

What is worth keeping? Inside the living archive challenging how we value design

Months in the making, three UAL graduates transform a historic Chelsea flat into a first-of-its-kind living archive, questioning what we collect, preserve and value and blurring the boundaries between home, archive and showcase.



University of the Arts London (UAL) is home to an extraordinary art collection, preserving more than 850 works by students and graduates that chart the university's creative history. But what happens to the outcomes that don't fit the traditional model of collecting?

The chairs developed through prototyping. The wallpaper designed for a live brief. The lamps brought to life through 3D printing. All the things we sit on, switch on, switch off, cook with and live alongside. Objects made to be held, worn, washed, repaired and passed on.

This September, the Atterbury Flat proposes a different way of collecting.

Hidden inside a former guest flat at Chelsea College of Arts, the Atterbury Flat is less an exhibition than a permanent, ever-evolving space that invites visitors to step inside a living archive. More than 100 objects designed and made by UAL students and graduates inhabit the flat, from furniture and lighting to wallpaper, bath salts and artists' books. There are no velvet ropes or viewing rooms here. Visitors are encouraged to open cupboards, leaf through books, draw the curtains and put the kettle on.

Across the university, thousands of students and graduates works emerge through live briefs, competitions and collaborations. Many find their way into people's homes through not just a shop, UAL's retail shop exclusively selling and supporting students and graduates from across the six colleges. Yet few are catalogued or collected as part of UAL's creative legacy.

The project asks what universities choose to collect, what we consider worthy of preservation and how creative education might be represented beyond one-off artworks and limited editions. It celebrates the objects that can fall somewhere between exhibition and everyday life and considers what it might mean to collect them too.

The Atterbury Flat has been more than a year in the making. The three UAL graduates behind the project have researched, commissioned and sourced work, developed its visual identity, learnt new skills, picked up unfamiliar tools, hunted down materials on tight budgets and worked alongside a growing community of makers and collaborators.

More than 400 students, graduates, academics and staff from across UAL's six colleges have contributed through recommendations, conversations, commissions, collaborations and many acts of generosity. While visitors will see the finished flat, much of what makes it special happened long before its launch for London Design Festival. It has grown through many hands and ideas, and a willingness to share, help and make things happen.

The team hopes this is only the beginning, that the Atterbury Flat will continue to evolve, shaped by the people who spend time in it, live alongside its collection and contribute to what comes next.

The Atterbury Flat opens at Chelsea College of Arts for London Design Festival from 12-20 September 2026. Visitors can explore the Flat throughout the week during its open house programme, alongside a series of events and activations hosted by UAL students and graduates.

The programme will include collaborations with Sonder Haus, live portraits by Lily Kong and a closing party in collaboration with What Does Not, with more to be announced.

For press enquiries or to find out more about the Atterbury Flat, contact atterburyflat@arts.ac.uk.

Notes to Editors

About the Atterbury Flat team

The Atterbury Flat has been brought to life by three UAL graduates: Zoë, Abi and Bhairavi, whose backgrounds and practices span creative education, design, making, research and storytelling.

Link to blog page: <https://theatterburyflat.myblog.arts.ac.uk/>

London Design Festival

Atterbury Flat

Chelsea College of Arts
12-20 September 2026

Open house, events and activations will take place throughout the week. Further programme information, timings and booking links will be available through the Atterbury Flat's website, blog

Press images

High-resolution press images are available on request.

Photography by Tom Morgan (@tommorgantm) and Zac Gates (@zac.gates_)