

an everyday life interiors magazine – issue #08

apartamento

Featuring: Marcelo Krasilcic, Nathalie Du Pasquier, Beda Achermann, Faye Toogood, Rafael de Cardenas, Brian Janusiak and Elizabeth Beer, Pilar Benitez Vibart, Cosimo Bizzarri, Michael Stipe, David John, Victoria Camblin, Julie Cirelli, Thea Slotover, Ben Rivers, Patrick Parrish, Athena Currey, Alexander Heminway, Makoto Orui, Valentine Fillol-Cordier
Plus: everyday life kids supplement with Olaf Breuning, Phillipe Parreno, Javier Mariscal and Mike Meiré



Marco Velardi. "Faye TOOGOOD – The World in a suitcase," *apartamento*, 2011.
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Faye doesn't like titles, she doesn't like to be placed in a box, she would rather put all of us inside her magic suitcase, together with the fantastic world of collections, atmospheres and obsessions she has been dreaming of creating since she was a little girl growing up in the English countryside. A few years ago she decided to leave her position at *The world of interiors*, a job many would have dreamed of. She found herself walking the undiscovered path towards a new life of complete creative freedom, being able to experiment with new disciplines and mediums, which ultimately lead her to design her own furniture collection and envision some truly spellbinding interiors'

FAYE TOOGOOD

The world in a suitcase

INTERVIEW BY MARCO VELARDI
PHOTOGRAPHY BY ROBERTA RIDOLFI

creations. If you have ever been lucky to step into one of them, you surely know the ways she can effortlessly capture all your senses with a wizardry only she is capable of. I have been amongst those lucky ones, and since then I have always waited in excitement to be granted access to the one and only Toogood 'queendom', Faye's home in northeast London. After a year of trying to arrange it, a few dinners, lots of emails and texts messages in between we finally met on a quiet sunny morning to talk about love, storytelling, fears and passions. A truly inebriating experience, I simply felt placed into one of Faye's perfect imperfect's worlds, walking the thin line between reality and pure fantasy, leaving inspired and wondering if it all wasn't set up only for me.

apartamento - London



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Stylist, creative director, designer, storyteller... who really is Faye Toogood?

I'm always getting different labels, which I find quite interesting and I like the fact that nobody quite knows who or what I am, they can't pigeonhole me. I'd probably now describe myself as a designer because I think that's broad enough.

Where did it all start?

Going right back, I was at Bristol University studying history of art and whilst I was there I realised I'd made a huge mistake not studying fine art, so I used my grant to pay to do fine arts at the other university in Bristol, so I did two courses.

At the same time?

Yeah. I never completed the fine arts course, but that basically saved me because I was so depressed not to be doing anything...

Where did you grow up?

I grew up in Rutland, which is the smallest county in England. Quite a bleak area, lots of wind and very flat. My parents were great walkers, we didn't have a television until I was 8 and I spent most of my time outside.

Do you have any siblings?

I have a sister that's five years younger than me. So for five years it was just me in the middle of nowhere. I think growing up in that rural environment has actually really affected me. I've come to realise that over the last two or three years.

When did you move out?

I left when I was 13 and came down south. We went to Winchester, which is an hour away from London and then it all opened up. I think that if we hadn't made that move I would be married to a farmer now.

Did you get along with your sister?

We do now, but we didn't at the time. She is very different to me. She's a fashion pattern cutter, but she's not interested in working in the way that I do. She's quite happy walking her dog and



Above: Faye as a child painting
Below: Sitting on her rocking chair circa 1980

she has completely opposite lifestyle to me.

Maybe you should get a dog too, I can see you with a little dachshund.

[laughs] That's exactly what I want! I just bought a wooden one [laughs] for the studio!

When did you actually visit London for the first time?

When I was 11 we had a day trip to London. It was amazing. I was very frightened by it. But I loved it.

So why did you decide to go to Bristol?

I had a place [a university placement] in London and

I had a place in Bristol and a place up north in Leeds. I was too frightened to come to London, I thought I couldn't handle it so I went to Bristol and I think it was probably a good choice because even Bristol was too big for me at the time.

Why?

Because I knew I had listened to my family to take a theoretic course. Probably in the end it was the right thing and it has helped me in the way that I think about things today.

Do you still write?

No. I don't write at all. I don't write and if I read I only read non-fiction books. It would be interesting to write again. After Bristol University I theorised about art so much. I was just fed up and I wanted to do something else.

So that pushed you to move to London?

Yeah, that was the only way I had to find other people like me. Because I still hadn't at that point. So I moved to Brixton when I was 21 and it was quite frightening.

What sort of job were you looking for?

I was interested in the interiors world. I didn't really know what aspect but I thought I wanted to do interior design, so I did a couple of weeks of work experience at an architect's studio but it was a mistake because everything took too long. The concept was done in a week and then it would take five years to happen and my temperament at the time was

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really impatient. So I thought maybe theater is the direction I should go in. But then I met somebody whose sister worked on a magazine and she said why don't you do some work experience there. So I went to Condé Nast, did two weeks and then they asked me to come back for six months.

Which magazine?

It was *House and Garden*. It really wasn't for me but I had no other option at that point. While I was there I heard about a job at *The world of interiors* and I realised that's what I want to do. I absolutely loved that magazine. It was the only magazine I'd collect when I was student.

So you were also into fashion.

More in the actual objects themselves, I'd end up buying shoes and clothes that I never wore but they were just lovely.

Did you also travel to other places to collect?

No. I never travelled as a child actually. I didn't travel until I was in my early 20s.

So initially art history was your only way to see the world?

Art history taught me how to look, as I was just obsessively collecting images. I'm not into just one period of history or one period of architecture. I'm looking at everything all the time.



Where you already a collector back then?

I've always collected. Always bringing things with me when moving places. But I've got rid of a lot when I met my husband. We got rid of so much stuff.

What kind of things were you collecting?

A lot of found objects because obviously at the time I couldn't really afford to buy expensive things so they were things that I'd found and there was always a special reason for it. Like if I found a really special stone, that was the right shape or the right colour, it would become as valuable as gold. When I started to earn my money as a student I would collect vintage clothes, shoes, bags, textiles...

And then somehow I bring it into my head and it mixes up.

You make your own theory?

Yes, exactly. Somehow I bring it all in and then I can make sense of it in one-way or another.

Is that how you convinced *The world of interiors* to hire you, with a suitcase full of thoughts and beautiful stones. Is the suitcase story I heard a true one?

It's very true! Basically I went to see them about the job, and I said how can I get a job as a stylist? I didn't really know what a stylist was. They said just show me what is in your head. So I got an old suitcase and I put things in it

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that I liked and I drew things and collected others and then I assembled them together to create small still lifes. I guess I did it to show them what I was looking at, and I think they must have seen something in it. So, suddenly I found this place where they shared my ideas, where I was going to grow and where I was going to learn even more. In the end I stayed for eight years.



of what's going on. I was beginning to feel like I wasn't really in touch with people my own age.

How old were you when you left?

I was turning 30.

A bit of a crisis?

A bit of a mid-life crisis. I actually had a burning desire to find my own style. So I left and I

became a vehicle again, but in a different way so that I could start earning money and I was able to work with different types of clients like Tom Dixon. I began working with *Wallpaper** and *Elle Decoration* and a few other ones. It was completely different. Completely different people, different priorities, different ways of working, different budgets and I

You were in the next day?

The next week I got the job. And then it was like shit I didn't know what I was going to do. They sent me on a photo shoot and they said go on, off you go.



Faye's styling work for
The World of Interiors and
Elle Decoration

That must have been a dream come true.

I think there was a realisation when I got the job that I was going to get paid to do something that inherently was automatic and natural to me. But somehow the way I put things together was relevant to other people. And that was a revelation. I don't think I realized before that it was a talent and that I could get a job based on it. Reinterpreting things and showing them in a different way. I learnt how to do that with *The World of Interiors* and how to make it work for the magazine pages. I knew what the editors wanted and I adapted my taste, my thoughts and the things that I was interested in. Then after eight years of doing that I realised I was on automatic and I wasn't looking anymore and I wasn't thinking anymore. I certainly wasn't thinking for myself, and I got very confused about what my taste was because I realised that I was almost a vehicle for the magazine to get pages. So I left.

Was it dramatic?

It was quite an emotional moment.

Did you create the stage for it?

How did I do it? [laughs] I just left.

Were you frightened?

Very frightened because I was going to be on my own. And I thought ok if I'm going to try and do this for other people, I want to get a sense

found it really exciting.

But you were still on your own.

I just had an assistant. I was styling and then it suddenly started to build up. Two years after I left *The World of Interiors* I decided to set the studio up because I realised I was being asked to do things but I needed more people to help me. So it was not just photo shoots. It was consulting on an exhibition, on designing a temporary space and that was the second realization. I could apply my eye not just to a two dimensional image, but to a three dimensional space. And the moment I did that I got very selfish and very greedy because designing a space for someone is like giving a present. You can't wait to see how people's faces react to this space that you have made. It's quite a selfish transaction. Working on magazines you don't get that. You never see someone on the tube looking at your pages. I was slightly left empty working ten years on magazines.

So you craved for interaction.

I wanted interaction with people, I think that's what it was. It's like having a dream and allowing everybody into your dream. And so the spaces became like that. I could let people into my story and maybe they'd understand it on

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time there would be people on laptops everywhere, and upstairs I had six people in what is now going to be our bedroom. Every time he came home there would be girls everywhere making things.

Where do you find the inspiration for your work?

I think my furniture and my objects are different from *Studio Toogood*.

That's your real surname by the way?

Yeah it's my real surname. My father's name, an old English nickname, and I kept it when I married.

That's amazing.

It's a hard name to live up to actually.

I think it's a very interesting one. It fits you well.

Thanks. I think the furniture and the objects are really refined and so pared down, it's me. It's kind of strong and elemental. While *Studio Toogood* allows me to be more frivolous, allows me to change, allows me to use colour and to be more spontaneous. Whereas with the objects, I want them to be permanent. I absolutely love the pure geometry and that's exactly how I wanted my silhouettes to be, really clean and really uncomplicated.

Your systematic positioning of objects is very geometric too.

Yeah quite graphic, even though there's quite a lot of stuff.

Everything is so perfect. Is there a precise order in how you like arrange things?

I don't know what the logic is. It's purely instinct. I don't know why it is the way it is. I just find things that make sense to my eye and they just have to be put in that way and it is a bit of a OCD [Obsessive Compulsive Disorder]. And so for some reason it makes sense for me, even if it looks out of place, it's in place.

Do you spend a lot of time at home?

This is my sanctuary basically.

How long will it take u to complete your home?

I am quick. I mean I'm used to producing and



'Spade Chair / Bronze' by
Faye Toogood for Phillips
de Pury

arranging things quite fast but with my own home, it has to last. There's nothing new in the house, because I got bored of modern design.

Still, there are lots of things in here, art, drawings and photography. Is that yours or Matt's?

It's my stuff, cause he doesn't buy anything on his own.

So do you bring him out at all or your keep him in the house?

No, he is not allowed out

[laughs]. He is the cellar, shall I go get him?

[laughs] Matt is very strong and very precise in what he likes and he has a very refined eye.

I think because he grew up with a grandfather who had an amazing art collection, he likes art very much. I buy a lot myself, but I still try to make sure we buy furniture together.

What's your schedule like?

I'm up at 6am and I don't get back until 8 or 9pm. At the weekend I often work one day. So I'm here at least one day a week, and in the evenings.

You are a workaholic.

I honestly think that Matt is a saint. He does put up with a lot.

What's his rhythm?

He has a nine to six schedule. He cooks a lot. That's how Matt is.

You don't cook?

I don't cook. Matt manages everything. He does the food shopping, because the kitchen is not my area.

Who is going to decide on how the new kitchen will look?

He would be choosing the cooker and the fridge. All the things that he needs to cook with I will...

Style it up.

Yeah, style it up [laughs].

Do you also style up your home with your own furniture?

I try to live with them for a bit, but then it all goes back to the studio.

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How do you see your furniture being sold?

To be very honest with you, when I decided to do the first collection of furniture in my very un-commercial mind, I didn't think about how to sell it. I just wanted to selfishly produce a collection. I designed interiors and there were certain things I couldn't find. So it became a new discipline to express the story telling I was into at the time. I wanted to work with small British producers and craftsmen because I have been lucky enough to handle amazing antiques, and thanks to *The word of interiors* I have been to beautiful houses where the furniture had been there for generations. I have been feeling that currently designers are producing things which

Can you offer a good level of service?

Yeah, you have to wait a bit, but so you should as it has to be made.

So do you fully consider your work as furniture?

Assemblage 3 has taken me into a world I didn't know about. The whole art versus design conversation. I haven't been conscious, I am aware of this, but don't know my direction yet either. I just haven't had a chance to work with a large manufacturer, I am not closing that door, because if someone like Cappellini or Patrizia Moroso would knock on my door, I would love to do something, but at the moment I am happy.



are not there to last. As consumers, we are buying objects and we are throwing them out the next year and we don't care about where they came from. I don't want to change the world, but I am providing an opportunity for people to buy things they could live forever with, and people need to understand that it's going to cost more than a plastic chair that has been mass produced. Now, that was the first collection [*Assemblage 1*], then the second collection [*Assemblage 2*] continued with the same philosophy and then Philippe De Pury asked me to produce a third collection [*Assemblage 3*], in a limited edition. The first two are not limited editions and they sell through me because if I sold it in a shop nobody would be able to afford it, because of the markup.

You seem to have moved on from being a frightened little girl?

I am actually still frightened by the dark.

So how did you manage your presentation in Milan last April, with all that darkness?

That was the point, exposing my fears true my furniture. I made a candle for it, and it was called *Afraid of the Dark* and the whole idea is that you lit it at night and so that it's not dark anymore...

Anything else you are still afraid of?

I am afraid of driving. I can't drive. I am afraid of being on my own.

Even at home?

If I can avoid it...

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