

Nest Design

EMILY TOBIN talks to Lucy Bathurst, whose one-of-a-kind curtains made using vintage fabrics are as exquisite as works of art

PHOTOGRAPHS DEAN HEARNE

Lucy Bathurst comes from a long line of keen 'stitchers'. Her grandmother wrote a book on patchwork – which curiously was published by purveyors of schmaltz Mills & Boon – and both her mother and aunt were interior designers. Holidays were spent in Scotland learning how to sew, while Lucy's time at home was dedicated to decorating her bedroom. 'A life of making things was inevitable,' she says.

Having worked as an interior designer for a time, Lucy trained in curtain making and launched Nest Design in 2001. In the company's first iteration, traditional tassels, swags and tails were the order of the day, until 2007, when she was flown to India to make 42 pairs of identical silk curtains for a palace in Hyderabad. 'I'd work on-site among the frangipani trees with pigeons flying over our table as we stitched,' she says. 'It was wonderful.'

Regretfully for Lucy, the project finished on time and on budget after three months, by which time she had fallen in love with India. Her plan was to move to Delhi, but when a job came up working for Retrouvius in London – a design practice known for its innovative and intelligent use of salvaged materials – it was too good an offer for her to turn down. 'Maria Speake, the company's co-founder, taught me to see fabric in a completely different way. She chucked out all convention and introduced the idea of incorporating vintage fabrics into design.'

It was there that Lucy formalised her magpie-like obsession with textiles, and when she left Retrouvius in 2010, she relaunched Nest as a design studio that is as much a hymn to the wonder of fabric as it is a place of production. Every piece she and her team of 'ninja' seamstresses make is bespoke.

In 2017, Nest relocated to a workshop in north London. Here, Lucy has squirreled away boxes stuffed with broderie anglaise, antique doilies, vintage handkerchiefs and embroidered linens. There are kimonos, hand-dyed velvets in gemstone shades, striped Moroccan wools and Indonesian panels. Where possible, all new cottons are sourced in the UK. One by one, each of these pieces will be alchemised into a new design, be it a blind, cushion or lampshade. 'The process is always the same: find a beautiful textile and imagine what it might want to become,' says Lucy. 'Seeing it through to the last stitch still seems to me to be a form of magic.'

OPPOSITE (clockwise from top left) A blind made from voile. A burgundy patch salvaged from a seat cover. Found fabrics in the studio. Hand-stitching voile. A restored antique silk panel. Lucy's bedroom wall, hand-stitched with gold thread. Antique lace. Inspecting laces. Lucy hand-stretching voile on lampshades. THIS PAGE Lucy in her north London workshop

Lucy has sewn translucent voile blinds for Somerset House's restaurant Spring, and created diminutive patchwork curtains for a gypsy caravan and a vast curtain for a double-height sitting room in Shoreditch. 'Our studio at the time wasn't big enough, so we had to lower it out through an upstairs window of my house and down the outside wall to test whether the six-metre drop would hang properly.' It did and the result was an enormous modernist panel in rich shades of copper, created using hand-dyed linen with circles of Indian khadi and a solitary block of burgundy velvet. It is an impressive creation.

Lucy is currently working on pieces for a hotel and continuing to collaborate with the interior designer Rachel Chudley on textiles for her projects. 'Watch anyone walk into a room and the first thing they'll do is look at the window,' she insists. 'So why not embellish it? Curtains turn an architectural space into a home. To quote William Morris: "Have nothing in your house that you do not know to be useful, or believe to be beautiful." Curtains are inherently that – they are genuinely useful and exquisitely made, and the fact that they are beautiful just makes them all the more fabulous' □

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