

ARCHITECTURAL DIGEST

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THE NEW COUNTRY CHIC

GREAT HOMES,
FROM CLASSIC TO
CONTEMPORARY



EXCLUSIVE
FIRST LOOK
AT THE
GEORGE W. BUSH
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• DISCOVERIES



SHOPS

PRIDE OF PLACE

After two years of planning and major renovations, Restoration Hardware—newly rebranded as RH—opens its largest store to date in a historic 1860s Boston building

While strolling through Boston's Back Bay area more than two decades ago, Gary Friedman found himself fascinated by a neoclassical redbrick-and-brownstone building that commands a parklike block of Berkeley Street between Newbury and Boylston. At the time, Friedman was an executive at Williams-Sonoma, and the stately 1863 structure—originally the Museum of Natural History—was home to the clothier LouisBoston. Enthralled with architect William Gibbons Preston's graceful Corinthian pilasters, Romanesque arches, and monumental interior atrium, Friedman mused, Wouldn't it be great to have a store as magnificent as this one day?

Friedman, now chairman emeritus of RH (formerly Restoration Hardware), the California-based home-furnishings company he joined as CEO in 2001, has finally gotten his wish. Two years ago, when he was seeking a location for a new Boston flagship, he learned the building was available. It didn't take Friedman long to seize the "once-in-a-lifetime opportunity," as he describes it.

Unveiled this spring, the 40,000-square-foot RH Design Gallery is the largest outpost for the expanding retailer, which has been adding product categories, such as tabletop goods (Chinese porcelain dinnerware, Belgian linens) and what the firm calls "objects of curiosity" (architectural fragments, faux antlers, iPod-compatible reproduction Victrolas). And the store's four floors—which include a basement level—offer, for the first time on the East Coast, a florist and a dedicated area for RH's Baby & Child collections, featuring pint-size leather chesterfields and armchairs. →



From top: The new RH Design Gallery in Boston occupies an 1860s building that was restored and updated by Backen, Gillam & Kroeger Architects. Furnishings are showcased in vignettes, such as this grouping of Churchill-collection seating and Foucault chandeliers in front of soaring windows. A glass elevator serves the structure's top three floors. A living room display features Odeon light fixtures and Belgian Slope Arm sofas.

DISCOVERIES



Signaling RH's evolution from home-goods purveyor to full-scale lifestyle brand are several spaces on the top floor. In addition to a wine bar run by Ma(i)sonry Napa Valley of Yountville, California, there's a quartet of club rooms: a billiard lounge with a rehabbed Brunswick pool table, a cinema room where TVs play classic movies, an inviting library packed with vintage novels and design books, and a pub serving craft beers at a century-old bar surrounded by Motown and rock-and-roll memorabilia. "We thought, Let's do something for the guys," says Friedman of the masculine spaces.

The club rooms share the floor with a Paris-themed "conservatory and park," where outdoor furniture is displayed among artificial olive trees and a 24-foot-tall steel replica of the Eiffel Tower, a flea-market find and a fitting

totem of RH's Francophile design impulses.

Bringing the Civil War-era structure up to date and adapting it to RH's new retail vision was a monumental undertaking that required 15 months of renovation work. Friedman brought in a team led by the AD100 firm Backen, Gillam & Kroeger Architects, designers of numerous other RH stores. "The exterior was a historic restoration in the truest sense of the term," says principal James Gillam. "Inside was more or less a complete gut and, as much as possible, an approximation of the original interior."

Consulting old photographs and architectural drawings, the designers took out mezzanines inserted by previous tenants, removed an elevator bank that blocked the central axis through the building, and refurbished original details. Most significant, they opened up the atrium to recapture views from the ground floor all the way to the gilded, coffered ceiling. Gliding up and down that 70-foot-high space is the store's pièce de résistance: a glass elevator modeled after the one in Los Angeles's 1893 Bradbury Building, another of Friedman's favorite landmarks.

While providing dramatic settings, the museum-scaled rooms presented challenges for showcasing RH's domestic furnishings. The company spent almost a year designing artful vignettes, which, Friedman says, "force you to stop and consider home design in a different way."

The firm plans to open stores in other historic buildings across the country, including a shop slated to debut this fall in a circa-1917 post office in Greenwich, Connecticut. "Our design point of view comes from an architectural perspective—it's all about balance, symmetry, and proportion," Friedman says. "When we have the opportunity to harmonize with great architecture, there's no better way to present our brand." *At 234 Berkeley St., Boston, MA; restorationhardware.com* —RAUL BARRENECHE

From top: A bedroom vignette includes Rococo-style iron-and-crystal chandeliers, Belgian-linen curtains, and button-tufted headboards. The top-floor conservatory space was inspired by Parisian parks, complete with a 24-foot-tall steel model of the Eiffel Tower. On the same level, a cinema room has been given a clubby, masculine feel, with cozy leather sofas and media easels holding TVs that play classic films.