



# White Gold

Creating each porcelain object with respect, Hering Berlin has carved a place in the tableware market through expressive shapes and experiential designs.

Words: Kristofer Thomas • Photography: Courtesy of Hering Berlin

When Stefanie Hering, founder and CEO of porcelain manufacturer Hering Berlin, relocated to the German capital in 1992, she sought a community of open-minded people and a city quite literally without borders. “I’m a very receptive thinker, and I felt I needed to work in that kind of society,” she explains. “Back then Berlin was the place to be, and it felt as if you could create anything you wanted.”

Twenty-six years on, we are sitting in her office drinking tea served in a cup from the brand’s expansive Pulse collection and discussing the driving forces behind her studio’s success. “We are functional but highly emotional,” she offers. “It is craftsmanship for the 21<sup>st</sup> century, through all stages of production, with respect from the moment it’s sketched until the moment someone uses it.”

A few doors down from the Potsdamer Straße office is the brand’s former pop-up gallery and

now permanent showroom, from which Hering has exhibited her work since November 2017 while hosting open-house visual art, craft and music events alongside. Perhaps it’s unusual for a luxury tableware brand to explore the medium’s relationship with hypnotic techno, but this approach hints at a wider theme that characterises the work Hering Berlin produces. Part-way through our conversation, she raises the concept of ‘gesamtkunstwerk’, a German phrase conveying the idea that everything ties into a total work of art, the designs, shapes, events and ideas all extending from the same core. The porcelain cups we drink from may give guests something physical to touch, but the experiences surrounding it are of equal importance.

“I think the emotional aspect is particularly important, because the minute you touch people in that experiential way you can have them asking why they’d ever want to use anything else,” she notes.



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Cutting her teeth as a trained porcelain craftswoman before pursuing a master’s degree and studying design, Hering was drawn to the material for its expressive natural qualities. Working predominantly with bisque porcelain – unglazed and with distinctive textures – she admires its resilience and sustainability as well as the aesthetic opportunities that it affords. She embarked on her “one-woman-show” in 1992 and now counts luxury restaurants, private connoisseurs and leading hotels including One & Only Bahrain, W Hotel, Seoul and Hamburg’s The Fontenay among her clients. “All in all, it’s been 35 years of passion,” she muses. “For me, the focus has always been on the material and how it works. It’s necessary that there is a respect for it and the craft involved.”

Since the beginning, respect has been the central philosophy around which Hering Berlin orbits, in the context of both design and approach. From the all-white Pulse collection to the light transmissive pattern of Cielo, the white canvas against which designs are added often takes centre stage. “I do not want to cover it,” Hering explains. “I want to show the beauty of the earth.” Likewise, having grown up eating the fresh produce from her grandfather’s farm, she appreciates the work that goes into making good food, and translates this into tableware that both reflects and respects the skill involved.

Where the additions to the canvas may seem deliberately simple and pointed – just a few dots of gold grace each piece in the Orbit collection – the shapes and profiles of the tableware are the product of both practical and cultural research. The cups we drink from have no handles, an interpretation of eastern drinking culture, while saucers in the Pulse range feature a slightly thinner and taller base so that when the cups are placed down they collectively resemble a flower in blossom. Elsewhere, the Granat collection’s carafe rises to the sky as a cresting wave, while Silent Iron takes an innovative approach that sees refined painting techniques applied to iconic shapes.

Each object is the result of a method that eschews moulds in favour of hand-shaped creation and physical connection to the material, to experience how it holds, functions and feels on the table and in use. “It should be immediately clear through the design that every object is made entirely by hand to create the emotional effect,” she states. “This is real, mindful luxury.”

This respect extends to those she creates for; her list of clients

includes some 260 Michelin-starred chefs and hotels across the globe. The hotel market is of particular interest for the range of environments and scenarios that it produces, wherein, Hering interprets, her studio provides solutions as opposed to designs. “Here there is a dramaturgy to create on the table,” she adds. From her perspective, hotel chefs must consider narrative flow and spectacle, how the experience builds from plating to service and finally the dish itself. Tableware is an essential catalyst throughout, which all links back to the idea of *gesamtkunstwerk*. “It’s not just making an object,” she says, “it’s a language and a world; it has to be precise and beautiful in every detail. The guest has given their time and money to be there. It’s their evening, and we want to do that justice.”

All this feeds back into a key tenet of her work and portfolio: dialogue. Be that travelling to other countries to experience new dining cultures, or fielding calls from clients requesting consultancy on which kind of vessel would best suit a specific tone, the dialogues at the heart of the collections see them absorb ideas from disparate sources. “They are chefs, and they know exactly what to do, but I’m a designer as well as an entrepreneur and I also know the same,” Hering explains. “It’s in the dialogue between us that something new emerges.”

However, for all this inspiration, she often sees a universal element to her work, adding: “My shapes are sophisticated and international, we can create trays for sushi or plates for chicken but the chefs will use them differently from region to region. It’s fascinating to see.”

Rather than launching new ranges every season or muddying the portfolio with filler, the method so far has been to build new solutions and ideas into the existing dozen core ranges. Working this way, Hering Berlin has been able to create a wide variety of style-defining shapes, profiles and silhouettes within consistent languages, playing to the market while exploring the possibilities of each collection, contributing further to the emotive aspect of the designs.

In the gallery below – spacious and white, with the porcelain lined up as individual objects on a table through the middle – Hering’s work is laid out like artwork as opposed to traditional tableware sets and scenarios. I notice this, and comment on it as I leave. “We don’t sell dishes,” she concludes with a smile. “We sell beauty and concepts.” ●

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