

FURNITURE

Best seat in the house

Want a chair made for the Hermès family? A table from the Schiaparelli apartment? Meet the women who can source the finest finds



Isabelle Dubern, left, and Anna Zaoui, the co-founders of the Invisible Collection
WESTON WELLS

It was covetousness, really, that led Anna Zaoui and Isabelle Dubern to set up Europe's first online limited-edition furniture company. Zaoui was having her New York apartment decorated by one of France's leading designers, Pierre Yovanovitch, and Dubern wanted to own one of his iconic Papa Bear armchairs. Knowing that he made pieces only for private clients, Dubern asked Zaoui to order it for her.

"Talking afterwards we realised that if we wanted to acquire special pieces by incredible designers, then other people would too," she says. "So we approached designers, agreed which pieces of theirs we'd like to stock, and The Invisible Collection was born."



Bespoke asymmetric chairs, designed by Pierre Yovanovitch for the Invisible Collection

Since they started the online store in 2016 their roster of designers has grown from ten to more than 40. Prices for products range from less than £1,000 (the Dot Stool by Reda Amalou) to tens of thousands. (A Matchy Matchy headboard from UK's Studio Ashby is yours for £20,000, or an aluminium Silverwing seat by Fabrice Ausset for £70,000.)

While you might gasp at spending that much on a piece of furniture online, the London duo are well placed to know not only what design-lovers want in their homes, but also the sorts of figures that they are prepared to spend. The French-born Dubern was the creative director of Dior Maison and the Moroccan-born Zaoui is a former actuary who worked with cultural institutions such as the Serpentine and Hayward galleries.

They have employed many of the site's designers in their own homes, and clearly have a honed aesthetic sensibility. When we meet in their "invisible shop" – a discreet apartment in Belgravia, London, with a curated selection of furniture for clients to view – Dubern is head-to-toe in navy Christian Dior and Zaoui is wearing an artful mix of Loro Piana cashmere and Zara cigarette pants.

Cleverly, they have brought on board not only star designers such as India Mahdavi and Thierry Lemaire, but also a clutch of former fashion designers: Jérôme Faillant-Dumas, the former artistic director of Yves Saint-Laurent; Vincent Darré, who was the artistic director of Ungaro; Karl Fournier and Olivier Marty of Studio KO, who did homes for Balmain and the Hermès family; and Isabelle Stanislas, who designed apartments for Schiaparelli.



The Invisible Collection includes lamps designed by Studio KO for the Chiltern Firehouse

Customers connect with these designers, Dubern says, because of their links with the fashion world. “They love that they can have a chair that’s in the Schiaparelli apartment. Or a table that was made for the Hermès family. Or the jellyfish wall lamp that Studio KO designed for the Chiltern Firehouse.”

Refreshingly, most of the pieces don’t have the hard lines beloved of many mainstream designers. Zaoui says: “What people want now are decorative arts pieces, one-off creations that show the human hand, that aren’t perfect or manufactured, but are beautifully crafted.”



A hanging mirror by Damien Langlois Meurinne features in the collection

Their favourites? Failliant-Dumas’s Armchair Elephant. (“The children love to curl up in it,” Dubern says.) And the Asymetrie chair by Yovanovitch. (Zaoui says: “It’s super-comfortable, but looks like a work of art.”) They also have one-off pieces that aren’t on their website – to prevent them being copied, or because clients are reluctant for bespoke pieces to become commonplace. “For the right clients, we have access to some of the most beautiful pieces on Earth – all handmade, all of the finest materials,” Zaoui says. “These are our secret collection.” Given the rate at which the pieces are being snapped up, they might not stay secret for long.



From left: Jérôme Failliant-Dumas Elephant armchair, £5,000; Thierry Lemaire coffee table, from £9,590; Studio Ko jellyfish wall light, £3,960; Vincent Darré Calder table, £6,300

All products available at theinvisiblecollection.com