

CHILD'S PLAY

by Cynthia Ward Vesey

For the designers at decorative accessory company FRED, being in touch with their inner child is an important part of their job.

"We are all completely immature, which seems to help a great deal," said Jason Amendolara, design director at FRED, a division of Cumberland, RI-based Easy Aces Inc. "When I'm at the dinner table, I'm constantly fidgeting with whatever is around me: silverware, shakers, anything. I think this 'playing with your food' mentality is what FRED is all about."

The FRED line, featuring decorative accessories for the table, kitchen and office, was first introduced at the New York International Gift Fair in January 2005. FRED's parent company, Easy Aces, has been in business since the late 1970s.

The owner of Easy Aces, Fred Roses, started with fun enamel pins and novelty jewelry. Throughout the 80s, the line evolved into humorous seasonal novelties and miscellaneous toys and giftware. In the early 90s, the company launched the Club Earth toy line.

Although the designers at FRED were new to creating tabletop and kitchenware products, they approached home accessories in the same way they approach designing children's toys.

"We have been creating toys for the specialty toy market under the Club Earth name for the last 15 years," noted Amendolara, who has been with Easy Aces for more than 12 years. "The addition of the FRED line [gave us] an opportunity to bring the same light-hearted attitude to products for the home."

He continued, "I'm drawn to the work that the European designers have created for their markets in the past. The Europeans get it—the irony, the humor and the sarcasm. I think the U.S. market is starting to embrace these types of products."

The company focuses on creating tableware and kitchenware items that are unexpected and often reminiscent of childhood. The unique product line features designs with a fun twist, including the Salt & Playtime salt-and-pepper shakers shaped like alphabet blocks; the FRED-o-Matic whirling kitchen timer; Hotheads potholders, shaped like different critters; Dinnersaurs silicone utensils, which channel prehistoric creatures; and Wiggli trivets, which feature caterpillars.

"In many cases, we're making items you already use in your daily life a little more fun or interesting," said Amendolara. "There are a lot of wonderful, smart products out there that serve more as art pieces, and their price tags reflect that. We try to present clever products that are a little more accessible."

The line is designed to foster interaction between the consumers and the products, and serve as conversation pieces. "The tabletop and kitchen items are based on play and interaction," explained Amendolara. "Interaction with the items themselves, as well as interaction [between people] at the table. Our products ask to be shared with others."

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