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Renaissance Movement

RH extends its West Coast sensibility into the cultural stratosphere

BY MELISSA GOLDSTEIN

Gary Friedman is having a Medici moment. Credited with transforming Restoration Hardware from a purveyor of industrial fixtures to RH, a luxury lifestyle brand, the chairman/creator/curator/co-chief executive officer is now setting his sights beyond tufted sectionals and beveled mirrors—carving out a niche for the Corte Madera-based company as a cultural juggernaut and patron of the arts.

This fall, Friedman debuted the ambitious new RH Contemporary Art platform, a business comprising an online gallery (complete with e-commerce), a print journal, an artist residency program and a six-story brick-and-mortar space in Manhattan devoted to showcasing

the oeuvre of RH's nascent roster of emerging talent. A site in Los Angeles where Friedman plans to mount the West Coast premiere of "Rain Room" (an interactive work by Random International that drew record crowds at New York's MoMA last summer, and for which he holds the North American rights) is forthcoming, with plans for future galleries in select U.S. cities. There's also talk of hotels, restaurants, architectural services and a clothing line.

"Our customers buy things that we curate, so the opportunity to curate art that we love is in some ways no different," he explains, adding: "There's more square footage on the walls of America's homes than there is on the floors—that's a lot of space that needs attention."

A music initiative is also part of the agenda: In September, RH Music introduced the first singer/songwriters to the family, including soul-infused chanteuse Edei, bluegrass duo Larkin Poe and retro pop act The Brixtons, with a private show at New York's Highline Ballroom and a concert at the Greek Theatre in Berkeley. The entrée into the struggling industry is an unlikely move, but perhaps entirely expected for a man increasingly known for galvanizing businesses. After all, this is the guy who reacts to a recession by going more high-end and continues to open over-the-top experiential retail spaces, when most are throwing their resources online.

Friedman (a Belvedere Island resident) partially attributes his philosophy to a West Coast sensibility: "Our attitudes are more open than closed, and we're influenced and motivated by our brethren in Silicon Valley who are breaking all the rules and changing the world," he says. But when it comes down to it, the strategy has less to do with geographic variables and more to do with instinct: "Some people say, 'Oh, don't take things so personally.' But those people are not our people," he emphasizes. "We're a company that takes everything very personally. And we're not going to be right all the time, but at least we'll be passionate about it." rhmusic.com; rhcontemporaryart.com; rh.com •



RH Music's concert at the Greek Theatre.



FROM LEFT Samantha Thomas' *Lanscapification #8*. Thomas at work in her L.A. studio. Gary Friedman. RH Contemporary Art's Chelsea gallery.



RH MUSIC CONCERT: DREW ALTIZER; THOMAS IN STUDIO: CHRIS BRICKLER; FRIEDMAN: ALEX FARNUM