

HOLIDAYS FOR DESIGN BUFFS / THE NEW HEIRLOOMS / FASHION'S NEUTRAL GEAR

THE GLOSS

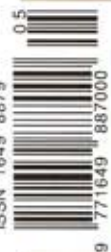
MAGAZINE

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Honey,
I'm
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IT'S
ME-TIME
NOT
TEATIME



IT'S ALL ME, ME, ME ... THE SELF-CENTRED FRIEND WITH DESIGNS ON YOUR TIME
PUNISH YOUR CHEATING HUSBAND WHY CLEVER WOMEN LOVE CELEB CULTURE
CRASHING BORES HE'S NOT "EMOTIONALLY UNAVAILABLE": HE'S JUST NOT THAT INTO YOU

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THE NEW HEIRLOOMS

FAMILY SEAT

The word may conjure up grandmother's china, but the new heirlooms are as much about the future as the past. Think about what you want to pass on to your children from beautiful furniture to elegant contemporary silverware, and start collecting future classics now

PHOTOGRAPHS BY NEIL HURLEY / STYLED BY AISLINN COFFEY

Not so long ago, after years of admiring (and not-so-subtle hinting) on my part, my mother gave me a beautiful antique necklace. I'd always loved how it looked - its heavy, interwoven chains and vintage feel - and, since I remember her wearing it throughout my childhood, it also held a certain talismanic quality. So inheriting this chain meant a lot (even more so when I learned it had once belonged to my great-grandmother), and it became a concrete reminder of my position - a link, if you like - in that more intangible chain stretching back generations. Such is the power of heirlooms - as artefacts of our personal histories, they are as much about the future as the past - and when you start to think about them, you're also faced with the question, 'what will I pass on?'

Furniture is an obvious choice. A serious piece can cost serious money, so it's already something you will put a lot of thought into, both in terms of financial investment and aesthetic staying power. "Durability is something to take into account," says Simon O'Driscoll of O'Driscoll Furniture, who make contemporary Irish pieces. "If you have young children, then a chair or table will get a great deal of use and abuse over the years. Our DC chair would certainly last a few generations." There's also the question of material - wood ages beautifully, mellowing and taking on a sheen with years of use. "Most timbers will age with time," says O'Driscoll, "some more than others - like cherry and walnut - but we recommend oak for its strong grain pattern and classic look." He also makes the point that opting for a classic piece means it will fit in with any interior, present or future, and you're less likely to get bored with it.

A family portrait by an artist you admire would be another good place to start - for now you'll enjoy it as a work of art, and in future years it will act as a snapshot of a particular moment in all your lives, capturing it for posterity.

Then there are the other, more traditional items that are passed from generation to generation, like monogrammed linen or engraved silver - luxuries that we tend to buy for other people rather than ourselves. "I find that most people who order monogrammed sheets are buying them as gifts," says Sari Winckworth of Beds of a Feather in Ashford, Co Wicklow, who specialises in bespoke bedlinen from Italy and Belgium (customers can specify their preferred colour, finish and quality). If a couple receive sheets as a wedding present, they can keep adding pieces themselves and build up a set to be passed on - one idea for a young family might be to have pillowcases made for every child born, with initials and

date of birth. Alternatively, sheets can be embellished with a family crest or other details. As the quality of the fabric is something Winckworth is passionate about, they'll also last beautifully; in particular the linen sheets, which, she says, "will just get better and better as they soften over time".

In terms of creating a legacy, few things can match a dinner service of bespoke porcelain for grandeur. John Coote of Coote & Co in Bellamont Forest, Co Cavan, has been designing furniture, rugs and lighting for seven years and, more recently, has created bespoke dinner services for Castle Leslie in Co Monaghan and the Duke and Duchess of Abercorn of Baronscourt in Co Tyrone, among many others. He says that his clients are very much thinking of the future when they commission porcelain - something bearing their own stamp that also references their past. Some work with their own heraldry and opt for a classic design - like the Duke of Abercorn, for whom he copied the Abercorn coat of arms from an existing 19th-century plate, matching the colours exactly - while others choose to create something completely new: Coote's son Angus came up with a contemporary design for his set, combining a silver A and smart blue stripes. When Sammy Leslie commissioned Coote to design three separate lines for Castle Leslie, they took elements of the family's existing dinner services as a starting point. For the breakfast service they copied a fragment of porcelain from the family's collection - plain white with a green double stripe; the afternoon tea service, gilt-edged with a pretty pink rose motif, was inspired by a teacup from a set that had belonged to her grandmother; and the main dinner service combines the family crest with quirky individual touches, like witches on broomsticks, chosen by Leslie.

But if their inherent sentimental value is what sets heirlooms apart from all our other possessions, then nothing could be more precious than a family album that brings together old letters and photographs, birth notices and children's drawings, birthday cards and wedding invitations, to be added to as years go by. Choose a leather-bound volume, personalised with engraving - a family name, or the name of a house - and it will be a beautiful object in its own right as well as a record of family history to look back on. Start one for your child's 21st birthday, or your parents' wedding next big anniversary - they'll thank you for it. ■ CATHERINE HEANEY
The Winckworth Collection at Beds of a Feather, Ashford House (Riverside), Ashford, Co Wicklow, 0404 42804, www.thewinckworthcollection.com. Coote & Co, Bellamont Forest, Cootehill, Co Cavan; 086 345 5024; www.cooteandco.com; www.cootehillbernardi.com.