



A large round platter from Hermès's Passifolia collection, \$1,130; hermes.com.

## Bienvenue to the Jungle

The new botanical tableware service from Hermès is a triumph in both color and technique. *by Sara Lieberman*  
*Photographs by Metz + Racine. Floral designs by Arturo Arita*



**A LEATHERY GREEN** palm leaf here. A delicate pink orchid there. An unfurled fern mingling with a hibiscus somewhere in between. Placing the flora and fauna on each porcelain plate, teacup, and bowl for Hermès's new Passifolia line was a bit like putting a puzzle together, says creative director of tableware Benoît-Pierre Emery. "Each piece must have its own identity, and be able to exist in isolation," he says of the 30-piece collection. "And at

the same time, it has to fit with the rest, and to fit with the rest it must play around with the white empty spaces so that they really go hand in hand."

French artist Nathalie Rolland-Huckel, who has created three collections for Hermès, starting with the orange-hued botanical set named *La Siesta* in 1997, didn't necessarily draw inspiration from one particular climate or locale for *Passifolia*. (The name is a play on the scientific name



of the perennial vine *Passiflora incarnata*, native to the southern U.S.)

Rolland-Huckel took an entire year to create the illustrations used on the tableware set, and in doing so broke a few records. For starters, with hundreds of very pointy paintbrushes, she used 32 colors, which is more than any other prior Hermès collection—there are 15 shades of green alone. (The lauded

*Above:* Creative director Benoît-Pierre Emery and artist Nathalie Rolland-Huckel. *Left:* Large deep round platter, \$1,130, and a small bowl, \$260. *Below:* The making of a teacup in the Limoges region of France.





*Right:* Creamer, \$315, teapot and lid, \$825, and a breakfast cup and saucer, \$370.  
*Below:* A bread-and-butter plate, \$130, and a dessert plate, \$165.



Carnets d'Équateur collection, by comparison, which has realistic illustrations of wildlife such as jaguars perched on a tree limb, uses only 24.)

The multistep chromolithography process was made even more demanding by the addition of decorated elements that extend to the inside of certain items, such as teacups. As a result, it took artisans in three different factories more than 2,000 hours to engrave each petal, leaf, and stem into the white porcelain, which is produced in Limoges. They even invented a new tool to more easily apply the pattern inside hard-to-reach curves and lips.

The result is an exuberant jungle explosion. “We wanted to find the spirit of tropical nature,” Emery says. “I have always felt that showing the beauty of nature is showing its fragile side and making us more attentive to it,” says Rolland-Huckel, who lives and works near Strasbourg.

The whole point, of course, is to use these pieces for serving an array of other shapes, colors, and textures—albeit edible ones, bringing us back to that puzzle. Deciding what to place where was deliberate but also coincidental. The designers chose to feature one lone leaf on the

dinner plates, for example, to present food in a “calm” way, Emery says.

Yet they realized afterward that it’s actually a “wonderful echo of many cultures,” he says, because in parts of the world people eat straight out of a leaf. To highlight the convergence of real versus faux, Emery suggests dressing the table with a dark cloth for drama and accenting it with complementary exotic flowers, such as birds-of-paradise and lone orchids, for a trompe l’oeil effect. “You can add to the extravagance in a way,” he says. “It can be quite amusing, as if it were a tropical invasion.”