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Clarke & Reilly: 8 Chairs



Maksymilian Fus Mickiewicz talks to the interior design duo about their chair project, which has travelled from Peckham to California

A certain musk, reminiscent of woody decay taints the air of Libby Sellers Gallery. Eight chairs sit on eight white plinths. Each holds to a certain period; from modernist office recliner to winged Georgian piece. Nevertheless, all are re-upholstered in haute couture fashion, be it bandaged tightly with hard wearing leathers or ruched lightly in folded pink hues. Then, they have been exposed to splintering and blistering courtesy of Peckham Rye's multi-storey car park roof and California's hundred degree Fahrenheit desert heat waves.

This is 8 Chairs, the work of David Grocott and Bridget Dwyer, a couple who reconsidered their respective backgrounds in antiques and fashion to form interior design agency Clarke & Reilly after a successful collaboration on an eccentric gentleman's flat eight years ago...

How did work on this particular project begin?

David Grocott : We have a weakness for chairs and we've been putting these things together for years, so it organically grew into this collection. But we didn't set out for it to be eight chairs.



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Bridget Dwyer: We were just collecting pieces that spoke to us over the last five years. There were times when there were eleven or twelve chairs... They got edited out.

David: We just experimented with them really, saw how they reacted to certain things and then worked with that reaction.

“They’re not based on people
...they’re not that literal”

What’s the process behind each chair?

Bridget: David’s education and knowledge of working with antiques means that every chair we source has a little something about it (in a very humble way). Each chair remains a beautiful chair: it’s not like we turn the chair into a table, a lamp or something funky. It’s more like couture, where a very traditional and labour intensive process sees every single thing thought out, and made bespoke for that particular piece.

Do you see *8 Chairs* as a design process?

Bridget: Putting them outside in Peckham gave a lot of opportunity to look at them in a new light and respond to their experience of the weather. We knew there would be a reaction to the weather, but it wasn’t like “if we expose them to the sunlight at a certain angle we’ll get a certain pattern”...

David: There was a strong effect left from a chain secured to a chair but the chair was going to get blown away so we just grabbed the heaviest thing that we happened to have, which happened to be a chain. It may look a bit forced but it was almost ad-hoc how it happened. It’s not faked in anyway.

Images courtesy of
Clarke & Reilly



You’ve talked about narratives being associated with the chairs. What narratives are these?

Bridget: They’re not based on people, or some character living in the eighteenth century... they’re not that literal. It’s more that if you’re around them all the time, and you look at them in a room they look like people because they have such strong characters. We ended up with this collection because each one of them is strong enough to stand on their own, but more importantly they’re strong enough to stand as a group and not lose their identity. And I think that’s where that referencing narrative came from.

David: It works best if you think of them as different characters round a dinner table.