

Wallpaper*

NOVEMBER 2018

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November 2018



ALISON BERGER'S
NEW YORK NIGHT INSTALLATION
AT RH'S NEW FLAGSHIP
STORE IN NYC'S MEATPACKING
DISTRICT IS MADE OF 120
HAND-BLOWN, TEARDROP-
SHAPED CRYSTAL PENDANTS

Power shower

Designer Alison Berger offers a raindrop-inspired welcome at RH's new NYC store

Traditional bricks-and-mortar retailing may be in retreat, but RH's chairman and CEO Gary Friedman has doubled down on investing in the physical experience. In the last two years, the US interiors brand has opened ten new stores – all ambitious in scale – in cities including Austin, Las Vegas, Pittsburgh, Portland, Toronto and Dallas.

The latest, and the jewel in the crown, is a mammoth new retail location in New York City – a 90,000 sq ft, six-level temple in Manhattan's bustling Meatpacking District that brings RH's interiors, outdoors, modern, baby, child and teen collections – along with a rooftop restaurant and wine bar, and its in-house interior design department – all together under one roof.

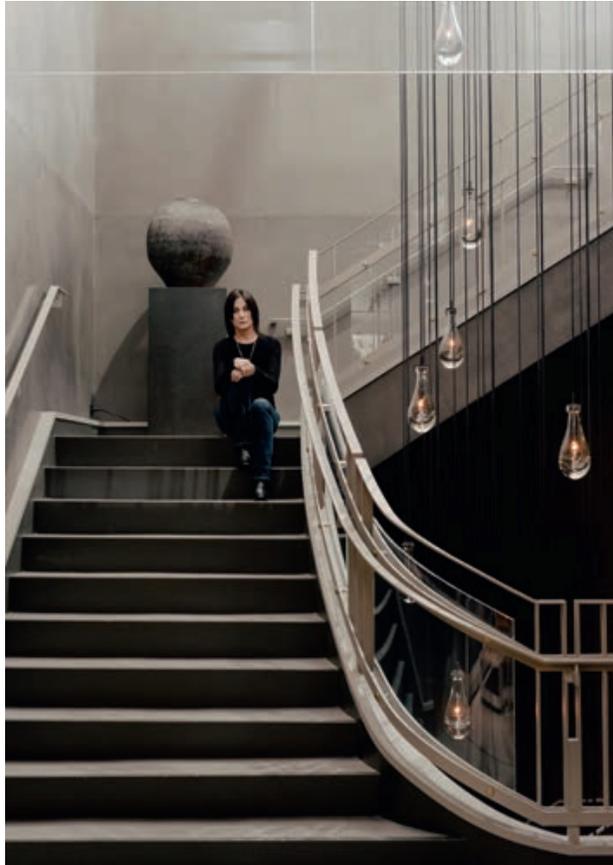
RH New York, The Gallery in the Historic Meatpacking District – as it has been named – occupies a landmark building,

originally owned by real estate magnate John Jacob Astor in the late 19th century. Reworked by architect James Gillam of the firm Backen, Gillam & Kroeger, the building, on a cobbled patch of 9th Avenue, is now a contemporary vision in steel and glass that seamlessly incorporates its meticulously preserved original brick façade, while boasting additional cast-iron I-beams that reference the neighbourhood's grittier past.

'We liked the irreverence and soul of the Meatpacking,' explains Friedman, who has been leading the charge (and change) at RH since returning to the company in 2013 after a brief hiatus. 'At its core, it's a neighbourhood of originals, and leaders – Florent [sadly no more], Patis [closed but set to re-open], the first Soho House outside of London, Diane Von Furstenberg's modern steel-and-glass rooftop penthouse, the High

Line, the Standard. It also offers us control of an entire building on an iconic corner with views of downtown and Freedom Tower, in a low-rise district that is flooded in sunlight, versus the shady streets dominated by high rises in most other districts. We loved the architectural challenge of having to keep the historic brick façade, and reimagine what it could become.'

Indoors, each of RH's collections has a dedicated floor. Flanked by cast-iron columns and topped off with a giant skylight that floods the space with natural light, a central atrium houses a glass-encased elevator and a double staircase. It is within this transitional stairway space that a particularly dramatic moment occurs. Spanning the 90ft height of the store, an intricate light-and-glass installation by designer Alison Berger (W*184) cascades down through the six-storey >>



rhythm, and also ensured that the work would look different when viewed on each floor. ‘The piece constantly changes wherever you are on the stairs,’ explains the LA-based designer. ‘Elevationally, you’re expressing the glass and the hardware and the beauty of the craftsmanship that went into the pendants, then as you go up, you’re aware of the verticality and how it actually feels like stop-action photography. From the lowest floor up, it becomes a constellation. These points of hovering light look like they are fireflies floating up the stairwell. That’s the beauty of something sculptural and so spatial like this – it’s constantly evolving; it’s not static.’

Berger’s attention to detail extends not only to the shape of the crystal bulbs, each an attenuated drop, but also to the fittings that hold them, which were inspired by the opening of an umbrella. Even the charcoal plaster finish of the stairwell’s walls is a nod to the asphalt of the New York City streets.

Berger’s commission is part of RH’s larger mission to support independent artists and designers in both its collections and retail spaces. For the artist, it was simply an opportunity not to be missed. ‘It’s so exciting to have the chance to bring this language to the public, so that more people can connect with it and share what I see,’ she says. ‘That was what was so motivating about these gallery spaces. You’re not going there to see art, yet there’s a six-storey art installation. It’s not just about what’s being sold.’ ✦

RH New York, 9 9th Ave, restorationhardware.com

stairwell on both sides. The piece, entitled *New York Night*, evokes a rainstorm that occurs just as night falls over Gotham City.

Berger sought to convey the feeling of being caught in the rain in New York. ‘The city looks so beautiful when it’s raining,’ she explains of its origins. ‘I thought about the reflections that happen when you take shelter in a stairwell or underneath a fire escape, and watch the city evolve into this almost impressionistic painting as it rains – the whole city gets soft. That was really the inspiration; to take this beautiful architectural setting and soften it with these points of light that randomly fall from the sky, all the way through the space.’

Berger’s involvement came about organically, after she had a chance run-in with Friedman and was invited to visit RH’s HQ. A few months later, RH got back in touch, commissioning her to design the central stairwell installation. ‘It was pretty easy to know that I wanted to draw something through the entire verticality of the stair, that talks about what it means to circulate through the space,’ says Berger. ‘You don’t really get the opportunity to drop something six storeys that often.’

While it feels like the installation has been formed by chance, a complex algorithm determined exactly where each pendant should be placed to achieve that natural

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TOP, BERGER WITH HER WORK IN THE CENTRAL STAIRCASE
 ABOVE, A RENDER OF THE NEW RH STORE, SET IN A 19TH-CENTURY BUILDING REVAMPED BY ARCHITECT JAMES GILLAM