

# HOUSE of COCO

## Designer Spotlight: Gentle Rattle of China

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*Gentle Rattle of China is a London-based business that sells unique pieces of antique porcelain. Its name is derived from Terry Pratchett's famous quote: "The sound of the gentle rattle of china cup on china saucer drives away all demons, a little-known fact." Sales reach into every corner of the world with a wide range of items that suit every budget – from small gifts to valuable pieces that feature in an interior design.*

*We went to talk to its founder Willa Latham...*

### **When did you launch the brand and what was the reason behind it?**

I launched in 2016. The idea came out of the blue when I woke up one Saturday morning. I had just quit a long and satisfying career that had left me burnt out, with no idea what to do next. I started an online shop that weekend and have never looked back. I feel we need more beauty in the world, and wanted to sell the joy of something historic, unique, and utterly beautiful.

### **Whats your background?**

I grew up as a classical musician and did very rigorous training, but couldn't handle the career pressure at such a young age. I ended up being a finance director for charities for several decades, and also studied philosophy. I came from a family steeped in art and history; my mother was an artist, her mother a singer and father a classicist scholar. I got my love for antiques from my other grandmother, who had a house full of beautiful pieces and let me drink from 200-year old antique teacups. It was weeks after I started my business that I remembered that last important detail, which seems to have shaped my development through life!

### **How many people are involved in the company and what are their roles?**

Just me at this point! But I feel grateful for the friendship of several experienced traders who give me lots of valuable advice and direction, as well as the people at Royal Mail and Hermes, who deliver and ship my treasures without breaking them. My artist husband is an endless source of support who is very tolerant of a house full of super-fragile fine china!

### **If you could start over with the business, would you do anything differently?**

It's easy to see things in hindsight... I would have made some different buying choices. But I wouldn't know that if I wouldn't have tried things first, so the main thing is to learn quickly. I feel more focused now.

**What is the hardest challenge you have faced since you started the company?**

In my previous career I've seen new endeavours fail after the initial period, when you need to balance the need for expansion with an income that's still small. I'm so glad I know this so I can tread carefully.

**Tell us one fact about you that people wouldn't know?**

I grew up in a forest and when I was little I befriended a hedgehog that would let me tickle its belly – true story!

**2018 is almost here, where do you plan on taking the brand?**

I will focus more on some makers from the 19<sup>th</sup> Century that I absolutely love and that deserve the limelight. And I'm going to launch a youtube channel talking about my collection.

**To date, what has been the highlight since launching?**

A gorgeous set of 10 cobalt blue and gilt dinner plates from about 1820, made by Coalport. Each plate had two flower arrangements and two birds, each one hand painted and completely unique – it was stunning! I sold it to a lucky person in Austria and I almost cried when I shipped it.

**Which city do you feel most at home in, London, Paris or New York?**

London!

**Three beauty products you can't leave the house without?**

Apart from keeping my hair and skin natural and beautiful, I don't use any. I'm a child of the 1970s who rebelled against beauty products, seeing my mother live under the pressure of the Mad Men era.

**Style means....?**

Each human being's genuine expression of what they love.

**Best thing about London to you?**

The diversity of people – it is extraordinary to live here as a foreigner and never feel an outsider.

**If you had to, what piece of clothing from your wardrobe would you wear everyday?**

I have an unusual little skirt, too short really for my age, that looks like it's made from upholstery – everyone loves it and I feel completely comfy in it.

**Best place for a coffee?**

Perky Blenders in Leyton, near where I live in Walthamstow.

**Most memorable piece of advice given to you?**

Sell what you love, and be generous to your customers.

**Guilty pleasure?**

Good cheese... but it doesn't make me feel guilty!

**If you could spend 24 hours in anywhere in the world, where would it be?**

Hong Kong! I used to go there quite regularly and would love to show it to my husband.

**In future, how do you plan on expanding the company?**

I'd love to work with interior designers – there are stunning early 19<sup>th</sup> Century pieces that are very suitable as design features.

**Find out more...**

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