A full-page photograph of Rosie Huntington-Whiteley. She is wearing a white, strapless, two-piece dress with a sheer, ruffled overlay. She has long, wavy blonde hair and is wearing large black circular earrings. She is looking slightly to the right of the camera with a soft smile. The background is a white curtain with large, stylized pink letters 'S', 'T', 'A', 'L' made of a triangle pattern.

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# LOVE IS IN THE AIR

ROSIE HUNTINGTON-WHITELEY ON HER SWEET, SWEET ROMANCE

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9 FEBRUARY 2014

## TELLIN

FOR THE GALLERIST LIBBY SELLERS, DESIGN REACHES FAR BEYOND FUNCTION. IT'S ALL ABOUT THE STORY, FINDS BECKY SUNSHINE

I'd like to be the Peggy Guggenheim of design. Is that too preposterous?" asks Libby Sellers, the London-based design gallerist and curator. "My long-term goal is to have a wonderful network of designers I call my family, and to have crazy times together, producing amazing work that other people might celebrate. That's as self-aggrandising as I'll get."

So far, so good. Since Sellers, a former senior curator at the Design Museum, in London, set up her own gallery in 2007, she has built a reputation as a champion of international design talent. Her gallery, which started life as a pop-up — at the London Design Festival, Design Miami and other international fairs — has, since 2011, put down roots. "When I left the museum," she says. "I knew my own gallery was something I had to try. I started talking to designers about commissioning work, without knowing where I'd show it. The pop-up was out of necessity. I hadn't run a commercial gallery before, and didn't have the money to take on a lease, so I had to do it organically and make mistakes without the outside world noticing too much."

Her aim wasn't specifically to support emerging designers, but, as it turned out, she did, and it went rather well. "Working with newer talent outside mainstream industrial production was the way to go for me," she says. "The people I collaborate with are all very different, but share passion and dedication."

Those designers include a rota of some of the most exciting names on the circuit, including the German-born Julia Lohmann, known for her award-winning experimental work with odd materials such as cow's stomachs, rawhide and, most recently, seaweed; the London-based Peter Marigold (part of the Okay Studio collective), known for his wedge-shaped shelving, which launched his career, his vast, rippling desk for the Museum of Childhood and his two-dimensional square light; Simon Hassan, who has created leather furniture pieces for Fendi and woollen rope for Kvadrat; and the current darlings of the design world, the Italian-born, Eindhoven-based duo Formafantasma, whose work straddles folk craft, sustainability and nostalgia, and includes investigations into Mount Etna lava and a project in charcoal for the Vitra Design Museum, in Germany.

It's the human element Sellers likes most. "I love the designers. I like that they're creative, yet still

Sellers nurtures new talent at her London gallery

# G TALES

have a sense of 'feet on the ground'. I love how they can go off on flights of fancy about how they perceive their work, and that they're eloquent and art-oriented in the way they research – yet they can have the most normal conversation about pricing and production.

"Design is allowed to be about materials, process and investigation. It doesn't just have to be about form following function. Once you free yourself from that 20th-century mandate, you realise there's a whole world of opportunities available to you to be more experimental and expressive."

Ask the recently married Sellers if she has struck a decent work/life balance and she smiles wryly. "I suppose not, but my work is truly my passion, so it's a 24/7 thing for me." When she's not in the gallery, she's flying off to see her designers, meet potential new ones and attend shows. Along with six to eight exhibitions a year, private consultancy for art and design collectors, and now luxury brands requesting her expertise, it's a packed schedule.

What defines her gallery, she insists, is the time, space and contemplation she allows around each piece to give it a narrative. "When you walk into any retail environment, there's so much competing for your attention that the individual story of an object gets lost," she says. "By running a gallery, I hopefully give the objects the breathing space to tell their story. That feels like the main difference between what I do and what a furniture retailer does. I have to sell, but for me the function is about its narrative. That's the added value the designer has brought to the piece."

Sellers's current exhibition is *Drawn From*, a group show featuring existing work from the gallery's inventory. "It's about celebrating the linear qualities of some of the designers I represent," she says. Works include hand-knotted rugs by the graphics studio M/M (Paris), which replicate the pages of the graphic designers' sketchbooks, thread-wrapped furniture by the Swedish-Chilean designer Anton Alvarez and architecturally inspired stacked glass lights by the Italian-born Paola Petrobelli. "My hope," Sellers says, "is that the kinds of works we're choosing are markers of their time and act as social conduits." ♦

*Drawn From* is at Gallery Libby Sellers, 41-42 Berners Street, London W1, until March 1; libbysellers.com

## COLLECTORS' PIECES

LIBBY'S LATEST HOT TIPS

24 lamp by Paola  
Petrobelli, 2013



Carpetalogue rug by  
M/M (Paris), 2012



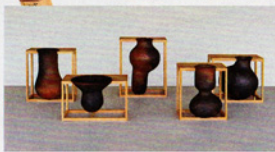
Wooden table by Peter  
Marigold, 2013



Wooden Vase B by Peter  
Marigold, 2011



Sinkhole vessels by  
Liliana Ovalle, 2012-13



Thread  
Wrapping  
Machine stool  
by Anton  
Alvarez, 2013



GIDEON HART, PETER MARIGOLD, PAUL FLEWIS, LILIANA OVALLE. ALL WORKS COURTESY OF GALLERY LIBBY SELLERS