

VITSOE Voice

Issue four

Unravelling the conundrum that is living better with less that lasts longer





What is a home? Your dictionary may describe it as ‘the place where one lives permanently’ – something we have all recently experienced as never before.

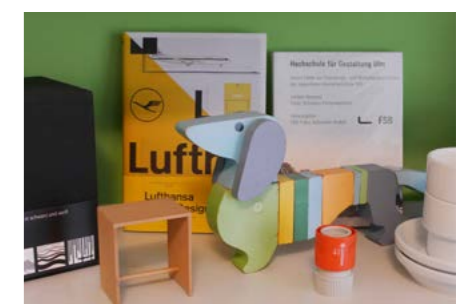
For PJ and Sairom Lee, it is a carefully conceived dwelling, which will determine the way their family learns and behaves. Whilst for John Harris and Camilla Nicholls it is a very special sanctuary, in the knowledge that time together is limited.

Hans-Gerd Grunwald has given everyday objects a carefully curated home. Meanwhile, the City of London is home to the Antiquarian Horological Society, housing their archive and providing a venue for meetings and lectures.

The variety of homes we encounter at Vitsoë never fails to delight and we are grateful to all our customers for sharing, especially those who have kindly allowed us to publish this experience.

Cover and left:
PJ and Sairom Lee;
home, see page 18

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A few steps to tranquillity

Author and journalist
Kassia St Clair is led
down the garden path



Children's author Roald Dahl wrote many of his popular stories in his garden shed in Buckinghamshire. Dylan Thomas penned poetry in a tiny timber hut perched on a cliff above the Welsh Carmarthenshire coastline. Over a period of 20 years, playwright George Bernard-Shaw retreated to his shed in St Albans. Similarly, Virginia Woolf chose to write novels from her potting shed in Sussex, while author Philip Pullman created the entire 'His Dark Materials' trilogy from his shed in Oxford. The list of notable British writers, who have sought the escape and solitude offered by the humble garden shed, goes on.

Which is where we find Kassia St Clair one sunny morning, sitting at her desk, birds singing away in the background and sunlight flooding through the windows, in what she lovingly describes as her 'shed', a garden studio-office created by Oxfordshire-based micro-architecture specialists 3rdSpace. Far from a traditional garden structure, this is a clean, modern, purpose-built construction, but with a very much lived-in and personalised feel.

The journey here each day is a swift one, a short commute from the back door of her south London flat, which she shares with husband Olivier, and Luna – the picnic-raiding Cockapoo. Her transition is to a

world of colourful postcards and post-it-notes. A large map – part of the research for her next book – takes up a full wall. Among the research-notes and books, various pot-plants, photographs, inkpots and an extensive fountain-pen collection adorn the shelves.

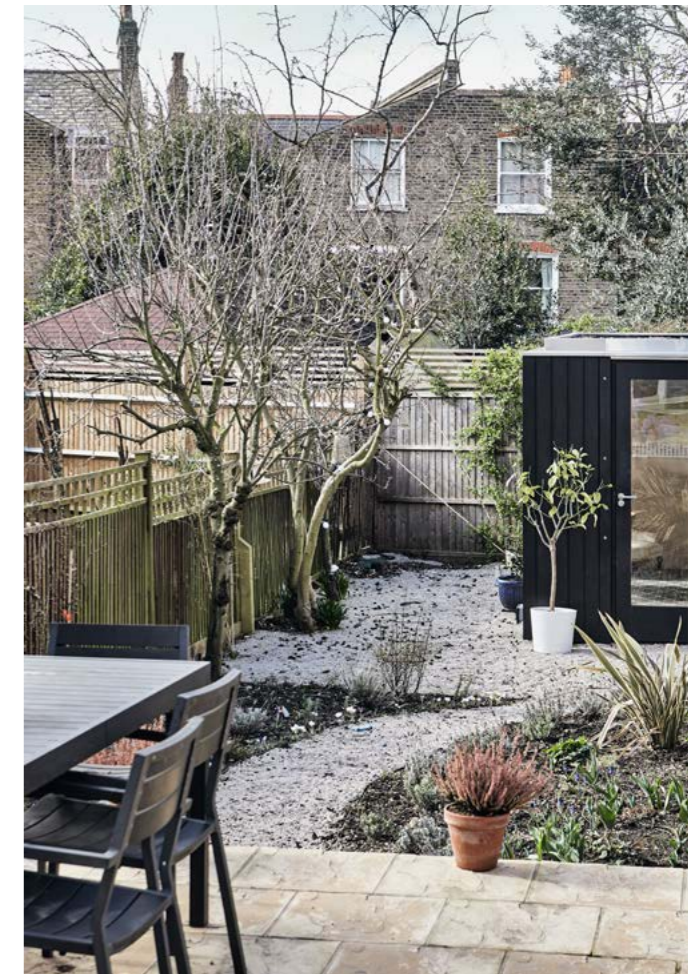
Having left university, where she read history, she interned for various periodicals, landing her first 'proper' job writing for *House & Garden* magazine as an assistant food-and-wine editor, before eventually moving on the books-and-arts section of *The Economist* newspaper (and fitting a master's degree in between). Meanwhile, she began writing a column on 'colour' for *Elle Decoration* magazine.

After a number of years in the industry however, Kassia found her career wasn't progressing at the same rate as her writing and decided to take the plunge as an author. With no pre-existing offers in place, she found herself an agent and successfully pitched her first book idea. The catch? – her publishers insisted on an incredibly tight deadline of just five months. She found herself researching and writing whilst simultaneously holding down a full-time job. Following an intense period of 5am starts and extremely late nights, Kassia successfully delivered her finished book 'The Secret Lives of Colour'.

By then it had become abundantly clear that juggling two very demanding jobs wasn't sustainable – a choice needed to be made. After much soul-searching, she took a leap of faith and handed in her notice at the newspaper. Her last day coincided almost exactly with the delivery of her final manuscript. She awoke the next morning with no job, no idea if her book would sell – and no other work in the pipeline – to realise, "OK, I write books now – or at least I'd better, because otherwise I don't have anything else to do!"

The notion that this was a brave undertaking she dismisses as "charitable", rather "a decision made under a little bit too much pressure." Yet despite the uncertainties, the gamble paid off. 'The Secret Lives of Colour' became a bestseller, and a staple of museum gift-shops and design bookshops across the globe. It has since been translated into multiple languages. A second book soon followed: 'The Golden Thread', a history of textiles and fabrics.

In tandem with her books, Kassia has also managed to maintain a role in print journalism, writing freelance for a number of publications – such as *Wired* and *Architectural Digest* – on a diverse range of topics from art and design, cultural history and science, to film, TV and book reviews. Reading her articles, it's clear she thrives on subjects that ←



The studio-office created by 3rdSpace

Right:
Kassia's colour-coding
systems for organising
her work thematically

Below:
Kassia in front of a map;
part of the research for
her next book



surprise the reader, digging out fascinating details you'd probably never considered. Her aim is to turn readers' minds to something they use or see on a regular basis, refocus their attention, and reveal just how fascinating everyday things can be. The intent being "to remind us that much of what we take for granted often has a complex and surprising backstory".

Perhaps inevitably, she tends to become 'typecast' for articles on the subjects of colour and textiles – a victim of her own successes. In order to diversify, therefore, she has to maintain a steady flow of fresh story pitches. As Kassia explains, for a freelance writer, "Out of 20 pitches you can only hope for about half of the editors to reply – and given the challenges currently facing the media industry, journalists fully expect the majority of those to be rejections." So, on the occasions that an article comes to fruition, she finds it all the more rewarding.

Into this mix, until late 2018, she was also co-hosting the writer's podcast 'Always take notes'. So how does she juggle multiple journalistic assignments, major book projects, and other commitments all on-the-boil at once? All projects run in parallel – continuously – which isn't usually problematic, but when magazine commissions mount up it's easy to lose sight of the bigger book projects, which can go months-on-end without attention. "The trick is keeping track of multiple looming deadlines," she says, comparing it to cooking and

remembering that the potatoes are boiling away, "You can completely forget about them, but sooner or later they'll turn into mush while you're busy with the flash-frying!"

The real challenge, she says, comes when organising time on a daily, or even hourly level. A morning person through-and-through, she works to a strict, self-imposed structure, assisted by her treasured Melitta coffee maker – without fail her final stop before heading out to the hut. A typical morning will find her at her desk by 6.30am sharp, where she looks out onto bird feeders in the fig and pear trees popular with the local rose-ringed parakeet population (now thriving in the London suburbs following a 1970s aviary escape). She writes in 40-minute bursts, aided by a phone-app called 'Forest', taking five-minute breaks in between. She maintains this concentrated routine for up to six hours, by the end of which she admits, "I'm done, my brain is mush" – though currently, this is the point at which she'll spend an extra hour learning a new language.

Admitting to being "distressingly analogue"; thinking best with pen and paper, she has a very particular and unique working process. The shelves behind her are fully packed with lever-arch files and notebooks, heaving with research, writing and 'mind-maps' for her books and articles. An explosion of countless multi-coloured sticky labels burst from the open end of each. Within, stripes of brightly coloured highlighter ink decorate page after

page. These represent Kassia's colour-coding systems for organising her work thematically – a system which probably makes sense to nobody else but her. "I just don't know how anybody does this on a computer screen", she puzzles.

So, any downsides? Very few in fact, though admittedly she misses working with colleagues. Book editors, she's found, will leave you alone to write for weeks-on-end – meaning almost zero human contact. Although this is very much her private workspace, Olivier is known to wander in and out during the day with cups of tea. Depending on how work is progressing, she'll either take the time to chat, or send him packing.

The subject of Kassia's new book marks a substantial change in direction from the previous two. It's also her biggest project to date in terms of ambition and scope. Without revealing too much, it covers an Edwardian motor-car race, the cultural and political histories of the remote regions along its route, and the emerging technologies of the time. It is also a human-interest story, focussing on the travellers who undertook an extraordinary journey, thought by many at the time to be an impossibility. Frustratingly, much of the source material happens to be in languages other than English, an added

complication which led to her latest bold decision, learning Russian, hence the plethora of post-it notes that decorate the workspace.

Together with her husband, she's intending to recreate the journey over two months next summer in 'Barbara', a vintage 1990's Toyota Landcruiser they've acquired for the trip. The terrain the route takes is unforgiving to say the least, so they purposely chose a functional, reliable vehicle, with easily replaceable parts, that can "just do the job". It's being adapted to carry extra fuel and water, and also to serve as overnight accommodation.

"Much of what we take for granted often has a complex and surprising backstory."

Having relinquished the security of a steady job, the busy, colleague-packed newsroom – and the office space it afforded, she remains keen to keep some separation between work and home. The nature of her work requires deep concentration, but come the end of a working day, she closes the door on it all, taking the few short steps back home, feeling like she can leave her work locked away for a while, both physically and mentally. 🖐️



Photography by
Beth Davies



Sophie Lovell,
photo: Lena Giovanazzi



Klaus Klemp,
photo: Andreas Baier

Klaus Klemp and Sophie Lovell have both been responsible for documenting the work of Dieter Rams. They reflect on his motivations, far-reaching influence and his legacy

Looking back, and ahead

Photography captured by Wolfgang Günzel on the day Dieter Rams visited the new exhibition. Images courtesy of Museum Angewandte Kunst



The German design historian and curator Klaus Klemp and the English writer and editor Sophie Lovell are probably the leading published experts on Dieter Rams and his work for Vitsø and the electrical products company, Braun. The occasion of the opening of Klemp's latest exhibition 'Dieter Rams: Looking Back and Ahead' in Frankfurt seemed a suitable moment to catch up with them and take stock of their professional association with Rams, his legacy, and their roles in preserving and sharing his work, his message and the context of his oeuvre.

15 years ago, Professor Klemp co-curated the major exhibition 'Less and More: The Design Ethos of Dieter Rams' together with Keiko Ueki, which opened in the Suntory Museum in Osaka. It was a huge success and toured to several major

museums around the world. Now, 13 years later, he has produced a new Dieter Rams exhibition.

Vitsø Voice began by asking Klemp about the difference between the two?

Klaus Klemp: The difference lies in the fact that "Less and More" was a very large exhibition with a lot of exhibits that primarily related to Dieter's design position, his "design ethos," as well as the context in which it came about and the effect that it had. It spanned the work of Peter Behrens for electrical appliance manufacturer AEG before WWI, through the 1920s and the Ulm School right up to successors such as Jony Ive, Naoto Fukasawa and Jasper Morrison, who all referenced him. Teamwork too played a big role in this exhibition, which also displayed many designs by other

Braun design-team members. It was originally planned for Osaka and Tokyo, but then went on to London, Frankfurt, Seoul and San Francisco. We never expect such a huge resonance back then. The show had over 400,000 visitors in total.

The current exhibition is much more modest. It grew out of the work on Dieter's catalogue raisonné that we began in 2019 and is strictly chronological. As a result, it shows clearly that throughout his creative period, Dieter was always involved in parallel with Braun appliances and Vitsø furniture. Even he was surprised by the connections that resulted from that. That was when the idea for this very compact exhibition came about, based on his work for the two companies and a few others. It is a kind of photo exhibition with only a few exhibits

and a lot of text. It is, thanks to designer Mario Lorenz's great exhibition system design, easy to transport and very flexible, so it can be shown in different sizes. Above all, it is intended to convey Dieter's design principles, in that it is as durable as possible and thus environmentally friendly.

VV: How has it been for you both writing about one of what many consider to be the world's greatest industrial designers? Do you feel a burden of responsibility there?

Sophie Lovell: I know both of us have struggled a bit with this kind of mythologising of Dieter as the lone, star-designer genius that the people tend to do. The real story is more complicated, because design is also very much a collaborative process, as Dieter would be the first to acknowledge.

KK: In much of the existing literature, he is either portrayed as the 'superdesigner' of all Braun appliances or simply as a member of their design team. Both are undoubtedly wrong. He was clearly involved in all the designs until 1995, but the design ideas of other team members also often dominated. His merit lies in his ability to have brought all these different ideas together into a single corporate design. Under his leadership, the design team was no monastic consensual community, rather a kind of pressure cooker with a pressure relief valve that occasionally needed to spring into action.

VV: Having turned 89 in 2021, Rams has stopped giving interviews, but there are two things he is still really passionate about: good design and the contribution it makes ←



towards improving the environment. When do you feel this awareness really started with him?

SL: Yes! He is absolutely tireless in this respect he cares a very great deal about the natural environment as well as the built one. I think he always has done in some ways, but my impression is that his awareness and concerns for the environment seem to have really taken root after he went to design summits at Aspen in the 1960s and 70s where there were great gatherings of creative minds and speakers like Buckminster Fuller as well as student protests outside.

KK: For sure, Aspen, with its many encounters and conversations, had an important influence on Dieter's work. In 1993, he himself gave a lecture there on 'The Future of Design'. But since the 1970s, he

“Throughout his creative period, Dieter was always involved in parallel with Braun appliances and Vitsoe furniture. Even he was surprised by the connections that resulted from that.”

has been invited to give many lectures in which he has expressed and increasingly developed his attitude to design, usability, functional and aesthetic qualities, the design process, education, the future and ecology. His lecture activities were almost as extensive as his design activities. Dieter has always been a very reflective person and has also always shared his thoughts with others.

SL: He also never stops looking at things with a critical eye and thinking about how objects, environments and systems could be improved, from the waste bins in the street to the organisation of a space.

KK: True! Dieter is never satisfied with how things are. He is always thinking ahead. And I think that is what makes him a good designer. He could of course be satisfied with

the products he has brought into the world. There is hardly a designer who has realised a greater number of successful and rational designs than he has. But even today, at 89, he is concerned about the future of design, about good design education and about a very necessary new relationship to the environment.

VV: In 2021, Braun celebrated its 100th anniversary. What, for each of you, is a key aspect of their legacy?

SL: I can't help thinking that instead of celebrating past products, the focus should be more on the fact that in the 1950s, Erwin and Artur Braun built the company's own health centre for its staff; that they had a doctor and dentist on-site, a canteen with nutritional food, a crèche for workers' children and share incentives for employees. Likewise, Vitsoe today also have an

incredibly holistic approach to their products, staff, materials, distribution and even the space they work in. Good design cannot be disconnected from the systems that it is part of.

KK: I agree completely. It's not just about the way things look, but also about the conditions under which our product environments are produced and used. Erwin Braun had a holistic approach to the Braun company since the 1950s. He was not so much concerned with a new design just as design, but with a future new company that focused on consideration and respect for employees and users. This followed the idea of a "social market economy" that should treat all members of society fairly. It was highly successful and stood in stark contrast to today's widespread turbo-capitalism, in which the only

thing that matters in many companies is the highest possible return on investment. In my opinion, however, this no longer has a justifiable future, because consumers, or rather users, are falling less and less for marketing tricks, but are judging a company more and more according to its objective attitude to the environment and sustainability. This is very much on the agenda at the moment.

VV: How has this holistic view – of which design is of course a part – evolved, in your opinion?

SL: Recently, the (also German) designer Stefan Diez came up with his own set of ten Circular Design Guidelines. They are guidelines for an interconnected world from a designer who is almost two generations younger than Dieter but are very much built on the

foundation of his ten principles. We are just beginning to see a different kind of modular future to the one a young Rams and his colleagues were envisaging, but it has strong parallels. There is a clear evolution of thinking there.

KK: Today, the circular economy is a highly topical issue which, although it will certainly not be possible to realise 100 per cent, can contribute to a significant reduction in resource consumption. This is an important field for product designers: to think not only about the use and aesthetics of things, but also about making things as environmentally friendly as possible. Incidentally, the HfG Ulm [Ulm School of Design] was already active in this field in the 1960s and the HfG Offenbach [Offenbach University of Art and Design] with Jochen Gros in the 1970s and 80s. If this has now

also arrived in companies, then we need designers who can really develop it. Stefan Diez is certainly on the right track. His theses on the circular economy clearly refer to Rams's ten principles and fulfil his wish that they be developed further into the future.

VV: In this respect, your exhibition 'Dieter Rams: Looking Back and Ahead', Professor Klemp, is part of this way of thinking – it provides a contextual background and shows Dieter's evolution of thought through his practice and how it is part of a continuum with the future.

KK: It is primarily intended as an example of how things that were designed half a century ago are still relevant today. It is an attitude to design – durable, usable, self-explanatory, environmentally friendly and, last, but not least,



highly attractive – that should be conveyed by this exhibition. Sensible design is only convincing if it is also attractive. It is an exhibition with many photos and texts and only a few exhibits. We do not want to fetishise Rams's design, but to foreground and explain his intentions. 🖐️

Further reading

Less and More: The Design Ethos of Dieter Rams. A catalogue compiled together with Keiko Ueki, to accompany the exhibition of the same name (2008).

Dieter Rams: As Little Design as Possible (Phaidon, 2011).

Dieter Rams: The Complete Works (Phaidon, 2020).

The beauty in everyday things



Building a family-home full of integrity

“Some people would say there is nothing special about our house. But in a world so full of design, we wanted to create something honest, useful and ordinary. The fact that we built a home that is perfectly suited to the needs of our family was the best decision we could have ever made. We believe that ‘nothing special’ can eventually become something very special indeed” said PJ, grinning with pride, seemingly unscathed from the completion of a self-build project he’d undertaken with his wife Sairom, on the outskirts of Seoul, South Korea.

With careful planning, the young couple have managed to turn the dream of living in a space that’s tailored to their needs into a reality. They met at university in New York, where they were both studying architecture, and bonded over a mutual ambition to settle down in a home that didn’t follow the rules of a typical Korean apartment. Sairom explains, “There’s a real lack of housing typology in Seoul, which I think is a cultural, social history-related problem. When you meet anyone from South Korea, 80% of them will be living in properties that have a similar layout – the apartments here are basically all the same, except for the number of bedrooms. It’s always 2.2metres

floor-to-ceiling height, wallpapered walls, two bathrooms, a balcony and harsh white lighting that hurts your eyes because the ceiling is so low! When we got married, we knew that although we’d grown up with that formula feeling very normal to us, we wanted something very different, but weren’t sure how or when we could make it happen.”

The process began much sooner than they’d imagined, after PJ watched a television programme about a German journalist who had built his own house in South Korea. Listening to him speak about his experience, PJ recalled, “He said that Koreans delay their hopes about the future. They work hard and love to hear about others working hard too, but that’s precisely the problem. There is no time like the present, so even by taking small steps towards something – at least it’s a start. It really triggered me, so the next day we drove around some of the more suburban, rural areas of Seoul looking for the ideal spot. After three months of searching, we finally found a small plot of land that we loved and knew that it was the right time to seize the opportunity.”

In order to reduce the inevitable stresses and strains that building 🏠

Photography by
PYODesignWorkshop



your own home can bring, PJ and Sairom knew meticulous budgeting would at least help to alleviate any disagreements about finances and prevent the project costs from spiralling out of control – a common problem for self-builders. Like a good marriage, a house must be built on firm foundations, so with a young family to support and limited funds, the pair combined their architectural knowledge and kick-started discussions about affordability and non-negotiable aspects of the design, furniture and interior decor. Everything was accounted for, including renting a temporary base that was closer to the site to ensure they could visit each day to monitor progress.

Sairom described how it all began, “We did it the opposite way – by working out and agreeing on everything we didn’t want. Knowing our restrictions beforehand made everything so much easier. Luckily, we share the same attitude, in that neither of us like things that are flashy or ornamental. In our minds, objects should have a purpose and a strong identity. Simple and

straightforward things are what we gravitate towards; things that are considered, that have a designer’s story behind them. We’re always looking for an internal quality, not something flamboyant. These values informed how we designed the house.” PJ laughed and added, “And believe it or not, we didn’t have one single fight! Maybe that’s what happens when you respect each other’s preferences – it creates harmony.”

Within six months of purchasing the land, they were already moving in. Gesturing to the large window behind them, PJ noted, “This is the largest one in the house. We didn’t see the point of spending money on huge windows for every room when the views aren’t great from every side. The bathroom doesn’t even have one because we knew that a good ventilation system is far more efficient for getting rid of hot steam and helping to keep the room clean.

The idea of finding beauty in everyday things really resonated with us. Having a clear understanding of our family routines: how we

eat, how we gather, and how we sleep were the most important factors. We didn’t feel the need to include the luxuries most people would expect, such as a home gym or cinema room because most of the time they would be empty. Our plans centred around it being a house where nothing is over-designed, and everything gets used every day. Sometimes we’d refer back to the theory behind the Jasper Morrison ‘Super Normal’ exhibition to remind ourselves of how practicality can sometimes be the most beautiful thing. It’s the reason we installed the Vitsø shelving. The system works with our possessions the same way as the house works for us – sitting there in the background like a blank canvas. It’s only when the artist starts to paint that you can learn more about their ideas and their identity. Sairom and I both agree that a house should express something about the lives and stories of those who live there. For us, we have nothing to hide, so by keeping everything simple, we’re able to really appreciate the things we love.” 🖐️



“Having a clear understanding of our family routines: how we eat, how we gather, and how we sleep were the most important factors.”

For the love of archives

A time and a place for everything,
in the City of London



James Nye,
chairman of the AHS

An unwritten prerequisite to being involved in the world of Vitsø is that you have a strong liking for detail and an interest in how things work and why they look like they do. Customer James Nye has been involved in questioning the nature of clocks and timekeeping since he was 13. He now fills his time (full-time, and then some) working with, researching and writing about them. James is the chairman of the Antiquarian Horological Society, which has recently moved into its new headquarters at 4 Lovat Lane in the City of London.

The Antiquarian Horological Society is always known (for matters of

legibility, expediency and pronunciation) as the AHS. It is a charity – nay, a learned society – founded in 1953. Its members (1,500 and counting) are people from around the world who are interested in the history of timekeeping: curators, writers, collectors and people at the business end of clocks, such as auctioneers. AHS members consider themselves the “academic lot” amongst the various clock societies. They are known for their hefty peer-reviewed journal *Antiquarian Horology*, produced four times a year. And an ongoing series of lovely niche lectures, on anything from ‘How to Make an

Atomic Clock’, to ‘The Faking of English Watches’.

Within the society there are specialist (more specialist) sub-sections and groups. The newest of these are the wristwatch group – apparently wristwatches were somewhat frowned upon when the society was founded. There is also a turret group (people fascinated by public clocks) who, when they can, like to “go up towers.” And the electrical horology group, which James has run for 22 years, who are particularly interested in the transmission of time (or how we can have the same time everywhere

and the machines we use to make that happen).

4 Lovat Lane, or 4LL (they do love an acronym at the AHS) was love at first sight. “Standing outside just evoked the right feelings for everyone who turned up,” states James. The area is redolent with the history of British clock and watchmaking; from the 17th century onwards the City was at the centre of all things telling us time.

4LL was originally two buildings: 4–5 Lovat Lane, a couple of early 19th century houses that were unsympathetically combined in the 1970s. At that point they lost their

two unique front doors and gained a single door and a grim “brutalist Sarajevo-hotel style” staircase up the middle of the two buildings. The frontage is all that was left of the original architecture and it is now listed Grade II. Lovat Lane runs between Eastcheap and Lower Thames Street. It is one of those charming narrow London streets where you feel, if you looked over your shoulder, you might spot Dickens fumbling in his greatcoat for his pipe.

The AHS has gutted both buildings, built a new conjoining, sympathetic and swooping helical staircase, and spent much time and effort to make a forever home for itself. The premises will house the society’s library and archive, provide a venue for meetings and lectures, and serve as a hub for all things horological.

For 44 years the AHS was based out in the “wilderness” at Ticehurst, East Sussex. But coming back to London makes so much sense for it, its researchers, and the volunteers who keep the society ticking. When the AHS moved into 4LL, 23 of those volunteers helped empty and transport four van-loads of books and archival material, up the stairs and into the new home. The next big job (and one already whetting the whistles of the volunteers) is to sort through and ratify the archive. And then to get it nicely organised on the shelves.

The material to be housed under the mansard roof at 4LL consists of an archive of the society itself (minutes

and things) along with runs of bound magazines and journals, such as the smart royal blue cloth-bound copies of *Chronos* magazine from the 1950s, ‘an elegant showcase for the horological world’, which is still being printed.

There are also personal archives that have been left to the society, often by former members. James explains, “An example of the kind of archive that we end up with, is a civil servant working in defence in the Bristol region for many years. He ‘repurposed’ stationery and kept, amongst other things, a huge number of spare photocopied forms from a survey he did in the 1970s. A survey I know very well.” That collection currently sits in a pile of sturdy recycled (we shan’t say stolen) box files with evocative trade names like the ‘Swifta Box File’. Another collection to be shelved consists of what looks like a lifetime of newspaper cuttings, glued into old scrapbooks of interesting shapes and sizes. Some of these scrapbooks have their own archival nomenclature, for instance a Mr Frederickson named his first scrapbook, grandly: Clock Miscellany No 1.

At the AHS they know that all this accumulated research from many decades needs resolving into something, ideally, that can be “arranged, catalogued and sorted so that we know what we have. At the moment we have a room full of boxes, there are years of discoveries to be found.” James is hoping that eliminations and





Antiquarian Horology
quarterly journal



The restored entrance
at 4 Lovat Lane

weeding will happen as they unpack the archive onto the shelves, that they will end up with “metres and metres of box files, arranged beautifully.” Don’t get him started about the quality of modern stationery. “A lot of modern box files are rubbish. All of this project is about the long term. Even down to the stationery that we use to store stuff, it’s got to be high quality and it’s got to be conservation friendly.”

They only have one actual clock at 4LL, the larger accumulations of them are in other places. A shiny museum of clocks called ‘The Clockworks’ in West Norwood,

south London, houses a collection (on rather nice shelves) of electrical timekeeping and is, James says “the only museum in the world dedicated to this really narrow little story about electrical timekeeping from about 1840 onward.” The Science Museum in London houses The Clockmakers’ Museum, a collection affiliated with the Worshipful Company of Clockmakers who were founded in 1631 and where (not so coincidentally) James is Renter Warden.

James has spent very much more of his life with clocks and timekeeping than most. “I was at a school in Sussex in the 1970s where the

assistant chaplain was a watchmaker. And in his house, half the ground floor was dedicated to workshop space. For those of us not so good at football or rugby, we could spend afternoons learning clock repair. I did that from age 13.” As well as learning “the conventional horological practice of bench repair,” James was given the responsibility of looking after the school’s time distribution system. “A single clock at the centre of the school sent out a pulse to lots of subsidiary clocks to signal the start and the end of lessons. I programmed that.” Clearly his appetite for electrical horology

began there and then and has been with him ever since. He became a member of the society himself when in his 30s but has been a member of the British Horological Institute since he was a teenager. Clocks take up “seven days a week, all waking hours.”

James currently finds himself at the AHS a couple of times a week. Moving the AHS into 4LL will clearly provide a focus for, and energise, the society’s various goings-on. The building itself should happily absorb all the talk and activity around the making of clocks and time, having always been a building

used for both trade and accommodation. Three generations of chimney sweeps once lived there. Hairdressers and barbers, boot repairers and, finally, city loss adjusters all worked out of 4LL before the AHS moved in. James explains that it feels magical, standing on their new doorstep, listening to the sounds of the City (there is no traffic on Lovat Lane) and admiring St Mary-at-Hill, the neighbouring Wren church. The society has found no history of clock making on Lovat Lane itself. But, as James knows well, clocks are in the fabric, history and very air of the AHS’s part of the City. 🍷



Photography by
Dean Hearne

Softening the edges

The 620 Chair Programme has a new linen coat. We asked the writer and curator Jane Audas to take a seat



It is not really the style at Vitsœ to blow trumpets and line the streets of Leamington Spa waving flags when they have a new product coming out. This is because design is an iterative process at Vitsœ. If something needs changing to improve performance, they think very hard about it, design even harder, and then make the change. Job done.

But sometimes it is OK to toot a horn (not as obstreperous as a trumpet) and share the thinking and process of product development, particularly when it represents more of a shift change to the product line. After all, it is a rare and lesser spotted thing – new Vitsœ. Well, may I cordially announce (ta da!) that the beloved 620 chair has a new coat. A softer, linen coat, in a palette of carefully chosen colours, to sit alongside the more usual leather jacket the 620 has worn since 1962.

The leather upholstery remains an option, of course. But over the years, because Vitsœ deal directly with customers, they've often been asked for another upholstery option for the 620; something that wasn't leather. They chose linen, the reasons for which will be unpacked a little further on. A linen-covered 620 is unapologetically a softening of presentation for this chair, it's more domestic, has a gentler feel. It is perfectly understandable that not everyone wants to buy, or sit in, leather chairs, for their own reasons – ethical, aesthetic or otherwise.

They have spent rather a long time getting to this point of launch, as is the way at Vitsœ. From the beginning Niels Vitsœ practiced his right to re-engineer the 620 chair, always ensuring the design remained backwards compatible. The covers for the 620 have always been replaceable (by customers, at home) although happily that need doesn't often transpire.

For customers who already have a leather-covered 620 or two (bought 4 or 40 years ago) you can swap them out for linen, no problem.

For such a long-lived chair, linen is an appropriate fabric. Leather lasts and so does linen. One of our oldest textiles, linen has been a fabric of significance for many centuries. It was woven for wearing – and many other things – by the Egyptians in the BC years, their pleated garments played to the crease of thin, cool linen. It remained a ubiquitous fabric until being gradually superseded (throughout the 19th century) by cotton, the production of which was easier to mechanise.

Linen is made from the cellulose fibers that grow inside of the stalks of the flax plant, or *Linum usitatissimum*. There are (almost) perfect places to grow linen and France, Belgium and the Netherlands are amongst them, growing over ↵



75% of the world's linen flax between them. Linen responds well to the particular balance of sun and rain in Western Europe. Sewn and grown tightly packed, the best flax grows tall, with as few branches as possible. This yields the long fibres that make linen such a strong and durable fabric, one that stands up to wear, washing and weathering.

Vitsø were very certain that the new 620 fabric choice would be as ecologically sound as possible. As far as sustainability goes, flax scores well. Whilst growing, flax absorbs CO₂, needs minimal watering and little or no pesticides. But, just to note, the 620 linen is not quite 100% organic because herbicides are used to grow the flax. But the linen manufacturing process, which itself is chemical free, is a zero waste operation and 620 linen is produced under Cradle to Cradle Certified™ conditions.

The parts of the flax plant not used for linen are all diverted into other uses, including paper making, insulation material, animal bedding and chipboard. Finally, Vitsø's linen is woven in carbon-neutral mills. The finished linen has other qualities that made it the fabric of choice: it is thermoregulating (cool in the summer and warm in the winter) and hypoallergenic. It wears extremely well: under the Martindale test for durability, 620

linen has withstood at least 30,000 rubs, making it suitable for public transport – should your living room be a busy one. And, just as importantly, the linen feels lovely to touch.

And the colours? As you may know, there is an invisible sign above the door at Vitsø 'no fashionable colours here'. The 620 linen upholstery is launching in a limited range of very hard-won colours: grey, marine, loden and flax (undyed). To get them right, colour samples were sent to Vitsø's global planning team for a bit of on-the-spot market research with customers. Unsurprisingly, grey and flax were popular early front-runners. But all four shades are what you might call recessive colours; they play gently with the eye and play nicely with other colours.

Aesthetically 620 chairs, whether joined or solo, have always had a quiet presence within a room. They have a small footprint and less of the 'look at me' swagger of other 'designer' chairs (I think you know the ones I mean). In terms of comfort, 620s punch above their weight; they are complex on the inside, and simple on the outside, giving deceptively good support and lounge-factor. In terms of design, 620s are quietly clever and cleverly adaptable. Vitsø never knowingly rests on its (design) laurels. 🍷

“Vitsø were very certain that the new 620 fabric choice would be as ecologically sound as possible.”





Songs, and the important things in life

How thoughtful tuning has led to a beautiful home



John Harris and Camilla Nicholls only recently moved into their rental Barbican flat in the City of London. But already it looks, and feels, like a home. Their move – and decorating the flat – has been hurried along by circumstance.

Barbican flats are undeniably a bit of a thing. The architecture of the whole estate is an acquired taste. Uncompromising, unusual and perhaps a bit brutal for some tastes. Camilla has been a resident here for nearly 20 years. It suits her. When she and John were looking for their first home together (he came to her from Brighton where he'd lived for many years) they decided to move into a new, to them, Barbican flat: "We really wanted a blank sheet.

Otherwise, John would have been squeezed into my flat and my way of living and we felt that wasn't right."

Camilla works as a psychotherapist. John was in training to be one too, but things changed when he was diagnosed with Motor Neurone Disease (MND) in late 2019. Although now retired due to his ill-health, John previously worked as a business consultant in learning and education and was a semi-professional jazz musician before re-training in psychotherapy. It was, he says, a "great, great shame" that the MND forced him to give it up. He is now writing. About getting to this point in his life. About the experiences he is going through now. 🍷



John and Camilla had drawn (not quite on the back of an envelope) a very detailed sketch of how they imagined their shelving system would look. It was complete with plants in-amongst the books, just as they are in the finished system. They visited the Vitsø shop on Marylebone Lane to see things for themselves and to finalise the design. This led to a few changes with John's mobility in mind.

On the TV wall, an up-and-over cabinet (which John might have struggled to grip) was changed for one with a fold-down door. And above the vinyl, a flipped 36cm shelf both houses the turntable and gives John a useful edge to grip when putting on records. On the opposite wall, the row of shelves with drawers work well, as the lip on the underside makes them easier for John to open. "We knew that John's condition was going to develop, and it was very important that the shelving system wouldn't become obsolete. Having things at the right height and a system that was really solid and wouldn't wobble when John leant on it – these were things we talked about with Vitsø planners Alistair and Robin. We knew how important music and television were going to be for us and we wanted them to be on something that not only housed them well but didn't make us fidget."

The shelves in John and Camilla's flat are very much on show. The long and low interior proportions of Barbican flats seem custom-made for them. In amongst John and

Camilla's system, spaces have been left for art, trailing plants soften one corner edge, whilst smaller plants nestle in elegant contemporary ceramics along a top row of flipped shelves. The planting continues outside where a full-width balcony 'meadow' provides a moving picture, positioned at just the right height for them to watch the swishing grasses and flowers from the comfort of the sofa. The plants give a good shadow show, too, across the large glass window in the bedroom. The balcony gives way to impressive views of 88 Wood Street, designed by the Richard Rogers Partnership, now spookily quiet in lockdown.

John and Camilla have, of course, books on their shelves but those books change. John has been re-reading old favourites, which is a real treat, he says. The shelves also hold 'some' of John's record collection, all tidily in clear plastic sleeves to protect their covers – a sure sign there is an audiophile in the house. Their Rega turntable happily announces itself with its bright yolk yellow wool turntable mat. They enjoy music together – a lot. From Michael Kiwanuka and Brittany Howard, to Billie Holiday and Brad Mehldau. "Very often in the mornings John will put on Songs in the Key of Life by Stevie Wonder. Which – especially if it is sunny – gets the day off to a fine start." And both have developed an obsession with Scandinavian Noir television series, revelling in the crime and punishment played out in beautiful locations. They also enjoy

French Noir television. Almost all Noir television, in fact.

Although John and Camilla found each other, in a romantic sense, relatively late in life, they have known each other (off and on) for a lot longer. They first met when they were at college together in the late 1970s, both studying for a joint BA Hons in English Literature and European Thought and Literature. Over the years, they kept in touch through Christmas cards. When a striking Andy Warhol card arrived conspicuously late one February, it sparked Camilla's interest. John was a widower with four children, based in Brighton and they reconnected there one afternoon over lots of good food and talk. "And we have been enjoying them both ever since." They married in 2017.

When it came to finding somewhere permanent to live together, the Barbican made a lot of sense. The flats are pretty accessible, says John, he is able to make his way around the estate with its multiple lifts and sloping walkways. They "did as much as they could" to find John a good-looking Rollator walking frame and a wheelchair for longer ambles. Scandinavian aid design outshone all the others.

Colours in this flat really matter. Their palette came from a Michael Stokoe artwork they own. Camilla explains: "For our wedding anniversary we went to stay at The George hotel in Rye, East Sussex. There was a lot of Michael's work in there and we loved it. I tracked one down and ←





“When you are in a small space everything is important.”

gave it to John as a present.” It is an abstract composition of squares and circles: “We took the palette for our flat from that,” says John, “We really wanted it to be warm. I often wear blue, so the blue in the picture represents us. We took the rest of the colours for the furniture.” They are obviously delighted with the way their shelves allow them to play out their chosen colour story. As Camilla explains: “The system is very beautiful in its own right, handsome in its own right. But it doesn’t shout.”

Most of their other furniture is Scandinavian; chosen for its warmth, texture and, where upholstered, for its colour. There is a forest green Swedese Lamino Chair that came from John’s Brighton home. Underneath the TV a line of colourful Muuto baskets pick up the turntable colour, which in turn picks up its colour from the Stokoe. They have a few Muuto Leaf lamps, again in Stokoe colours – which are good because “the switch is so easy for John.” On the British design front, they have an Ercol sofa (layered with Eleanor Pritchard blankets) and an Unto This Last plywood dining table and chairs, both of which play nicely with their Scandinavian furniture.

There isn’t much work or buying left to do for the flat. A Wolfgang Tillman’s print (a ‘reward’ they earned after donating to the Art Fund’s Saving Prospect Cottage campaign) came with extremely detailed instructions for framing, so that will go up next. The smaller things that change from day to day

are John’s collection of scents: “I’m healthy and happy apart from the MND. My senses are all intact and so we have lots of smelly things around the flat.” Eucalyptus candles are a favourite, as is a lemon cologne that reminds John of when he lived and worked in Istanbul for several years, where lemon was a lovely, ubiquitous smell. Textures are important for John, too. From the smooth rubber floor fitted throughout the flat (less tripping) to the Stokoe-colour co-ordinated wool upholstery throughout. The ceramics are all textured too, either in their glazing or in their surface patterns.

“When you are in a small space everything is important,” Camilla says, looking around at all the furniture, fixtures and fittings that she and John have carefully chosen together. One’s surroundings – the things you touch, smell, sit on and drink tea out of – really take on added importance when your life, for whatever reason, becomes less external facing. This is something everyone has been dealing with, in some small way, during lockdown. Camilla reflects: “We were anticipating our life was going to be more confined and we wanted our flat to be lovely, beautiful. Vitsø was just perfect for us, it became the spine for everything else we did.” This calming, colourful, comfortable and delicious smelling flat has become John and Camilla’s chosen retreat, as they cope with John’s disease and treasure their time together. And they have furnished it with love; both literally and figuratively. 🖐️

Workspace intelligence

Design duo Pearson Lloyd discuss transforming a former Victorian workshop into a new studio space



Photography by
Taran Wilkhu

The design partnership of Pearson Lloyd is enduring; their back catalogue quietly impressive. Tom Lloyd and Luke Pearson have been designing together for 24 years. They are satisfyingly yin and yang as a duo. Tom is the more laid-back half. Luke is the lean-forward half. It's a good combination and has done them well. The practice has recently moved into a new studio space in Shoreditch, Yorkton Workshops, slap in the middle of London's old furniture-making district, which seems very appropriate. The building has its own history of making. It was once stables, then Victorian workshops housing furniture and musical-instrument makers, wood turners and the like. There was undoubtedly sawdust on the streets back then. Tom and Luke scouted around the area for a while but closed on this building quickly, sensing its potential.

They gracefully re-modelled the whole Yorkton space with Cassion Castle Architects. Initially they'd thought to build new on the site. But with their sustainability hats on, decided to preserve instead. The conversion is light-touch, retaining wherever possible the original structure, features and materials. Yorkton is now an incredibly welcoming space, redolent of things being made. They have expanded to fit their new space, with a nice sky-lit main studio for the team to work in. A bigger workshop R&D space. An outside area. New meeting rooms. And a nice fat red staircase as the heart of the conversion. There is an impressive

Pearson Lloyd archive in the back, nicely boxed and as tidily labelled as you could wish. They employ about 10–12 members of staff and, except for a few temporary expansions for bigger projects, that number has remained steady for many years. The inevitable emphasis of management duties over design duties has meant they like to keep the studio size, well, manageable.

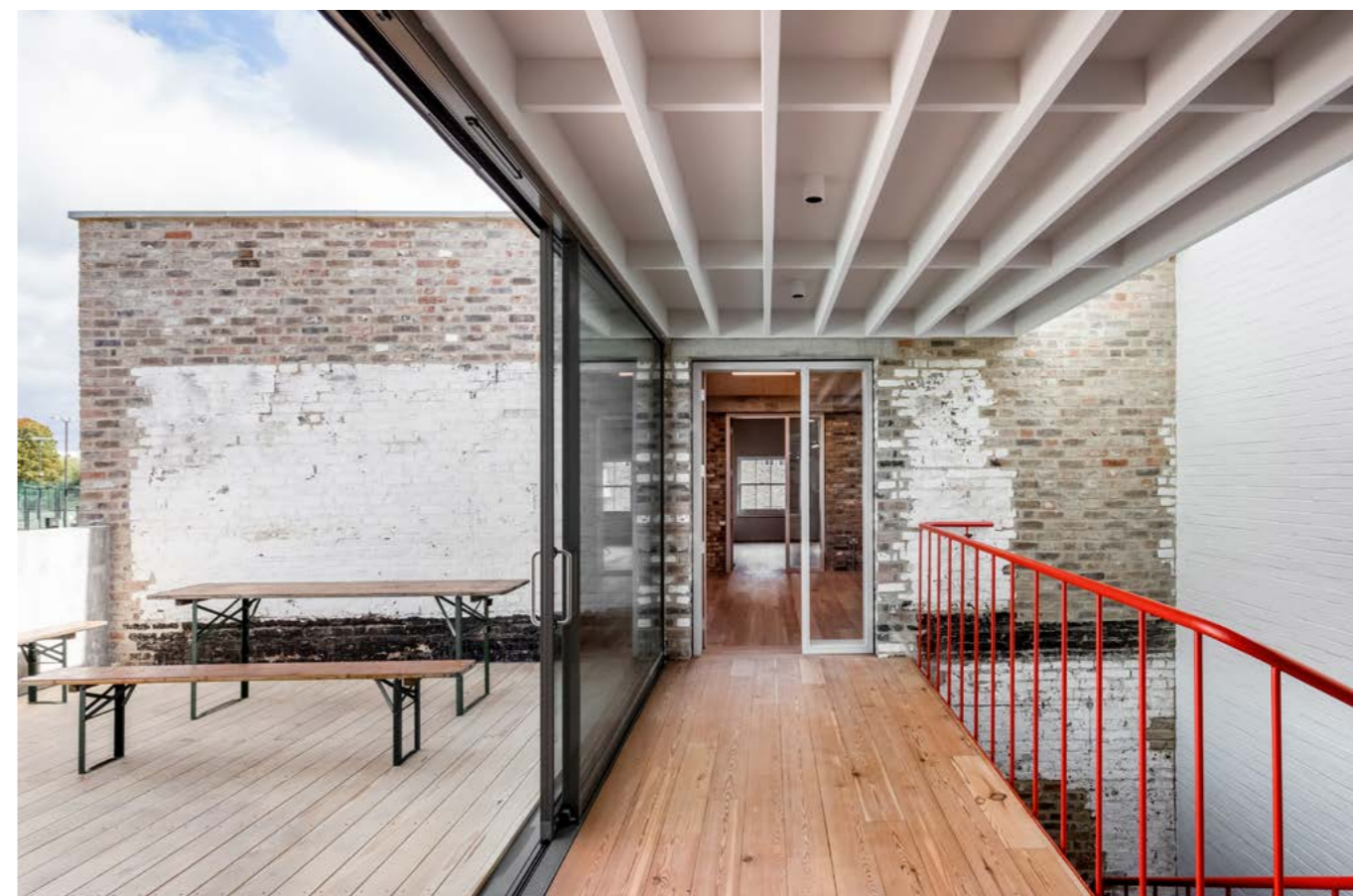
This move to a bigger space (some 5000 square foot) is less to do with expanding the practice and more to do with bringing everything Pearson Lloyd together, literally and figuratively. Here they are presenting themselves to the world in a manner quite new to this quiet practice; with an additional public-facing space, at ground level, to play with. In it they will hold exhibitions, readings, events with a design bent. Tom: "We're always delighted to be invited to do talks. But it occurred to us – why aren't we instigating that as well?" It will be interesting to watch these designer's designers (who are, it could be said, a little publicity shy) open things up. Tom again: "It's just nice to have things coming and going."

Pearson Lloyd's design work encompasses interiors, furniture, airline seats, waste bins and hearing aids. They are quite slow (perhaps 'thoughtful' is a better word) in their approach: circling around to a design solution, testing it, throwing it out, bringing it back in, until it has proven itself. They have come to trust their process is about testing the process. They are about editing out

superfluities. Their designs are almost sparse in appearance but never uncomfortable. "We're not typical designers. We're a bit in-between. We do lots of things because we're interested in them, when it might not be the sensible route to go for business."

The hub of Yorkton is the workshop where they make things. They need all the space they can get, prototyping projects. The new workshop allows them to leave things out, to live with things a bit, to sit on things a bit, and to see how their designs work in the real world. Luke explains: "People naturally position furniture where they want it to be, to do the thing they want it to do for them." Tom continues: "A thing that connects all our work is the human body, human scale. How do you understand how people use space, first. And then let that become the thing that drives the response." They have been thinking, in particular with the Yorkton project, about intelligent spaces and are interested in how people use a space, physically and emotionally. Luke: "Emotion is a function. We've been talking about emotional ergonomics for years, how you feel emotionally might be every bit as important as how you feel physically."

Design for the 'third age' is not particularly sexy; not usually high on a designer's dream project list. Until you find yourself, at whatever age, in need of an NHS aid and can't find anything you would remotely like to own, wear or use. The stairlift that





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“People naturally position furniture where they want it to be, to do the thing they want it to do for them.”



Pearson Lloyd have just designed for ThyssenKrupp is an example of slowly, surely, and thoughtful. They were approached to re-design the lift because customers were buying stairlifts as a retrograde step, after they'd had an accident; rather than fitting one to prevent accidents. And, as Luke says: “They were just such ugly things! The project has been going on, off and on, for ten years, the longest single project they've worked on. The social repercussions of design, particularly health aid design, are fascinating. And facilitating people to remain where they want to live, as long as possible, benefits us all. Luke continues: “It's about removing stigma. So many people could be saved from a bad fall, or remain with their loved ones. Why, when my body gives up, and my mind is still like a sixteen-year-old's, do I have to go into an old people's home? We thought it was such an interesting and difficult challenge: why are they so badly designed?”

Over the decades Pearson Lloyd have been designing, workplace needs have changed. Luke thinks workplaces, spurred on by the

pandemic and a need for home-working solutions, will soon change fundamentally. Home-working is now much more the new norm: “We're not all going to be going back. We've got cultural shifts occurring because of technology. And then on top of it, we've had COVID as another sort of input into that dialogue. Before it was the most trusted people that would be at home. But now, I think it might actually be the most important people that come back into the office. Because office space is going to be ultra-valuable. We're in a very interesting time, I think, for recalibrating how work cultures can interface.” But he doesn't think the office is ever going to be completely obsolete because weighing in against the convenience of video calls is that things still get lost in communication: “The physicality of being in the same space with people is, I think, a concrete, immovable, reality. We just don't quite know how much of it we'll need.”

As furniture designers themselves, what they chose to furnish Yorkton with is interesting. They have populated it throughout with their

own designs and some few antique pieces, including an arts and crafts cabinet by a relative of Tom's. The only other furniture 'by a named designer' that has passed muster are some Bouroullec pieces in the outdoor space and their reused 606. Tom: “We don't just want Tom and Luke furniture in here, that would be really tiring for us.” Their 606 has travelled with them since it was installed in their (former) Drysdale Street studio in 2006 and they both have 'miles of it' in their own homes. As Luke says: “It's just clever.”

Tom and Luke are the first to admit it's taken them a long time to be able to articulate what they do as a design practice. But really Yorkton tells us all we need to know about Pearson Lloyd – their work and how they work – with nary a word spoken. It is a space that re-articulates how we all might work in the future. How the line between work and home might become less demarcated and more fluid. And how we might all be the better for less insistence on modes of working that are no longer fit for our purposes. 🖐️



Objects connected by head and heart

A true aficionado delights in the stories behind everyday objects he curates in his home

Kettles: Behrens 1909 and Sapper 1983



Bakelite phone by J. Heilberg / J.C. Bjerkness for Ericsson 1950



Kitchen clocks by Max Bill / Ernst Moeckl for Junghans 1957

Hans-Gerd Grunwald's visual memories from his youth, like many of his generation, are marked by the powerful, democratic German design expressions of the 1960/70s, as exemplified by the 1972 Munich Olympic Games and Braun household products.

With the maturing of a keen interest in the history of design and product development, he became something of an expert in the field, through correspondence courses and his own research. The chance to take early retirement from the automobile industry and focus completely on this first great love, saw him turn what was essentially his hobby (of giving guided design tours of museums to friends and acquaintances) into becoming a specialist tour guide at Die Neue Sammlung – The Design Museum in Munich, which is one of the largest and most important museums of applied art in the world.

Grunwald moved into his current, modest, two-roomed apartment in the Schwabing district of Munich

in 2016. "I developed an interest in having good furniture and started to collect things with a design approach around 25 years ago," he explains, "that was when I bought my first Wassily chair by Marcel Breuer. Then came scale models of cars, and an AEG electric kettle, by Peter Behrens from 1909, that I found at a local flea market. I also have a collection of 1:6 scale miniature furniture pieces from Vitra. I don't have the space in my two-roomed flat for all the furniture that I like, so sometimes I buy a model instead."

Grunwald's particular area of interest is in the HfG Ulm (Ulm Design School), which operated from 1953–68. It was founded by Inge Aicher-Scholl, Otl Aicher and Max Bill (a former Bauhaus student). During its short existence, the school was ground-breaking in its rational and systems-thinking approach to industrial design and visual communication. It is also where most of the designers came from that pioneered the design revolution that took place at Braun

in the mid-1950s, and strongly influenced a young Dieter Rams in his design approach. One of the first products that really made Rams's name at Braun was the SK 4 Radio-Phonograph from 1956 that he collaborated on together with Hans Gugelot, who was a tutor at HfG Ulm and a key designer of many Braun products at the time.

Through his work doing the guided tours for the museum, Grunwald also moved towards buying vintage Braun products, such as hairdryers, cameras and shavers. "I have all their shaver models from 1950 up to the 'Sixtant' of 1962," he says, "because it is interesting to see, through them, the development of a product. Sometimes when I do a tour, I take a shaver with me and open it to show how it is made and the intelligence of the design."

A favourite piece of Grunwald's is a 1953 compact Rangefinder Werra camera made by VEB Carl Zeiss Jena in the in the German Democratic Republic (GDR). "What I like about it is that the design is

Model of the 'Ulm stool' and the 1972 'Olympia Waldi' by Elena Schwaiger



really, really simple. It looks like a Braun object – like it could have been designed by Dieter Rams or Otl Aicher or Hans Gugelot – but it was designed two or three years before the start of the design studies at HfG Ulm by Rudolf Müller. For me, its extraordinarily clean, puristic form, the golden section of the front and the shutter release as just a single control element on the top – kind of like a 'home button' – make it a thing to fall in love with. The rest of the controls are protected from the rain and visually tidy on the underside and the protective cap can also be used as a lens hood."

The story behind Grunwald's fascination with this camera started

with a new exhibition introduced by the Neue Sammlung in 2019 called 'The Sound of Design' ["Der Sound des Wirtschaftswunders"], which allows visitors to listen to the sounds of appliances from the 1950s and 60s on display in the museum. In this collection, there are about ten different objects from the GDR and the Werra camera is one of them. "It came as quite a shock to me," says Grunwald, "I was born 60 years ago in West Germany and for the first 30 years of my life I lived in a divided Germany. After a further 30 years of living in a united Germany, I realised I could tell you a lot about Scandinavian or Italian design but knew next to nothing about GDR design and production. So, I did some research in the

museum library and found out more, also about this camera, and thought 'I must have it, it's a really important object'."

It's not just objects that are close to Grunwald's heart, but their context too: the stories and circumstances that surround them. Through context, objects acquire meaning and the user greater understanding. When he was asked to do his tours at the Neue Sammlung, they liked the idea of having someone from the industry to explain industrial design from a completely different point of view from that of an art historian, he says. "When you talk about objects there is the big story relating to the historical style on the one hand, but there are also a lot

of small stories from the people who designed and made it on the other. With art, for example, you have one artist that painted a particular picture. With design it doesn't work like that. An industrial design object is never invented by one person alone. Take the Braun Sixtant shaver, which is famous for its black and silver colour combination. It has this colour because Ewin Braun and Fritz Eichler [Rams's predecessor as head of design at Braun] really liked some Scandinavian cutlery design from the 1950s that was silver with black plastic handles. So Eichler suggested to Hans Gugelot together with Gerd Alfred Müller, to try that combination with a shaver. After Müller left Braun he went to work for the pen-makers Lamy where he used the same colour combination for his designs there. A product never stands alone. This is what I try to share with my tours."

The arrangement of Grunwald's collection throughout his home is very specific and clearly a lot of thought has gone into where each object is placed. "When you start your professional life with technical drawing, you have to be precise, so yes part of me does like precision," he says, adding: "It's a gift but also a burden sometimes. It's about how I see things and aesthetic compositions. I was always fascinated by Wassily Kandinsky's work – not so much his paintings as his theoretical works on form such as Point and Line to Plane – because it showed me that there was a concept behind why things work one way and not

another. So, over the years I have developed an eye for arrangements. Graphic design for a book, for example, is all about how you arrange things. It's the same exhibits in a museum or for the contents of your shelves at home."

Although some of the objects in his collection look factory-fresh, despite their age, others bear the marks of years of use. Dieter Rams is very keen on the traditional Japanese aesthetic of wabi-sabi, which is all about transience and imperfection – it is the idea that an object becomes beautiful through time and use. It might seem a contradiction to apply this term to an industrial object, as against one that is crafted by hand, but what they have in common is that they are both tools for the user. Grunwald explains: "My SK 4 radio-phonograph, for example, is old but it looks new, like fresh from the factory, because it has been repainted over the years. I chose this one because it is a big piece and I wanted to have the same feeling that people must have had in the 1950s about having what was really the first technical object, as against a piece of furniture, in their living spaces. On the other hand, I have a 1955 Braun SK 1 radio, designed by Fritz Eichler and Artur Braun, where you can really see the traces of use over the years and the plastic has discoloured in places. I like this too, precisely because it has been used. It's 65 years old and has done what it was made for. For me it is a balance, I can live with both of them."

The precision curation of the contents of Grunwald's shelves extends to his kitchen as well. Even the food packaging appears to be a considered part of the aesthetic. "I did actually buy a whole bunch of Bärenmarke condensed milk cans, which have a distinctive light blue graphic design on the tin, because they contrasted so nicely with the orange wall behind," he admits. His kitchen shelves are also home to a collection of coffeemakers, including the Moka Express first designed by Alfonso Bialetti in the 1930s, as well as Richard Sapper's 9090 Espresso maker for Alessi alongside some Braun kitchen appliances, like the coffee grinder by Reinhold Weiss. "All of them look really new," he says, "but I use them, they are not just for display."

There are two designers in particular whose work runs like threads through Grunwald's collection and his research. The first of them is the aforementioned Hans Gugelot (1920–1965), one of the least-known greats of his profession and professor at HfG Ulm, who was stopped short in his prime by a heart attack at the age of 45. "If he had lived longer, I think we would have known much more about him and he would have achieved so much more" says Grunwald. He was incredibly important for the Ulm Design School. The product design there was much more impressive than that of the Bauhaus in my opinion – much purer, much more methodical – and he was responsible for that. He also influenced many students of

"A product never stands alone. This is what I try to share with my museum tours."



Compact Rangefinder Werra camera, 1953



Apple's iPod, 2002; Rams T 41 for Braun, 1962; Sony Walkman, 1979; Apple iPhone, 2007



product design, including Reinhold Weiss and Richard Fischer who went on to Braun. Gugelot was certainly known for his contribution to Braun design, but I think it is a pity that he is not known more for it. The SK 4 again is a good example for context in this respect. The design is not just Rams, it is not just Gugelot, and it is not just Rams and Gugelot either. It also an idea by Fritz Eichler, it's a system from Wilhelm Wagenfeld and Gerd-Alfred Müller, it's a layout from Otl Aicher ... there are seven or eight different people who made their contribution to it. That is how industrial design is. Nobody mentions my name when talking about a BMW, or the name of the engineer who designed part of the engine."

The other important person in Grunwald's life is the graphic designer and typographer Otl Aicher (1922–1991), so much so that the entire colour scheme of his apartment derives from his work. "As a child I remember Otl Aicher's designs for the 1972 Olympic Games in Munich being pretty much omnipresent, but it wasn't until much later that I learned the story behind them," explains Grunwald. Aicher was a school friend of Werner Scholl, the brother of the German anti-Nazi activists

Hans and Sophie Scholl, who were executed by the Nazi regime in 1943. Aicher too was strongly opposed to the Nazis and deserted the army and went into hiding with the Scholl family towards the end of WWII. He later married their older sister Inge Scholl and they both, together with Max Bill, founded the Ulm Design School. "When Aicher became the lead designer for the 1972 Olympics he wanted to create something as far as possible from the Berlin Olympic Games of 1936 under the Nazis, so the colour scheme does not include red, for example, which he felt was the colour of dictators.

"What really fascinated me about his work for the games was this combination of his knowledge and skill in graphic design and the content, or intention behind it – that his decisions were not just aesthetic ones. The 1972 Olympic Games were about showing another kind of Germany to the world. I spent a lot of time researching Otl Aicher, looking through the HfG Ulm archives and talking to people who had worked with him. So when I moved into my apartment, which incidentally is only a few hundred metres away from where Aicher's design studio was and from where Hans and Sophie Scholl used to

live, I decided to make the connection I also have in my heart to his work to the walls of my home by painting each room one of the colours from the Olympic Games: orange for the kitchen, blue for the living room, green for the bedroom/office and silver in the hallway. Silver was the celebratory colour used instead of gold. I also have pictures of some of his early designs on the walls, including one of the Olympic torch relay that I like very much because on one hand all the colours meet in it and in the other hand because he took this thing that the Nazis introduced (the torch relay) and completely changed its representation, stripping it of all the mystification and symbolism the Nazis tried to imply with it."

So Grunwald's choice of domestic colour scheme was not just an aesthetic, but a political and ethical one as well. It's an unusual way to choose the paint for your apartment. But it brings in a lot of layers of context, which is totally in keeping with this design expert's ethos: the colour scheme, together with the furniture and the objects on display, complete the interior decoration of his flat as a collaboration across time with most of the greats of German post-war design in a precisely perfect way. 🖐️



Olympic sports poster by Gerhard Joks, 1972



Just a finishing touch

Plans for dinner

Training to be an architect helped Hanna Geller prepare her menus

"I was always the person who turned up to site meetings with food. It was amazing what an impact baked treats could have, whilst we all sat around talking through plans in some freezing cold, half-finished building. My food lifted the mood, and everyone got on a little better – which made proceedings run so much smoother" explained Hanna Geller, who didn't plan on forging a career in the world of communal dining. After studying architecture, she made the decision to move into interior design and spent many years creating domestic interiors for private clients. It was only after managing the completion of substantial renovations to her own family home in 2013 that she decided on a shift in career path – it was time to start something new.

'Building Feasts', began as a food blog (that Hanna started during the pregnancy with her fourth son) and gradually morphed into teaching cookery classes from the comfort of her own kitchen. A couple of years

later, the 'Supper Club' was born, set up with her friend and photographer Jeremy Coleman. Hugely popular, these laid-back, ticketed events were always a sell-out success, and took place at Hanna's spacious home in central London. With menus designed around seasonal themes or planned with like-minded collaborators, every morsel of food was prepared and cooked by Hanna. An intimate, communal dining experience, all courses were served 'family style' and accompanied by bespoke cocktails created by a local mixologist. Smiling, she remembered, "It was really all about people building new friendships in a relaxed setting. Food was just the vehicle – not the main performance."

It wasn't long before 'Building Feasts' banquets had become the place to dine in the capital, but the pair were soon forced to adapt when the global pandemic meant sharing dishes (and tables) with strangers was off the cards. ←

Unable to entertain in the usual way, Hanna turned to the digital world instead and launched the 'Monday Bake Date'. Hosted from her Maida Vale kitchen over the summer of 2020, they amassed a cult following with up to 80 people a week tuning into the group video call. Unaware of how the move online would affect the demand, Hanna laughed and said, "Just like everyone else, I was stuck in the house – with four kids. At the start it was fantastic because all the usual rules went out of the window. We were staying up late, having ice-cream parties and eating breakfast in bed. It became a bit of an adolescent truant house with us all running our own schedules and getting into our own rhythm. But when we realised this might continue for longer than expected, I knew I needed to be doing more – I wanted to try and build a community."

Connecting people with food seemed the most obvious thing to do, and before long there were home cooks from all over the world joining in. 'Monday Bake Date' subscribers were sent an email listing all the necessary ingredients a few days beforehand to give them time to prepare. "It was fantastic. I chose the recipes very carefully so they required minimal equipment or experience, and for an hour everyone could take a break from the news and share something good together. We had someone waking up at 5am in Sydney, another woman in India baking at midnight. Others joining from the United States, Germany, France, Switzerland and Ireland. The great thing about cooking, is that it forces you to concentrate on what you're doing and helps create balance – you have to be present in the moment. I was beginning to really miss holding the 'Building Feasts'



Hanna's chocolate chip cookies

"The great thing about cooking, is that it forces you to concentrate on what you're doing and helps create balance."

cooking classes, but the 'Monday Bake Date' meant that I could now teach people to cook on every continent, not just locally."

The stress of dinner party preparations has always bypassed Hanna, who prefers to disregard the competitive side of culinary expertise and focus instead on the social aspect of sharing a meal. At university, she was the self-proclaimed household hub, and became renowned for her seemingly endless ability to put together delicious meals made using modest supplies for herself and fellow students.

With a grin, she described the parallels between cooking and her

architectural background and revealed, "It's all about planning. Back then, when I was designing spaces, every project would have a long, drawn-out exploration phase. Finding out what the clients are into, what their lifestyles entail and what kind of taste they have. Armed with this, you begin to build. You start with the bare bones, then lay a solid foundation and keep adding layer, after layer, of flavour, colour, texture, lighting and then the final details. When you build a meal it's the same principle. From an outsider, or a dinner guest's perspective, it might all look effortless, but the process begins long before the doorbell rings. What they'll never know is that the magic happens because, even when I was out shopping ←



The family home and the location of the 'Supper Club'

the day before, I was already cooking (in my head) and thinking ahead – planning a timeline for roasting the chicken and spicing up those carrots.”

Gesturing towards the discreet shelving system behind her, stuffed with cookbooks, crockery and tall glass jars packed with grains, Hanna smiled and said, “I’m not the world’s best cook, but it gives me permission to be messy, creative and enjoy myself. The beauty of what I do isn’t about the ingredients, it’s not food theatre.

I want people to feel more confident about buying food, organising the pre-recipe to cut down on the pressure and make sure everything is more fun. Even with the ‘Supper Club’, there are still components and timelines to consider. There are similarities to my old job, but instead of years in the making, in a few hours it’s all over – and either you’ve had a glass of wine and a giggle, or an explosive argument and smashed a few plates. Whichever way you look at it, it’s evolving and never really finished. Just like life.” 🍷



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