

Photography TIM O'CONNOR



Driving with
CHARLOTTE COOTE

INTERIOR DESIGNER CHARLOTTE COOTE
SLIPS BEHIND THE WHEEL OF A HEAD-
TURNING ROLLS-ROYCE GHOST EXTENDED.

By motoring expert Elise Elliott @EliseElliott_Media



CHARLOTTE'S STYLE is sublime and sophisticated. There are not enough superlatives to capture the spectre of the new Rolls-Royce Ghost Extended – longer and more lavish than ever before. Every finish is ultra-opulent, from the 850 stars which illuminate the roof, massaging seats and a rear Champagne fridge with two cooling settings: six degrees for non-vintage, and 11 degrees for vintage bubbly.

Despite its provenance, price and power, the Rolls-Royce is not flashy; it's quietly and classically confident much like designer Charlotte Cote. Charlotte's passion for design was ignited by her late father, larger-than-life interior designer John Cote. Charlotte spent a great deal of time in Ireland at the magnificent 18th-century Irish Georgian house, Bellamont Forest, which had been built for her ancestors and bought back and restored by her father in the late 1980s. In 2007 Charlotte started her own Melbourne-based business, Cote&Co, which specialises in classic contemporary, high-end residential interior design.

Charlotte brings that assurance to everything she does, including sliding with confidence behind the wheel of the \$1 million Bohemian-red Rolls-Royce for a day. There's an Irish twinkle in her bright blue eyes. "Shall I bring Champagne to fill the bespoke fridge?" Charlotte asks. It's okay; Rolls-Royce has already done the honours!



GRAHAM GEDDES ANTIQUES

Charlotte effortlessly reverse parks the Ghost Extended on Armadale's busy High Street, juggling a space right outside Graham Geddes Antiques. Our first stop is a sentimental one. John Cote and Graham Geddes were interiors pioneers in the 1980s, introducing an entire new aesthetic with the global, timeless appeal of antiques.

What's more, Charlotte's first part-time job during the school holidays was polishing the furniture here. "Graham was terrifying back then! He only paid me nine dollars an hour," laughs Charlotte. "But working here provided a brilliant education. It instilled in me an appreciation of antiques and their significance in history. I was surrounded by beautiful objects. The smell of polish still reminds me of this place to this day," says Charlotte.

Like Aladdin, Graham appears from his cave of wonders. "Oh, Charlotte, you've grown so tall!" he muses. Charlotte gives the less than terrifying Graham a big squeeze. "I'm not 13 anymore," she quips.

From the dense, dizzying display of objects, Charlotte chooses two pieces: a late 2nd or early 3rd-century Roman white marble torso of Apollo and an exquisite 1810 celestial globe from a collector in Jaipur. Both pieces fit snugly and safely in the boot of the Rolls. grahamgeddesantiques.com.au



SCOTT LIVESEY GALLERY

Despite the Rolls-Royce's generous length, Charlotte executes an efficient three-point turn and drives down High Street to Prahran and our second destination. While Scott Livesey started his eponymous business 22 years ago, he only recently bought and renovated this light, bright and ethereal space. Scott stocks mainly Australian artists, including bold works by Dick Watkins who is still painting and producing in his 80s. After much deliberation, Charlotte settles on a small piece by Sydney artist Alesandro Ljubicic. scottliveseygalleries.com

This page, clockwise from top Vibrant works by Australian artist Dick Watkins capture Charlotte's attention at Scott Livesey Galleries. The Rolls' capacious 500L boot easily stashes the treasures that Charlotte has sourced. A small work by Alesandro Ljubicic wins the designer's heart. Opposite page, clockwise from top left Charlotte in the cabin of the Rolls-Royce getting to grips with the leather-covered steering wheel. Perusing the eclectic artefacts at Graham Geddes Antiques. The Rolls-Royce takes to the streets of Melbourne with aplomb.



"Glamorous, strong and sophisticated, it's the vehicle we all aspire to drive."



CADRY'S

It's no secret Bob Cadry is a car lover. The owner of Australia's oldest and leading retailer of antique, classic and contemporary rugs is waiting out the front of his Melbourne showroom for the Rolls-Royce's arrival. What's more, he's reserved a spot.

Bob's passion for rugs is just as infectious. His father Jacques Cadry established the business in 1952 upon his arrival from Tehran, Iran. Today, Cadrys boasts the country's largest collection of decorative and antique rugs from Persia, Afghanistan, Morocco, Turkey and India.

"Dad was a great collector and advocate of the weavers' art. I'm honoured to pass on the tradition," says Bob as he brushes a Persian Qashgai kilim. "A handwoven rug is a work of art, yet the piece is rarely signed. They are often made by humble people keen to pass on culture and tradition. A rug possesses a talismanic quality; it's imbued with mystery and history. They have adorned many great palaces in the world," says Bob.

Charlotte loves working with rugs. "They add texture. They're so tactile," she says. She is interested in the latest range of Cadrys shearling rugs – a textile traditionally used for European coats and jackets. They're impossibly soft and luxurious, and match the sheepskin mats in the Rolls-Royce.

cadrys.com.au

DOMUS TEXTILES

Across the road is Domus Textiles which features heavily in Charlotte's work. Her favourites are Colefax and Fowler and Nina Campbell's fabric and wallpaper – fittingly, two brands embodying British sophistication. "I appreciate Nina's lush, textured weaves in an earthy palette," says Charlotte. Today, however, Charlotte is poring over 100 per cent Belgian linen in Glacier by Manuel Canovas with Domus's Julie Clark.

domustextiles.com.au



This page, from top Charlotte indulges her passion for fine rugs at Cadrys. Motoring fan Bob Cadry reserved a spot out the front of his Melbourne store in anticipation of the arrival of Elise (left) and Charlotte in the Rolls. Julie Clark of Domus Textiles guides Charlotte in her selection of fabrics in the Melbourne showroom. Opposite page, clockwise from top left Charlotte takes a closer look at William Yeoward pieces at Cromwell. The control panel of the Rolls-Royce Ghost Extended. Iconic high-fashion store Le Louvre is one of Charlotte's perennial favourite destinations.

CROMWELL

The Ghost floats down to Cromwell, also in Prahran. This wholesale-only showroom is a furniture, lighting and interior accessory mecca for designers and decorators. Cromwell sources several brands, including Jonathan Charles, Theodore Alexander, Currey and Company, and Lexington. "I love that Cromwell is a family-run business and has been so for more than 50 years. I feel as if every time I come here they know my style and what I like on projects. There are always new items coming in and, most importantly, they are always on time," says Charlotte, who is a particular fan of the late William Yeoward, one of London's leading creative forces. She has her eye on his 'Broxton' console. "Yeoward based his design on older European 18th-century furniture pieces and adapted and updated them giving them a contemporary feel and finish," says Charlotte. She also has her eye on his 'Ruthin' coffee table with signature spot design. cromwellaustralia.com.au

LE LOUVRE

Our final destination is high-fashion haven Le Louvre. Founded in 1923, the boutique brought European couture to the city and today is this fashionista's favourite haunt. "I've been coming here since I was a little girl!" exclaims Charlotte as she pulls the Rolls-Royce up under the iconic pink neon Le Louvre logo. "You have to look good for good interiors. I particularly love the designers stocked here, including Stella McCartney, Jil Sander, Saint Laurent and Chloé." Charlotte tries on a Saint Laurent red cotton corduroy blazer. It matches the Rolls! Consider it sold. Now where's that celebratory Champagne? lelouvre.com.au



CHARLOTTE'S FINAL THOUGHTS... ROLLS-ROYCE GHOST EXTENDED

DESIGN

Glamorous, strong and sophisticated, it's the vehicle we all aspire to drive. Rolls-Royce says this car "rejects superficial expressions of wealth" but it's extremely luxurious inside. I like how pleasant the leather-wrapped steering wheel feels between my hands. The red stitching on the interior that perfectly matches the exterior paint is a lovely touch. The lambswool floor mats feel divine. Even the mirror is perfectly lit for applying makeup.

DRIVABILITY

Initially it could feel intimidating to drive but in a short while it becomes intuitive. I quickly learn where the various controls are located and how to manoeuvre the vehicle. Despite its imposing size it's incredibly fast. I floored it a couple of times and it really took off. It's incredibly smooth to drive over Melbourne's potholes and tram tracks thanks to that magic-carpet-ride suspension. And despite its power (provided by a 6.75-litre twin-turbo V12 engine) it's extraordinarily quiet in the cabin. Steering it around busy streets is actually a peaceful experience. Out on the road this car garners a great deal of attention and respect. Everyone stares, and drivers let you in the traffic.

FUNCTIONALITY

The Ghost Extended has that delicious smell – an exceptionally elegant new car smell! The 500L boot could hold just about any artefacts I source. The doors that self-close with the touch of a button are brilliant. It's incredibly spacious. I just won't be letting my black labrador inside!