

TheObserver

MAGAZINE

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"Faye Toogood Creative Designer," *The Observer Magazine*, November 2010.

FRIEDMAN BENDA 515 W 26TH STREET NEW YORK NY 10001

FRIEDMANBENDA.COM TELEPHONE 212 239 8700 FAX 212 239 8760

INTERIORS

FAYE TOOGOOD CREATIVE DESIGNER

As a child, Faye Toogood was a habitual collector. She grew up in rural Rutland and would go out gathering stones, shells and odd bits of wood and then shut herself away in her bedroom to arrange her finds. "It was kind of obsessive," she says, "and it would drive my mother mad because she was always having to dust it."

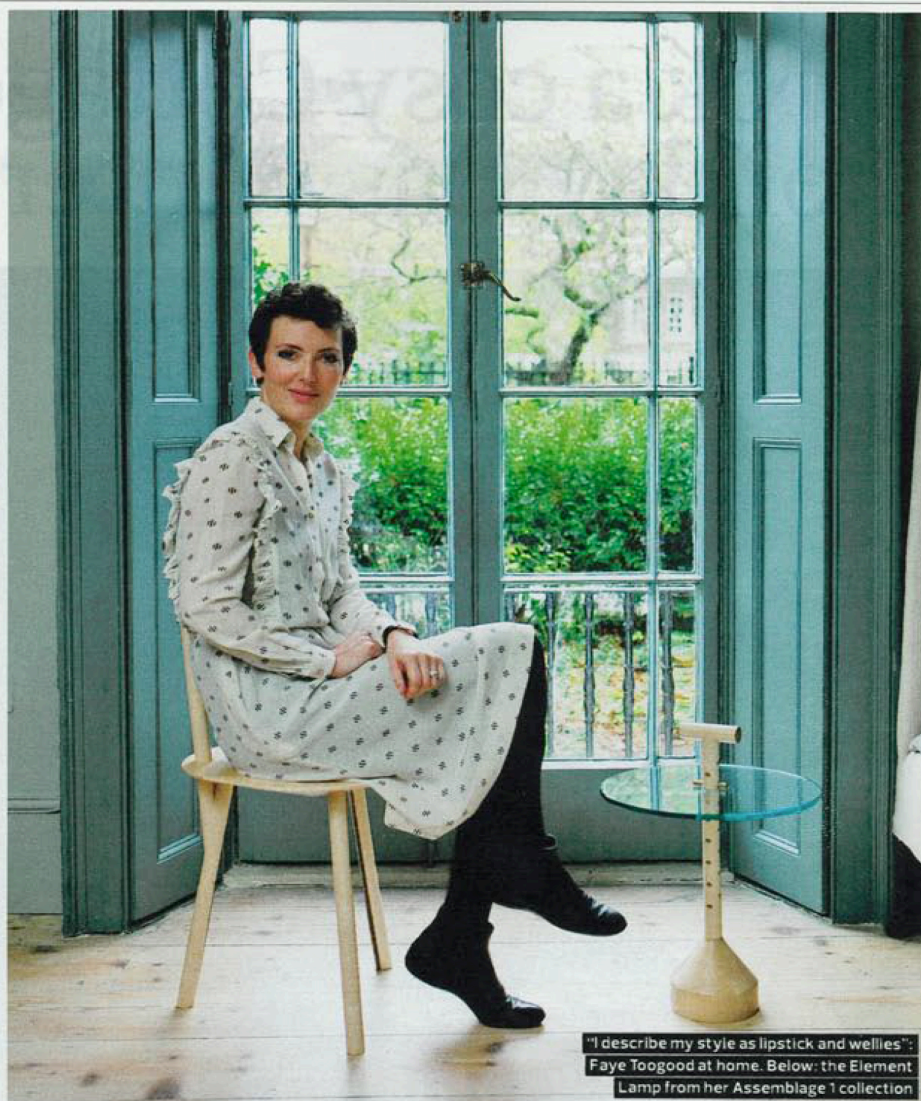
It's a magpie's instinct that Toogood, 33, has turned into a career. Straight out of university, where she studied fine art and art history, she applied for a styling job at *World of Interiors* and turned up at the interview with nothing but a suitcase full of objects that had grabbed her attention and though she had never styled a shoot in her life, she was offered the job. "I was very raw," she says, "but I think they just saw something about my eye."

After almost a decade on *World of Interiors*, Toogood left in 2008 to start up her own creative consultancy, Studio Toogood, based in her own home in north London. Recent projects include fantastical window displays for Liberty, with tattooed mannequins drowning in a sea of textile prints, and the shoe department at Dover Street Market; her company also consults for lighting and furniture designer Tom Dixon. Currently she is working on designs for the Selfridges Hotel, due to open in 2012.

Although Toogood refuses to be pinned down to a signature style, her work demonstrates a love of heritage and craftsmanship and is packed with historical references. Colour is also an important motif. "I had a long blue period," she says, "when everything, including my eye make-up, was blue."

She thinks nothing of mixing her eras and letting things clash. "It's OK to put something from the 18th century together with something orange, plastic and ridiculous. I'm interested in things that are well made, but also in things that make me smile. Perfect good taste bores me."

Toogood can now add furniture-maker to her long list of talents, as in September she launched her own collection, *Assemblage 1*.



"I describe my style as lipstick and wellies":
Faye Toogood at home. Below: the Element
Lamp from her *Assemblage 1* collection

"A lot of stuff in the design world is either really strong and male or very gimmicky," she says. "I wanted to do something that was beautifully made, democratic and that would work with antiques as well as a modern interior."

She shows me two of the chairs. Each has a back based on the handle of a large wooden spade and a brass strip detail running up each leg, just like the seam on the back of a stocking. "That's what turns it into something a little more elegant than just a worthy wooden stool," she says. It's a reflection of her own rural/urban crossover. "I've been trying to think of how to describe it," she says. "The best I can come up with is lipstick and wellies. I'm happy in wellies and high heels, but not much in between."

Toogood works full pelt from 6am to 7.30pm, when she stops to have dinner



with her husband, before getting back on her laptop. "I can't separate my passions from my work," she says. "It's just completely integrated."

Studio Toogood is bursting at the seams. In the past four months the head count has risen from three to eight, with each new staff member – all specialists in sculpture, fine art or architecture – brought in using the same bring-along-a-suitcase-of-stuff-you-like process that got Toogood her first job. The staff squeezes into her house, which is crammed with her collections of Indian alabaster crockery, African azurite, ceramics, photos, rocks and glassware.

"Sometimes I wonder," she says, looking around, "whether I am just one of those old ladies slowly but surely filling up their house with stuff." ■

For details, go to studiotogood.com

PHOTOGRAPH HEGE SÆBJØRNSSEN

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