



Garance Primat-Schlumberger, far left, with Béatrice Saint-Laurent at Galerie BSL in Paris. Clockwise from far left: Faye Toogood brass, rubber, steel and stone Caged Elements chair, price on request. Charles Kalpakian Cinétisme I lacquered-wood wall cabinet, €12,000. Studio MVW jade and anodised-brass JinShi coffee table, €42,000. Set of five Taher Chemirik sodalite and copper-plated-brass side tables, €48,000

FINDERS KEEPERS

art furniture

A Geneva-based investor and a genre-pushing Parisian gallerist have created a furniture collection that is both stunning and a joy to use, says Charlotte Abrahams. Portrait by Léa Crespi

Today's avant-garde designs are the antiquities of tomorrow. They provide a link between the past, present and future," says Garance Primat-Schlumberger, the Geneva-based director of asset-management firm Primwest Holding. She has been buying pieces of statement, contemporary furniture for as long as she's had a home in which to house it; but in 2014, her collecting took a turn when she was lured through the doors of Galerie BSL in Paris by an eye-catching

set of side tables – slabs of vibrant blue sodalite atop industrial-looking, tubular, copper-plated-brass legs. Once inside the stylish Saint-Germain-des-Près space, Primat-Schlumberger fell in love. Not just with the Pathway Sodalite tables (€48,000 for a set of five, pictured above) by Paris-based jeweller and artist Taher Chemirik – which she bought immediately for her townhouse in Geneva – but also with the vision of gallerist Béatrice Saint-Laurent. The two women swiftly learnt that they share a common sensibility and have worked together to

create a collection ever since. For while Primat-Schlumberger is interested in the idea of nature as art, Saint-Laurent's focus is on challenging work that "makes a connection with nature or society and says more than just being another object". Saint-Laurent grew up surrounded by cutting-edge furniture by the likes of Le Corbusier and Mies van der Rohe (her father was an architect and designed the Tarbes-Lourdes-Pyrénées Airport); by the age of four she even had her own, child-sized Harry Bertoia Diamond chair. It is little surprise,

then, that she ended up opening a pair of Paris galleries dedicated to collectable contemporary objects. "When I opened in the Marais in 2010, there weren't many galleries for contemporary design," she says, "but I felt there was a growing market for what I like to call art furniture." Her instinct was spot on: contemporary design galleries, fairs and auctions are becoming increasingly common, and prices are rising – at Phillips New York in June, for example, the US-shaped Corten and stainless-steel

Right: Nacho Carbonell paverpol, pigment, sand, silicone, steel and LED Luciferase table light sculpture, from €9,000



bookcase, Oh, the Farmer and the Cowman Should be Friends (2009) by Ron Arad, sold for \$298,000, while the PAD London fair, where Galerie BSL will be exhibiting in October, attracted some 24,000 visitors last year. At the forefront of this burgeoning design scene is Saint-Laurent, with a reputation for championing work that combines function with an emotional dimension. "As a gallerist, I want to be amazed and enchanted, so I focus on designs that have soul and energy," she explains. "That gives Galerie BSL a very specific remit."

Saint-Laurent's most recent discovery, the German artist Pia Maria Raeder, perfectly encapsulates the aesthetic she shares with Primat-Schlumberger. Over the past year, Raeder has developed a series of objects and pieces of furniture made up of thousands of individually placed, white-lacquered beech rods. Collectively titled *Sea Anemones*, these exquisite, biomorphic works defy the rigidity and simplicity of their material and seem to have grown organically rather than been made. "I need to talk to Béatrice about the wall mirror [€48,000]," says Primat-Schlumberger. "It's a piece that speaks to my emotions."

Primat-Schlumberger won't buy anything that doesn't trigger this visceral response, but since the work she buys is furniture (albeit of a fine-art bent), she also looks for a level of functionality. "I want to build a relationship with everything I buy and use the pieces as part of my everyday life," she says. This means her books are stored in a black and gold lacquered-wood *Cinétisme I* cabinet (€12,000,

pictured on previous page), by Lebanese street artist-turned-designer Charles Kalpakian, a hypnotic wall piece that plays with perspective, leaving the viewer unsure whether it is in two or three dimensions. And she puts things on the striking *JinShi* coffee table (pictured on previous page) by Shanghai-based Studio MVW, which is composed of a piece of pink jade measuring over a metre in diameter, balanced on a base of anodised-brass spheres in such a way that the stone appears to float. At €42,000, it's one of the most expensive single items she has bought to date.

"I divide life into short, medium and long term," Primat-Schlumberger says. "This, like all the pieces I buy from Béatrice, is long term, so I am happy to spend the money."

Both women believe that their respective roles as gallerist and collector come with responsibilities. "We both influence the system," says Primat-Schlumberger. "By commissioning and buying work from artists, we are participating in tomorrow's creation." They also both enjoy sharing that creation with the wider public: Saint-Laurent through the gallery, and Primat-Schlumberger at *Domaine des Etangs*, the 1,000-hectare "place for living" (she doesn't like the term "hotel") she has created in an 11th-century castle in southwest France that was bought by her father,

oil billionaire Didier Primat, as a family retreat. "This is where I holidayed as a child," she says, "and now I want to use it to share my passion for contemporary design with the rest of the world."

The first piece she bought for the *Domaine des Etangs* was a set of bronze chairs (€22,000 each) by British designer Faye Toogood. The form is utterly simple – cast from a milking stool and the handle of a spade – but the bronze lends it a near precious jewel-like status. The next is likely to

be a something by Spanish furniture and lighting designer Nacho Carbonell. "I never think in terms of gaps in my collection," says Primat-Schlumberger, "but I have had my eye on Carbonell for

"I want to share my passion for design with the rest of the world"

some time." His luminous *Luciferase* collection (example pictured above, from €9,000) for Galerie BSL, for example, that reflects the flora and fauna found in the deep oceans "is both primitive and futuristic". As she speaks, her excitement is palpable. Primat-Schlumberger may be hugely knowledgeable in her subject matter, but she collects from the heart, not the head. "I buy pieces that address my soul," she says. "For me, collecting is like being a child again – a chance to be spontaneous." ♦

Galerie BSL, 10 Rue Bonaparte, 75006 Paris (+331-5681 6152; galeriebsl.com). PAD London, 2-8 October, Berkeley Square, London W1 (pad-fairs.com).