

Boom times at a London festival

By Alice Rawsthorn

He spotted it on Hampstead Heath. A beech tree had fallen down, and tree surgeons had started breaking it up. Peter Marigold was struck by the extraordinary shape of the bark and branches. "I was suckered," he said. "It was such a monster. Giant green twisted elephant skin with glowing discs at each point the chain saw had cut in. Incredibly graphic."

Marigold sought permission to remove the tree from the heath, and reworked the branches into "Octave," a shelving system whose shape is defined by the natural lines and angles of the wood. Octave is to be unveiled next week in Grandmateria, the debut show of Gallery Libby Sellers, a new contemporary design gallery opening in London.

The gallery's launch is a highlight of the London Design Festival, the design jamboree running for 10 days beginning Saturday. Now in its fifth year, the festival spans more than 200 events: from exhibitions of furniture by rising stars like Assa Ashuach and Maarten Baas; to a rare talk by the Dutch book designer, Irma Boom; and the World Congress of the Lomographic Society, a geekish bunch who chart the world in old-fashioned snapshots, over 100,000 of which are to be displayed in Trafalgar Square.

The London festival can't match the commercial clout of Milan's or Cologne's gargantuan furniture fairs. Nor does it rival the Dott 07 design biennial in northeast England for rising design engagement, or Turin's World Design Capital program for cultural ambition. But it has become bigger, and more eclectic each year, and is now setting up camp in the freshly renovated Royal Festival Hall, where it will exhibit new design pieces by the architects Zaha Hadid and Amanda Levete, on the riverfront. The festival's motley assortment of talks, debates, exhibitions and lomographyfests acts as a fun entrée to the London design scene. And Octave combines the two seemingly incompatible themes of events this year: the "design-art" boom and sustainability.

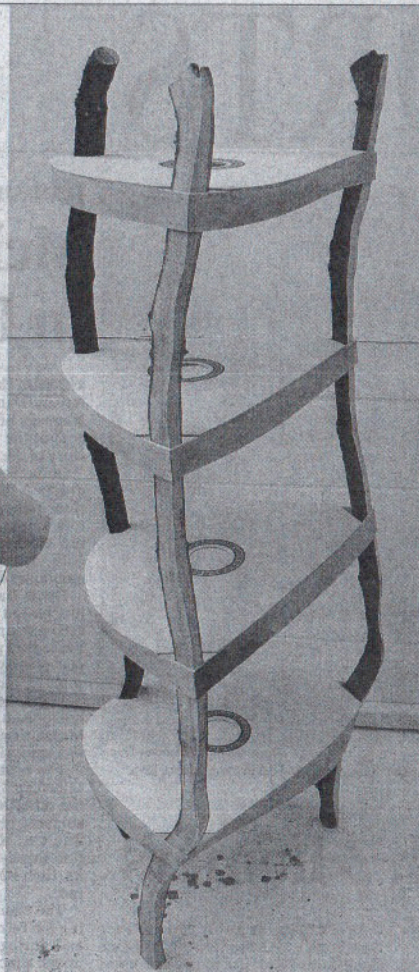
Historically, Britain in general — and London in particular — has a great design tradition dating back to the 18th century. The Industrial Revolution was fueled by the country's prowess in science and engineering, and gifted designers emerged in other fields: John Baskerville and Richard Austin in typography, and the Thomases — Chippendale and Sheraton — in furniture.

Britain has continued to produce — and edu-

LONDON



Above, a light (untitled) by Karen Ryan; right, the "Octave," made of tree branches by Peter Marigold.



designersblock, Karen Ryan and Rabih Hage Gallery (above left), and Gallery Libby Sellers and Peter Marigold (above)

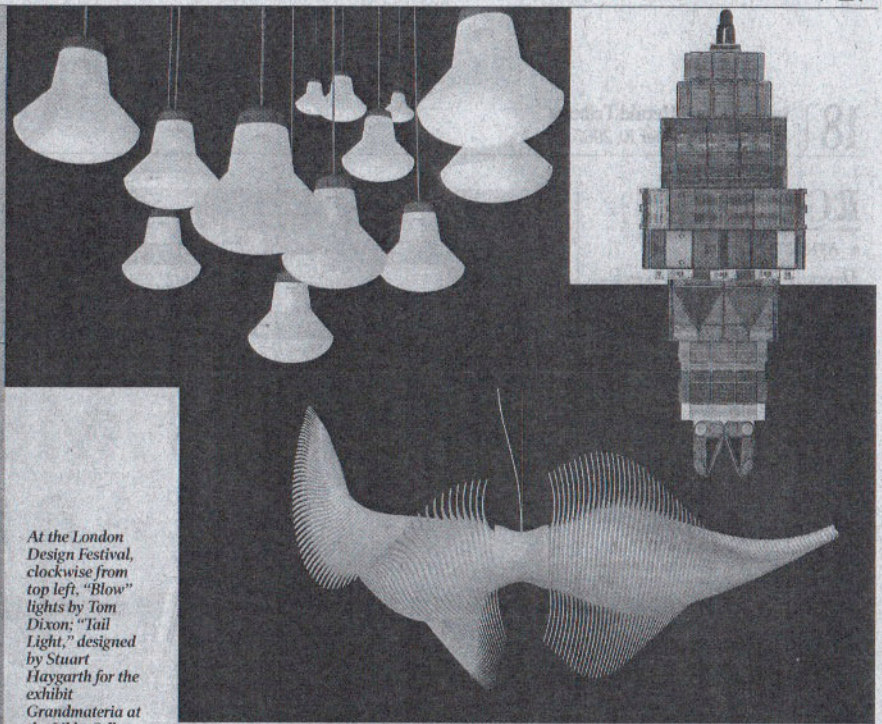
cate — some of the world's leading designers: Graphic Thought Facility, Peter Saville and Kerr Noble in graphic design, and Matthew Carter in typography. Industrial design is dominated by Rolls-Royce's coups in aerospace engineering, the mostly British design team at Apple in southern California, and by London-based independent designers such as Jasper Morrison, Marc Newson, Barber Osgerby and Sam Hecht.

The British are equally accomplished design consumers, fueled by the television "makeover shows" that are despised by design snobs, but have spawned a new breed of design buffs. Newson's retro-futurism is now the default style on the high street. Motorway cafés sport Morrison's neo-rationalist chairs, and you can sink into Arne Jacobsen's modernist Egg chairs in McDonalds. The festival plays to this audience in its commercial hub, the 100% Design

2007 exhibition at Earls Court. Anyone interested in young designers' work can find it in the fringe events around designersblock in Shoreditch and Tent in Spitalfields, which includes the Circa "vintage" design fair.

By far the most dynamic market is for dizzyingly expensive design-art, otherwise known as limited editions of sculptural (often uncomfortable) furniture and experimental graphics. Until now this market has focused on New York and Paris, but prices have rocketed, buoyed by soaring contemporary art sales and rising demand from London collectors. The boom could turn to bust if the turbulence in the financial markets continues, yet the London Design Festival, and next month's Frieze Art Fair, will mark the emergence of a new design-art scene in London.

Grandmateria is the first of a series of guerrilla projects at which Libby Sellers will exhibit



At the London Design Festival, clockwise from top left, "Blow" lights by Tom Dixon; "Tail Light," designed by Stuart Haygarth for the exhibit Grandmateria at the Libby Sellers Gallery; and the "AI" light by Assa Ashuach. Inset, "The Fluke," by Jay Osgerby of Barber Osgerby. Its shape derives from an anchor.

From above left, Tom Dixon Ltd; Rabih Hage Gallery and Assa Ashuach; Gallery Libby Sellers and Stuart Haygarth; and Barber Osgerby

Ideas flourish and prices climb to new heights

work of young designers such as Stuart Haygarth and Julia Lohmann, as well as Marigold. Another new design gallery is to be opened by the furniture company, Established & Sons, on Duke Street in St. James's during the Frieze, when a group of international design dealers will pitch their tents in Hanover Square for the first annual DesignArt London fair.

The auction houses are investing in London design, too. A highlight of Christie's London contemporary art sale next month is to be one of Marc Newson's 1986 Lockheed Lounge chaises longues. With an estimate of up to £2.2 million, or \$2.4 million, it is by far the most expensive work by a living designer ever to be auctioned, and Christie's expects it to break the record of £500,000 set by a Newson cabinet in New York in May. Phillips de Pury is also planning to hold major design auctions in London starting in March.

For those who seek a higher purpose from design than £1 million-plus chaises longues, the sustainable strand of this year's festival may be more appealing. Among the most engaging projects is the Deptford Design Market Challenge for which 27 design teams — including &made, Daniel Brown and Marti Guixé — were each asked to choose a second-hand object from Deptford Market in southeast London. Their challenge is to make a new object from it for an exhibition at the Royal Festival Hall.

Equally enticing is Tom Dixon's installation of Blow low-energy lights in Trafalgar Square. "The trouble with low energy lighting is that the light is too cold," said Dixon. "We've created a shape, pretty much like an enlarged bulb, that warms it up." At 5 p.m. on Sept. 19, he will give away 1,000 Blow lights. If you're wondering whether or not to go, think of the limited edition based on the 500 chairs that Dixon gave away free at last year's festival. It is now on sale at Moss in New York — at \$35,000 for each chair.

For information on festival events, visit www.londondesignfestival.com.

iht.com/design

A slide show of more images from the London Design Festival.