



Peacock Blue

The **Style** council

Imogen Clements meets power couple **Siobhan and Mat Hayles**, whose natural flair for design has seen them create two successful interiors businesses. Photos by *Jake Eastham*.

There is compatible coupling and then there are collaborative and utterly complementary pairings. Siobhan and Mat Hayles have forged two businesses that make the very best of their keen eyes for design and complement each other perfectly.

The Hayles are a transformative couple. Siobhan has built an interior design business out of her love for transforming buildings into stylish homes; Mat has created a vintage homewares site out of a love for uncovering quirky Americana and repurposing it into statement pieces – be they lighting or furniture.

“Bizarrely, neither of us comes from a design background. We were both based in London. I was working in the travel industry and Mat was a landscape gardener by day and in a rock band by night.” Mat was the elder brother of a friend of Siobhan’s and the couple met by chance on a visit to the family home.

Although not design-specific, their former careers certainly played a role in where they were to end up. Siobhan took a lot of inspiration from the decorative style

of the plush hotels she needed to visit as part of her job, and Rust and The Wolf, Mat’s company, has certain rock band connotations, not least in the name.

“I called the business Rust and The Wolf,” Mat reveals, “out of a love of old things that have a history and tell a story through signs of wear, hence Rust. The Wolf comes from a love of wolves. For me, they represent a spirit of freedom and the wild. Plus, the name Rust and The Wolf had a certain ring to it.” With a name and logo that wouldn’t look out of place on the front of a bass drum, the products Mat sells are also in keeping with the rock theme. “The business evolved from my love of iconic American styling, from Western times right through to the 60s and 70s. I was keen to bring this to the fore by repurposing items which have that classic American branding.”

How, then, did this couple come to build their respective businesses in Devon? “Although we met in London, we had a springer spaniel puppy who needed masses of exercise,” recalls Siobhan. “Mat had a beaten-up old Land Rover at the time and we’d bung a blow-up



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Mat and Siobhan

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mattress in the back and each weekend escape to the coast and countryside with the dog. We'd see derelict houses, ruins and talk in depth about how we'd renovate them, then we decided to do just that – sell up in the capital and head for one of the more remote spots in Cornwall – Cot Valley, near Land's End – to buy an old farm that we could renovate and turn one of its outbuildings into a holiday cottage.”

They'd found their forte, and their skill and unique styling turned heads such that others in the area asked them to work on their own cottages and convert them into stylish homes. On occasion, the owners were looking to go travelling, so Mat and Siobhan would offer to manage the property as a holiday home, and their first business grew from there – renovating and managing property. “At one point,” recalls Siobhan, “we were managing 12 holiday cottages, then our first child came along and like so many new parents we chose to move closer to our own. After a couple of moves and renovating along the way – this was now clearly an obsession – we were drawn to the moor and found our perfect home in Ashburton, with an additional barn also ripe for renovation.”

And so, Peacock Blue, a property that ultimately showcased both Siobhan's interior design skill and Mat's Rust and The Wolf product range, was born. “It was so called because a peacock used to occupy it,” says Siobhan. “The children called it Peeky. It used to watch as work proceeded, became a friend of the family and effectively inspired much of the look of the interior – both the colour scheme and the decorative flourishes. There is a lamp, the shade of which is created from peacock tail feathers. It's interesting, because peacock feathers are considered unlucky by some. In our case, Peeky would shed them in the barn, as if they were a gift. It seemed fitting to make use of them, make them

integral to the design and name the barn after him.” On moving to Ashburton, Siobhan formalized her interiors training by studying an Ivy House design course and then went to work for Woodford Architects' interior design team. “Gavin and Sarah Woodford were such great people to work with. During my time at Woodford I learned new systems of drawing, and the latest in design software. We worked on some great projects together, but after a couple of years, Mat's own business, after months in development, was ready to launch and I decided to go freelance to help him. It turned out that he didn't get much help from me as planned, though, as interiors jobs kept beckoning. Then, through Peacock Blue, I was approached by Unique Home Stays to design for them.”

It had always been the Hayleses' aspiration to let Peacock Blue through Unique Home Stays, as the company is known for its high quality, interesting properties. Unique Home Stays came to view the barn and liked it so much that they enquired about employing Siobhan's skills. “I was immensely flattered but thought they were being polite rather than serious. A few months later, however, they got in touch again and I've been working on Unique Home Stays projects ever since in my own capacity as a freelancer, which is wonderful.”

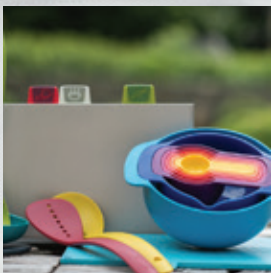
The arrangement is such that there is no cut, but a clear mutual benefit: Unique Home Stays sends clients Siobhan's way, because they know that she will deliver the style and standard of design they want on their books and that will ensure properties meet their full letting potential. For Siobhan, Unique Home Stays provides a stream of clients and a wide variety of properties to work on. “In some cases the jobs are merely as a consultant to owners or prospective owners looking to buy or renovate properties, and assessing the cost in doing so. In other cases, they are partial or full interior design jobs.



“Right now I’m working on a lodge in Bodmin, a hexagonal gatehouse that we plan to do wonderful things to. Mat travels, frequently stateside, trawling fleamarkets to source some of the most incredible American antiques for a song, then shipping them home to repurpose and sell to those looking for furniture and lighting that’s unlike anything else you’ll see.” Rust and The Wolf’s range features oil cans repurposed as floor lamps, console tables made from Crush soda crates, and footstools repurposed from Pepsi crates, the quirkiness of which lends itself not just to modern domestic interiors but also to restaurants and cafés looking to set themselves apart.

Each business is moving a pace. Rust and The Wolf, trading for just under a year, gets busier with pop-up shops planned in Bristol and London; Siobhan is embracing the wide variety of work that comes her way through Unique Home Stays and building her portfolio. “I’m loving being involved with projects that offer up a variety of design challenges, which I’ll occasionally turn to Mat on for creative input. For him, there’s nothing better than to see something he’s uncovered in a market and repurposed, on display and being used the way he intended it to be.”

rustandthewolf.co.uk
siobhanhayles.com
uniquehomestays.com



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