabochon (highly polished, not faceted) and attached with ring of metal.

William Spratling (Mexican, 1900-67)
Set of salad servers, ca. 1944-46
Sterling silver with ebony handles
Margo Grant Walsh Twentieth Century Silver and Metalwork Collection, gift of Margo Grant Walsh
2017:2.36a-b

The term “salad” may refer to any vegetable dish, or sallet, that is raw or cooked, usually dressed with oil and vinegar. On formal occasions, lettuce-leaf salads are served pre-portioned on specialized plates following the main course, or on a large platter accompanied by serving utensils. During informal meals, salad is served before the main course or as a side dish, often in a central dish from which guests help themselves using salad servers. This elegant rosewood-handled set delights in a simplified design and contrasts between materials – common elements in William Spratling’s designs. Spratling is known as father of modern Mexican design, revered for initiating a Renaissance in local craft and indigenous design in Taxco, Mexico – home to one of the oldest silver mines in North America – in the 1920s.

Stephen Dweck (American, b. 1960)
Serving fork and spoon, 1986
Sterling silver
Margo Grant Walsh Twentieth Century Silver and Metalwork Collection, gift of Margo Grant Walsh
2016:12.20a,b

Specialized utensil pairs such as serving spoons and forks evolved to accompany a wide array of dishes including meats, salads, pastas, vegetable gratins, and ragouts. Though the set remains together and is frequently used as tongs, each utensil may also be used individually to spear (fork) and scoop (spoon). The ornate decoration of this pair is unusual for such utilitarian tableware, which is often defined by a simple lines and restrained elegance. Trained as a painter, sculptor, and jeweler, Stephen Dweck turned to functional homeware in the late 1980s to create high-end dinnerware with lavish designs inspired by the organic fecundity of nature. Every piece is adorned with his signature beetle, named Adam, who crawls across the intertwining vines and grape leaves of the open-looped handles on this serving set. Both beetle and leaves were made by creating molds from real leaves and insects.

Clemens Friedell (American, 1872-1963)
Chocolate pot, ca. 1920
Sterling silver with ebony handle
Margo Grant Walsh Twentieth Century Silver and Metalwork Collection, gift of Margo Grant Walsh
2014:39.44

Chocolate was introduced to western Europe in the late fifteenth century, brought in the form of the cacao bean from South America and Mexico. It traveled to Italy at the turn of the seventeenth century, then to France and England. The cost of raw cacao dropped by mid-century, enabling chocolate to become an everyday feature of dining service through delicate desserts and hot chocolate. This chocolate pot by master craftsman Clemens Friedell was designed for such a luxury. Though smaller in stature than the late-seventeenth century coffee pot it was modeled after, it is similarly fitted with a straight wooden handle attached perpendicular to the body to ensure insulation. The short spout (replaced in the eighteenth century by a more delicate lip) accommodates the traditional service of unsweetened chocolate mixed with cream and beaten into a paste with sugar. This thick mixture is poured into individual cups, hot milk is added just before serving.

Clemens Friedell (American, 1872-1963)
Dessert bowls & undertrays, ca. 1915
Sterling silver
Margo Grant Walsh Twentieth Century Silver and Metalwork Collection, gift of Margo Grant Walsh
2014:39.43a-d

Taking its name from the French *desservir* (to clear the table), dessert evolved from a simple, formal course at the dining table during the Middle Ages into an elaborate feast served outside the dining room in the eighteenth century. Service in another room allowed servants ample time to clear the dinner table after setting the dessert course, which could involve dozens of communal dishes including cakes and puddings, candied nuts, steamed fruits, and ice cream. By the nineteenth century, individual dishes and pre-portioned desserts served became common. Simple but elegant bowls were preferred, such as this bowl and undertray pair made in the Arts and Crafts *martelé* (hammered) technique

Carl Poul Petersen (Danish-Canadian, 1895-1977)
Compote, ca. 1930
Sterling silver
Margo Grant Walsh Twentieth Century Silver and Metalwork Collection, gift of Margo Grant Walsh
2014:39.46

Compotes are stemmed shallow dishs or footed bowls that derive their form from the *tazza*, a shallow ornamental drinking vessel mounted on pedestal, popular in sixteenth-century Italy. They are common to both formal and informal meals, used to serve steamed and glacéed (candied) fruit, nuts, chocolates, and other confections. Large compotes became fashionable in the nineteenth century as formal table ornaments, often arraigned in pyramidal formations and remaining on table throughout the meal for guests to serve themselves. The elegant handle of this particularly ornate compote from silversmith Carl Poul Petersen drips with a flourish of floral beading that guides the diner's eye to the enticing sweets that await in the stylized leaf-shaped bowl below.

William Neale & Sons Ltd. (British, 1911-41)
Monteith, 1938
Sterling silver
Margo Grant Walsh Twentieth Century Silver and Metalwork Collection, gift of Margo Grant Walsh
2019:11.23

In the late seventeenth century, two new vessels for keeping wine at a cool temperature became popular substitutes for the traditional cistern in Great Britain. With its wide basin and notched upper rim, the chilling bowl, or monteith, was ideal for two purposes: as a vessel for holding liquid (often wine) and as a place to hang individual drinking glasses where the interior liquid could keep them cool. The colloquial nickname derives from a Scotsman named Monteigh who wore a cloak with a notched hem. This Art Deco-inspired monteith produced by the British company W. Neal & Sons Ltd. features inverted stepped pyramid notches, providing a modern update to a traditional design. The bowl may be filled with ice, water, wine, or punch while glasses rest in the notches on the rim until ready for use.

Los Castillo (Mexican, 1939-present)
Pitcher, mid 20th century
Mixed metals with lapis lazuli inlay
Margo Grant Walsh Twentieth Century Silver and Metalwork Collection, gift of Margo Grant Walsh
2017:2.52

As a category of serveware, hollowware encompasses any object with height and a hollow center. Though more common in reference to beverage vessels such as pitchers and coffeepots, the term may also be applied to candlesticks and napkin rings, goblets, bowls, and tureens. Pitchers evolved as the traditional hollowware form by which apprentice silversmiths proved their skill, the functional simplicity providing an ideal foundation for technical acumen and artistic nuance. Though small, this pitcher makes a distinctive statement with a large circular base, tapered neck, and slim, elegant lip perfect for serving water or iced tea at informal luncheons and tea services. The handle adds color and character with a lapis lazuli inlay that expresses the maker’s heritage as innovators of silver design and manufacture in Taxco, Mexico.

P.V.J. Kragh, (Danish, 1905-57)
Tea Strainer, 1920
Sterling silver
Margo Grant Walsh Twentieth Century Silver and metalwork Collection, gift of Margo Grant Walsh
2019:11.56

Tea strainers are traditional accessories used by a hostess during the methodical presentation of a formal tea service. After measuring tea leaves directly into the teapot, freshly boiled water is poured from a kettle and the brew is steeped for three to five minutes to desired strength. The hostess then serves the tea to individual cups, placing a tea strainer above the cup to keep any dregs from entering the vessel. Sugar, milk, and lemon are then added upon request. Though a simple, functional object, designers can impart a touch of whimsy and elegance to the strainer's flexible form. This strainer delivers handcrafted refinement with a hammered finish, beaded swag handle, and straining holes punched in a starburst pattern.

Stuart Devlin (Australian-British, 1931-2018)
Caddy Spoon, 1983
Sterling silver, silver gilt, enamel
Margo Grant Walsh Twentieth Century Silver and metalwork Collection, gift of Margo Grant Walsh
2019:11.79

Used to measure and scoop loose tea from the canister (or caddy) to the teapot, caddy spoons emerged as a specialized accessory of formal tea service in the late eighteenth century. The spoon's straightforward function prompts a wide variety of designs that range from refined simplicity to experimental and expressive. The traditional form pairs large shallow bowls with short handle, as seen in this spoon from Australian silversmith Stuart Devlin. Decorative adornment and enameled gilt work balance enhance the restrained simplicity of the spoon's utilitarian form. Stuart's ornate feathered handle, known as the "Prince of Wales" motif, honors the 25th anniversary of the Prince of Wales's confirmation and provides a visual echo of one of the oldest handle designs for caddy spoons: sea shells.

Messulam Enrico di Alberto (Italian, 1935-present)
Tea Service with tray (teapot, water pot, creamer, sugar bowl), ca. 1930s
.800 silver and wood
Margo Grant Walsh Twentieth Century Silver and Metalwork Collection, gift of Margo Grant Walsh
2019:11.99a-e

Afternoon tea developed during the nineteenth century as a way to stave off hunger between the common meals of breakfast and dinner. High tea evolved contemporaneously as a means for shopkeepers to maintain energy while keeping their businesses open after eight o'clock for shoppers with late shifts; tea was consumed at the six o'clock hour, a numerically "high" time of day. Though initially light and casual, both customs evolved into elaborate feasts similar to a cocktail hour. At any time of day, formal and informal tea service are differentiated by number of guests, seating arrangements, and menu. Formal settings tend to be elegant and complex like formal dinners; tea is traditionally served by the hostess in the dining room after dessert, accompanied by coffee and sometimes a light snack. A formal tea service includes a teapot, hot-water kettle, alcohol burner for maintaining water temperature, sugar bowl, creamer, tea caddy, caddy spoon, tea strainer, and waste bowl for tea dregs. Lemon slices accompanied by a lemon fork are a common addition.

Roberts (American, dates unknown)
Coffee Service, ca. twentieth century
Sterling silver and wood
Margo Grant Walsh Twentieth Century Silver and Metalwork Collection, gift of Margo Grant Walsh
2019:11.84a-c

The design of this modernist American coffee service reflects the origins of this specialized beverage pot: the tall, narrow cylinder of the Turkish ewer, a shape that encourages grounds to sink and brew to rise. In the early eighteenth century, tapered upper registers with dome lids were fashionable, with high spouts (in contrast to teapots) to further aid in keeping grounds in the pot. Coffee service and serveware vary widely around the world. In many cultures, formal occasions limit coffee to post-meal, served with dessert or to conclude the evening. Informal services encompass casual dinners in addition to morning and afternoon meals. Breakfast and luncheon coffee are conventionally served with cream and sugar as guests desire, while after-dinner coffee is customarily black. Though coffee is always presented alongside tea in formal service, it is given preference in the United States where it is more popular. Formal service will usually include a coffee pot, alcohol burner to keep coffee at an ideal temperature, sugar bowl, and a creamer.

Allan Adler (American, 1916-2002)
Sugar tongs, mid-20th century
Sterling silver
Margo Grant Walsh Twentieth Century Silver and Metalwork Collection, gift of Margo Grant Walsh
2019:11.72

In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, compressed sugar was sold in loafs and cones, which were nipped with sugar tongs and placed in the sugar bowl to accompany coffee and tea service. Sugar tongs are still a requirement of formal dining and also common to informal occasions. They are the ideal implement for delivering the sugar cube (equal to 1 tsp. of granulated sugar) from bowl to cup. Tongs come in a variety of sizes with an array of decorative touches. This set has a spring arch with an inverted U shape, which enables it to be hung over the rim or handle of the sugar bowl when not in use.

Lebolt & Company (American, 1882-1944)
Sugar Spoon, 1921-26
Margo Grant Walsh Twentieth Century Silver and Metalwork Collection, gift of Margo Grant Walsh
2014:39.27a,b

A seventeenth-century proverb states: “Sugar nourishes the body, generates good blood, cherishes the spirit, makes people prolific, and strengthens children in the womb.”

Though they frequently appear together, granulated (loose) sugar is more common to casual contemporary dining than its cubed counterpart. Loose sugar dissolves faster and is easier to adjust for portion preference. In contrast to tongs, the sugar spoon is used only at informal meals where people spend minimal time at the table. Accounting for its wide round bowl, this specialized utensil is also known as a sugar scoop or sugar shell. Stylized monograms at each handle’s terminal and personalized engravings on the reverse indicate these spoons were gifts, likely commissioned for special occasions.

Earl Pardon (American, 1926-91)
Bar set, 1955
Sterling silver handles with stainless steel and wood attachments, enamel terminals
Margo Grant Walsh Twentieth Century Silver and Metalwork Collection, gift of Margo Grant Walsh
2016:12.31a-d

This toolkit for the modern domestic bartender contains three essential utensils. The wood-headed muddler is used like a pestle to mash (muddle) key cocktail ingredients such as fruit and herbs, for example mint in a Mojito. The slim bar knife with a stainless-steel blade is ideal for slicing lemons and limes. A bottle-opener where blade meets handle increases the tool's functionality, as does its sharp pronged tip perfect for handling olives, cherries, and other signature drink additions. Two slender bar spoons complete the set; each stainless-steel spoon is fitted with a long sterling handle to facilitate mixing and layering of liquor in tall glasses. Acclaimed American metalsmith and jewelry designer Earl Pardon created patterns for commercial silversmith firms across the east coast, such as this "Contempra House" pattern for Towle Silversmiths (1857-1990).

Hector Miller (British, b. 1945)
Goblets, 1979
Sterling silver and silver gilt
Margo Grant Walsh Twentieth Century Silver and Metalwork Collection, gift of Margo Grant Walsh
2019:11.11a,b

Taking their name from the Old French words *gobelet* (cup) and *gobbet* (mouthful), goblets were reserved for fermented drinks such as mead, cider, and ale during the Middle Ages because water was usually polluted. Modern goblets may still serve wine and beer, but water is more common in formal service, poured throughout the meal as a refreshment between courses and wine selections. These goblets were made for the New Forest Ninth Centenary, a celebration of the 900th anniversary of one of the largest areas of open pasture, heathland, and forest in Southern England – established as Royal Forest in 1079. A decorative pedestal of Oak leaves and acorns forms on each goblet forms an enclosure for a gilded mare and her foal. An inscription on each base honors the work of the New Forest Heritage Center, which now protects the land and houses a museum and library to facilitate education.

Franklin Porter (American, 1869-1935)
Cucumber server, ca. 1924-35
Sterling silver
Margo Grant Walsh Twentieth Century Silver and Metalwork Collection, gift of Margo Grant Walsh
2017:2.51

Between 1921 and 1928, Secretary of Commerce Herbert Hoover implemented regulations to standardize and simplify common products like sterling silver flatware and serving utensils. Inspired by Quaker values that emphasized utility, thrift, and efficiency, Hoover's ingenuity resulted in a reduction of American flatware production from a dizzying array of over 130 items to a trim 56. The cucumber server is one of the serving utensils to remain on Hoover's ideal table. The small flattened plate is pierced to drain from the water-laden vegetable before transfer to the diner's plate. Other specialized flatware that survived Hoover's overhaul and remained common in formal dining service include lemon and pickle forks, asparagus servers, and bonbon spoons.

Fritz S. Heimbürger (Danish, ca. 1898-1948)
Tomato server, 1917
Sterling silver
Margo Grant Walsh Twentieth Century Silver and Metalwork Collection, gift of Margo Grant Walsh
2016:12.65

Herbert Hoover's reduction of silver flatware and utensils in the 1920s served a rapidly expanding middle class that preferred quicker, less elaborate meals. Hoover did not eliminate specialization entirely, however, maintaining six categories that allowed for a variety of both function and whimsy. In addition to basic staples such as forks, spoons, and dinner knives, carving sets for meat and specialized flatware for infants and children remained available. Also included were the categories of "fancy dozens," including ice cream serving sets, bouillon and coffee spoons, fish and fruit forks; and "fancy singles" tailored for treats like berries and butter, cheese, jelly, and mayonnaise. With its large flat serving tray, this tomato server is the ideal implement for transferring a slice or two of large heirloom from platter to plate.

Celsa (Mexican, active 20th century)
Flatware, ca. 1955
Sterling silver
Margo Grant Walsh Twentieth Century Silver and Metalwork Collection, gift of Margo Grant Walsh
2019:11.121a-f

The knife, fork, and spoon – each of which evolved on its own trajectory from ancient global roots – comprise the basic makeup of most flatware sets. This open handle "Avanti" pattern flatware set includes a pair of each in an unusual composition. The larger dessert knife is a specialized utensil, traditionally paired with a dessert fork and rarely found in flatware sets; its rounded edge is perfect for softer desserts while the pointed tip caters to firmer delicacies. Always the smallest knife in a set, the butter knife is a common inclusion; seen here with a rare pointed tip. The soup spoon is reserved for its namesake dish in formal dining while informal service employs it for any food served in a shallow bowl. Serves a bite approximating two teaspoons, the smaller dessert spoon is used consistently in formal and informal events. A large, ubiquitous dinner fork manages the main course for all occasions, while the smaller salad fork, also common to both services, is tailor-made for its titular task with the addition of an extra-wide left tine to cut thick vegetables and lettuce veins.

Gorham Manufacturing Co. (American, 1831-present)
Ice cream server and spoons, 1870
Sterling silver, gilt
Margo Grant Walsh Twentieth Century Silver and Metalwork Collection, gift of Margo Grant Walsh
2019:11.76a-m

Though ice cream became a fashionable desert for European nobility and upper classes in the seventeenth century, specialized utensils and flatware did not become commonplace until the mid-nineteenth century – spurred by an expanding middle class and an increased affordability of the chilled dessert in the United States. Prestigious silver companies such as Gorham Manufacturing produced a wide array of beautiful yet functional flatware sets specialized for ice cream. Gilding (a process of covering silver in gold to protect the sterling alloy) and sharpened edges were common features, incorporated as reinforcement against the frozen temperature and solid texture of early ice creams. Intricate designs, often double-sided, became defining features of such utensils. An elegant palm tree leaf pattern adorns the convex side of each spoon in this set, transforming each handle into a tree trunk. Such patterns were an opportunity to showcase the creativity and wealth of the hostess, and would rarely match the household flatware.

William Spratling (Mexican, 1900-67)
Butter dish and knife, 20th century
Sterling silver and rosewood
Margo Grant Walsh Twentieth Century Silver and Metalwork Collection, gift of Margo Grant Walsh
2019:11.68a,b

Functional for both service and storage, the butter dish is still found in most contemporary kitchens. Though this elegant sterling and rosewood set from Taxco silversmith William Spratling makes a statement befitting formal occasions, bread and butter are not traditionally included in formal dining service. When offered at informal gatherings, butter is pre-proportioned and applied to an accessory bread plate, which is set to the left of the dinner plate above the forks. The butter knife was introduced in the mid-eighteenth century, made with a wide dull blade thick enough to cut through sticks of chilled butter and occasionally finished with a pointed tip to transfer slices to from dish to bread plate.

James Fenton (British, ca. 1852-1925)
Condiment jars with spoon, 1906
Sterling silver and enamel cabochons
Margo Grant Walsh Twentieth Century Silver and Metalwork Collection, gift of Margo Grant Walsh
2019:11.47a-c

Condiments encompass a wide range of meal and beverage additives, including whole foods that can be eaten with fingers, such as radishes and olives; sliced foods eaten with forks, such as pickles and onions; or liquids that may be poured, or spooned in the case of salsas and chutneys, mustards and mayonnaise. This miniature condiment set enhances functional form with a light touch of charm and whimsy through the addition of an engraved serving spade and “peacock” enamel cabochons that correspond with the Arts and Crafts aesthetic flourishing in Britain. The naturalist philosopher John Ruskin, a progenitor of the movement, promoted stone embellishment finished *en cabochon* (finished with high polished instead of faceted), which are sometimes referred to as “Ruskin enamels.”

Venetian Glass and the Artistry of Stemware

Glass is a natural compound formed through the thermal fusion of silica (a hard, glassy mineral that provides strength) and alkali (a soluble material that reduces the melting point of silica to promote integration at lower temperatures). The first glassmakers used sand (silica), soda ash (sodium carbonate alkali), and sometimes dried seaweed (alkali). Ancient Egypt perfected the early craft, creating glass beads from crushed quartz In the Fourth Dynasty (ca. 2613-2494 BCE) and the first molded glass vessels (used for perfumes and oils) in the Eighteenth Dynasty (ca. 1850-1350 BCE). Roman glassmakers (known as *vitrearii*, from the Latin for glassware, *vitrum*), developed many of the decorative methods still in use and transformed glass from a luxury item to a mass-produced utilitarian object with the invention of the blowpipe in 50 BCE. Glassmakers throughout Mesopotamia, in modern-day Syria, Iran, and Iraq, cultivated an equally inventive trade between the seventh and twelfth centuries.

As the Roman Empire progressed through division and ultimately collapse, Venice became the melting pot for these cradles of creativity. Its fine sand and alkaline sea plants provided the ideal materials for Roman and Islamic refugees to continue their craft. Traditional Venetian glassware is known as *cristallo*, a type of soda glass modeled after the Roman technique. It used soda ash called *barilla* imported from Spain and employed limited surface ornamentation. Soda glass remains the most common type of commercially manufactured glassware, composed of 72% silica, 15% soda (mineral carbonate), 9% lime, and other materials. Like it's ancestor, the resulting compound is thin and ductile but hardens quickly and must be worked immediately in its molten state. Formal variety and applied decoration are added during this time, with the exception of glass that is painted, carved, engraved, or embossed once cooled.

Unknown Artist (Italian, ca. 1900)
Venetian Glassware Dinner Set
Blown soda glass with gold dust
Gift of Charles Ingham; 1976:17.1-8

Three basic methods are employed in shaping glassware: free-blowing, in which the artist uses a blow-pipe and shapes the object by hand; mold-blowing, which shapes blown-glass in a metal mold; and pressing, an entirely automated process in which melted glass is poured into a mold and fired.

This set of free-blown glassware is finished with a delicate gilded ornamentation. After cooling, the once-fired glass was brushed with a mixture of gold leaf and a fixative, then fired a second time at a low temperature. The stemware features a *baluster* motif, an English-inspired architectural form derived from the balusters of stairways; and small protuberant pads called *prunts*, a German tradition of functional ornamentation that provides traction for greasy (or intoxicated) fingers. The addition of a metallic oxide as a coloring agent adds a complementary rose-gold hue, giving each object an inviting warm glow.

Dinner Plate
Blown soda glass with gold dust
Gift of Charles Ingham;
1976:17.1

Sherbet Glass
Blown soda glass with gold dust
Gift of Charles Ingham;
1976:17.7

Sherbet is a frozen desert traditionally served as a palate-cleanser during multi-course meals or as dessert on simple occasions.

Champagne Glass
Blown soda glass with gold dust
Gift of Charles Ingham; 1976:17.3

Champagne glasses come in five traditional shapes: coupe, tulip, hollow-stem, trumpet, and flute. The wide, shallow bowl of this coupe variety concentrates the effervescent fragrance bouquet less effectively than its narrow-bodied cousins. However, a touch of provocative whimsy offsets the potential disadvantage with a legend that the shape was modeled after Marie Antoinette's breast.

Compote or Fruit Cup
Blown soda glass with gold dust
Gift of Charles Ingham; 1976:17.5

Compotes are stemmed shallow dishes or footed bowls common to both formal and informal meals, primarily used to serve steamed and glacéed (candied) fruit, nuts, chocolates, and other confections.

Compote or Fruit Cup
Blown soda glass with gold dust
Gift of Charles Ingham; 1976:17.8

Wine Glass
Blown soda glass with gold dust
Gift of Charles Ingham; 1976:17.4

Glass is the preferred medium for wine because the acidic liquid can extract a metallic taste from alloyed vessels. Stemware tailored to different types of wine first became popular in the seventeenth century as a luxury item for wealthy diners. Following an expansion of mass production techniques in the eighteenth century, it was embraced as a domestic comfort. Because the flavor of wine deteriorates when exposed to oxygen, only 3-4 ounces of a traditionally 8-12-ounce glass are filled; white is served an ounce less to concentrate the delicate fragrance bouquet.

Water Goblet
Blown soda glass with gold dust
Gift of Charles Ingham; 1976:17.6

The water goblet is traditionally the largest glass at table, a crucial part of any stemware set used in a formal dining service, which includes water as a refreshment between food and wine courses. Informal service may only serve water if the meal includes dishes of a high salt or spice content.

Liqueur Glass
Blown soda glass with gold dust
Gift of Charles Ingham; 1976:17.2

The smallest stemware varieties are reserved for beverages with high alcohol content – dessert wines, cordials, and sweet liqueurs – which are traditionally portioned at just one or two ounces and offered following after-dinner coffee service. As with wine and champagne, the liqueur glass is shaped to balance flavor and scent bouquets. The outward flare of the rim on the glass, for example, ensures a release of fragrance and directs the liqueur to the sweet-sensing taste buds on the tip of tongue