



A Feast for the Eyes

Toburen creates her tables while listening to classic rock, and names each table in honor of a song or artist. Her Harvest table (left and below) is named in honor of Neil Young.

Phyllis Toburen's Tabletops are Off the Wall

WHILE PHYLLIS TOBUREN'S BEAUTIFUL dining room tables are made of acrylic on glass, her artistic fearlessness can be traced back to another medium entirely — a tangerine-colored mini-dress that she crocheted while attending UW-Madison during the late '60s. That dress would launch her career as a couture fashion designer. Jessi Colter, Waylon Jennings' wife, bought a dress and Lynda Bird Johnson Robb picked one up, too.

"I figured if I could sell knitwear to body-conscious women I could do anything," says Toburen. Her extraordinarily lovely tables are a natural extension of the large, wall-hung paintings she'd been doing for years (20 are on display at Palms Bistro & Bar in the Third Ward). "All I had to do was put legs on them," she says. The tabletops are matched with vintage bases, which Toburen acquires from antique shops.

"I start with a medium and I pigment it," Toburen explains. "All the colors become my own. Once I place them on the glass, I don't use any heat and they show me what

they are going to do. It's often layer upon layer. You've got to work really fast and the medium is like working with molasses."

Her tables are perfect for kitchens and entertaining areas of the home, because the coatings are UV-/bacteria-resistant, and spills are easily wiped up.

Now that she's taken her art off the wall and moved it into the middle of the room, Phyllis wants to keep going. "I want to do everything in a room — entire environments," she enthuses, "the paintings, tables, countertops, curtains, doors, partitions, even the wallpaper."

"Art should reflect the soul and personality of the artist," she says, "I'm pretty much a person of free will. I don't pre-plan. I let it happen. I did these by not following the directions."

Phyllis Toburen's art can be viewed at the Fine Furnishings Show on October 3 and 4 at the Harley-Davidson Museum. Her tables are also available for purchase at Cranston, 250 N. Water Street in the Third Ward.

