Made to Order

The professional and entertaining style of potter Michael Obranovich

For Michael Obranovich, form follows food.

The Oak Cliff potter handcrafts stoneware pieces that are noted for their beauty of line and delicate coloring. But to Obranovich, a bowl or platter should do more than sit around looking pretty; it should also be useful in the kitchen. And often a design is inspired by a specific dish.

The history of his enchilada tray is a good example.

Obranovich first began making enchiladas five or six years ago, concocting his own recipe for a special chicken-and-spinach filling.

"Enchiladas are so labor intensive that when I made them, I would usually make four or five dozen and freeze some," he says. "But the metal trays I was using couldn't be put in the microwave, and in the summer, I didn't want to use the oven and heat up the house." Also, he notes, the foil trays were not suitable for use as serving pieces, especially when entertaining.

His solution was to design a stoneware tray that could go from freezer to microwave, conventional or convection oven, "anywhere but on top of the stove."

The tray "worked great and looked terrific," Obranovich says, and he and his wife, Claudia, also found it was serviceable for such dishes as baked fish, meat loaf and vegetable casseroles.

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“Everyone thinks making enchiladas is so hard,” says Obranovich. “When they see me do it, they realize it isn’t.”

He gives demonstrations wherever he’s asked — recent ones were at Foley’s and a meeting of ceramic artists. He also spent three days in a Chattanooga, Tenn., art gallery/gourmet cookstore, and he is planning to make a video that can be used by shops selling his stoneware.

The enchilada trays are decorative, but Obranovich notes that the glazed design is “applied in such a way as to not compete with the food.”

They come in three designs: the Santa Fe (shown), which has a desert/mountain motif in pale gold, orange and blue; Blue Sky, with a blue and white pattern; and Desert Rose, in terra cotta and matte white.

Obranovich’s other made-for-food pieces include tortilla dishes, chip and dip trays, sangria pitchers, and chili, bean and salsa bowls. He also made the fajita platters used at Hard Rock Cafe.

Ideas for his designs come from customers at his gallery and people he meets at crafts shows. One woman asked him to make a bowl that would hold a tub of a brand-name margarine; another