TATLER

STYLE

RH comes to London! Meet the man behind the impressive US-born interiors empire that just touched down in Mayfair

RH has arrived in London. Society swans, Hollywood hunks and the fashion set gathered to toast Mayfair's latest luxury mecca, formerly known as Restoration Hardware, in spectacular style – but who is the man behind this new gilded emporium on Burlington Gardens? *Tatler* sits down with CEO Gary Friedman to learn more about the birth of this temple of taste – and why Britain has always been the chicest of them all...

By Chandler Tregaskes
29 June 2026



'I tell people I'm the least likely guy to be doing what I'm doing,' says the enigmatic multimillionaire CEO Gary Friedman and man behind the US-born RH interiors empire that's not just gone global, but stratospheric, and has now officially landed in London. 'I never lived in a "home" [growing up]. I was never exposed to luxury. I was never exposed to furniture or furnishings. And I got booted out of junior college my first year,' he confesses. Now he sits atop an empire of opulence. Those in leafy Oxfordshire might recognise the American tycoon as the man who, in 2023, opened the doors to his reincarnation of Northamptonshire's Jacobean-era Sir John Soane-filled pile, Aynho Park, that now positions itself in a harmoniously lavish balance of part luxury retailer, part museum, part fine dining eatery, and part - basically - where practically anyone would dream to wile away an afternoon in decidedly dazzling design nirvana.



Across the pond, he's a living legend, a man whose highly ambitious and - to some - unorthodox career has seen him take the RH (formerly known as Restoration Hardware) brand from flogging fly swatters and garden gnomes on the cusp of bankruptcy to amassing an international portfolio of his 'gallery' concept megastores in just a quarter of a century. 'I got to know Steven Gordon who had founded the company. I never thought it was a great concept because it was all built on these kind of knickknacks and discovery items with a tiny bit of furniture, but I knew they had X amount of new stores, a relatively new, well-positioned retail footprint and I thought I could reconceptualize it and turn it into a premium home brand,' Friedman explains. 'Everybody told us it was impossible, it couldn't be done, so on and so forth. But we like to say, "We're looking for a few good people who don't know what can't be done."'

And that he did. Think Harrods if only for homewares and drenched in ecru and aureate shades; Selfridges for interiors but filled with ever more sumptuous dining experiences; the Conran Shop on souped-up and splendiferous steroids and you'll be at the heart of what the RH world *is*.

Now, the capital is getting its own gold leaf-licked RH treatment, taking over an 18th-century Palladian mansion once owned by the 1st Earl of Darnley that finds itself on an impressive corner of Burlington Gardens. It's neighboured by Bond Street titans, Savile Row stalwarts and backs up against the RA. Now *that's* hot property... 'It's going to tell a story and I think we're doing a good job of amplifying that story, respecting what was here. But that's what we look for [in our properties]. And this [one] happened to be in the middle of Mayfair...'



It is vastly impressive. But equally as impressive is Friedman's resume. The protagonist in his own rags to riches story, the business mogul is sat in the TwentyTwo 48 hours ahead of RH London's grand - and I really mean *grand* - opening, quietly and confidently deep-pocketed in a black t-shirt and jeans, boots, a SanFran tan, with one wrist wrapped in gold and leather bands and a particularly sparkling golden timepiece on the other. But he shares his hard-knock upbringing of losing his father at five and living with his bipolar schizophrenic mother is what instilled in him a dedicated and driven work ethic. 'I never imagined leaving a job. I started as a stock boy at The Gap and I worked my way up. I was the youngest store manager in the history of The Gap. People used to call me "Gary Gap"', he recalls.

'Gary Gap'; then became a William Sonoma wunderkind, his former CEO/mentor affectionately calling him 'kid' throughout his years-long tenure there, ('He said, "Kid, no one will be the CEO but you. You've made me a wealthy man."'). But what he describes as a 'heartbreak' moment when he missed out on the top position when the-then chairman left his post at the kitchenware behemoth without naming Friedman as his replacement as planned, caused him to forge his own path. 'I excused myself from dinner. The entrees weren't coming yet [...] I was waiting at a red light, there was this low fog that night and I looked up and there was a Citibank billboard that had these typewriter quotes and my whole career is flashing through my head and it said "He who dies with the most toys is still dead". That was an epiphany for me. I said, "It's not about the money".'



HENRY CAVILL, MARGOT ROBBIE, GUY RITCHIE AND THEO JAMES MARK RH'S LONDON ARRIVAL Dave Benett



FRIEDMAN WITH WIFE BELLA HUNTER AT THE EVENT Dave Benett

So, with five of his own millions and a friend on the phone who was fishing in Chile at the time, they bought together a few partners and took over the then near-bankruptcy RH with a $15 million investment and embarked on an expedition to bring the height of luxury into the homes of the jet-set elite. It began initially in the States, and now boasts outposts in Paris, Milan, Brussels, Madrid and finally London, totalling nearly 100 stores from here to Canada. 'We've always found most of our inspiration in the world in Europe and the UK, I think that's where most of the great taste and style and fashion has always emanated from,' says Friedman.

Speaking with the magnate is inspiring. He oscillates from throwing out motivational and heartfelt quotes and teachings from Steve Jobs ('You can't connect the dots looking forward') to Da Vinci with pure passion. Particularly piquing his interest is da Vinci's 'Vitruvian Man', now a symbol of the RH brand - and one that has wrapped 7 Burlington Gardens in its symmetrically poignant sketch in specially-made 70-foot scaffolding whilst the address's reawakening has been under way for the past few years. 'On my coffee table, I have the Leonardo da Vinci book that has the rendering of his drawing of the Vitruvian Man. And I would see that drawing and I thought, "Oh, the person who did that, they must believe what I believe because I interpreted it as a study of a human and being balanced and symmetrical."'



And now the barricade has been lifted. RH London is officially unveiled: five floors, 5,000 square metres, a restaurant, wine bar, tea salon, design library, studio and ample suites filled with RH's elegant and refined interiors. There's even a four-sided hologram showcasing the business's other properties, which itself is a world-first (only three-sided stereoscopic displays have been attempted before, according to RH), and a glass elevator dreamed up by Foster + Partners that reaches up to the top of the gold-painted rafters of the imposingly grand edifice.



Then there is the Perch Bar and upper-level al fresco courtyard dining area, designed by Anouska Hempel, Lady Weinberg. Surrounded by a glass-covered sparkling water moat, five aviary-like structures offer inside-outside eating with views of the neighbouring Mayfair skyline. 'We brought in one of the people that have inspired my career greatly [Hempel]. Everybody thinks Ian Schrager invented the boutique hotel. No, Anouska Hempel was 10 years before him and she's really the godmother of the boutique hotel. I remember when I first went to Blake's, it was the most magical place I'd ever seen,' Friedman shares.



Of course, only an opening soirée of equally as grandiose glamour would suffice to mark its arrival. Some 1,500 guests were invited to make their way down to be among the first to grace its antique-gold mirrored staircases, sizeable custom chandeliers swinging from the domed ceilings, and coterie of ornate Greek goddess-inspired statuettes. There were - for one night only - vesper martini bars from Duke's, bellini stations, sushi spots, lobster rolls, and, of course, cascades of flowing champagne. The guest list glittered with aristos and A-listers alike. Hollywood hunks and heroines including Margot Robbie, Henry Cavill, Guy Ritchie, Theo James and Naomie Harris looked suitably premiere-ready; Lady Amelia Windsor, the Marchioness of Bath and India Hicks conjured their quintessential society swan sumptuousness; and fashion folk including Charlie Casely-Hayford, Adwoa Aboah and Burberry's Daniel Lee were sure to check out the new Bond Street-adjacent digs. Even Janet Jackson made an appearance, looking superstar-cool in a black flat clap and shades.



So what does man, myth, legend Gary Friedman do in his downtime? Well, he doesn't get much. His team often work into the small hours ahead of a large-scale arrival such as RH London. He does, however, believe firmly in bricks-and mortar-experiences, even in the crescendo of the digital age, and credits hotspots such as Hotel Costes in Paris as places of inspiration. 'We're physical creatures. We like to interact. We like to be outside. I don't think everybody wants to sit around and spend their life on a device'.



When asked what three words he would use to describe his latest Mayfair design mecca, he pauses, deeply in thought. ‘Give me a minute....’ he ponders before offering up: ‘Respectful’ (‘I think it's very respectful of the history and the heritage [of the address]’); ‘Mysterious’ (‘There's a sense of mystery to it because it's four different buildings strung together and it's a mystery walking through it’); And ‘magical’ (‘There's many parts of it that are very magical. There’s this magical sense of discovery about it’).

Intrigued? You should be. W1 just got enchantingly more RH...