

# VOGUE

LIVING

## Why RH Is Taking Over Europe—and Hosted Milan Design Week’s Glitziest Party

BY LIAM HESS  
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The La Volta restaurant and bar at RH Milan, The Gallery at Corso Venezia. Photo: Courtesy of RH

On any given Tuesday in the Milan neighborhood of Porta Venezia, you might spot families strolling through the leafy avenues of the Giardini Indro Montanelli, or locals gossiping and sipping spritzes on the street at aperitivo hour, or shoppers toting enormous bags from the luxury stores that line the southern end of Corso Venezia. But last Tuesday evening, on one of the busiest evenings of Milan Design Week, the scene looked a little different.

A roaring crowd had formed a snaking queue that extended for hundreds of yards from both ends of a monumental 19th-century palazzo entryway, the ornate details of its facade dramatically uplit. A stream of blacked-out luxury sedans pulled up directly in front of the 20-foot stone archway entrance, where A-list stars were escorted from their vehicles—Margot Robbie and Zoe Saldaña could be spotted bobbing and weaving past the paparazzi to get inside—and straight through the door. Sure, Milan Design Week can get a little crazy, but this? This was another level.



Photo: Courtesy of RH

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The reason for the fracas was the arrival of the American lifestyle behemoth RH to Milan. And they landed with a bang. Stepping inside the grand, marble-lined lobby, with its displays of books by the Italian architectural greats—Palladio, da Vinci, Brunelleschi, and even an illustrated 16th-century first edition of Vitruvius’s *De Architectura*—the crowd passed through to the courtyard beyond, where revellers sipped cocktails whizzed up by the Sant Ambroeus Milan team and miniature bowls of Da Vittorio’s famous triple-tomato paccheri, while dancing to a French house DJ who had landed fresh from Coachella. (At this point, I had to fight the urge to let out a “Mamma mia.”) Perhaps most impressively, they somehow convinced the team behind Bar Basso—the beloved bar just up the road that transforms the street outside into a kind of mini-Glastonbury every night during Milan Design Week—to take over the top floor, serving their signature *negroni sbagliati* to guests under a recreation of their iconic neon sign.



Photo: Max Montingelli  
Margot Robbie



Photo: Max Montingelli  
Carolina Cucinelli, Brunello Cucinelli

It’s just the latest in a series of splashy openings for RH—widely recognized as the world’s largest luxury home furnishings brand—following the opening of a similarly imposing space on Paris’s Champs-Élysées last September. (Where RH Milan is putting a lavish spin on *la dolce vita* with its underground La Volta restaurant serving truffle pizza and veal Milanese, or the sculptures from classical antiquity and contemporary Italian artists dotted across its seven floors of showrooms, RH Paris embraced *la vie en rose* with its Grand Palais-inspired conservatory restaurant and gold-leaf ceilings by by Ateliers Gohard, the French workshop responsible for the gilding at Versailles and the Dôme des Invalides.) Next up is a London outpost, housed in the former Abercrombie & Fitch flagship on Savile Row, set to open later this year. Asking Gary Friedman, RH’s chairman and CEO, ahead of the event about how they overcame the challenges of opening this string of hugely ambitious projects within the space of a year, he replied, succinctly: “Patience.”

“We’ve worked tirelessly and overcome countless obstacles for more than 25 years, transforming an essentially bankrupt Restoration Hardware that sold slinkies and yoyos into RH,” Friedman continued. “To open RH Paris, Milan, and London within a 10-month period, all in unique and significantly historic buildings, each with unique and distinctive hospitality experiences, is a dream come true.” While he notes it’s something he’d never have imagined when joining the company in 2001, “we feel we’ve earned the right to be here, right now.”



Photo: Courtesy of RH

To understand *why* the brand has gone full-throttle with its European expansion, you have to look at all of the pillars that make up the RH empire: not just the high-end furniture you can stroll in and purchase—if you’re within a certain tax bracket, of course—but its interior design wing, which has already set up shop within its own floor of the building. (Over the past two decades, they’ve quietly become the largest residential interior design firm in the world, working on projects from Dallas to Dubai.) In 2010, they launched their first “next-generation gallery” showroom in San Francisco’s Historic Bethlehem Steel Building, the success of which led to the immersive hospitality-retail model they’ve become known for in the States. It prompted the rapid springing up of outposts in historic buildings across the country, from Boston’s former museum of natural history to a historic former post office in Connecticut. In 2023, they kicked off this new wave of European openings with a gallery at Aynho Park, an English country estate set across the rolling hills of Oxfordshire, within an imposing manor house that was worked on by Sir John Soane. Essentially, they haven’t done things by halves.

As for why Milan, in particular, was high on their wish list? There’s the fact that it’s an international design capital, of course. “Milan is a city of dreamers, designers, and definers,” says Friedman. “People who have taught us to inspire and to create desire.” But there’s a more personal reason, too: Friedman has family roots in Italy, and intended the gallery as something of a tribute to his mom and uncle. “This is about a lot more to me than selling furniture,” he notes. Indeed, after spending many years keeping their eyes peeled for the perfect Milanese palazzo in which to set up shop, Friedman received an email with a brochure for the building they now occupy—the Palazzo del Principe di Piombino—and flew to Milan the very next day. Before he left, they finished negotiating the deal on the balcony overlooking the courtyard. “I’m certain we could not have found a more inspiring home in this inspiring city,” he says.



Photo: Courtesy of RH

Of course, there was every possibility that locals might turn their noses up at this brash American entrée to their cherished design week. (A common refrain throughout the week was that the design world and locals are growing increasingly disgruntled by the growing presence of fashion brands during the annual circus of events that surround the Salone del Mobile furniture fair, which is beginning to drown out all of the actual, y'know, design.) RH may be a design brand through and through, but its eye-popping annual revenues allow it the ability to flex in a way most other design houses simply cannot.

That risk seemed to be firmly dispelled on Tuesday night: sure, Robbie and Saldaña were there, but the crowd was largely made up of glamorous, Paolo Sorrentino-worthy Milanese grande dames and their signores in natty tailoring. Italian fashion titans Brunello Cucinelli and Remo Ruffini rubbed shoulders with their counterparts in the design and architecture worlds, from Martina Mondadori to Piero Lissoni. As the crowds streamed through the showroom spaces, stationing themselves on plush Cloud sofas to snack on caviar blinis, everybody seemed to be having a very good time indeed. (Those free-flowing Bar Basso negroni sbagliatos probably didn't hurt either.) "There's a realization that we've planted real roots, and plan to be a permanent part of the community," said Friedman. Next stop: London.