

DESIGN

SNEAK PEEK

It's uncomplicated



Alessi

Comparing dresses with dishes might not be the most obvious metaphor, but in describing his studio's forthcoming *Ovale* dinnerware collection, Ronan Bouroulec summed it up perfectly. "It has an elegance and delicacy," he said, "but is still easy to wear."

Indeed, for top designers such as Bouroulec and his brother Erwan, that is the challenge: crafting beauty and sophistication in a time ruled by practicality. When the worldwide economic crisis began to deepen more than two years ago, the legendary Italian accessories firm Alessi approached the Bouroulecs with a very specific question: Could you create table service that incorporated stainless steel from a local factory where hundreds of workers had lost their jobs?

The Bouroulecs said yes, knowing full well that their task was further complicated by the fact that their client was best known for whimsical, often humorous pieces. Whimsy and lightness in such dark economic times?

The brothers found their answer in simplicity: a range of objects that are effortless in beauty and uncomplicated in spirit. "We wanted to do something for everyday, something you could use for your breakfast — rustic," Ronan said by phone from the Bouroulecs' studio in Paris.

Ceramic plates, bowls, cups and lidded containers (\$14 to \$85 apiece) bear gentle curves and ever-so-slightly asymmetric forms. Stainless steel pieces (\$112 to \$275) are double-walled, with an air pocket acting as insulation to keep soup warm and ice cold. Together, they form an elegant yet pragmatic collection premiering at industry shows this month and landing in stores and online this fall.

What's next? The designers will have a retrospective of their work in fall 2011 at the Centre Pompidou in Paris, as well as a bevy of projects that include a sailboat for mass production. "I am — we are — fascinated by objects," Ronan said. As their fame spreads, commissions roll in and long days end with phone interviews from editors half a world away, he added with a laugh: "I have to admit, I don't like appointments. I'd rather just spend hours and hours just drawing objects. It's my joy."

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