

# ELLE DECORATION

SEPTEMBER 2023

## DAREDEVIL DESIGN

**Boho to bold**  
Decorating  
to suit  
all styles

**Kitchen  
extensions 2.0**  
Radical ways  
to rethink  
your home

**Avant-garde creatives & interiors  
that embrace the experimental**

£6.99

9



09



# Home of the brave

US homeware brand RH has finally opened its doors in the UK. But forget a London flagship, the design giant has put down considerably more rural roots

WORDS CLAUDIA BAILLIE

'If you're in the home business and you want to do something extraordinary, why not do it in an extraordinary home?' asks Gary Friedman, CEO of American homeware brand RH. 'Why open a store in Mayfair, which is what everyone else has already done? Although we are going to do that,' he says, laughing. 'But who has opened a store in a 17th-century, 73-acre estate in the middle of the countryside?'

It's a point well made. Until this year, the answer was no one. But, at the beginning of June, RH – formerly Restoration Hardware – launched its first outpost beyond North America at Aynho Park, a historic property near Banbury in Oxfordshire. Flung its sizeable doors open with a star-studded party that saw Idris Elba take to the decks, guests in the nearly 1,000-strong crowd included Ellen DeGeneres and Portia de Rossi (whose



art-curation company General Public partners with RH), as well as a host of names from the design and hospitality world.

Known as 'RH England, The Gallery at the historic Aynho Park', the lifestyle destination marks the first leg of the luxury US retailer's global expansion plan. 'It was an incredible challenge to introduce ourselves into Europe in a really inspiring and unforgettable way,' continues Friedman, who took control of the business in 2001, famously transforming it from a company offering nostalgic knick-knacks into a multibillion-dollar brand that's loved by the likes of Gwyneth Paltrow and Kendall Jenner. 'We didn't build the Gallery primarily for commerce – if we had we'd have never done it way out here,' he adds. 'We did it for conversation, and to inspire and educate ourselves and our guests.'

First constructed in 1615, the vast property

with over 60 rooms sits on a 400-year-old landmark estate with historic gardens designed by iconic landscape architect Capability Brown. One of England's rare Grade I-listed buildings (other places in this esteemed club include Buckingham Palace and the Houses of Parliament), in the early 19th century it was expanded further and refurbished by none other than Sir John Soane. It's not the first landmark building that Friedman has reinvented; the former Museum of Natural History in Boston, the Three Arts Club in Chicago, the Bethlehem Steel Building in San Francisco and the company's six-floor space in the Meatpacking District in New York are just some of the substantial US sites that are now home to RH Galleries. Nonetheless, the project, which took just over four years to complete, wasn't without its unique challenges.

'People say it's going to take twice as long and cost twice as much as you think, and that's usually true,' says Friedman. 'Then, with historic buildings, it can be three times that, but in a Grade I-listed building it's even more once you start pulling at the threads. I wouldn't change a thing though – it's an investment into our education and our brand. I think people will respect the work.' As well as boasting three restaurants – the



**'We didn't build the gallery primarily for commerce – if we had we'd have never done it way out here'**

Loggia, the Courtyard (opening this autumn) and the Orangery, an almost seven-metre-high space featuring a hearth flanked by custom Molteni rotisseries, Calacatta gold marble tables, seating upholstered in Italian merino-wool velvet and a lighting installation by acclaimed Los Angeles-based glass designer and artist Alison Berger – the estate now includes a tea salon, a juicery, two terraces and its own wine lounge complete with a 19th-century Rouge Napoleon marble Louis XV-style fireplace. On the upper levels are beautifully appointed rooms and suites, while the east wing houses the RH Interior Design Studio, an interactive space offering a professional design service with private presentation rooms, state-of-the-art technology and a full design library.

There's also, fittingly, a homage to Sir John Soane. Displaying reproductions of original drawings, models and artifacts, the exhibition was created in partnership with the London museum. The cherry on top of this extravagant cake, however, is the dedicated Architecture and Design Library, at the centre of which sits a rare copy of the first edition of *De Architectura libri Decem* by Roman architect Vitruvius in a modern language. 'In the entire property, this is the part I'm most proud of because it speaks ▶

**Opposite, from top**  
Furniture and lighting from the RH Interiors collection; Gary Friedman, CEO and chairman of RH  
**This page, from top**  
Named after Aynho Park's previous owner, this is the James Perkins Stairway to Heaven; the Architecture & Design library at RH England, the Gallery



# update

to what we believe in and what we're about,' enthuses Friedman.

The remarkable space is, of course, a showcase for RH's supersized, minimal, easy-living pieces that include a full remit of sculptural furniture and lighting, as well as textiles, artworks, decorative objects and antiques. Going forward, it will also be home to a selection of even more elevated designs that will make their debut at the property having been flown in from all over the world.

Next on the schedule is that showroom in Mayfair, along with Galleries in Milan, Paris, Madrid, Brussels, Düsseldorf and Sydney, but, for now, Aynho marks another step up for the brand in its continued quest to climb what Friedman calls 'the luxury mountain'. 'There are other luxury brands that have always been there and never had to make the climb,' he says. 'It's not for the faint-hearted. In order to get there we have to do work that's so extraordinary and so remarkable that it forces those at the top to look at us differently. And when they do, we hope they'll tip their hat.' [rh.com](http://rh.com) ED



**From top** The Grade I-listed Aynho Park, historic home to RH England, The Gallery; bedroom furniture from the RH Interiors Collection displayed at RH England, The Gallery at Aynho Park

