

# British bespoke

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PHOTOGRAPHS  
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'Harmer' sofa, £3,576, by Edward Bulmer, made using traditional upholstery methods. **Garden seat** made from a composite material with an antique-bronze finish, £2,600, by Felicia Fletcher. **Curtain** by Corita Rose, printed on cotton velvet, £2,000 for a pair. 'Antarctica' engraved glass **bowl**, £540, and 'Streamscape' **vase**, £500; both by Frank Grenier. Georgian **Bath town house**, hand-painted with decorated period interiors, by Mulvany & Rogers; price on application. 'Pollock Stripe' hand-painted empire **lampshade**, £300 for a 50cm shade, with vintage wine-bottle glass **lamp base**, from £220 for the 34-litre version; both from TMO Lighting. Hand-painted and gilded **screen**, £2,000, by Glaze. Porcelain **pendant light**, £1,800, by Martha Freud. 'Kirkwood' **chair**, made from pallets, £890, by Hendzel + Hunt

People think nothing of spending thousands on a designer coat but balk at spending on furniture,' muses Melanie Cable-Alexander, who recently opened an online shop, Lapaloosa – meaning 'beautiful object or thing' – for British-made furniture and crafts. She hopes to encourage shoppers to spend differently and at the same time help these craftspeople, many quite unknown, to bring their skills to a wider audience. 'By buying something handmade by a British designer maker, you are choosing something that will be talked about for generations, as well as supporting local craftsmanship and lowering your carbon footprint,' says Melanie.

Melanie's desire to support these skills, some of which are in danger of dying out, was born of her time at *Country Life*, for which she ran a hugely successful series called 'Living National Treasures', featuring everybody from a 91-year-old pearl worker to a restorer of Silver Cross prams and much more besides. Melanie longed to find a way to keep these unique skills alive and two years ago decided that an online emporium was a good way forward – Lapaloosa launched last December. Alongside this, she also founded the Slow Furniture Movement, a non-commercial umbrella organisation to support good-quality, British-made, bespoke and sustainable craftsmanship – the antithesis of the cheap flat-packed furniture to which we so easily resort.

Despite its youth, Lapaloosa already has over 30 designer makers on board, a number that is continually growing. From each maker – be they a potter or a candlestick maker – Melanie has carefully selected products that she thinks will sell. From some she has commissioned entirely new products, something that she plans to expand on over time. Everything is made to order, and you can buy direct from the website or call Lapaloosa to discuss tweaks or new commissions. She is bringing these craftsmen and bespoke possibilities to your door.

'I'm not an interior designer,' says Melanie, 'but I've always made things and above all I'm a domestic creature. I want to make a home and give people a sense of happiness as they come through the door.' As you browse the Lapaloosa website, this sentiment is very much in evidence – the products, whether traditional, practical, quirky or indulgent, are all pieces you could easily live with.

Makers have come to Melanie in many ways – some are well known, others not, which she tends to prefer. Several were featured as 'Living National Treasures', such as Mulvany & Rogers, a husband-and-wife team who make exquisite architectural houses in miniature – basically, very

trains local potters and has a thriving apprenticeship scheme, which Melanie admires.

Melanie is based in the West Country, 'a magnet for talented makers', so many of her makers are local, such as upholsterers and furniture makers Hossack & Gray, who like to create something new out of something old. Another is Corita Rose, who designs bold and vibrantly printed cotton velvet – Melanie discovered her when she sat next to her web designer on the train. Some things have caught her eye in friends' houses – for example, the leather chinoiserie coasters, in fact made by engineering company Freshlook, which is more used to building bridges. Others have been recommended to her

– such as Thomas Greenaway, who Melanie sees as 'one of the most gifted and unusual mosaicists of our time, pioneering a revival in the ancient craft of pietra dura'. There can be few in this country doing anything like him, or who are so accomplished at such an early age.

Maddie Argyle and Sarah Garrett of specialist decorators Glaze got in touch because they had heard about Lapaloosa through Edward Bulmer – another designer for whom Melanie sells furniture. She went to their studio, spotted a beautiful screen in the corner and convinced them it was something she could sell; it now appears proudly on the website.

Lapaloosa showcases products by many other designers and makers too, and Melanie is constantly updating and adding to keep the website fresh and interesting. And as Mary Hossack of Hossack & Gray says, 'Although it is all about traditional craft, the mix on offer is edgy and interesting, not stuffy.' Most important, one gets a sense from the makers involved that it is good to be part of something

supporting good-quality British craftsmanship □



**1 Storage trolley** with waxed-steel frame and handcrafted wooden trays, £540, by Hossack & Gray. **'Animal Magic' wallpaper**, by PaperBoy, £120 a roll. Welsh **stick chair**, in ash and yew with a carved seat, £990, by Ben Willis. Hand-painted **candlesticks**, £75 each, by Luke Piper, made using a mould by his grandfather, John Piper. Découpage glass **table mat**, £110, by Suzy Barbor. Hand-dyed vintage linen **sheets**, £300 each, by Polly Lyster. **Cushions** in 'Animal Magic' (blue and glitter), £90 a metre, and 'Hand Made' (dark grey and black), £56 a metre, by PaperBoy. **2 Pietra-dura panel**, made

grown-up dolls' houses. Their clients include private individuals and museums, but for Lapaloosa they have released a limited-edition, six-room Gothic house complete with electrified light fittings. Whichford Pottery was also a 'treasure' – as a maker of terracotta pots it is very well known, turning out 600 pots a week, but also employs and

from hand-cut semi-precious stones, by Thomas Greenaway, from £1,500. A piece like this would take a month to make. **3 'Plant Box No 1'**: 12 porcelain vessels in a pigeonhole cabinet, each containing a light, and imprinted with a plant on the exterior £1,200–£1,500, by Martha Freud. **4 'Great Rollright'**, giant hand-thrown terracotta garden pot, £2,075, by Whichford Pottery. **5 Bespoke, personalised, hand-painted and lacquered backgammon board** by Alexandra Llewellyn, made using various woods, from £4,600. Clay **tiles** imprinted using real leaves, £12 each, by Nick Inns □

Lapaloosa: 01963-359639; www.lapaloosa.co.uk  
Slow Furniture Movement: www.slowfurnituremovement.co.uk | Melanie's Slow Furniture Movement show is on September 25 at Britannicus Stone, Unit 24 Chelsea Wharf, 15 Lots Road, SW10



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