



# SHATTERED CHIC

Forget shabby, all out destroyed is the name of the game for today's interiors, as **Anya Cooklin-Lofting** discovers



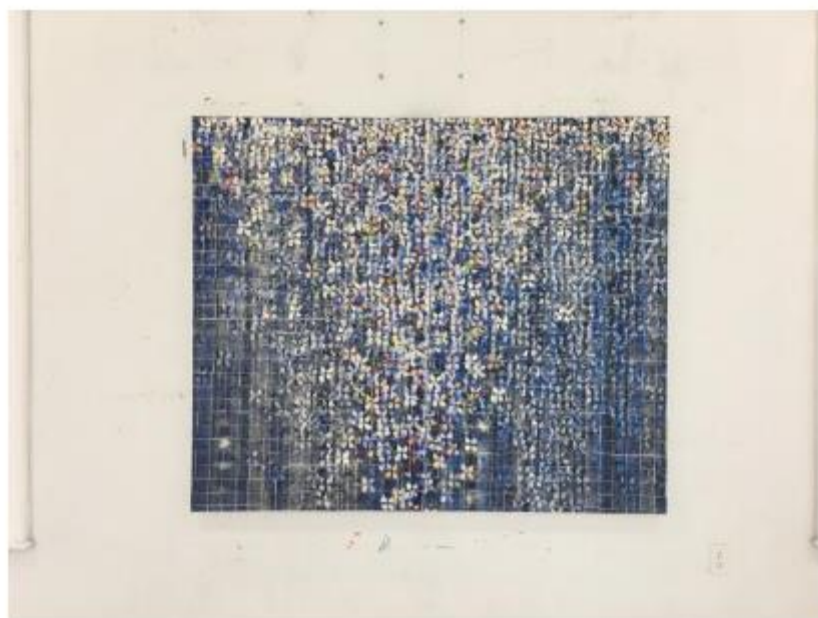
'Beyond Paradise' by multimedia artist Lauren Baker (Lauren Baker)

Amongst the refined glamour of the interiors trends of rich velvets and golden bar trolleys is a hint of the imperfect, the distressed. And no – for the record I am not talking about Shabby Chic. Leave this cult-like phenomenon to those donning Live Laugh Love signage, faux-driftwood furniture and whitewashed rattan baskets.

No, I'm talking about the smoked and the roughed up, the petrified and the raw. In some cases, I'm talking about the exploded. This week, I spoke to two young artists about their work, the appeal of objects that appear distressed or damaged in some way, and why we enjoy having them in our homes.

I met artist Kirk Mechar at one of his recent London exhibitions at the Herrick Gallery, in Mayfair. His work is the product of the creation, destruction and rebuilding of small, painterly tiles that are reconfigured again and again into organically changing pieces of art. His Mosaic series is created from paintings that are cut into tiles which in turn are reused to create new artworks mounted in new configurations and sizes. The process is often repeated a few times so the new artworks bear only a fragmented resemblance to former iterations. This cycle of creation via destruction is an ongoing theme in Mechar's work, which also explores our relationship with the environment and the importance and beauty of the reuse of materials. "I am seized by the passage of time and how it affects everything and everybody. My work attempts to accept the inevitable process of decay through a distressed appearance," he says.

Next, multimedia artist Lauren Baker has just launched a collection of artworks that delve into why we feel the power of destruction in art so keenly. Baker believes "there is an intriguing beauty born from destruction and chaos," a notion that led her to the use of pyrotechnics to blow up books about philosophy and physics for a new collection, *The Immensity of the Universe*, inspired by the origins of the cosmos. Of the series of mangled, crystallised, box-framed books she says "there is no place for polishing, perfecting here. It is real and true. I find a different kind of beauty in the chaos."



Mosaic reiterates paintings (Kirk Mechar)

Baker believes there is a universal paradox in the love of perfection and imperfection, saying "art, as with life, doesn't have to be typically beautiful to be intriguing and even mesmerising. There is a seemingly endless pursuit of perfection in today's culture. However, in the last year, I started thinking differently, bored of the perfection addiction gripping the world. I had an intense desire to burn, rip, explode."



A petrified log stool (Andrew Martin)

When I asked Baker why we are so drawn to artistic destruction, she said: “Demolition is fun, chaotic and unpredictable. The sudden release of explosive energy is captivating. We are impressed by things that produce a lot of energy and randomness. There’s an ebb and flow to the whole thing. Destroying treasured or expensive things is also pretty decadent. The outcome is raw and uncontrollable and that is special.”

The ways a material reacts to some form of distress, be it age, pyrotechnics or anything in between, is also present in new high end furniture designs. For example, Andrew Martin offers a variety of home accessories made from petrified wood, including ornamental wooden slices, side tables and stools. The unique effect is the result of permineralisation, which turns wood



Raw and natural finishes are in vogue for interiors (Andrew Martin)

into stone. It takes place when wood is buried under volcanic ash or sediment and starved of oxygen. David Harris, design director of Andrew Martin, says such distressed finishes and materials fit cohesively within the wider interiors trends landscape, saying “in recent years, home interiors have included more unusual materials and surfaces to add an extra sense of tactility in the home. Industrial and utilitarian chic has been driven by the popularity of raw and natural finishes.”

Other homewares brands which provide beautiful distressed accessories include Vinterior, Notre Monde, 1stDibs and of course, there is always eBay for more one-off finds. For an even more curated selection of unique aged pieces, Rose Uniacke's online shop (or showroom, if you find yourself on Pimlico Road) is a must-visit. The garden and sculpture selection is a faded grandeur-lover's digest, complete with moss-covered terracotta jars and scuffed Victorian statuary.

So don't shy away from the rough and ready. Embrace the uniqueness and the change in your home that comes with age or distress. Just as Van Gogh was known to paint only wilting sunflowers, to achieve a more interesting composition, why not take a break from this "endless pursuit of perfection," as Baker puts it, and create depth in your interior scheme with some distressed art and furniture?