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Toogood at home,  
with one of her many  
animal skulls.

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# FAYE TOOGOOD'S TRUE NATURE



The London interior designer  
and creator of stunning sets introduces her first  
furniture collection, which resides  
somewhere between the city and the farm

By Catherine Osborne / Portrait by Marius W. Hansen

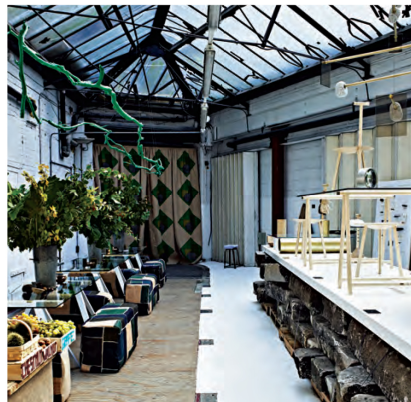
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Toogood staged Super Natural in London last September to vibrantly display her new furniture and hardware collections. The installation included a café that served local cheeses, fruits and nuts. "I want to bring a bit of the countryside to London," she says.

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The Element light, shown  
here in stone, also comes  
in wood and brass.

IT'S THE 2010 LONDON DESIGN FESTIVAL, AND FAYE TOOGOOD is stirring something up. She has transformed a large, dusty garage in the upscale Brompton District into a makeshift exhibit hall with a bustling food market and café. A constant stream of spectators populates the place, curious to see what the interior stylist turned furniture designer is up to. In one corner, women serve visitors hand-baked local breads and farmhouse cheeses, while at the entry a half-dozen or so carts overflow with beds of moss, and mushrooms freshly hand-picked by Mrs. Tee, a renowned 68-year-old forager whose wild fungi (Toogood proudly explains) are coveted by London's top chefs. Every few minutes, the damp mushroom smell mingles with a woody scent concocted especially for the event by Parisian perfumier Francis Kurkdjian, best known as *le nez* for Jean Paul Gaultier.

At the centre of all this sensorial pleasure stands Toogood herself, chatting with visitors as they move through the space and take in the sounds, tastes and smells. Her installation, *Super Natural*, ran for an entire week last September, garnering considerable media attention as one of the festival's

most ambitious events. On the day we meet, she's dressed in a white 1930s petticoat and a loose-fitting military overcoat, a seemingly tossed-together ensemble that contrasts with her ruby red lipstick and pixie cut.

"I love this," she enthuses above the din of chatter. Her boho chic style fits perfectly with the urban farm atmosphere she's created – an elegant mixture of high fashion and Old World charm, a sensibility that has made her one of the most compelling interior designers in the business.

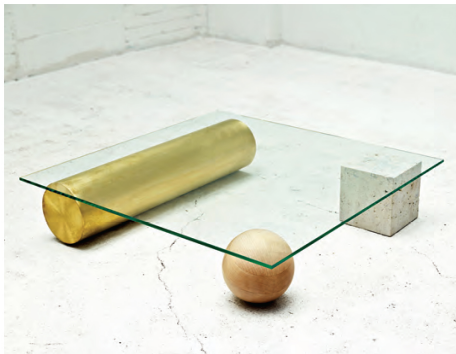
At just 34, she boasts a client list that includes Selfridges, Liberty, The Rug Company, and Tom Dixon, whose first retail store she helped to develop.

But what she's most keen about these days is the main attraction at *Super Natural*: her first line of furniture, whose chair, stool, desk, cabinet, lighting and mobile take centre stage on a platform assembled using loosely stacked granite curbstones. Each piece is fashioned from four basic elements – English sycamore, stone, glass and bronze – and crafted by local stonemasons, carpenters and metalworkers.

Considering her eclectic style, the furnishings are remarkably stripped

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Though Toogood's furniture collection appears ultra-chic, it was inspired by rural life, and uses just four primary material elements: glass, bronze, stone and English sycamore. For a series of doorknobs and coat hooks (right), she made metal casts of rocks and bones she has collected over the years, on walks in the country and along the Thames.



Assemblage 1 consists of nine pieces, including Silo (left), a cabinet with a rounded form and tambour doors.





The Spade chair combines elements of two iconic farm tools: the three-legged milking stool and a spade's T-shaped handle.

Some of Toogood's set designs, including Tom Dixon, Comme des Garçons and a temporary installation called the Hatch.



down and devoid of hardware (they're built using traditional peg joinery). In the Element coffee table, for one, a square sheet of glass rests on three discrete volumes: a brass cylinder, a block of stone and a wooden ball. It looks both contemporary and like a throwback to the '30s and the works of Isamu Noguchi. Other pieces, including a three-legged chair that takes its cues from a barnyard milking stool, seem more akin to Jasper Morrison than to Liberty of London, more Danish than Victorian.

Super Natural has also enabled Toogood to bring something of the English countryside to London. "I think people are going back to basics," she says. A return to nature is a growing trend, of course, but she puts an authentic spin on it. Raised in the countryside, she is right at home intertwining elements of the natural world with urban luxury. "Wellies and lipstick!" she says, summing up the rustic chic aesthetic she shares with Londoners who crave local, artisanal fare over imports.

One evening during the festival, a group of brand planners and strategists working with such companies as Boots, BMW and Marks & Spencer gathered at Super Natural to discuss the trend they have dubbed the Rurban Revolution, and invited Toogood to discuss Super Natural's "rurbanist" styling. While eco-design falls into a similar realm, her intentions are not so much to tap into sustainability as to create a feeling of rural sophistication, part city, part farm. "I wanted to produce a collection that's elegant and simple, really pared down. It's more about beautiful, clean ingredients, as in a good restaurant – no need to mess with natural materials."

Last year, in a variation on rurbanism, she created a series of door fittings for the British hardware company Izé. The suite consists of bronze castings of bones and rocks she has collected on her walks through forests and along the River Thames. She invited Eddie Heathcote of Izé to her home and presented him with a tray of samples, each one labelled with how she pictured them as organic forms that would replace typical, geometric

door furniture. A bone shank could serve as a coat hook, while a smooth rock fits in the hand as a doorknob. Impressed by the concept's simplicity, Heathcote launched the collection four months later.

Toogood's knack for sourcing materials and her compulsion to group unlike things derives from a love of research that harks back to her art history studies at Bristol University, and her stint at *World of Interiors*; when she was 22, the leading British interior design magazine hired her as an intern. "I didn't even know what a stylist was," she recalls, but she certainly learned. In her 10 years there, she rose to the position of senior stylist before opening her own studio in 2008, to branch out beyond creating dreamy sets that lasted no more than a few days. Studio Toogood has since designed interiors, both temporary and permanent, for various creative brands. For a display at Comme des Garçons' flagship store in Tokyo, she took the fashion label's deconstructed plaid – a defining pattern in its 2010 men's collection – and recreated it on stacks of white cubes with coloured electrical tape. At The Rug Company's New York store, she covered the walls with archival images of English houses, then painted them with graffiti. The plan was to eventually turn the murals into tapestries.

Her furniture collection signals her latest evolution, which is both professional and deeply personal: "I started to get involved with people who were creating their own worlds. I realized I wanted to do that, and I hoped people would like it." Beyond fashioning luxury pieces custom tailored to today's rurbanist, she aims to create enduring classics that become just as personal to their owners. "We want to have luxuries, but we don't want what everyone else has. Luxury is being able to order a piece directly from a designer, and talk to him or her about where it came from. It's not about buying something that's a bit of a gimmick and not really caring where it's made. That has no real meaning to me – no soul. I want people to love their furniture." **AZ**

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