

“We live in ’60s houses and we bring pieces into the home that aren’t new, that have a personal feeling and a warmth about them, and then we mix them with contemporary design to sharpen it all up.”



Midcentury Modern

Facing page Lucy beneath the open-runged staircase
Clockwise from right Small enamel and wood
teapot bought at Midcentury Modern; Yellow glass bowl
by Holmegaard, available from www.ourshowhome.com;
Michael Young Stick Lights for Tom Dixon; OZ
lights bought at Midcentury Modern; vintage number
boxes bought at Midcentury Modern.



The show has been held at some interesting venues, among them the renowned Modernist De La Warr Pavillion in East Sussex. I asked Petra and Lucy how they go about choosing them.

“For us the setting is as important as the exhibition; we want people to come to see the building as well as the show. It’s the icing on the cake. We’re sticklers for natural light so all our shows have that feeling of space; I think that helps you picture what the objects would look like in your home.”

The sunlight that pours through the floor-to-ceiling windows certainly enhances the experience; it feels like a freer way of buying than in an artificially lit exhibition space.

“Christison Hall at Dulwich College was a gift. We couldn’t have asked for a more appropriate style of building. The college was really shocked that we liked it so much – I think at the time they thought that all that concrete and glass was a bit of an eyesore!”

I ask them what type of shopping experience they are aiming to create. “We’re determined to keep the shows unpretentious. The way they look is deliberate, like they’ve been spontaneously created. They’re not supposed to look like an Olympia show with sets that have been built over three days, because we find that a bit intimidating ourselves.”

“We want items of furniture to remain affordable. We both get such a buzz from seeing people actually walk out carrying a chair, a standard lamp, or a sideboard!”

The show has certainly remained accessible to all its visitors, as there’s something to suit every budget. The possibility of ultimately making a purchase creates a tangible energy. “Primarily it’s the type of show that we want to go ►



Midcentury Modern



to ourselves, and we're always disappointed if we haven't had a chance to look around!"

I ask about 'upcycling': Do you think this is an initiative we will see more of in the future? "We now include more upcyclers in the show, because we believe that this adds another dimension, where people like Rupert Blanchard, Zoe Murphy and Ellen Calvert are taking mid-century pieces and doing amazing things to them."

"There's a comfort in this make-do-and-mend approach – it may be just a case of getting that chair down from the loft and realising "Wow, that would look fantastic re-upholstered."

Some dealers are now reupholstering chairs and sofas themselves, often choosing fabrics in subtler tones to suit contemporary taste.

What advice would the pair give to someone looking to start a collection or re-style their home? Petra says, "See what you feel passionate about. Find something that speaks to you and tells you a story. It may be one particular thing that kick-starts a collection."

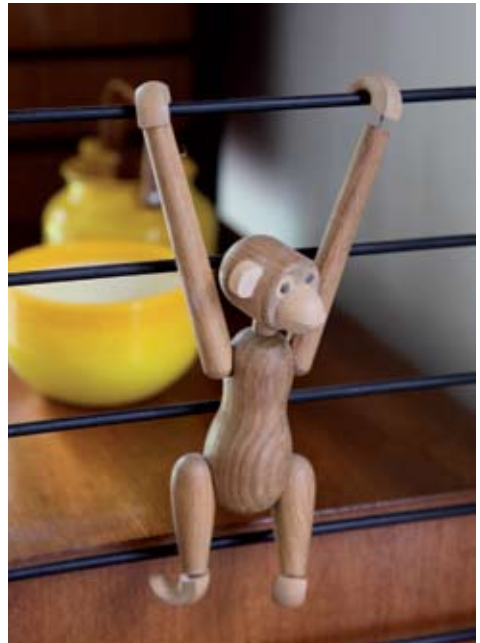
Lucy adds, "I'm not into houses that are dead with too much design, for me there should be elements that remind you of who you are. Keep things personal. Don't hide the children's toys for instance and occasionally let your kids scribble on the walls. I think people shouldn't get too precious about it."

There's one particular question that I've been pondering through the course of the conversation: which '50s designer would they most like to have met?

Petra answers, "I would love a walk in the woods with Tapio Wirkkala, just absorbing nature. Asking him about the effect it had on his designs would be inspiring and wonderful. He must have had the most amazing house."

Lucy responds, "I would like to lounge around with Grete Jalk, possibly in her beautiful hanging chair, and chat all afternoon about what it was like to be a female designer in a male-dominated world. I'd ask her how she balanced her home life with such a successful work life."

With a new show at Lord's Cricket Ground on the horizon, I ask whether they're intending to attract a different crowd.



Above left Green glass vase by Holmegaard and green plastic pepper and salt, both available from www.ourshowhome.com; Above Teak monkey by Kay Bojesen, available from www.ourshowhome.com

"Although we want to attract visitors from north London, we're hoping that the die-hard Dulwich fans will come too. We want people to feel that there's something new for them in the May show."

Once again the venue has been carefully selected. Lord's has got a rich architectural history; the nursery pavilion, where the show will be held, overlooks the Media Centre, an aluminium and glass pod designed by architects Future Systems.

With attendees ranging from top designers to casual enthusiasts, the show has certainly made its mark over the last eight years. "The support's been brilliant. We're constantly humbled by the success of it. We're optimistic that the new show will be just as popular and we look forward to seeing how it's received."

And the recipe for this success? "No matter what people have told us to do with the show, we've always gone with our gut instincts. As a woman, I think you use your instincts more than anything else." 🍌

Modernshows have been invited to curate the furniture and homeware section of the High Street outside the Royal Festival Hall at Wayne and Gerardine Hemingway's Vintage festival on the South Bank on 29–31 July 2011.



THE SHOW: SPRING 2011

Tom Rigden
Photography by Jonathan Goldberg

For the past nine years Dulwich College, the independent school in south-east London and educator of such great minds as PG Wodehouse, Raymond Chandler and Bob Monkhouse, has also been home to the renowned 20th century design show Midcentury Modern.

Previously listed as one of *Time Out's* Top 10 Things to Do in London, and now attracting up to 3,000 visitors, it has become something of an institution itself. The show works its magic on the college twice a year, creating a treasure trove of British, Scandinavian, European and American mid-century furniture and decorative arts.

On 20th March 2011, we arrived eager to immerse ourselves in the experience and to establish what makes this day out such a popular event.

With 85 dealers and designers in total, we began our journey in the Modernist hub of the show, the Christison Hall, a 1960s concrete and glass refectory housing 19 dealers. We then headed upstairs to visit the 29 contemporary designers whose work is informed by mid-century design, and afterwards a stroll across the playground led us to the North and South Cloisters where we found a further 37 dealers and upcyclers. We had reached design nirvana!

The show really does attract a cross-section of design enthusiasts: from the cool East London crowd, to young families looking to furnish their homes, to people who were probably buying this stuff first time around. And it's not just about the furniture: there's a social buzz too, with some great food, a display of vintage cars, and even a mandolin player strumming a tune as you arrive. ►



DEALERS

Name of business Mark Parrish,
Cirencester

How did you become interested in mid-century furniture? "For most dealers it tends to be a bit of a lifestyle choice – I've been doing it for 20 years now. A lot of dealers start out as collectors and then when they gather too much stuff, they need to get rid of some of it. I remember going to Camden Market as a student in the '80s, and seeing all this amazing stuff and it fuelled my love for modern design. Things have changed now, as we can see it all on the internet."

Name of business Fragile,
Birmingham

Star piece? "Today I've brought British 1950s pieces from Heal's and Harrods. My star pieces are chairs from Paris by Howard Keith, c.1952, which I've reupholstered in teal linen."

