



By Grace Cain / Photographer Eva Donckers

From left Bernadette satin pyjamas £635 and dress £540

FRUIT OF THE BLOOM

Creativity abounds at the Belgian home of Bernadette and Charlotte de Geyter, whose fabulous florals are a breath of fresh air

Interview

“Once you arrive at my mum’s house, you immediately feel as though you’re on vacation,” says Charlotte de Geyter of her mother’s two-storey *bastide* – which, with its ivy-blanketed façade and tiled roof, looks as though it has been lifted straight from the Provençal countryside (where this type of abode is traditionally found) and dropped just outside Antwerp. “That’s the atmosphere we want to introduce into our daily lives,” she explains. “Bernadette the brand is how we feel when we are home.”

Charlotte is the white-blond echo of her mother. And aside from bringing her into being, Bernadette de Geyter is also her daughter’s business partner and the inspiration behind the name of the brand they now operate together. Sitting side by side in their white-walled Antwerp studio, the pair often intercept each other’s sentences, continually trading a never-ending supply of knowing looks and bright smiles. Exuding enviably nonchalant elegance, they are the living embodiment of the brand they launched in 2018 with a collection of vivid dresses featuring Charlotte’s hand-drawn botanical prints. Indeed, the brand’s Instagram account is as much a personal record of their daily lives as it is a showcase for the latest pieces. “The more we share, the more we feel like people understand the brand and what we are trying to do,” Charlotte explains.

Over the past 18 months, most of us have found that our lives (and Instagram feeds) have revolved around home, and the de Geyters are no exception. However, even before lockdowns became the norm, Bernadette’s colourfully eclectic dwelling was an integral part of the family’s routines and inspirations. “My mum has a special way with decorating,” says Charlotte. “I think she could make a trash bag look cool.” Bernadette has a penchant for flea markets, which has translated itself into an impressive collection of treasures: vintage tablecloths and bed linen from France; quirky porcelain objects from local haunts in Belgium. “She has the ability to see something and imagine how it could work in the house,” says Charlotte.

Fortunately, Bernadette has plenty of room to work with. Inside, her home is spacious; on the ground floor, each light-filled room leads into another, making it perfect for entertaining – and although Bernadette lives alone with her Australian labradoodle, Maurice, she insists that “everyone is



Above and right: All around the country retreat, with its inescapable connections between outside and in, colours create warm, comforting spaces, not least the impressive – and inspiring – rose garden



Far left Natural textures and neutral colours give vibrant artwork the chance to take centre stage; left, clockwise from top left Bernadette Pink Cup and Saucer £75, Wide Mug £40, Espresso Cup £35, Round High Bowl £35, Dinner Plate £55 and XL Flat Round Plate £285



Quirky porcelain, mix-and-match colours and flea-market finds look entirely at home against a candy-floss-hued canvas – and chime perfectly with the de Geyter duo’s take on life

“Every room has a *big window*... the connection between *interior* and *exterior* is very special”

always welcome”. To that end, she focuses on creating a warm atmosphere. “My home has to be cosy,” she says. “That’s very important to me. For example, I always light a candle while I eat – even in the morning.”

Then, of course, there is her unmistakable knack for playing with colours. “You can’t do it with every house, but you can here because it’s so spacious and it works really well with the outside,” she explains. “Sometimes, it can be very grey here in Belgium, so it’s nice to enter a room where everything is so happy.” Charlotte agrees: “A couple of years ago, my mum painted her dining room pink... now, every time you walk through the door you get an instant hit of joy.” This attitude to colour has certainly fed into the way that mother and daughter design for their own brand. “We are really inspired by the ways that colour can affect your mood,” says Charlotte. “We love to challenge ourselves to use really bright, fresh tones.”

Both women also acknowledge the impact of the garden, not only on their work but on the décor of the house itself. “Every room has a big window, so the connection between the interior and the exterior is really very special,” says Charlotte. The leafy outdoor space was inherited from the French woman who owned the house before Bernadette – and, as a keen gardener herself, she’s upheld the legacy of her botanically enthusiastic predecessor. She has also added plenty of her own touches over the years, most notably a rose garden that blooms each year in clouds of pink and white. And it’s >





From left Bernadette maxidress £785 and dress £900



Right, clockwise from left Bernadette Tablecloth £210, Cup and Saucer £75, Wide Mug £40, Espresso Cup £35, Large Vase £380, Round High Bowl £35, Side Plate £35, Napkin £205 and Dinner Plate £55



Left and below: A ceramics collection this extensive (with Bernadette pieces alongside myriad others) demands to be shown off – and to be used; light floods into interlinked rooms, adding yet more joy and energy to the ever-present swathes of pink

Fine Watches, Ground Floor; Luxury Jewellery and Womenswear, First Floor; Home, Third Floor; and harrods.com

“One of our *strong* points is that we are women from *different generations* with *different ideas*”

a place where Charlotte can often be found, snapping photos on her phone and searching for inspiration for her print designs. Both women agree there is no better place to unwind after work than in this peaceful, verdant space where the only sound that disturbs the air is birdsong.

In recent months, the garden has assumed an even higher level of importance. A combination of lockdown and surprisingly good weather meant the family spent a great deal of last summer outdoors. They took to carrying the dining table out onto the lawn, where they could sit down and enjoy an alfresco meal together (“When the sun shines here in Belgium, we really have to take advantage,” says Charlotte, wryly). Ultimately, these intimate family occasions began to spark new ideas. “It was the first time since we launched the brand that we had time on our hands,” remembers Charlotte. “When we started dressing up and hosting our own private little gatherings in the garden – creating special moments just for us – we found that we wanted more Bernadette.”

That’s when they had the notion of taking Charlotte’s prints and transforming them into a new collection of ceramics. “Now, you can have breakfast, lunch and dinner with Bernadette,” says the elder de Geyter. “You can match your plates to what you’re wearing and what you’re serving.” This sets off a giggly back-and-forth between the duo about which meals

they like to serve on each dish. “It’s nice in the morning to use the cream one, and then the pink is good for pasta...”

Charlotte picks up the train of thought. “The mint green would be good for a salad, or perhaps a little snack at 4pm,” she says, referring to the latest addition to the Bernadette colour scheme (exclusive to Harrods, no less). Bernadette laughs. “We definitely eat more now!”

Luckily for the pair, they have what could well be one of the world’s most comprehensive collections of recipe books. Piles of them line the shelves that creep around the walls and over the door in the kitchen. “My grandma was addicted to cookbooks,” Charlotte explains. “Every holiday she would give us one of her old ones, but she would rewrap it as if it were a brand-new gift. Now, my mum’s kitchen is like a library!”

Bernadette describes this room as her favourite space in the house because “it is the place where everybody comes together”. Aside from the plethora of cookbooks, it’s also where she keeps a portion of her own sizeable collection of ceramics (both antique and new), which she has been building over the course of many years – and which has undoubtedly had an influence on the brand’s first foray into homewares. Characterised by striking prints and colour combinations, this organised jumble of dishes, bowls and teacups is certainly beautiful to look at – but the items are not merely decorative.

“If you put things behind doors, you forget to use them,” Bernadette says. “I keep everything on shelves so I can see them... that means I use it all.” And she is unconcerned with presenting a uniform tablescape, instead preferring to mix and match items and patterns, depending on her mood.

She is quick, though, to point out that she is not the chef of the family – that accolade goes to her daughter. “Well, I really love to eat,” Charlotte laughs. “So I have to cook, especially this past year. I love making pasta and anything from Yotam Ottolenghi’s books; and I am *obsessed* with eggplants.”

Life in the de Geyter household certainly sounds idyllic, but we haven’t yet touched on the (potentially thorny?) question they must get asked all the time: what’s it *really* like working with family? The two women give each other a playful side-eye. “You can answer,” says Bernadette, and Charlotte laughs: “At the beginning, we had to adjust, because we were always talking about work. But now, we know what we have to do – relax, pour a little glass of Champagne and talk about something else!” says Charlotte. “But it’s fun, and there is a lot of trust. We know each other so well that we don’t need a lot of words to explain what we mean, and we always have the same vision.”

The duo’s cross-generational viewpoint is often lauded as a central part of Bernadette’s appeal, a sentiment with which Charlotte wholeheartedly agrees. “My friends tell me that once they try on a Bernadette dress, they can tell it’s been designed by a woman,” she says. “I think one of our strong points is that we are women from different generations, with different bodies and different ideas of what we want to wear.” “And we can see it for each other,” Bernadette interjects. “I learn a lot from my daughter; sometimes I don’t feel as though I can wear a particular dress, but she persuades me to try and it ends up becoming my favourite piece.”

Perhaps more than their unique perspective, it’s the mutual respect for each other that mother and daughter share – and the obvious joy that comes with it – that is really at the heart of Bernadette. The pair radiate a certain kind of unaffected joy that makes you want to step into their world and stay there. “We are very proud to work together – and it makes us very happy,” Bernadette says. “We are very, very happy people.”

So what would such a contented duo consider to be the ultimate luxury? “Doing nothing!” Charlotte exclaims. “Being at home on a Sunday, turning off our phones and eating good food.” Beside her, Bernadette offers up her warm, quietly thoughtful smile. “For me, it’s that moment in the evening when you put on your pyjamas and say: My God, we had a good day today.” □

BERNADETTE AND CHARLOTTE’S TOP PICKS



Studio William Tilia Satin cutlery £380 for 24-piece set



Holistic Silk pillowcase £80



Cartier Panthere de Cartier watch in pink gold £18,200



RedLine Absolu yellow-gold and diamond bracelet £595

