

HAMPTONS



Martha Stewart

Celebrates the holidays at her East Hampton home

Toni Ross in front of the memorable Eric Fischl mural at Nick & Toni's

Superlatives

PEOPLE, CULTURE, STYLE

SECRETS OF SUCCESS

a new medium

TONI ROSS DEBUTS A COLLECTION OF SCULPTED STONEWARE DESTINED TO BE AS COVETED AS A RESERVATION AT HER FAMED NAMESAKE RESTAURANT. BY CARRIE DOYLE KARASYOV

PHOTOGRAPHY BY ERIC STRIFFLER

“I’m really attracted to simplicity and the quiet power of the forms,” explains Toni Ross, cofounder of four of the Hamptons’ most beloved restaurants: Nick & Toni’s, Rowdy Hall, La Fondita, and Townline BBQ. She moves about her sun-drenched studio in Wainscott, pointing out her latest works of East Asian wedged coil-built stoneware. “Some artists work more conceptually, but not me. I’m very intuitive about what I do. Somehow the collective memory leads me there.”

Her current work, which will debut at Manhattan’s Ricco Maresca Gallery on November 17, is a rich collection of hand-built sculptures that play with linearity and form, a “hybrid of the ancient and the industrial,” says gallery owner Frank Maresca. For Ross’s first New York City show, which was two years in the making, 20 works will be on display, as well as one installation that contains 40 pieces. Ross cites Cycladic art as a large but chance influence on this collection, stemming from a visit to the Getty

Museum. It was only after she completed the first few pieces that she realized how much the genre resonated with her.

Indeed, it is impossible not to see the artist in her work. Like Ross herself, the stoneware is graceful and elegant, with an understated complexity. “She is one of the most remarkable people I’ve ever met,” says Maresca. “She’s completely, totally, and unequivocally without pretense. I’ve known her since she was a young woman. My partner and I were at a party at her father Steve Ross [former Time Warner CEO] and his wife Courtney’s house, and there was some work there that caught our eye. When we found out they were Toni’s, we were really surprised. From that moment on, we have followed her, interested in what she was up to and watching her grow. Nine months ago, we went to her studio and saw this sculptural army standing erect, and it was immediately clear to us that Toni had reached a point where the show that had been brewing in our mind for 25 years had come.”

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SECRETS OF SUCCESS

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Although today Ross is best known for her restaurants, she was an artist long before she was a restaurateur. After studying ceramics and film at Wesleyan University, Ross was inspired by Elaine de Kooning, wife of famed artist Willem de Kooning and a painter in her own right, to move to East Hampton to pursue her art. De Kooning mentored Ross and brought her into a drawing group that included renowned artists Connie Fox and Mercedes Matter.

After working with de Kooning, Ross went on a solo trip to Italy for several months to draw, frequent museums, and learn Italian. Just before returning to the States, she stopped by a Carrara marble quarry to see where Michelangelo had

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culled his stone. It was there she met Jeff Salaway, who was buying stone with a group of artists. Love bloomed, and Ross stayed in Italy for another year. When they returned, Ross and Salaway found work in restaurants before they decided to become their own bosses and

open Nick & Toni's, where Ross embarked on a career as a pastry chef. The couple had two children and began an empire that remains wildly successful and has birthed a Manhattan offshoot. (Tragically, Salaway, a larger-than-life figure adored by so many, died in a car crash in 2001.)

More than a decade ago, Ross changed mediums, and pastry gave way to clay. “I like texture, leaving remnants and the imprints of my hand on a piece,” she says. Fittingly, it is at Nick & Toni's that both of Ross's passions harmoniously combine. Ross and Salaway had begun collecting works like stone dogs, lions' heads, and those of Bill Traylor early in their marriage. As their collection grew, they decided to install the works at the restaurant, knowing they would be spending more time there than at home. One night, when local artists Eric Fischl and April Gornick were dining, Salaway broached the idea of Fischl creating a mosaic on the face of the wood-burning oven. “To our enormous pleasure, he said yes,” says Ross.

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Nick & Toni's regularly rotates a wall of art courtesy of the Ricco Maresca Gallery, and it was Ross's idea to include drawings by Justin Canha, the 21-year-old autistic talent recently featured in *The New York Times*. “I think his work has completed the room in a way that is powerfully beautiful,” says Ross. Interestingly, Ross's own work is not on display—because, as the proprietor says, “anything that is not nailed down is at risk of disappearing in the most surprising ways.” *Ricco Maresca Gallery, 529 W. 20th St., 212-627-4819, NYC; riccomaresca.com H*

Ross's *Triad* (2011), a trio of Shino glazed stoneware



Ross always works in front of a mirror, she says, “to see both sides at once and to get perspective.”

ON DISPLAY

These other East End exhibits are not to be missed.

American Portraits: Treasures from the Parrish Art Museum

This six-week exhibit reveals some of the finest examples of portraiture in the Parrish Art Museum's collection.

Included are some 45 works in a variety of mediums by different artists, including William Merritt Chase, Richard Avedon, Chuck Close, and Robert De Niro.

When: Through November 27

Where: Parrish Art Museum, 25 Jobs Lane, Southampton

Contact: parrishart.org

SCC Winter Exhibition: Artists from the East End

Local talents in painting, print, drawing, and sculpture, both past and present, are displayed; see works by the likes of Elaine de Kooning, Priscilla Bowden, Ronald Stein, and Jack Youngerman.

When: December 1 to January 17, 2012

Where: Southampton Cultural Center, Levitas Center for the Arts, 25 Pond Lane, Southampton

Contact: southamptonculturalcenter.org

Holiday Salon

A group exhibition that coincides with the Marders Annual Open House.

When: November 26 to December 22

Where: Silas Marder Gallery, 120 Snake Hollow Road, Bridgehampton

Contact: silasmarder.com



This sandpaper is affixed to the counter to aid in leveling the bottoms of Ross's sculpture.



The tools of the trade

