



Country ONE HUNDRED phile

Magazine stylist-turned-designer Faye Toogood has furnished galleries with corn, made chairs out of milking stools and has just released her third collection of pieces inspired by rural England. But don't brand her part of the "British wood pack" - she enjoys exploring the dark side of nature, too

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After collecting things, I have a story to tell, and I find out how that can be translated



“I’m too greedy to do just one thing,” says London-based designer Faye Toogood.

We are sitting in her new studio talking about her debut furniture collection, launched during the London Design Festival last year. Predominantly made of wood, it meant she was “quickly pigeonholed in the British wood pack”. Her second collection – in pewter and black leather – made it clear just how she felt about that.

Indeed, Toogood has no loyalty to any particular material, style or process. “Stylistically, I’m interested in many periods,” she says. “Thirteenth-century churches are as interesting to me as a church that was designed yesterday. There’s no hierarchy.” She also has no desire to build a portfolio of work with her signature stamped on it.

Then again, Toogood is not a trained designer – or even a designer in the traditional sense of the word. A former stylist for *Wallpaper** and *Vogue* and decorations editor at *The World of Interiors*, she is a visual journalist of sorts, exploring topics and trends through imagery. And – like many apprentices of the magazine industry – she has an unquenchable thirst for “newness” and “reinvention” and an eye for what’s hot.

In 2008 she founded Studio Toogood, and

her eccentric 2D layouts exploded into 3D. Commissions for sets for *Comme des Garçons*, *Liberty* and *Burberry* – as well as for installations – soon followed. During 2009’s London Design Festival, Toogood hit the city like a design Viking. At Tom Dixon’s *The Dock* project, she designed a cafe where visitors made their own eggs, an

Top left and above *Stratum Table* and *Bronze Bowl*

adult’s playground made out of giant Formica building blocks – “a bold and positive space” following a “not positive year”. She also designed Tom Dixon’s first permanent showroom – inspired by a stage set – and, across town, invited a group of designers to furnish London-based Gallery Fumi’s space entirely out of corn.

Journeying from one of her creations to the next was like walking through a series of fantastical sets in a magazine. But now she was no longer restricted to paper, Toogood was

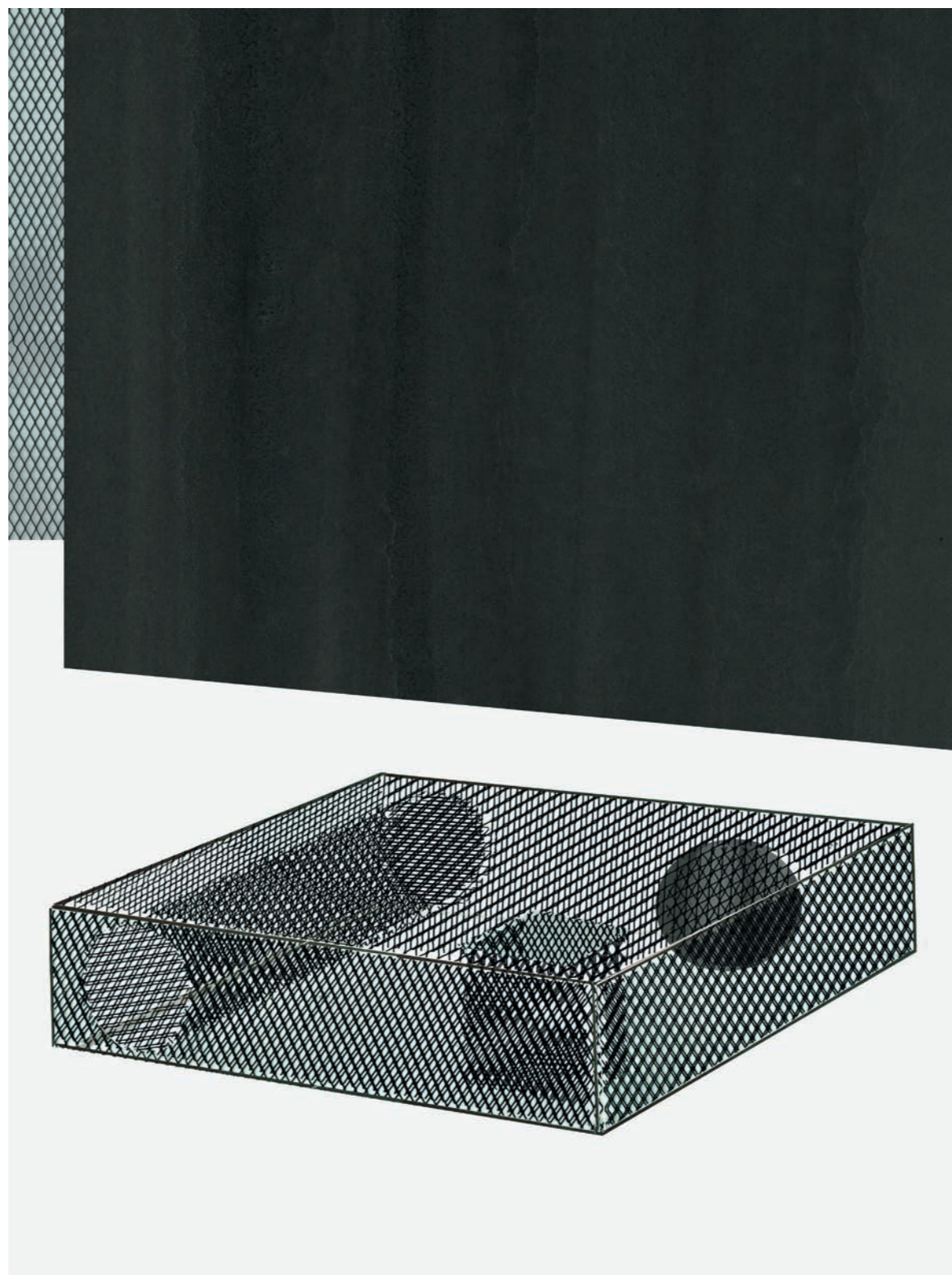
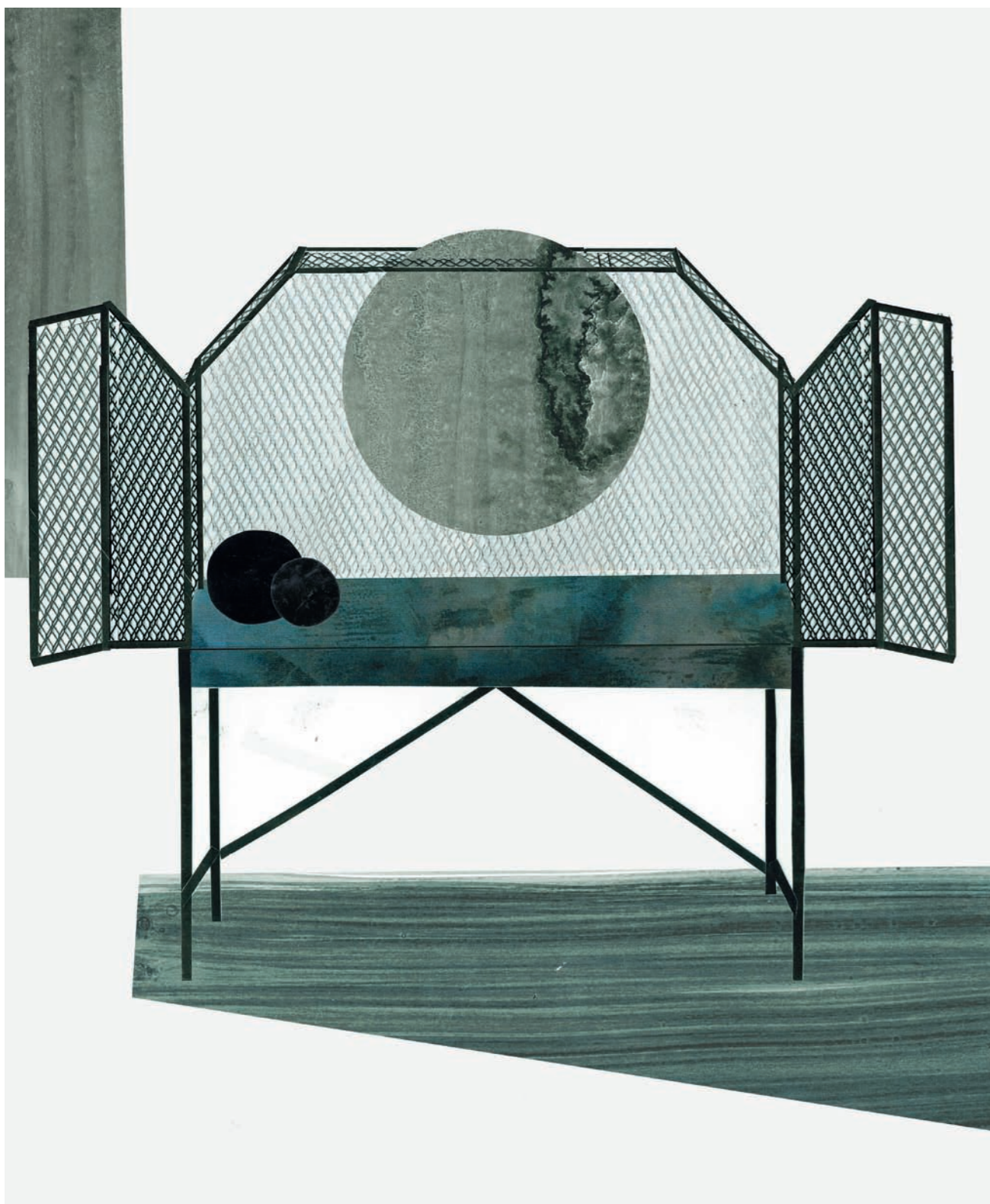
able to launch a full attack on visitors’ senses – you could smell the corn two floors down. “I wanted to affect how people felt,” she says.

Her next goal was to achieve the same effect with objects. Following two acclaimed furniture collections, her third – *Delicate Interference*, which explores iridescence in nature – is currently sitting in auction house Phillips de Pury’s space at Claridge’s.

With all her creative outputs, however, Toogood says her process remains the same. “The way I start designing objects now is the

Above *Super Natural*, a project that explores foraging, observing and collecting from the English countryside

way I’ve always started,” she says. “I get obsessive. I become interested in something, then I start researching it, investigating it and collecting things to do with it. In the end, I have a story I want to tell, and I find out how that can be translated.” In this sense, Toogood’s process is the inverse of most designers. “It starts with an image, then I >



employ the materials and shapes and forms that allow me to build that story.”

Her first collection of wood, brass and stone took foraging, collecting and observing as its starting point. The range includes Spade Chair, with the base of a milking stool and the back of a spade; a wooden and glass trestle table; and Element Table, a glass sheet resting on a brass tube, sycamore sphere and stone cube. Surrounding the objects, during its display, were mini-installations and paraphernalia that helped to tell this story, building up the narrative layer by layer. Toogood cast stones, rocks and bones in brass to make a series of door handles and coat hooks for hardware

company Izé. She also exhibited a series of vintage binocular bags, customised by the studio. Then there were the other senses: the temporary, on-site Brambles Cafe sold delicious wild produce from the English countryside; there were mushrooms foraged by a New Forest expert; even the air was scented with the smell of moss, lichen, tree barks and leaves by an expert perfumer.

For her second show, she

shifted the tone. Toogood kept many forms from the first collection, but executed them in a different material. Rather like the same landscape at different times of day, they made you feel different. This time her Spade Chair was dressed in leather and “became more sexual”, while the Element Table’s elements were replaced by voids, surrounded by clear crystal resin. “For me, that was the moon shining in the dark sky,”

Above (left to right) Dressing Table, Element Table Cage and Element Table Steel

she says. “It was a completely different table, even though the configuration was the same. This show was about the darker side of nature.”

Her iridescent versions of the furniture for Delicate Interference are, perhaps, darker still. Her latest collection sees Toogood use a variety of “pretty toxic” material treatments and “a touch of alchemy” to mimic nature’s ability to trick, attract and adapt. “Birds of paradise and insects use iridescence to attract – but some also use it for protection,” she says. “The Scarab beetle uses it to protect itself and camouflage – get that wrong, and it could be fatal.”

The countryside is where Toogood plucks her narratives from – so it is no surprise



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that she was born in the thick of it. But she has bigger ideas than simply using it for inspiration. “In this country we have always had a great manufacturing legacy and we aren’t embracing it,” she says. “So many craftsmen are going and will go unless we start buying from them.”

All Toogood’s products are made in the UK by craftsmen and artisans of bygone industrial processes. “We have started to do this with food,” she says, referring to the move towards organic and local produce. “People now care about ingredients and buying directly from the farmer – we need to do that with other things.”

Her means, however, are far from old-fashioned: “eBay is my market,” she says. “Through the internet, people can have direct contact with craftsmen and designers, which is a new thing.”

Reviving British crafts is a bold mission and the stumbling block, of course, is cost. That humble wooden chair, for instance, is priced at “close to £1,000”. “It’s an investment,” she agrees. “Hopefully one someone will live with forever.”

For those of us who can’t stretch to that, her shows and installations give us something to enjoy. “I don’t want to be exclusive,” she says. “You can buy into these ideas – it’s accessible to everyone as an experience.” ■