

T THE NEW YORK TIMES STYLE MAGAZINE

About Last Night: T Celebrates the Greats

We toasted our new issue in a townhouse transformed into an enchanted forest — complete with topiary rabbits and papier-mâché squirrels.

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<https://www.nytimes.com/2019/10/17/t-magazine/t-greats-party.html>

On a night that felt unmistakably like the arrival of fall — with horizontal rain and umbrella-inverting wind — it was a particular delight to arrive at 8 St. Luke's Place, the five-floor townhouse that David Alhadeff of the design company the Future Perfect has transformed into a vibrant gallery, for a celebration of T's 2019 Greats issue. Hosted by the magazine's editor in chief, Hanya Yanagihara, in honor of the cover subjects — the actress Rachel Weisz, the designer Nicolas Ghesquière, the artist Nick Cave and the architect Shigeru Ban — the event welcomed guests into an enchanted forest of sorts, where fallen leaves carpeted the floors, clusters of moss and ferns crept along the walls and topiary animals hid among objects created by the London-based designer Philippe Malouin and the Amsterdam-based studio Floris Wubben.

Casa Perfect, as the space is called, encourages visitors to not only observe but also spend time among its works, setting an intimate tone for the evening. Guests lounged on the edge of a marble bath and perched at the end of a bed by the British brand Pinch, as they might at the home of a stylish friend. Downstairs, the more minimal, artfully appointed upper floors gave way to a woodsy environment that was so convincingly natural — thanks to the floral designer Joshua Werber's foraged logs, leaves and mushrooms — it was impossible to tell where the dining room ended and the garden began. Beneath the table, where guests enjoyed a casual take on the **chef Hiroki Odo's** signature kaiseki (a traditional multicourse Japanese meal), there was even a layer of sod — "so people can take their shoes off," said Werber.

The Venue: A Forest in a Townhouse

From the outside, 8 St. Luke's Place looks like a traditional West Village townhouse. But once visitors cross the threshold of the building, which was erected in 1901, they emerge into an open, loft-like space whose focal point is an angular honeyed oak central staircase that winds through the interior's five floors. Guests, still damp from the storm outside, warmed up on the first floor before wandering upstairs to find rooms filled, jewel-box-like, with unexpected pieces: a tropical, metallic chandelier by the Brooklyn-based artist Chris Wolston; an arcing, clean-lined floor lamp by the New York-based lighting designer Bec Brittain; and a collection of busts of African women, hand-carved by the Ghanaian woodworker Jacob Tetteh-Ashong.

The Decor: Moss, Ferns and Topiary Fauna

For the event, the rooms were adorned with natural elements as well. Werber, known for his offbeat, intricate floral headpieces, aimed to create a space that felt "like the jungle," he said. On the upper floors, arrangements of Pilea aquamarine and cryptanthus sat on table tops and rabbit-shaped topiaries hid in the corners. In one room, the curved stems of a banana tree, still heavy with green fruit, might

have been mistaken for a sculpture, and on the parlor floor, against the back wall, ferns and moss clustered along the baseboard like undergrowth. “I wanted everything to feel like it was coming from the ground,” said Werber, who sourced much of the greenery from his own Brooklyn garden. As people descended to the garden level for dinner, they emerged onto the forest floor: Autumn leaves, damp from the weather, carpeted the ground, and guests delicately sidestepped tree stumps and fallen logs.

The Food: An Abbreviated Kaiseki

The autumn forest crept onto the plate, as well. The seasonal dinner menu, crafted by Odo of the recently opened kaiseki restaurant by the same name in New York, was designed to evoke the feeling, he said, of “being in the woods”: A roast washugyu beef dish with a Sancho soy reduction was plated alongside pine needles and leaves of Japanese momiji, and for dessert, wagashi confections were made to look like the golden leaves of a Japanese ginkgo tree. Meals at Odo’s new restaurant can stretch to eight courses, but for the Greats dinner he created “a sort of abridged kaiseki dinner,” he said, “to keep things a bit more casual.”

The Gifts: Handmade Papier-Mâché Animals

No forest would be complete, of course, without fauna. Yanagihara tapped the artist Liz Sexton, who makes striking natural objects from papier-mâché, to create a custom sculpture for every place setting. “They’re a bit like little busts,” Sexton said of the 70 pieces she produced, each one in honor of a different animal whose population has been identified as threatened by the International Union for Conservation of Nature or the Endangered Species Act. Sexton was particularly taken with some of the lists’ less glamorous creatures, such as the Northern Idaho ground squirrel and the California tiger salamander. The artist, whose studio is based in Minneapolis, handcrafts each piece from strips of brown paper bags, paste and paper pulp, and each creation can take up to 12 hours. “I’m embarrassed to admit how long they take,” she said. “I get a bit obsessive.”