

DECEMBER/JANUARY 2021

# TABLEWARE TODAY

THE TABLEWARE SOURCE

THOMSON®  
P O T T E R Y

An elephant is standing in a room with wood-paneled walls and a chandelier. The room is in a state of disarray, with several white chairs overturned on the floor. A small table is also overturned, and a cup and saucer are on the floor. The elephant is looking towards the left side of the frame.

# PSST... THERE'S AN ELEPHANT IN THE ROOM

Let's just admit that we're at the end of an annus horribilis which looks to linger well into 2021.

A global pandemic, natural disasters, economic meltdown, soaring unemployment, racial violence, political turmoil... a bountiful smörgåsbord of doom and gloom.

But just like hope laying crushed at the bottom of Pandora's Box after every evil was unleashed, there's a light at the end of the tunnel. There has to be.

We asked tabletop execs and retailers what shape our industry will be in after the pandemic, what gives them cause for optimism, and what a new normal will look like.



**SAL GABBAY, CEO  
GIBSON OVERSEAS**

The most significant change this year has been the rise of ecommerce. In only a few months, online shopping has been catapulted to levels that would've taken years to reach otherwise. Already, avid online shoppers – as well as people that never shopped online – have adapted quickly to this channel, and the retail industry will never be the same. When the majority of the country was asked to remain at home and dining-out options weren't available, people had to get reacquainted with their pots and pans. Demand for housewares has been strong since shelter-in-place orders began, with the cookware, bakeware, and dinnerware categories experiencing the highest demand. Our team is working to meet demand and get products on customers' shelves quickly. Gibson's ability to shift gears quickly and adapt to circumstances has always been our strength and the foundation of our optimism. No matter what's going on in the world, it's what has allowed us to support our retail partners for over 40 years and I'm optimistic that our willingness to adapt and pivot will get us through any challenges the future brings. This experience has been a lesson for us all – understanding consumer needs has proven to be extremely valuable during these uncertain times. The new normal is simple; it means that successful industries and companies must connect to their audiences in more meaningful ways and meet their specific needs like never before.



**CHRIS COLLINS, PRESIDENT  
ARTE ITALICA**

Wholesalers and retailers have been forced to conduct business in a very different manner. Many of these changes are things that have been discussed and toyed with for years; however, now, they've had to be employed to survive. There will be far more on-line and virtual relationship building vs. trade show and/or in-person interaction. We executed a merger with a great complementary company, Crown Linen Designs, during these crazy times. The pause button on business-as-usual allowed us to focus on the transition and build a business model that we could allow to mature at a strategic pace and come out on the other side a very strong combined company. Consumers are far more focused on their home and creating a beautiful environment which will help fuel purchases in the home category.

**People received a once-in-a-lifetime wake-up call that will contribute to a greater desire for entertainment, nice products, and the small things that make people happy. This should result in a greater demand for our industry offerings for the first time in a very long time.**

The changes that have been coming along slowly for years are now the new normal. Virtual and online relationships will be the primary path that wholesale will need to take to build business with the retail population. Wholesalers and retailers who were reluctant to move in this direction have become very comfortable with this approach; those who do most effectively will be the winners.



**DOROTHY BELSHAW, CHIEF CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE AND MARKETING OFFICER.  
INTERNATIONAL MARKET CENTER**

All members of our industry will have to adapt to support a channel-agnostic environment. The pandemic has accelerated and amplified the need to meet buyers where they are and give them the ability to discover, source, buy, and replenish when, where, and how is most comfortable and efficient. Whether at markets or shows, on the road, on a website or digital marketplace, buyers will expect a frictionless buying experience. Manufacturers, reps, and market producers must prepare to service those needs. We had to really listen to our customers and understand the immediate impact of business closures and figure out how we could support them most effectively.

We had to mobilize quickly to develop thorough and extensive safety protocols for reopening to support recovery. **WE HAD TO RETHINK THE FORMAT AND ROLE OF MARKETS SO THAT VENDORS AND BUYERS THAT WANTED FACE-TO-FACE OPPORTUNITIES COULD ENGAGE SAFELY AND PRODUCTIVELY. THERE WERE NO CLEAR RIGHT ANSWERS, BUT WE MADE THE BEST DECISIONS WE COULD WITH A FOCUS ON ADAPTABILITY AND OPTIONALITY. IT'S BEEN A HUMBLING EXPERIENCE, BUT ONE THAT HAS RECONNECTED US WITH OUR CUSTOMERS AND FORCED US TO THINK DIFFERENTLY ABOUT OUR BUSINESS.** This is a resilient business – loaded with entrepreneurial spirit, creativity, grit, and determination. Gifts, tableware, barware, housewares, and home furnishings are the mainstays of family, gatherings, and community; they deliver beauty and comfort. These products and the people that make and sell them will fuel recovery. Collaboration, transparency, and agility will be essential as we navigate the next 18 months and develop new strategies to thrive in a channel-agnostic, always-on, and customer-centric world.



**MOSEN ASGARI, PARTNER  
TTU**

The most significant change will be in the retail landscape as customers are less likely to do in-person browsing. The greatest impact to us has been the elimination of trade shows, which has been the place to gather vital information about our products and exchange ideas in the industry. As with any other crisis in history, this pandemic will come to an end and we will start our normal lives again. The new normal is limited personal interactions and more remote meetings.



**MORGAN THOMPSON, V.P. SALES AND  
MARKETING – DAUM HAVILAND USA**

The most significant change in 2021 will be the regularity of virtual presentations, trade shows, and meetings. But thanks to the increase in home décor sales during the pandemic, our sales have increased and there's a higher appreciation for bringing beauty into the home. **THE INDUSTRY IS DOING A GREAT JOB ADJUSTING TO THE NEW NORMAL WHEN IT COMES TO SHARING PRODUCT INFORMATION WITH CUSTOMERS AND POTENTIAL CUSTOMERS.** With virtual tours, social media, and online marketing, we've been able to reach old and new collectors. Most of our team is working from home; we go to our showroom when needed.