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The Well-Composed Life of Faye Toogood

By PILAR VILADAS NOV. 15, 2013

The designer Faye Toogood finds exceptional beauty in unexpected arrangements of objects, and uses them to create installations for fashion houses — and her own house.



A Well-Composed Life

Photographs by Henry Bourne. Produced by Rita Konig

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When Faye Toogood was 21, fresh out of college, she showed up for a job interview with Min Hogg, the founding editor and creative force of *The World of Interiors* magazine, with a suitcase in hand. In it was a résumé of sorts — cuttings of favorite fabrics and loose pictures of furniture and art that she admired. Hogg hired her on the spot, and Toogood spent most of the next decade at the magazine, producing witty, inventive still life stories.

The hallmark of Toogood's work was, according to her, "the combination of the unexpected and the theatrical with something tactile or handmade, even painterly." (For one shoot, she styled glamorous dressing tables with wildly overscaled mirrors, lipstick and pearls in the grand but ghostly hotel in the St. Pancras train station, before it was renovated.) She continues to explore unusual juxtapositions today with Studio Toogood, which she started when she left the magazine in 2008, and which designs interiors and also retail spaces, installations and visual materials for brands like *Comme des Garçons*, Alexander McQueen, Opening Ceremony and Tom Dixon. (Toogood also designs her own lines of furniture.)



The multifaceted designer opens her London home, and discusses her affinity for using unusual juxtapositions in her decorating. By Henry Bourne on November 16, 2013.

Toogood's affection for contrasts is clearly at play in the cozy late-Georgian London house she shares with her husband and young daughter. Its small rooms are filled with things antique and modern, fine and flea market, pristine and mended. "I like to combine the precious and the raw," she explains.

Toogood describes herself as an obsessive tinkerer, who can't help but "adapt, meddle or adjust" things, whether it's a look book for a fashion house, the furniture for a pop-up shop or a row of teacups and plates on a shelf at home. For an installation this month at the Hermès store in London, Toogood riffs on the company's iconic Birkins and Kellys by using the negative shapes left behind by

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the artisans after the leather hides are cut to make the bags. For her sitting-room mantelpiece, Toogood arrayed a deer skull, an 18th-century creamware pitcher, carved Indian alabaster vases and gleaming chunks of iron pyrite. “I find a harmony in those objects,” she says. “Of course, when I get a new object, everything has to be rearranged.”

Toogood’s still-life obsession goes back to her childhood in the English countryside, where she would take disparate objects that she’d found outdoors — rocks, birds’ eggs, a piece of broken pottery — and arrange them in her room. She inherited her father’s love of nature, its textures and its contrasts of light and dark. Even now in London, Toogood said, the garden behind her house and the nearby New River, a 17th-century aqueduct, are “my escape.”

Later, at the University of Bristol, Toogood studied art history, where “you scrutinize still lifes and compositions,” and fine arts, honing visual skills that would be nurtured under Hogg’s tutelage at The World of Interiors. Hogg believed, Toogood explains, “that the interior of a 13th-century chapel in Italy, a mud hut in Africa and a squat in East London are all of equal beauty and value. She also taught me things like how important it is to be independent in spirit.”

It was at the magazine that Toogood met her husband, Matt Gibberd, who wrote about architecture and was Toogood’s editor; the two married in 2008. Gibberd went on to co-found the Modern House, a real-estate agency that specializes in Modernist and contemporary houses and apartments in Britain. “Matt grew up in a minimalist environment,” Toogood says. (His father and grandfather were architects.) When she told him she wanted to paint parts of their house a glossy deep blue, he assented, but with reservations. “So we agreed that some rooms should be light,” she says.

When the pair bought their house in Islington about five years ago, it was, she says, “a typical London house: little rooms stacked one on top of the other.” After stripping the wood floors of layers of yellowed varnish and painting the rooms in a moody palette of grays, blues and whites — colors that “remind me of the English landscape,” she said — Toogood filled the house with her idiosyncratic collections of furniture, art and objects. As in all her work, Toogood’s taste in these elements runs toward the clean-lined and minimally adorned, like the 18th-century blue and white slipware dish on the mantelpiece in the back sitting room. “It looks 1950s to me,” she says. “I love things that are really old but look modern.”

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