1. Cabbage cheese tray, $135; bordallo pinheiro.com.
2. Alberto Pinto **Potager dinner plate,** $326; mary mahoney.com.
3. La Galine **vegetable knife rests,** $19 each; theedition94.com.

You Say Tomato...

...designer **Michael Devine** says setting the table with produce—real or replica—signals summer is just around the bend. Here, a taste of the healthy obsession that has delighted designers for decades.

←LONDON'S EPIC PRODUCE AISLE
Gold-medal growers **Medwyn's of Anglesey's display** at the RHS Chelsea Flower Show is arranged like a colorful chorus line of spring harvest stars, from leggy carrots to troupes of kohlrabi.

IN-STALK FLORALS ↓
Eric Goujou of Paris pottery boutique La Tuile à Loup cloaks a **vase in green and white asparagus,** secures them with twine, and adds anemones, daffodils, and Muscari.

↑ CAPO DI MONTE TRIBUTE
Using his garden's veggies, designer and author Michael Devine crafts **vegetable topiary trees** in the spirit of the classic Italian ceramics.

PHOTOGRAPHY BY *Pamela Cook*
PRODUCED BY *Dayle Wood*
WRITTEN BY *Michael Devine*

PRODUCE DISPLAY, RHS/GEORGI MABEE; VEGETABLE TREES, MICHAEL D. DEVINE; BUNNY MELLON CABBAGE CHEESE TRAY COURTESY SOTHEBY'S; ARRANGEMENT COURTESY OF LA TUILE À LOUP.

LIKE SO MANY OF THE THINGS I HOLD DEAR, I first discovered the artistic potential of the humble vegetable while I studied in Paris. It was during my Renaissance art course at École du Louvre that I became acquainted with the fantastical works of Giuseppe Arcimboldo. His portraits of the seasons were remarkable in their renderings of vegetables and incredibly expressive—the hands of autumn made from turnips, with their astounding life and elegance, rival any of the great masters. I had also begun to explore the wonders of the topiary. The French, I was quickly learning, have a knack with secateurs, no doubt an inheritance from the great Baroque garden designer André Le Nôtre. In his magical Parc de Sceaux, for instance, the vertical geometric forms add both lightness and a third dimension to the exacting linear designs of the garden.

As I started working with vegetable topiaries myself, particularly as table centerpieces, I found the range and depth of color fascinating: the ombre spectrum of greens in Brussels sprouts; the Milan turnip's blushing shades of purple; the clear, pure red of the humble radish (to say nothing of the rainbow parades that came with heirloom carrots and eggplants). It was like opening a Pandora's box of options to the clever and experimental. Building these into amusing squat cones and double-tiered towers was like developing characters, each bringing their own surprises and peccadillos to dinner guests.

Their trompe l'oeil likenesses have been around for centuries—further proof that Arcimboldo was onto something. In studying the interiors of Nancy Lancaster and John Fowler, I spotted little ceramic displays of garden produce on side tables and mantels and, of course, dinner tables. Valentino, Bunny Mellon, and Brooke Astor, too, coveted these as decoration, and today, contemporary makers like Le Cabinet de Porcelaine, Vladimir Kanevsky, and Dodie Thayer are keeping the art alive for a new generation of garden disciples.

For me, they represent one more way to welcome the garden inside. In the depths of a bleak winter, there is something very cheering about a dinner table loaded with vibrant replicas of peas, lettuce, and asparagus. A sure sign that summer is around the bend or, in spirit, already here. ✦

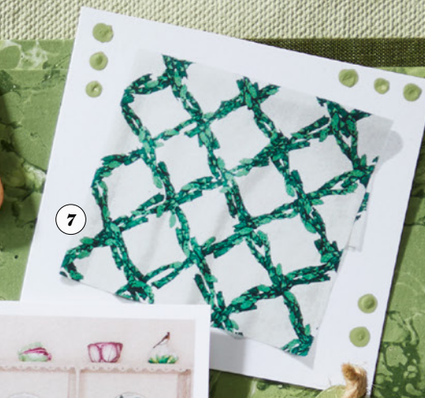
BETTER THAN TAFFETA ↑ Devine's **miniature eggplant tower** resembles a lavish, layered ball gown skirt with its tumbling purple tiers.

STAR POWER BY THE BUNCH → A miniature **Limoges porcelain asparagus box** from Mario Buatta's estate. $300; eerdmansnewyork.com.

L'ART DES LEGUMES ↘ Floral visionary Cathy Graham's **herbarium-style table design** turns radishes, okra, gherkins, and other tiny growers into a three-dimensional textile pattern.

PURPLE DISPLAY: MICHAEL D. DEVINE; CATHY GRAHAM: QUENTIN BACON.

PEAPODS AS EYELIDS ← **Vertumnus,** the surrealist work of Renaissance painter Giuseppe Arcimboldo, who constructed portraits of nobility almost entirely of fruits and vegetables.



BUNNY MELLON'S OTHER GARDEN ← The legendary horticulturalist collected **rare botanical and vegetable porcelain** in earnest, including many pieces by celebrated makers like Chelsea and Meissen.

RAREFIED RADISHES ↑ A pair of Mellon's **trompe l'oeil Strasbourg plates** from the prized Paul Hannong era (1750–1754) sold for more than $10,000 at auction in 2014.

CRUCIFEROUS MAGNIFICUS ↓ For a summer luncheon table, Goujou wraps a bundled arrangement of lisianthus, *Scabiosa*, and Queen Anne's lace with layers of **cabbage leaves.**

BUNNY MELLON'S OTHER GARDEN: CABBAGE TUREEN, AND RADISHES: COURTESY OF THEBY'S; ARRANGEMENT COURTESY OF LA TUILE À LOUP.

1. Penkridge **porcelain asparagus,** $535; johnderian.com. **2.** Limoges **vegetable dinner plate,** $356; aubainmarie.fr. **3.** Tomato **tureen,** $138; bordallopinheiro.com. **4 and 6.** La Galine **vegetable knife rests,** $19 each; theedition94.com. **5.** Cabbage **tureen,** $10,500; vladimircollection.com. **7.** Asperges **tablecloth,** $375; reedsmythe.com. **8. Marbleized paper portfolio,** $110; parvumopus.com.