



QUESTIONS FOR

## YOTAM OTTOLENGHI

**1. If the FEAST collection could be encapsulated into one of your dishes, which would it be?**

It will have to be the French beans and mangetouts with hazelnut and orange. This is an Ottolenghi classic, published in the first Ottolenghi cookbook in 2008 and often appearing on our menus, mostly during the autumn holidays. It looks as wonderful on a large platter as it does in a small bowl, alongside other vegetables. There is something very honest about the dish, as there is in Ivo's plates.

**2. How did you come to choose Serax as partners for this collection?**

We have always known Serax's reputation as working with the best designers in the world to create a range of stunning homeware items. Looking through their catalogue, you are constantly tempted to dive into the universes of each of these artists. The beauty and the functionality are seamlessly interwoven and that's exactly what we needed for our first homeware range. It was clear to all of us at Ottolenghi that we must have something unusual, contemporary and beautiful, and yet totally usable, as the first official collection of plates to serve our food on. Serax have been absolutely amazing partners - they allowed our creativity complete freedom, trusting that we'll be able to translate the Ottolenghi ethos into beautiful objects, supporting and encouraging along the way; it's been the most pleasurable collaboration.

**3. The FEAST collection is wildly colourful and contemporary. What was the main inspiration behind the collection?**

Working with Ivo, we always knew the collection will have to be a riot of colours, echoing the food we serve, which is always multi-layered and full of contrasts. There isn't one kind of Ottolenghi recipe or dish, just like there isn't one kind of plate in Ivo's collection. Yet there is definitely a thread of intensity and exuberance.

I have always been obsessed with the platters we display our foods on in our delis. Working closely with Ivo to create dishes that suit the food perfectly and make it shine is a dream come true.

#### 4. What is your favorite piece from the collection and why?

I love all the large serving platters: the mere size allows them to really shine, and they are ideal for serving our salads. If I had to choose only one, it would have to be the platter in turquoise with a gold pepper print. Finding just the right shade of turquoise was a challenging task, and we probably had 5 rounds of experiments before we found the right tone, which conveys a perfect combination of happiness and calmness. The gold adds a touch of sheer, hedonistic luxury, but, by taking the abstract shape of a humble vegetable it is anything but corny.

#### 5. You've worked with Ivo Bisignano on the creative elements of the Ottolenghi brand for a long time. What is your working relationship like? Do you ever disagree on how you think something should look? Who takes the reins with new creative endeavours?

Noam Bar, Ottolenghi's co-founder, and I have been working with Ivo for a few years now. Whether it is a functional napkin, a logo for a menu or a wrapping for a Christmas gift, Ivo always comes up with original ideas, full of humour and humanity. Naturally, there are sometimes hot-blooded Mediterranean arguments (Ivo is from Sicily, after all), but somehow we do share a visceral understanding of what the brand stands for and what are the aesthetic values that underpin it. This communal understanding is something that, I know, brings us all a lot of pleasure. By creating this collection Ivo has really managed to expand the visual language of Ottolenghi and reinvent it. We are all totally grateful for that.

#### 6. What was your favorite part of the process of creating FEAST?

Seeing the dishes come to life, gradually, in a way that deeply understands food and how it is presented on a plate was great fun. The first time we actually served food on the dishes of this collection reminded what I have always known: that the way food is presented is as important as its taste; that appreciating food is a holistic experience which involves all the senses.





**7. What were the most challenging aspects of creating FEAST?**

I have to say that it has been a beautifully collaborative and positive process where all sides understood what they have to contribute, when they need to insist and when it is wiser to step back and allow the other to shine. What was difficult was the fact that over half of the design process happened during Covid times, via Zoom: Ivo in Israel, we here in London and Serax in Belgium; there were limited opportunities to touch and feel the pieces. I was really worried - can one design a whole collection virtually? How is it even possible? But we somehow managed, and I don't feel that the collection is in any way far from perfect.

**8. Have the dishes, silverware and table decor at Ottolenghi restaurants always been created in-house? If not, will the FEAST collection adorn the tables of all of your restaurants present and future?**

We did commission quite a few pieces from young ceramics artists here in London, but dishes in restaurants, even with all the care in the world, have a very limited life span, so the collaboration never lasted. The fact that we are now in a position to use our own pieces on a large scale (as well as to share them with the public) is a huge privilege.

**9. The collection looks like it can host every meal of the day - from a casual Israeli breakfast to the most opulent/elegant/sophisticated dinner. How important was it for you to design something so versatile?**

This is what our food is all about. It's "in place" at any time of the day and for any occasion, really. The beauty of all of it is that the dividing line between formal and informal has been completely blurred; you can see what you want to see, both when it comes to the food and the plates. So the same item can function differently, depending on the context or your state of mind. Just like the plates in the range, our harissa potatoes with garlic yoghurt, for example, can be the centre of the most casual supper as they can be a side dish in a glamorous mezze feast featuring elaborate and simple creations, side by side.