

# Daughter by design

Arriving back in Australia after working for her family's furniture design business in Ireland, designer Charlotte Coothe has launched her own range. **Jacinta Le Plastrier Aboukhater** reports.

**A**S A 14-year-old boy growing up in Victoria's Western District grazier belt, John Coothe came across a grand 1729 southern Irish house, Bellamont Forest, in the pages of *Country Life* magazine. Designed by the esteemed architect Sir Edward Lovett Pearce (1699-1733) in a Palladian style, and originally built for a distant branch of Irish forebears, it sparked the stuff of dreams. He set his heart on one day owning it. Several decades later Coothe's family — with now-former spouse, Victorian MP Andrea Coothe — moved there, living in Bellamont Forest with their two daughters, Amelia and Charlotte, attending the village school.

An interior designer in his own right, the house inspired his family business, Coothe & Co, which specialises in Irish Georgian reproductions, including the manufacture of one piece of table furniture for Bellamont Forest that he had discovered in the margin of an archival drawing of the architect.

"Basically, dad has been a designer since he was very young and when we moved to Bellamont Forest, he couldn't find any furniture to fit it that was of the right proportion," says Charlotte. "So he decided to make his own."

The breakthrough came with his manufacture of a reproduction Irish Georgian peat bucket made of carved mahogany with a brass lining: "Everyone went nuts for it."

"Because of the type of clients we were dealing with, who had very old Irish houses, the product was traditional Irish and English furniture. But we adapted it to how we live today, making it more comfortable for a start — upholstering dining chairs with hand-sprung seats so you can't feel wood underneath the back of your legs . . . and not mean little seats. We also altered its scale."

For the past five years, Charlotte Coothe has spent life betwixt London, working initially for trendcaster The Future Laboratory after completing a marketing degree; Ireland — at Bellamont Forest running Coothe &



Co; and Australia, where other family members remain.

Yearning for the beach-fresh lifestyle of Australia, she decided to return late last year and branch off on her own, rebranding the family design lineage into her own business with modern interpretations of European and American classics.

The result is her inaugural range of Charlotte Coothe Furniture, featuring about 15 designs.

These include the Versailles Tub, an oversized planter box; the Bellamont Chair, a version of a traditional English design in a black gloss finish; and the Montgomery Console, with its five-clawed feet.

"That's the way you discern the difference between English and Irish furniture — Irish has five claws, English has four," she says.

Prospective clients meet with Charlotte to look through images before ordering the designs to be made up as is or customised. Manufactured by suppliers in Asia using sustainable hardwoods, orders take about three months to fill.

"It's classical contemporary furniture that is very much influenced by my experience with Coothe & Co," she says.

"However, I have to Australianise and adapt it and make it work for here. For example, I won't do stained wood and am steering clear of stained mahogany."

"It is more about raw wood and limewashes, giving it a more

rustic and relaxed feeling."

But it retains a sense of glamour, she says, embodying a forecast that The Future Laboratory made when she was at the company and that has remained vibrant in her.

"This is the idea that the future will swing back to the old, that people will start to dress up more, take more pride in themselves and their houses, and that they will want to start entertaining more formally, as in older days," she says.



## Contact

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Charlotte Coothe's furniture line reworks Irish and European designs with a more relaxed feel for the Australian market.

PICTURES: GARY MEDLICOTT