

Discover

Bugatti Chiron, Marfa road trip,
Cannes Château, The Arts Club

Influence

Roberta Naas, Laurie Brookins,
Frank Marrenbach, Essi Avellan

Inspire

Top outdoor adventures, African
archeology, Galápagos in style

Explore

Rio de Janeiro, Thailand,
Sydney, Marrakech

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Desert flower

BANISH THE BLUES WITH THE
BEST BRIGHT COLORS FROM
THE SPRING COLLECTIONS



Contents

Discover

23 Object of desire
The chicest bejeweled smartphone in the world

24 Travel
Charter the largest yacht in the Galápagos Islands

27 Watches
Jaeger-LeCoultre's 85th anniversary Reverso

30 Men's style
Spring florals and the ultimate cigar chest

33 Women's style
The cold shoulder trend and how to wear it

36 Jewelry
The trend for strong, architectural lines

40 Property
An iconic Cannes château fit for a king

42 Motoring
Hyperventilate over the hypercar at the Geneva Motor Show

45 Technology
Two super smartphones to rival Apple's iPhone

46 Design
An unusual art-themed road trip to Marfa, Texas

48 Food & drink
Hotly anticipated London restaurant openings

Influence

52 Laurie Brookins
Our fashion columnist on incorporating past, present and future into fashion, plus how designers are building wearable technology into their designs

53 Roberta Naas
Our watch columnist on the industry's pioneers and what, if anything, there is left to invent

54 Essi Avellan
Finland's first Master of Wine on the myths of champagne and the best ways to enjoy a glass

55 Charles Metcalfe
Our experienced wine writer uncorks and savors the 2013 rare and delicious Domaine de la Romanée-Conti

57 Frank Marrenbach
Luxury hotelier and CEO of the Oetker Collection on the definition of luxury

Time for tea
Marc Newson tea service for Georg Jensen

Inspire

60 The 10 grandest American adventures
From Newfoundland to Patagonia, we round up 10 of the best escapes for a true adventure

70 Cover story: Desert flower
The very best of the spring collections, shot in Scottsdale, Arizona

79 Reap the whirlwind
Roberta Naas examines the watch world's fascination with the tourbillon

86 Going wild in the Galápagos Islands
Wildlife, luxury ecolodges and snorkeling in one of the world's most biodiverse natural habitats

90 The cradle of life
Face to face with the birth of human evolution and archeological relics in Lake Turkana, Kenya

96 Port of call
There's more to discover in the Douro Valley than the delights of Portugal's most famous wine

100 Elite interview: Gary Friedman
The renowned business executive on taking on Restoration Hardware

46



60



48



Back from the brink

Since he took the helm of Restoration Hardware, Gary Friedman has turned a near-bankrupt business into one of retail's hottest success stories. Laurie Brookins asks him the billion dollar question – how did he do it?

I

nterior designers are often inspired by their travels to exotic lands – but would you expect the same from a businessman with a keen eye on the bottom line? Then again, Gary Friedman isn't just any businessman. As chairman and CEO of Restoration Hardware since 2001, he has taken a near-bankrupt home furnishings brand

and transformed it into one of retail's hottest success stories. So how did he bring RH (note the new, sleek moniker) back from the brink?

What's surprising is the answer isn't about sales figures or cost cutting. Instead, Friedman's intention was to make RH feel as much like a hotel or home as it does a store. He was inspired by some of his most memorable life experiences – such as staying at his favorite hotel in Paris, Hôtel Costes on Rue Saint Honoré. For example, the courtyard of Hôtel Costes was an integral element of his store in Chicago.

Located in the city's Gold Coast district, RH Chicago is a seamless amalgam of retail and hospitality. Shoppers wander from one perfectly curated room to the next, often with a glass of wine in hand. Speaking about the store, Friedman says: "It's more home than store, the chance to just relax and feel good in these spaces." He adds: "Putting together a home can be a really time-consuming project, so we thought, what can we do to make it as enjoyable as it can be?"

Also integral to RH's turnaround is RH Modern, an entirely new business that taps into the modern design market. The brainchild of Friedman, it was developed in just 18 months, from the moment Friedman sold the idea to his board to the culmination in fall 2015 with the launch of the first stand-alone RH Modern Gallery in Los Angeles. The opening attracted scores of A-listers, including Gwyneth Paltrow.

"[RH Modern] connected a lot of dots for us," says Friedman. "If you're a baby boomer who's retiring, you don't want to feel old to get there, so how do you do that? By surrounding yourself with a modern lifestyle. Millennials, meanwhile, who grew up around technology are attracted to more modern environments. It made sense for us."

However the first store to introduce RH Modern was RH Chicago.

“It's more home than a store, the chance to relax in these spaces”

This, says Friedman, made sense because the store itself was a quantum leap forward. For example, the store houses a showstopping café, located under a glass and steel atrium, from which you can purchase every item you can see – every chair, table, even the huge crystal chandelier suspended above a restored fountain in the center.

The success of RH Chicago compelled Friedman to translate the idea elsewhere: not by creating cookie cutter versions – “that wouldn't feel right to us at all” – but by tailoring it to the store's location. His next – and arguably most ambitious – project is a boutique hotel in New York, dubbed Guesthouse, and inspired by another of his favorite vacation spots, the chic J.K. Place in Capri. “It will be our first real foray into hospitality,” he says. “An intimate, personalized space where you can escape all the noise.”

Asked how far he believes he can drive such concepts, Friedman smiles. “In many ways,” he says, “we're just getting started.” And I, for one, believe him.

