



(Clockwise) Ceraudo chairs, hand-painted by Tess Newall; the dining room at Charleston, East Sussex; close-up of details on chair legs; room designed by Newall for the set of the 2018 film 'Vita & Virginia'; Tess Newall  
Penelope Fewster; Hermione McCosh



"They believed that people should be surrounded by beautiful, well-made things that are long lasting"



## A chair of one's own

**Interiors** | Set designer Tess Newall and furniture maker Ceraudo are reinterpreting Bloomsbury Group designs to chime with a contemporary aesthetic. By *Ana Kinsella*

Those who know her work, Tess Newall is the go-to millennial interpreter of the Bloomsbury Group. Perhaps it's an unlikely role for the 32-year-old decorative artist and set designer to occupy: it's been a century since the circle of artists, writers and intellectuals based in central London, who included EM Forster, John Maynard Keynes and Virginia Woolf, were at their peak. But for Newall and many of her age, the group has never been more relevant than it is today.

Why might that be? Newall has theories. "There has been a marked shift recently in the value society puts on how things are made," she says, sitting in her London studio. "After a materialistic period of mass-produced pieces which end up in landfill, we are trying to be more thoughtful consumers, thinking about how we can make and use the things that we have around us."



The Bloomsbury Group were informed by the principles of the Arts and Crafts movement. "They believed that people should be surrounded by beautiful, well-made things that are long lasting and could be used in everyday life."

Those principles came to life in the output of the Omega Workshops, the design studio at 33 Fitzroy Square established by Roger Fry in 1913. Fry was known for introducing French Post-Impressionist painting to London and, inspired by this, wanted to bring a more playful sensibility to furniture and

fabrics. "We have suffered too long from the dull and the stupidly serious," he said to one journalist.

Along with fellow Bloomsbury artists Vanessa Bell and Duncan Grant, Fry oversaw the production of furniture, fabrics and objects by resident artists at the Omega Workshops — objects that became emblematic of the Bloomsbury aesthetic. It is with Omega in mind that Newall has collaborated with online furniture retailer Ceraudo — started by sisters Emily and Victoria Ceraudo — on a set of hand-painted dining chairs inspired by the lampshades and furni-

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Sisters Emily, left, and Victoria Ceraudo

Ceraudo. Victoria and Emily Ceraudo approached Newall about creating a new piece together.

“I’d always really loved hand-painted Dutch and Scandinavian furniture,” Victoria Ceraudo explains. “I saw Tess’s children’s chairs and we thought that it was perfect – knowing that she could do everything by hand, without having to reproduce a print, was really amazing.”

“It means every single chair will be unique and hand-painted by her, instead of her designing a stencil and it being replicated.”

Founded in 2016 and stocking a range of both vintage and contemporary furniture, last year Ceraudo launched Pome! by Ceraudo, a line of pieces designed in-house by the sisters and their collaborators.

Victoria Ceraudo says that her typical customer is a young professional, perhaps a renter or design-minded first-time buyer.

Newall’s dining chairs match that market: two hand-painted designs on a dove-grey lacquered wood chair, with a woven seat that recalls the detail on the Omega dining chairs now in the dining

lish at university. Soon she was exploring the archives at the Victoria and Albert Museum.

A friend then asked her to paint a Bloomsbury-inspired mural in a cottage bedroom, which was spotted by the Anglo-Swedish interior designer Beata Heuman. Heuman went on to commission Newall to paint a wardrobe based on Vanessa Bell’s own.

Later she was the on-set art director for *Vita & Virginia*, the 2018 feature film starring Gemma Arterton, based on the relationship between the writer and the author and garden designer Vita Sackville-West.

“We recreated Charleston in a farmhouse in the Irish countryside,” says Newall, referring to the East Sussex country home of Vanessa Bell and Duncan Grant, which became a hub for the Bloomsbury Group during the 1910s and 1920s.

“They were radical and quite forward-thinking. I loved that as a group they didn’t take themselves seriously. Even Charleston itself was ever-evolving.” Newall has also led hand-painting workshops at Charleston, which today is a museum housing the Bloomsbury archives.

It was her hand-painted pieces – lampshades and children’s chairs – that led to Newall’s collaboration with

**‘If you can’t afford to do up a whole room, having painted pieces, whether it’s a little chair or lampshade, can transform a space’**

room at Charleston. “They bring an element of art into a room,” says Newall. “If you can’t afford to do up a whole room, having painted pieces, whether it’s a little chair or a lampshade, can completely transform a space.”

If modern money favours the austere, then the decorative, playful approach of Omega represents the charming and understated. This is an aesthetic that fits a country cottage or a Georgian townhouse, rather than a slick new-build.

Pentreath says: “The fascinating part of the Omega Workshops’ legacy is that something essentially so rarefied and shortlived should resonate with history and culture for so many generations.”

Plus, as both Newall and Victoria Ceraudo say, the style has a certain character. “A chair like this is such a good conversation piece,” says Ceraudo. “I imagine most people who see them in your home will ask about them.”



ture produced there. Fry closed his workshop in 1919, after financial difficulties and a frosty reception from critics. Yet 100 years later, Omega and its output is revived.

“The reputation of the Bloomsburys has ebbed and flowed over many decades,” says Ben Pentreath, an interior designer and contemporary Bloomsbury shopkeeper and resident. “But a combination of their rich colours and patterns, eclectic sourcing and the entire narrative romance of this group of friends and associates has never felt more attuned to contemporary trends.”

It is a sense of timelessness, Pentreath says, antithetical to the dominance of buzz-worthy, social media-friendly decor, that makes this aesthetic appealing to decorators and designers today.

Like many of her generation, Newall first learnt about Bloomsbury through the work of Virginia Woolf, recommended to her by a friend studying Eng-

(Above) the library at Charleston; (left) Bloomsbury Group member and painter Vanessa Bell cuts Lytton Strachey’s hair, 1920  
Jon Santa Cruz, Alamy

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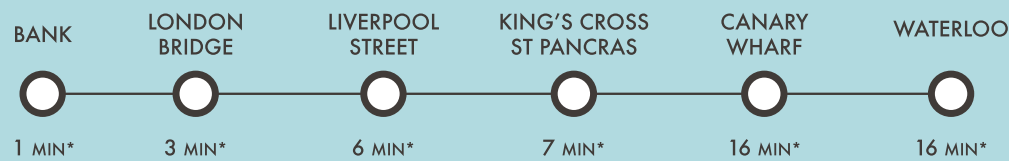
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