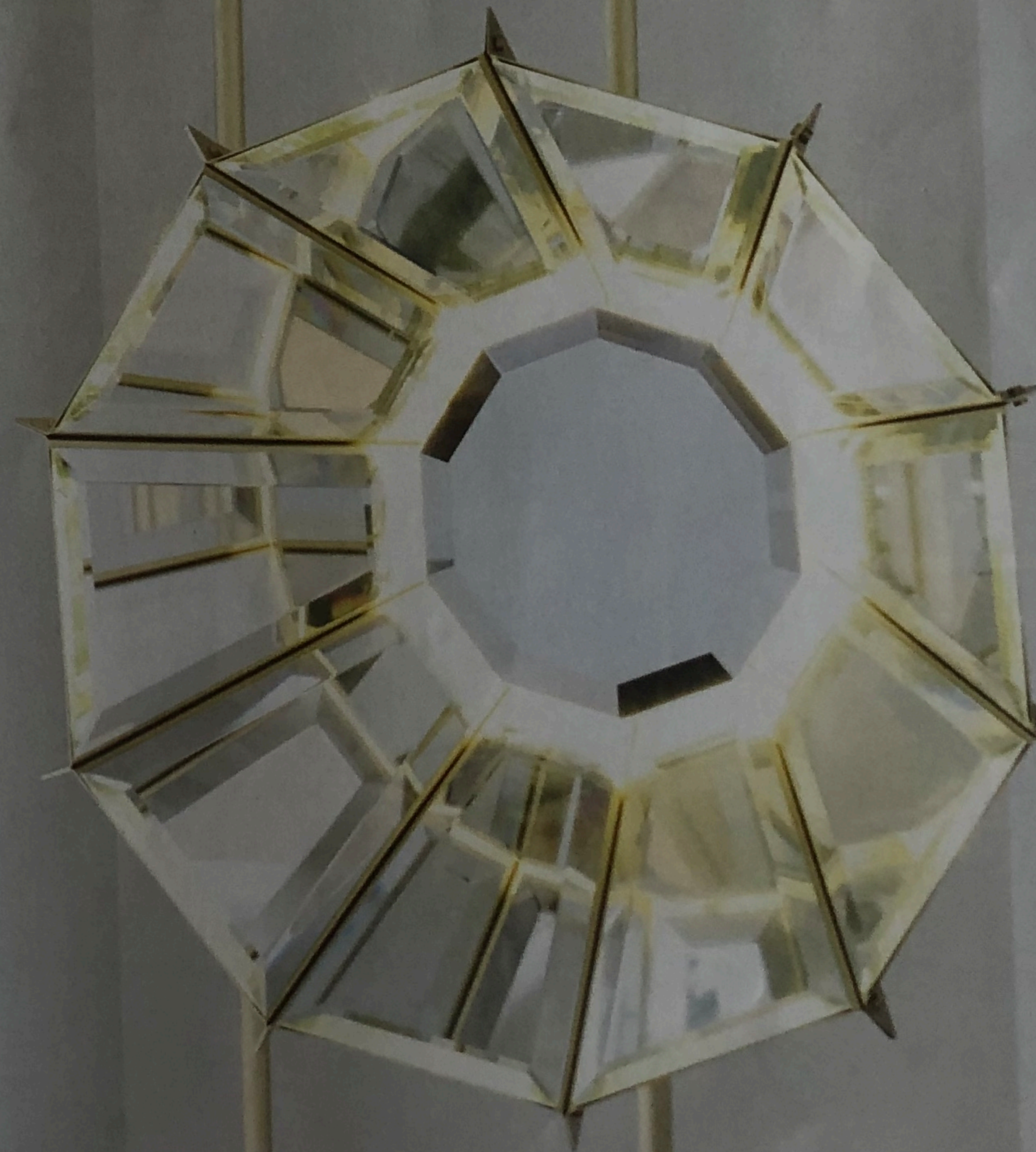
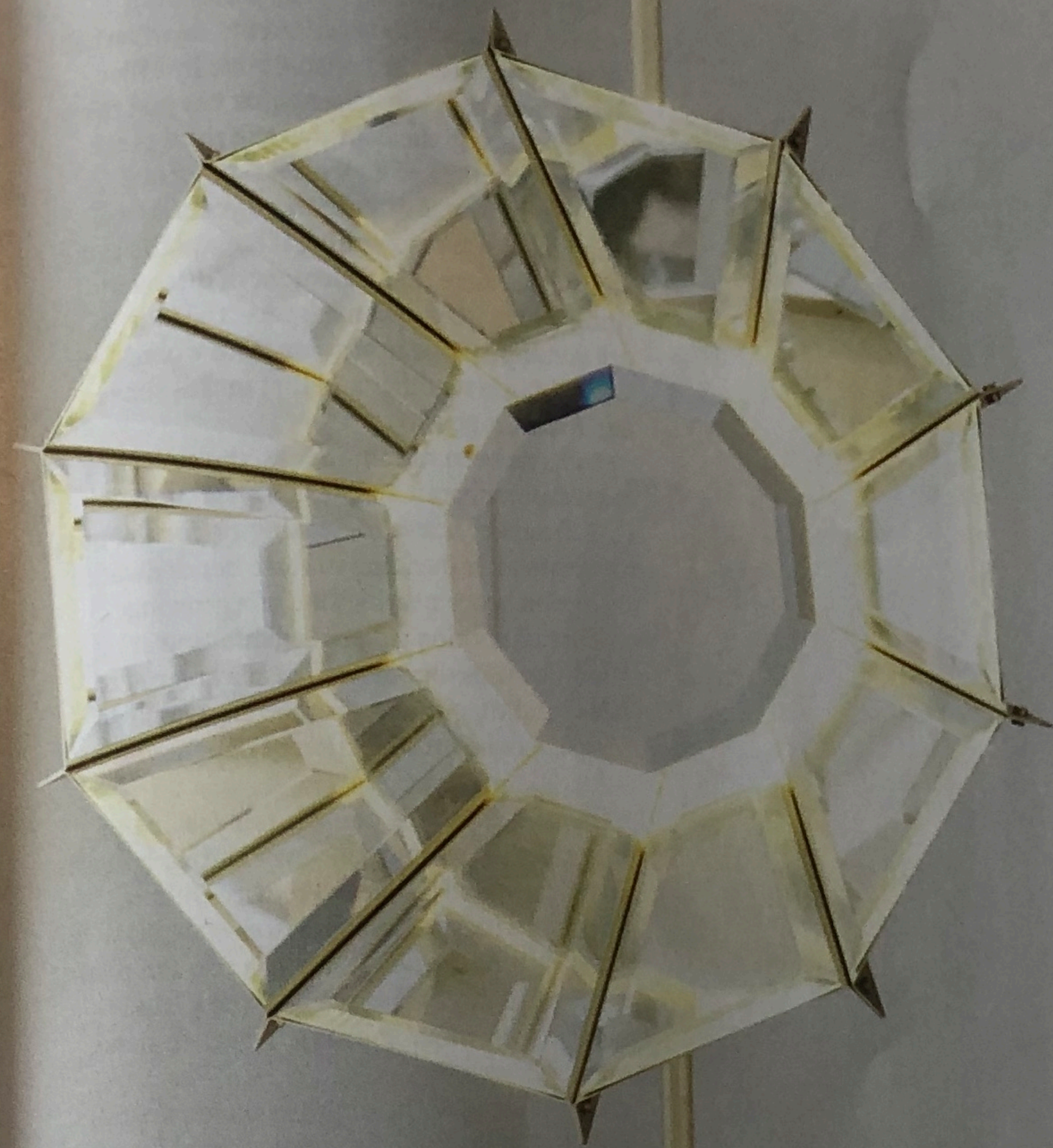


# HOME GROWN

Seeds gallery founder Nathalie Assi's London home is an incubator for experimental craft, as well as a changing canvas for her own furniture collections. *Debika Ray* takes a tour. Photography by *Suki Dhandu*







'Every time my children come home from school, the house looks different,' says Nathalie Assi, gesturing at the console table by Milan-based designer Pietro Russo that has just taken up residence in the hallway – the third piece of furniture she has had in that spot since she moved into the house three years ago. 'But people will stop visiting if it stays the same – they come here for an element of discovery. And I like it: it's a dynamic space, the kids are coming in, you're arriving from work. Everything is together and that makes sense and makes it possible.'

Assi has been running Seeds, the gallery of contemporary craft and design she founded in 2016, from her house in Kensington for the past two years after deciding to close her dedicated exhibition space nearby. One of a growing number of London gallerists exhibiting at home, she uses the space to display pieces to clients and try out new discoveries, which sit alongside her own collection of bought and commissioned objects.

Hanging above the console table is one of the items that are on trial: a new mirror by Paris- and Beirut-based designer Frédéric Imbert, framed by a rugged ring of plaster covered with gold leaf. 'It hasn't been shown yet so I'm testing it for a month or two to see how the patina will form over time,' she says. 'I want to make sure it ages well.'

She leads me to the dining room downstairs, dominated by a colourful set of stained wooden tables made by No Ordinary Love, a collective of well-known designers that she brought together in 2016. Martino Gamper, Bethan Laura Wood, Max Lamb, Jochen Holz, Gemma Holt and Silo Studio first teamed up during the London Design Festival that year to make a set of ceramics for Seeds that people could buy at face value for a fixed price, or pay more to find out who made them, in a playful comment about authorship. Assi recalls how the same designers later sat around these very tables for a spontaneous making session over dinner, creating wax models for a set of candle holders that she had cast in brass the next day. It's an



ious pages:  
o Russo, Daffodil  
s, 2016.  
e: Test Tubes  
n by BCXSY, 2018,  
uskan stool by  
fice, 2014.  
ssite: Apollo light  
etro Russo, 2013.  
ilibrium low table by  
elmo Poletti, 2016,

with Moire vase by Silo  
Studio, 2016. Objects on  
fireplace include works  
by Olivier Van Herpt,  
Giovanni de Francesco,  
Tiago Almeida and  
Martino Gamper.  
Mirror by Marc Dibeh.  
Oxidation stool by Edhv,  
2017, with Penguin vase  
by Jochen Holz, 2018





Left: dyed marble table, 2019, by Silo Studio.  
On top, from left: Rive Roshan, Colour Wheels, 2017; Coloured Bark vases, 2019, by Jochen Holz.  
On floor: Mushroom stools, 2018, by James Shaw, and Poly stool, 2006, by Max Lamb (centre)

example of the close creative relationships she forms with her designers and artists.

Plunging from the ceiling of the dining room is one of the first items Assi ever collected for herself: a finely balanced and sculptural bronze Haus Lange Lampe suspension light, made by Austrian artist Franz West for the Meta Memphis collection in 1991. This blurring of boundaries between personal possessions and the gallery's collections in Assi's home captures the zeitgeist. In the internet era, few clients are concerned whether Seeds has a conventional gallery space and are just as happy to encounter its collection at design fairs, on its website or via Instagram. This means no additional rental cost for a gallery and a far broader geographical reach than just a physical space might offer – she has more freedom to visit fairs and her buyers are located both in the UK and abroad.

Meanwhile, inviting people to view items in a west London townhouse contextualises the more daring design pieces in a domestic setting, showing collectors – most of whom are buying for themselves rather than for commercial spaces – how they might look in a home.

'When I specifically commission something for myself, sometimes people end up wanting it, so it can give way to another collaboration and slightly different objects,' she says, pointing to a prototype for a bar stool by Portuguese designer Tiago Almeida, commissioned by a client who saw Assi's own dining chairs and wanted a taller version. It is called 100 Degrees, after the angle of the backrest, which the designer says is more comfortable than the right angle 'so glorified by the Modernists'.

For the Lebanon-born, France-educated former banker, the house itself was a launchpad into the world of design and craft – Assi had no background in either and only came to the field when she started redesigning her home. 'I didn't want to go to shops or commercial places, so I started trying to understand who the makers of today are – how they are making and with what. The idea was that you can have a functional object that also has a concept, and possibly visit the studio to see how it's made.' She soon





Above: Far Deep  
Void vases, 2017, by  
Duccio Maria Gambi.  
Opposite: Mass shelves,  
2016, by Odd Matter  
with Piggy Bank by  
Laureline Galliot, 2015

turned her own fascination for collecting into a career, showing off the fruits of her research in a more public way.

It's no surprise then that Seeds's aesthetic reflects Assi's own philosophy as a collector and commissioner of craft and design. But her selection criteria goes further: all the works are limited-edition or commissioned pieces by designers that she knows personally – 'I've met 99 per cent of them and the others I've spoken to on the phone or over Skype.' And all the pieces are ultimately made by hand, whether by the designer themselves or by dedicated craftspeople.

By way of example, she points to objects by two design practices based in Milan who work with specialist makers to realise their ideas: the Tuskan stool by Oeuffice, a series of classical forms in different types of stone and marble stacked together; and the Section bench in the garden by Guglielmo Poletti, a Corten steel tube sliced horizontally, with the cut section swivelled and welded into place for balance. 'They don't make things, but they conceive projects and pieces and work with artisans, like an orchestra conductor, rediscovering skills that have been acquired over generations and are in danger of getting lost,' says Assi.

In contrast, she observes, many UK-based designers tend to take a more hands-on approach, referring to her collection of colourful blown glass vessels by Jochen Holz and a yellow stool made of expanded polystyrene scraps coated in rubber by Max Lamb; both makers are Londoners. 'I think this new generation of designers develop and learn a skill to make objects, as opposed to just a conceptual way of thinking,' she says.

Whether they are emerging or established practitioners, all the designers and craftspeople she works with are encouraged to experiment. This does not necessarily need to involve high-tech or cutting-edge processes – experiments can include fusing familiar materials together to create something new, in the manner of Odd Matter's geological Mass shelves in gypsum, plaster and cork, or simply rethinking a process,







like the distinctive pink marble table that London-based Silo Studio made for the Crafts Council's recent Collect art fair.

'Traditionally, colour was applied to stone but since the Renaissance, the ideal of beauty has been to have stone whiter than white,' says Assi. 'Silo Studio's research led them to rediscover how applying dye can be a contemporary way of looking at stone.' She worked closely with the studio on this project to develop the idea, from applying a range of primary colours to marble to a single one to create a more monolithic look.

In the three years since Assi launched Seeds, she's witnessed tastes becoming more daring and noted a growing appetite for the bespoke. 'The definition of luxury is changing from something that's just expensive to something that is unique,' Assi says. 'It's not just about the object – it has to do with an understanding of the story of where it's coming from, the sourcing, the materials and its sustainability. Imperfections are now embraced.'

And sales back this up, she says. 'We are witnessing a noticeable year-on-year appreciation and understanding of experimental design through the pieces we show and the stories we communicate about our designers, and the research behind every piece.'

As the collectors and tastemakers of tomorrow wield their influence, she believes this ethos will spill over into the public sphere, bringing unique, hand-made objects into more people's lives every day. 'There's a point where even hotels and commercial spaces are going to realise that what their consumers are looking for is craft, rather than just pieces of equipment.'

When it comes to her own home, it may seem a precarious act to merge family life with collectors' items – including her own and those of the gallery – but Assi takes a relaxed approach. 'We just live naturally with design pieces in the home, without being too precious or overly conscious about them,' she says. 'But I do admit that it makes me happy to surround myself with, and actually touch and use, these objects every day as a family.'

[seeds london.com](http://seeds london.com)



Above: Ginko shelf, 2016, by Pietro Russo  
Opposite, clockwise from top: tapestry on wall by Soojin Kang, 2016-17, Cumuliform table lights, 2016, and Iridescent vase, 2018, both by Jochen Holz; jug and cups, 2011, by Aldo Bakker. Piuma table, 2013, by Pietro Russo