

AnOther

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**Michelle
Williams**

There's No Place
Like Home





Clarke & Reilly

Couture meets furniture design

There may be considerably more to a chair than meets the eye. That is certainly the case with designers Bridget Dwyer and David Grocott's latest art project, the aptly titled 8 Chairs. The founders of Clarke & Reilly, creators of bespoke interiors and furniture (the business is named after their respective mothers' maiden names), travelled extensively and invested heavily in the furniture in question, the dates of which span three centuries, from Queen Anne to post-second world war.

"The chairs were sourced throughout England," says Grocott, who has more than 25 years' experience sourcing objects of rare loveliness and then re-working them, often leaving their most profound elements intact. This is all carried out with a couture-like attention to detail and emphasis on fine hand-craftsmanship, not to mention the potential emotional power of a piece. "We responded to the chairs," adds Dwyer, whose passion is textiles and who sourced them from similar time frames as the chairs: a precious Fortuny indigo print, Spitalfields silks, and an 18th-century prairie dress all appear. "We covered the chairs, we uncovered them..." Grocott explains. "Because they are old, the guts of them - the skeleton, the joints - are very beautiful."

For five years, the chairs became part of their lives. The duo lived with them, obsessed over their every quality, and subjected them to the

most extreme elements: the snowy rooftop of a rundown warehouse space in south London, and then the California desert. The chairs travelled with their owners to 29 Palms - they were working on a house for a client there - where sandstorms and heat battered and faded them still further. "We thought if we were going to expose them then we should do it in London in February and in the desert in July," says Dwyer. "To us, each chair is based on a fictional character, a fictional person. We wanted to see what would happen to them and try and make sense of that."

There is a wistful, romantic quality to what remains a work in progress, and a delicacy to any treatment that is as respectful of each chair's roots as it is imaginative and transformative - from the stain made by a chain that tied one particular piece in place, to the fading of fabric from black to navy, and from the barely visible erosion of a water-gilded 19th-century frame, to a highly distinctive scent. (Grocott loves the latter, Dwyer isn't so sure.)

"We felt almost sad abandoning the chairs," Dwyer says, looking at them back in the safety of the showroom, before they are unveiled at Libby Sellers Gallery in the spring. "But they blended in with the environment. They came to life there."

Words Susannah Frankel
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