

# Collective good

*Design Anthology UK celebrates its fifth birthday with a special get-together of some of our favourite women, dressed by Raey at Matches*

*Words / Emily Brooks Images / Joe McGorty Styling / Sorrel Kinder*



Five years ago, the first issue of *Design Anthology UK* rolled off the printer and a new publication was born, dedicated to the values of quality, beauty and innovation (and, most importantly, a belief that those values are far from mutually exclusive). Among the features inside were thought-provoking ideas on biodesign, a travelogue of the Lithuanian capital, Vilnius, and homes in London, Paris and rural Denmark.

The events of the intervening years can only be described as seismic, but *DAUK* didn't skip a beat: in fact, armchair daydreaming about other places, other spaces and other people's brilliant ideas often delivered a critical means of escape. So, for the magazine's 16th issue, and fifth birthday, the editorial team thought it was worth taking a step back to reflect on and celebrate all that's been achieved, viewed through the lens of some of the women who have graced its pages. This formidable group are all dressed in clothing by Raey – Matches' peerless in-house label – and shot at 5 Carlos Place, its Mayfair townhouse HQ.

Some of this talented group were right there in issue one: fashion designer Edeline Lee; Natsai Audrey Chiesa of biodesign lab Faber Futures; interior designer Tatjana von Stein of Sella (formerly Sella Concept, whose daring interiors and furniture launch were also both featured in the most recent issue of *DAUK*, bringing things nicely full-circle); and interior designer Sophie Ashby. They've all gone on to deliver game-changing work, with the sense that all of them are still only getting started.

In 2018, Chiesa – whose ambition is nothing less than to overturn the textile industry's reliance on petrochemicals – talked about the challenge of scaling up and standardising Faber Futures' bacteria-based dyes (which use no harmful chemicals, and 500 times less water, than normal dyeing processes). In 2023, a new brand, Normal Phenomena of Life, was launched at the London Design Festival, co-founded by Faber Futures as a marketplace for biodesign products, including a bacterially dyed silk jacket. "Having a lifestyle brand allows us to really explore the possibilities of

where biodesign can have the biggest impact," she says. "In the next 12 months we hope to share a perspective of the kind of real material and environmental impact we can hope to make with biotechnology." What's changed now, says Chiesa, is that many more designers are embracing biodesign as a part of their everyday practice: "We are reaching this milestone where everybody can get involved."

Laura Fulmine of M.A.H (Modern Art Hire) was featured in *DAUK*'s third issue "in its infancy when we were just finding our feet and unbeknown to us, heading into the eye of a lockdown storm with Covid." A stylist and creative director, Fulmine spotted a gap in the market for a business that could supply art and design pieces for shoots, short-term loans or purchase: since then, "the gallery has grown substantially," she says, with a sister space, The House, opening last year and several successful collaborations, including with Soho House.

Sophie Ashby's design career, meanwhile, has gone stratospheric ("it's been a rollercoaster," she says); a monograph of her work is out next year and she's working on projects from Brooklyn to Hong Kong. But she's also found the time to create a product line, Sister (with a capsule collection of fabrics its most recent launch); move to a new HQ near St James's Park, featured in *DAUK* issue 12; and co-found United in Design, with fellow designer Alexandria Dauley – a charitable trust that addresses the lack of diversity in the industry. It now runs a highly successful apprenticeship scheme that links design professionals with graduates from black, Asian, ethnic minority and low socio-economic communities. Ashby says that Dauley is one of the people she looks up to the most in the industry: "She is a force; a passionate and talented designer but also a committed campaigner to our cause."

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Left to right: Pooja Agrawal, Sheena Murphy, Emily Furniss Potter, Genevieve Bennett. All clothing, Raey at Matches ([matchesfashion.com](https://matchesfashion.com)). Agrawal wears shoes by Tod's, Murphy wears shoes by Gucci, Furniss Potter wears shoes by Bottega Veneta, Bennett wears shoes by Le Monde Beryl, all Matches (as before)





**“If you are bringing another product into the world,  
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Architect and planner Pooja Agrawal has also been busy meeting the challenge of societal inequality. In issue 09 in 2021 *DA/UK* featured her Sound Advice project (and subsequent book, *Now You Know*), an examination of the discrimination not just within her industry, but also stitched into the fabric of buildings and spaces themselves. She’s now CEO of the not-for-profit she founded in 2017, Public Practice, which gives the public sector the tools to help tackle inequality. “Public Practice believes that societal inequality plays out in places, be it the lack of housing, access to clear air or the feeling of belonging in public spaces,” she says. “By supporting local authorities’ skills and capacity, we can achieve more equitable places.”

What ties everyone together here is their desire to leave behind something with meaning and substance, whatever the discipline. When it comes to makers and creatives, that means walking a path between generating something new that genuinely fulfils a need, and treading as lightly as possible. “It is always about making the best product. In terms of quality, but also how we make it, what we use to make it, how we ship it, how many products we should make,” says Cassandra Ellis of Atelier Ellis, whose paint emporium in Bath was featured in issue 14 in spring 2023. “If you are bringing another product into the world, it has to be excellent – not just on trend or fashionable.”

Clémence Pirajean, interior designer and co-founder of Pirajean Lees (whose 20 Berkeley project was in *DA/UK* issue 15, a venue that also hosted one of the magazine’s supper

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Left to right: Tatjana von Stein, Edeline Lee, Louisa Grey. All clothing, Raey at Matches (as before), except Lee wears dress by Edeline Lee (edelinelee.com). Von Stein wears shoes by Souliers Martinez (all jewellery her own). Grey wears boots by Bottega Veneta, both Matches (as before)

clubs), says that she approaches projects “by *not* designing” as a way to foster longevity. “Instead, we prioritise developing a strong narrative that serves as the foundation for each project. By rooting our designs in a strong narrative, rather than focusing on aesthetics, we aim to create spaces that will withstand the test of time.”

Genevieve Bennett is head of design for Liberty Interiors (whose show in Milan this year, *FuturLiberty*, co-hosted an event with *DA/UK*). For her, longevity is also a prime consideration (perhaps not surprising given the 150-year heritage of the fabled department store she works for): “As textile designers we have a very strong focus on innovative fabrication, working with exciting suppliers on fabrics which are long lasting and timeless in terms of design and materiality,” she says. Currently designing Liberty’s 2025 collection, Bennett says that one of the barriers to achieving this is simply carving out the time to do her best work: “The modern workplace is one of permanent connectivity which can be very positive, but the pay-off is it can be very hard to find sustained, focused creative time to develop ideas, in terms of thinking, research and then creative development – and those are the things that are needed to produce really good, mature, long lasting and relevant work.”

Sustainability is often at the heart of this issue of creating substance, and uppermost in people’s minds as a professional and personal concern. “When we meet with new clients this is certainly one of the big issues that we discuss. It’s increasingly important as a consideration for everyone, from corporate brand strategy to home energy bills,” says Emily Furniss Potter of Daytrip Studio, whose Clapton house project was featured in *DA/UK* issue 11 in 2022 (a collaboration with M.A.H’s Laura Fulmine). “The challenge is around how we qualify ‘sustainability’; it is a dense topic with

constant progression.” Her recent projects include the interiors for architect Vaughn Thistleton’s Black & White Building, an office block that made headlines for its all-timber construction; Daytrip’s contribution followed the same sustainable path, using recycled materials and working with local artisans and creatives with a similarly conscious outlook.

For Louisa Grey of design studio House of Grey, whose London Design Festival “home concept” pop-up was in issue 01, all these subjects are interlinked: for her, design must be tackled as a big picture, where materials must not only be circular for the planet, but health-promoting for humans, what she calls a “whole person whole world” approach. “Regenerative design is holistic,” she says. “Instead of primarily focusing on solving or minimising humans’ negative impacts, we create ways for humans to enhance and contribute to thriving, living systems across the globe.”

Pooja Agrawal observes that “there is a bit of an existential crisis in design and architecture practices, where people are asking themselves if their work reflects their ethos and values.” Her solution is collective work for public good, to “take on the responsibility of addressing the lack of good quality homes, or the unequal distribution of green spaces, or the lack of practical steps to reach net-zero in practice. Encouraging people to explore different career opportunities, like working in the public sector, is one way to make meaningful change.”

Sheena Murphy, founder of interior design studio Nune, had just returned to London from living in New York when one of her Manhattan residential projects was featured in *DAUK* issue 02. Now fully settled in the UK, she says that “one of the best and most important things about doing this work is acting as a vessel through which clients learn about emerging and less well-known talent, and we are committed to being as inclusive and as ethical as possible in that role.” That includes working with those from less-represented communities, “because it feels like there must be a massive amount of unexpressed talent out there, and we do need to balance the scales. The

more curious we are about this, the more exciting the work will become, for all of us.”

These women may be striving for equity and sustainability, but there’s still plenty of room for beauty in all this – or perhaps more specifically, room for the way beauty can foster a sense of wellbeing and belonging, which is at the heart of *DAUK*’s philosophy. “My work seeks to celebrate the poetry of movement and to create spaces that people instantly relax in,” says interior and product designer Mimi Shodeinde of Miminat, whose work appeared in issue 14 at the beginning of 2023 (since then she’s started work on several new global products, including her first hospitality project, in Antigua). Emily Furniss Potter of Daytrip Studio says she has noticed how clients “are placing more emphasis on comfort, ease of use and wellbeing. Spaces are required to support user activities and express positivity more than ever.” Cassandra Ellis similarly notes how “people have to feel good – safe and uplifted – by how and where they live.”

Some of these women feel they have faced discrimination at work for their gender, but it clearly depends on which industry you work in. When Ellis was setting up her paint company, “it felt like wave upon wave of ‘no’ because I was a woman – they felt like I was dabbling. But I am tenacious, and I finally met someone serious.” Interior designers are a part of the construction industry, where “people generally assume you’re just a decorator, and that you don’t know much about the technical side of projects and construction,” says Clémence Pirajean. “It can be very frustrating, but you have to trust your instincts, have confidence in your knowledge and just keep going.”

Artist Sinta Tantra, whose work was profiled in *DAUK* issue 06 in 2020, is concerned with

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Left to right: Cassandra Ellis, Laura Fulmine and Natsai Audrey Chiesa. All clothing, Raey at Matches (as before). Ellis wears shoes by Birkenstock, and socks, stylist’s own; Fulmine wears shoes by Bottega Veneta, rings by Paola Sighinolfi and Sylvia Toledano; Chiesa wears boots by Isabel Marant, necklace by Alighieri, all Matches (as before)





Photographer's assistants, Holly Taylor and Stefania Carli; stylist's assistant, Flora Leahy; make-up artists, Dina Catchpole and Grace Hatcher; retouching, Nadin Lapawa

## “One of the best and most important things about doing this work is acting as a vessel through which clients learn about emerging and less well-known talent”

identity (her own multicultural background, as well as the way others might find their own identity reflected in her art). She describes what she calls “over professionalising” as a way of compensating for the low expectations of others – being so incredibly qualified and knowledgeable that no one can ever catch you out for not getting it right: “Sometimes I think that over-preparation is actually a superpower.”

For every negative story, though, there are many more about how these women run their own businesses with pastoral care in mind, not just the bottom line. Ellis talks about how she has built in personal leave days for her staff, for “sick children, dogs, friends, or just having a crappy time” and has strict rules on working hours: “I ask people to bring their whole selves to work, and they can’t do that if I’m emailing them at 10pm.” Tantra says she is “interested in creating a mini community within my own studio practice,” including taking a leaf out of sculptor Antony Gormley’s book and making lunch for everyone. “It’s a form of nurturing but it’s also breaking away from the artificiality of what art is. The simplicity of eating something well can feed you in so many ways. You need that time out from the working day.”

Louisa Grey thinks that there is something distinctive about women-led businesses. “The approach is slightly different – there’s a sense of warmth, more open and collaborative, more imaginative and thought-led with higher levels of attention to detail,” she says. “Female

designers are inclined to think holistically and consider how something *feels* – not just focus on the specification and the aesthetic. We also tend to be self-sufficient and extremely organised, which makes for a much easier life.”

There’s also a generosity among these women to recognise those around them. “For the biggest commercial project we’ve won to date, I did the pitch when I was 39 weeks pregnant,” says Sophie Ashby. “What excites me about that, beyond the fact that the client could see past my pregnancy, is that it’s a real testament to the strength of my team and the belief in us as a collective rather than the individual. It takes an army.” Ellis says that her biggest recent achievement is “growing our team well – choosing good people who fundamentally have the same approach and moral guide.”

Laura Fulmine says that “I could not have got to where I am without an incredible team of people,” and muses on lingering ideals that say that women can have it all, which is unrealistic, and a burden. “I think women carry a lot on their shoulders, striving for perfection in every area of their lives. Telling yourself you don’t have to be the perfect designer, businesswoman, mum, yoga warrior and best friend *all* the time, and accepting that you are enough, is a huge and very important thing.”

“It is crucial for us to champion and support one another, ensuring that we provide young female designers with the optimal opportunities for development and growth in the industry,” says Pirajeau. “There is an abundance of remarkable women in the design industry. Perhaps we should vocally highlight our accomplishments more.” And *Design Anthology UK* will promote those accomplishments just as intently – whether it is championing people at the beginning of their careers or celebrating those who have already reached the top.

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Left to right: Mimi Shodeinde, Clémence Pirajeau, Sophie Ashby, Sinta Tantra. All clothing, Raey at Matches (as before). Mimi wears rings by Paola Sighinolfi, shoes by Bottega Veneta; Pirajeau wears shoes by Givenchy, ring by Paola Sighinolfi; Ashby wears sandals by Birkenstock; Tantra wears necklace by Alighieri, cuff and ring by Sylvia Toledano, all Matches (as before)