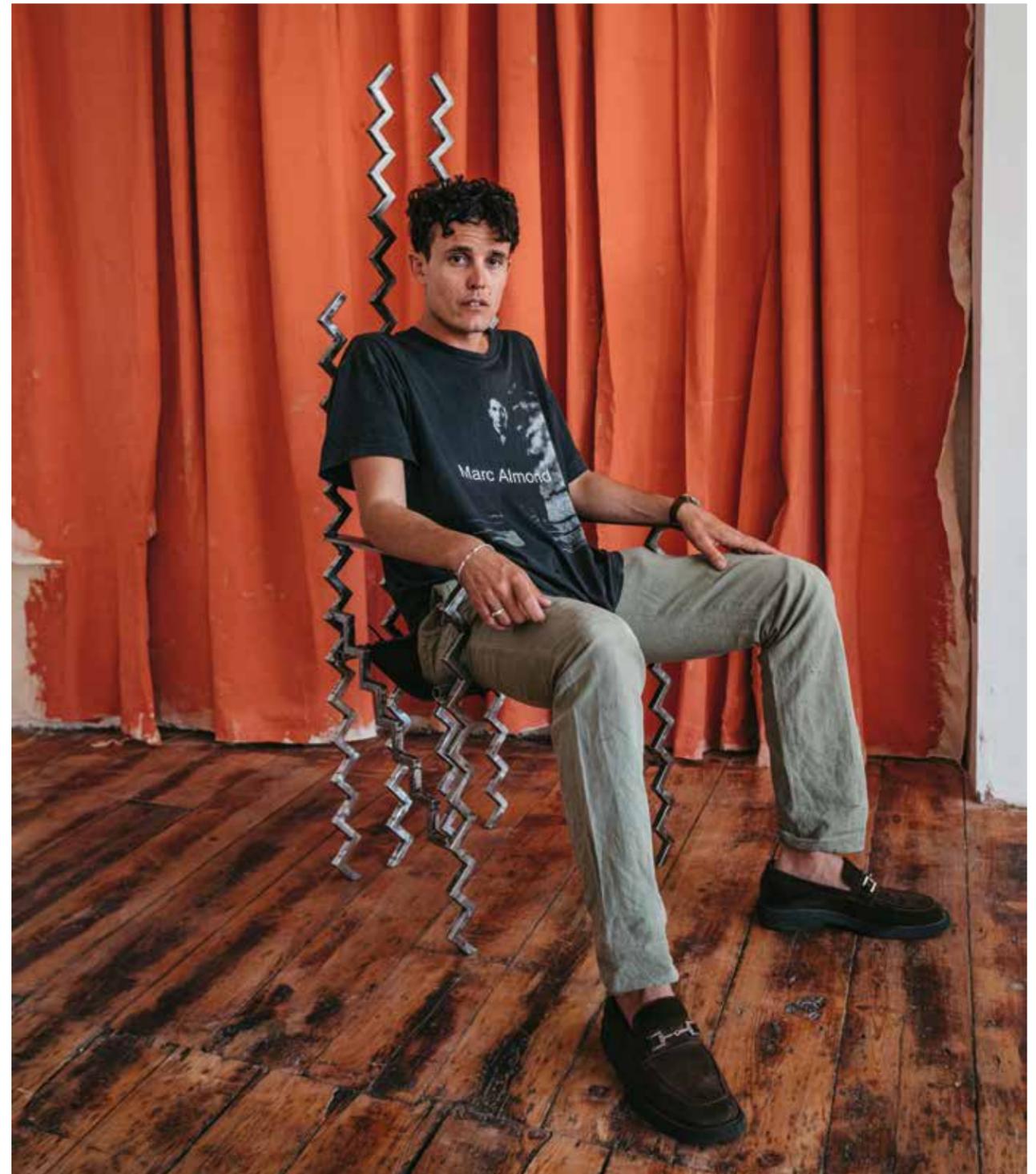




'I wanted some colour around the bed as it felt a bit cramped in here,' Jermaine Gallacher says of the curtain around his bed. The plaster table is by Viola Lanari. Opposite: the dealer in a 'Throne' chair, which Ben Burgis made to his design



MAN ON THE EDGE

Jermaine Gallacher describes himself as 'a bag of nerves', yet his fans know him better as London's coolest furniture dealer and designer. With the acclaim and client base growing all the while, he now finds himself on the cusp of something big - and not entirely sure what to make of it. As he tells Augusta Pownall, he has no time for big names and provenance, only fresh young talent. Oh, and zigzags. Photography: Antony Crolla >



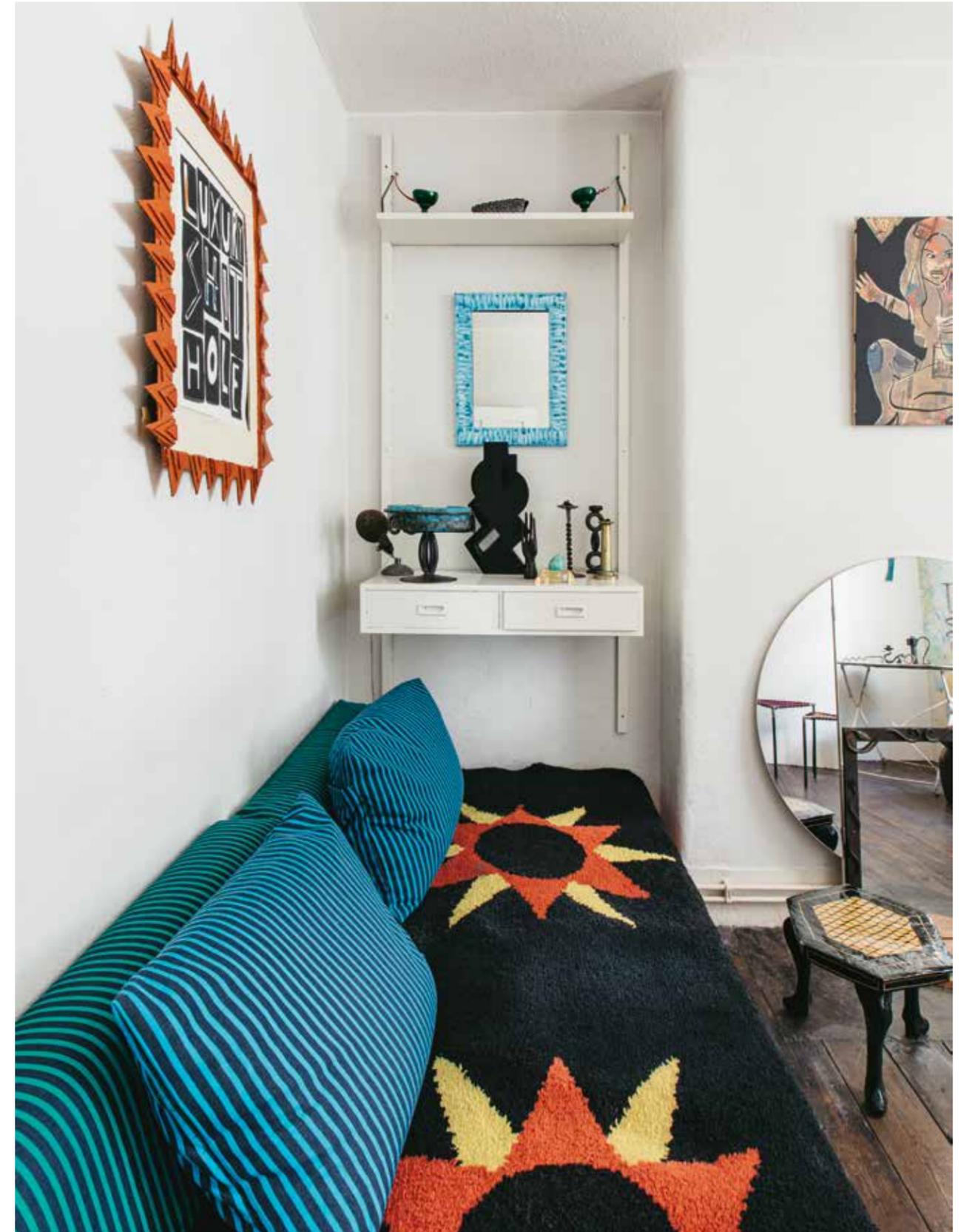
DESIGN DEALER Jermaine Gallacher, 32, has lived in the basement of a 19th-century Peabody-owned block in south London for a decade, but only really started fixing it up in the past couple of years. 'It was nice enough, and it had some nice things in it, but I wouldn't say it was decorated,' he says as he gives me a quick tour of its four rooms, which all lead off a single narrow corridor. Like all the best dealers, though, he's been collecting at markets and auctions for much longer; some things, like a small panther figurine, to keep forever, some to have for now, and the rest to sell.

Gradually he's added 'fun bits' to the blank white canvas of the flat, but recently there's been a sudden flurry of activity that has seen him pin a bright-orange-painted calico curtain around his bed and add startling slicks of colour to the corridor. What brought it on? 'It was lockdown and I was fucking bored, and I just thought, what am I going to do with myself? So I was at Leyland every day,' he says. 'And actually it was all these things that I really wanted to do, but I was always quite busy round the corner.'

Round the corner is Lant Street, a bar and showroom in a 19th-century former cork factory that will re-open this autumn, which Gallacher runs from within an existing wine merchant's. The pine-clad interior is the perfect backdrop for his blend of offbeat Memphis Group-tinged furnishings and Postmodern design objects by a close-knit roster of under-the-radar names. He'd been buying bottles there for years, and clearly feels indebted to the owner, Ben Wilcock, for giving him a chance. It's the latest in a long line of different selling spots, and the one that he feels 'really works'. First up was a stall with a mate at Spitalfields Market while he was studying illustration at Camberwell College of Arts. 'I was always a bit off the mark,' he says about his relaxed attitude to actually flogging the stuff, which relied simply on people liking what they saw. He freely admits he's not a great salesman, and would take someone on if he ever got big enough. 'I don't see why I should have to explain things all the time,' he adds in his nervy, slightly distracted manner.

Then came a space on Lower Marsh in Waterloo with amazing terrazzo walls that he loved. 'I'm not saying I'm a trendsetter but I swear it was all terrazzo. It was an old deli, and then suddenly everything all just became really terrazzo-y.' He moved on to a place in the Soho sex district ('grubby times') >

Top left: the 'Zigzag' console table in the bedroom is a prototype by Gallacher. Far from fitting the space perfectly, the bed, which his mother gave him, had to be shortened. 'I've had a few people in there and they can't fit.' Top right: the illustration to the left is one of his, while the chain handles on the cupboard doors further down the hall are by Ben Burgis and are sold in Jermaine's showroom



Above: Gallacher declares the rectangular blue enamelled mirror to be one of his favourite things in the world and says he would like to do a collection based on it. The banquette sofa – a market buy – is covered in a striped fabric from 'somewhere posh' and a rug emblazoned with suns. On the top shelf are two little cups by artist Miranda Keyes, who works mainly in glass and jesmonite



and a short-lived joint venture on Shacklewell Lane in east London before landing at Lant Street, where he hopes to stay put for a while.

The flat used to be a party place with people crammed in until the early hours, but he's picking up bigger clients, so can't afford a sore head in the morning these days. The LA-based doyenne of decorating and one-time glamour model Kelly Wearstler ('imagine doing that at Colefax and bloody Fowler – you'd be sacked!'), whom he adores, dropped by recently, splashing the sort of cash that has allowed him to soup up his website. He's also too anxious as he gets older to party hard, he tells me, and although British *Vogue* described him as 'London's coolest new furniture impresario' he opts for 'a bag of nerves'. He's certainly brilliantly unrestrained, and a wonderful raconteur, flitting from one idea to the next with caustic wit. If I were to list all the 'grossy-gross' things he jokingly hates, and the many 'Penny Dreadfuls' across the fashion and design industries, we'd have a lawsuit on our hands. But they all want his eye for a zigzag, and a strong silhouette, even if he can't quite put his finger on his own style. 'I've always had my eye,' he says, admitting that his taste has changed, becoming less Pop-py and more informed. And yet if a dealer tells him the provenance of an object, it immediately turns him off. 'I don't want named things, I want modern things in the showroom, and my things, and new designers, people like Viola [Lanari; *WoI* Oct 2019], and I like old things to have an ambiguity, and a magic about them. I'm not really interested in an old English chair. I'm not that geek.'

With all his ducks in a row, he's now facing an internal struggle between running a business – 'I do need to make a bit of lolly!' – and finding what that actually entails in the modern world (social media, press events, a personal brand) a bit grubby and unappealing. 'I'm pretty work-focused, but not in a bum-out way where I'd sit on a washing machine in a pair of Gucci loafers... I just want there to be more shows. I think you have a duty with a big space like that to have more of them. And for people to be able to drink at the bar and for the wine shop to make some money' ■

Jermaine Gallacher, 59 Lant St, London SE1 (020 8133 3826; jermainegallacher.com), is open by appointment only. An exhibition of works in paper and plaster by Viola Lanari is taking place there until 21 Sept

Top left: Gallacher made the console in the galley kitchen by slicing in half a piece of furniture discovered during one of his forays to London's Golborne Road. In the corridor beyond is a zigzag table that he plans to put into production, perhaps with a tray to make it more practical. Top right: the dealer isn't keen on modern ovens, and so waited until his mother found the perfect vintage model