

# TEMPUS

INSPIRATION

## A BOLD NEW BEAT

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the brand prepares to change  
the face of fashion horology

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# RESTORING NOBILITY



Following the opening of RH England, The Gallery at Aynho Park, Restoration Hardware CEO Gary Friedman has ambitious plans for the American furniture brand's international expansion

Words: Lauren O'Neill



Dating back to the 12th century, Aynho Park has historically been inhabited by England's noble families, coveted for its unique elevated position, offering not only incredible views across the landscape but also an excellent vantage point from which to see incoming visitors — whether friend or foe. These days if you look out, however, you're more likely to spot a swathe of well-heeled, luxury interiors enthusiasts making their way to the stately home, which was recently acquired by American homeware brand RH, formerly Restoration Hardware.

After an exhaustive restoration, redesign — and rename, dropping the final 'e' to become Aynho Park — the brand has reopened the historic venue as RH England. The Gallery at Aynho Park, a bold statement of a move that triumphantly marks its first outpost outside the US.

With fans including the likes of Zoe Saldana, Sydney Sweeney, Matthew McConaughey and Kendall Jenner, the brand is something of a powerhouse in the States, where it was founded in 1979, and RH chairman and CEO Gary Friedman is confident it can emulate this success internationally. It is clear when you see the exquisite transformation of Aynho Park's interiors that RH has made an extremely significant investment into the stately home's

longevity and, with a second UK space soon coming to London's Mayfair, along with several other galleries currently under construction in cities such as Madrid, Paris, and Milan, the brand is accelerating its expansion into Europe.

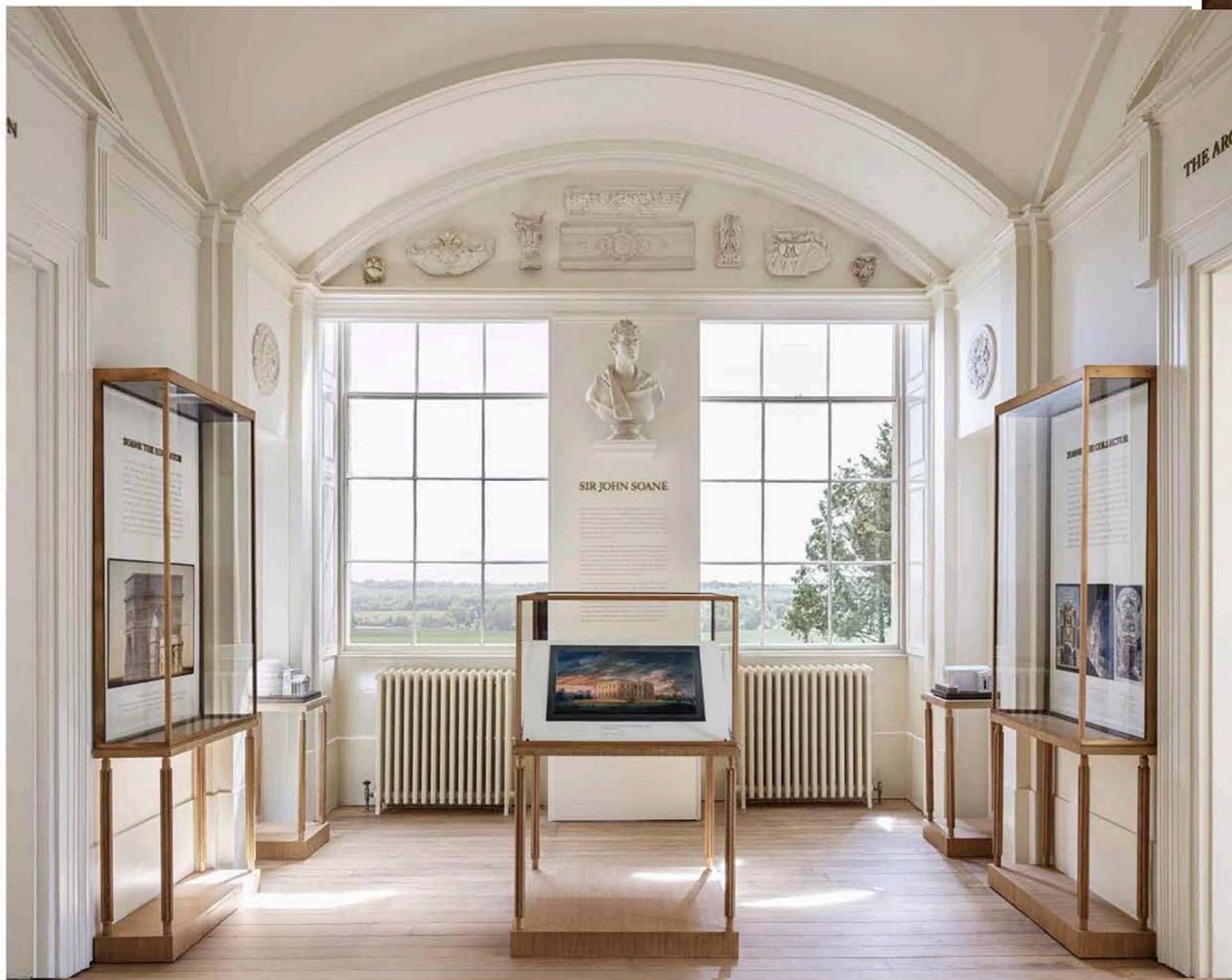
"We needed to do something for our first international gallery that would say who we are and what we're capable of," Gary tells Tempus. "Most people would say we're nuts opening our first European store an hour outside of the capital city, but we knew Aynho Park was right the moment we saw its magnificent architecture and a country park with roaming deer."

Originally built in 1615 for the Cartwright family by revered architect Sir John Soane, Grade I listed Aynho Park overlooks the Cherwell valley dividing Northamptonshire from Oxfordshire. It remained in the Cartwright family until the mid-20th century and, in recent years, the building was the home of hedonistic British businessman James Perkins and his family, from whom RH bought the property.

So, what inspired the decision to debut RH in the UK and breathe new life into this stately home? Gary explains: "Grade I listed buildings represent only 2.5% of all listed buildings in the UK. So, RH England is built on a foundation of rarity and revered for being something remarkable in the history of architectural spaces



Clockwise from top left: CEO Gary Friedman; RH 'Repose' bedroom; the Architecture and Design Library and Sir John Soane exhibition. Previous: Exterior of RH England, The Gallery at Historic Aynho Park



and places. Aynho Park has a design history that we are inspired by and presented a beautiful canvas for us to write its next chapter and ours."

It makes sense. What better way to showcase the RH lifestyle and sell its products than by creating spaces steeped in grand heritage that allow you to experience RH first hand? The concept of an immersive interior showroom fused with hospitality spaces is not a completely new one — rarely do visitors of ready-to-assemble furniture store Ikea not indulge in its café's Swedish meathalls or Daim cheesecake — but RH England's seamless integration of gallery spaces and showroom set-ups with food and beverage outlets make you wonder why this isn't a more common way to shop.

In recent years, the brand has diversified beyond selling furniture and homewares — its first hotel concept, RH Guesthouse, opened in New York in 2022 — integrating experiential spaces that use the RH aesthetic as the backdrop. RH England is home to three primary restaurants, The Orangery, The Loggia (its outdoor venue featuring wood-fired pizzas), and the new Conservatory, an American bistro, opening later this year. On top of this, shoppers can enjoy an earl grey in the Tea Salon, a green juice at the Juicery (featuring the most eye-pleasing arrangement of fruits and vegetables), or something a little stronger at its Wine Lounge. »



## SYMMETRY AND STYLE

Unlike most furniture stores, the beauty of RH England is that you can visit simply for a great day out with no prior intent to redesign your home (that said, if you choose to try out the lounge areas, you may end up leaving with an order placed for a Cloud Chair whether you were in the market for one or not). On arrival, the imposing and satisfyingly symmetrical exterior by Soane is something to behold. Symmetry and balance is a theme that runs throughout. Architecture enthusiasts will love the Architecture and Design Library, which honours Soane's legacy and has on display a series of incredibly rare and old books depicting the Vitruvian principles — symmetry, balance and proportion — among those of other great minds like Da Vinci and Alberti, upon which classical architecture is based.


Looking straight through the open doors of each room, from the library right through to The Orangery restaurant at the other end of the building, you can see how they are perfectly aligned to allow the rooms to act as separate rooms when closed, or as one bigger space, perfect for entertaining and perhaps an early example of the open-plan living that is popular today. In the room adjacent you will find a dedicated Soane exhibition, created in partnership with Sir John Soane's Museum in

London, which highlights his life and works with reproductions of his original drawings alongside architectural models and other artefacts.

One fascinating thing about this room, shown to me by RH's wonderful concierge, who has an encyclopaedic knowledge of both the building and the brand, is its domed roof, which is not just an interesting design detail. Lili Cartwright, a Bavarian aristocrat who came to England in 1835 as the new wife of Aynho Park heir Thomas Cartwright, had nicknamed this particular room 'The Whispering Room'. The room would have been where staff gathered to prepare for service, and where Lili imagined they would gossip about the family and gentry in attendance of dinners or parties. Visitors should refrain from having private conversations in this room, however, unless you are an expert in physics and know exactly where to stand. Because of the shape of the roof and how it refracts sound, if you are to stand at opposite ends, your companion need only whisper and it will sound as though they are speaking directly in your ear.

Retaining many of its original features, and complemented also by rare art and antiques, the RH collection plays out perfectly at Anyho Park across over 60 rooms, each featuring a QR code allowing visitors to easily shop the room. Known for its luxurious neutrals and contemporary

design, RH England shows how at home modern living can be in ornate, historic buildings and, as people invest more in experiences, RH cleverly illustrates the important role that aesthetics play in curating these experiences.

"These new Galleries and the integrated hospitality experience position our brand for the RH of the future," says Gary. "Our ecosystem of products, places, services and spaces inspires customers to dream, design, dine, travel and live in a world thoughtfully curated by RH, creating an emotional connection unlike any other brand in the world." 

rh.com

RH ENGLAND SHOWS  
HOW AT HOME MODERN  
LIVING CAN BE IN  
ORNATE, HISTORIC  
BUILDINGS

Statement décor: A marble unicorn guards the foyer (below) and (main) James Perkins' 'Stairway To Heaven'

