



The team at Rachel Bates Interiors, from left: Nicola Kilroe, Katie Goodwin, Sophie King, Rachel Bates and Alberta Skinner

# WITH BATED BREATH

*Tytherington-based interior designer Rachel Bates has set her sights on world domination, writes Kate Houghton*

'MY head is bit of a crazy place, filled with colour and ideas,' Rachel says. 'When I first set up three years ago I knew I had a long way to go so spent a lot of time getting to know and be known by the brands I wanted to work with. Very quickly I sat down and asked myself what I wanted from my business. I realised that I didn't want to be 'just' an interior designer – I wanted to be a brand in my own right, to create a legacy, something to fulfil and stretch me. I set my mind on creating a luxury, global brand.'

Before the paint was even dry on her first commission, Rachel had attracted the attention of that doyenne of interior design, Nina

Campbell, who spotted in her a natural successor to her crown it seems, and offered Rachel the opportunity to place some of her own interior accessories in Nina's Chelsea shop.

Rachel explains: 'I had developed a range of accessories using vintage glass bowls and glasses filled with silk flowers. Nina invited me to produce a collection for her shop, which would be clearly labelled 'Rachel Bates Interiors.' It worked really well and was my first own-branded product.'

This was perhaps the first indication that Rachel's dreams were not of the pipe variety, but something she could stretch for and grasp.

PHOTOGRAPHY: JOHN COCKS

Her ambition is grand, but if you don't ask...

'I am hugely inspired by Natalie Massanet. While Nina Campbell showed me it was possible to create a world-known interior brand, Massanet demonstrated that it was possible to launch an online, high-end brand fashion retailer wholly online. While there have been additions to the online fashion retail market in the mould of Net-a-Porter since, there was no interior design version – so I set out to do it myself.

'It was a May Bank Holiday weekend, only a couple of months into the life of my new business, and I sat down and sent emails to some of the companies I wanted to work with. I decided that before I looked at collaborations with famous names, I needed to sort out my own brand range. I emailed the Limoges porcelain designer-manufacturer Marie Daâge and the Prague-based crystal makers Artel. On Tuesday morning I opened my emails, and both had responded positively. I nearly fell off my chair – both my first choices had recognised what I want to achieve and liked the idea!'

Rachel chose Artel and Marie Daâge as she recognised kindred spirits in their design style.

'We are inspired by colour, by nature and by what can be achieved by traditional, artisan craftsmanship. Both Marie Daâge and the team at Artel work in the most vibrant, rich shades and this love of colour informs much of what I do myself.

'I had decided that I needed a motif, or two, that ran through all my own brand designs. I chose the peacock and the lace cap hydrangea. Where I grew up in Nether Alderley, the neighbours kept peacocks and they would come and sit on our high garden wall – I was fascinated, obsessed even, by the colour and the iridescence

of their plumage and by the grace with which they move. The lace cap hydrangea is my favourite flower; I adore the delicacy of the blooms and, oddly for someone so immured in colour, I love the white ones best!

'Marie Daâge loved the peacock motif, and started sketching ideas there and then at our first meeting. The team at Artel work with the floral motif and tell me that my design is the most demanding and difficult of all they do! I thought that this was perhaps not a good thing, but in fact their craftsmen love it, as it gives them a challenge that they relish. Everything they make is done with passion and pride, one piece at a time.'

It is the 'one piece at a time' concept that sets Rachel's range apart from the rest. Her studio in Tytherington is filled with sparkle, colour and fragrance and irresistible pieces from her collections. You can see and hold the pieces she has designed, but you can't take them home – each piece is made to order solely for the purchaser. Hand crafting

takes time; but you truly do get what you pay for. A single Rachel Bates' champagne saucer costs £185, but when you see the work that goes into it, you can quite appreciate why. To further help us understand, Rachel has created a series of beautifully shot videos. Each one examines the relationship she has with the craftspeople with whom she has chosen to work and looks in detail at their heritage and production values.

A recent collaboration with Laurent Perrier brings a smile to Rachel's face, a slightly conspiratorial one, if I'm being honest.

'I make no bones about it,' she laughs. 'Champagne is my favourite treat in the world and Laurent Perrier Rosé my favourite of Champagnes. I sent them an email explaining my

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Laurent Perrier Peacock crystalware





Rachel Bates surrounded by beautiful pieces she loves



Marie Daâge Limoges porcelain in turquoise



Marie Daâge Limoges porcelain Peacock tea set in amethyst and emerald

vision and telling them I wanted to collaborate on a crystal collection for their various Champagnes. They loved the idea and have really seized on it; we have a rose pink Artel crystal Champagne cooler and glasses to launch with, for their Rosé, using the peacock motif. We will release further collections over time, where I will draw inspiration from the brand's history.'

It's obvious that Rachel has a clear vision for her brand and the talent, work ethic and sheer chutzpah to make it happen. It took two years to bring her to the point where she was able to open her studio in Tytherington, when she also recruited a team to help her. Her interior design business is going from strength to strength, with three full house projects on the go at the moment, in Alderley Edge, Westminster and Quinto do Lago on the Algarve, as well as numerous single room projects. Her website is gaining traction and both Marie Daâge and Artel are working on commissions as we speak. I ask what she has set her sights on next.

'I'd like to break into retail,' she tells me. 'I think there is a global market for what we're creating here. I've pinpointed some of the most luxury retailers in London, New York, Tokyo, Hong Kong, etc, and now I'm going to email them.'

Ah, those magic emails. Global domination...and all from a small studio tucked away in Tytherington. ♦

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