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RH Expands New Gallery Retail Strategy With West Palm Store

Text by Hadley Keller Photography by Courtesy of RHP
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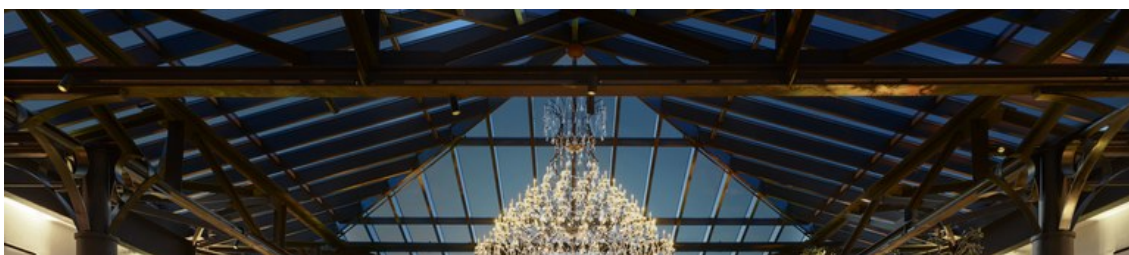
The latest sign that home furnishings purveyor RH is on the upswing? It's shuttering stores. The company, which has had a roller coaster of a run in the ever-changing retail world, nearing bankruptcy several times in the early aughts before commencing a steep rise in stock value over the past year, has been gradually rolling out what it calls "galleries": large-scale flagship stores in key cities that will slowly replace the dozens of storefronts throughout malls across the country. The strategy aligns with one Nike announced—and news outlets [breathlessly heralded](#) as the new revolution of retail—last month, when it enacted plans to focus efforts on just 40 of its stores worldwide. The move begs the question: In an era when branding is ubiquitous across the internet, does it need to be in real life?





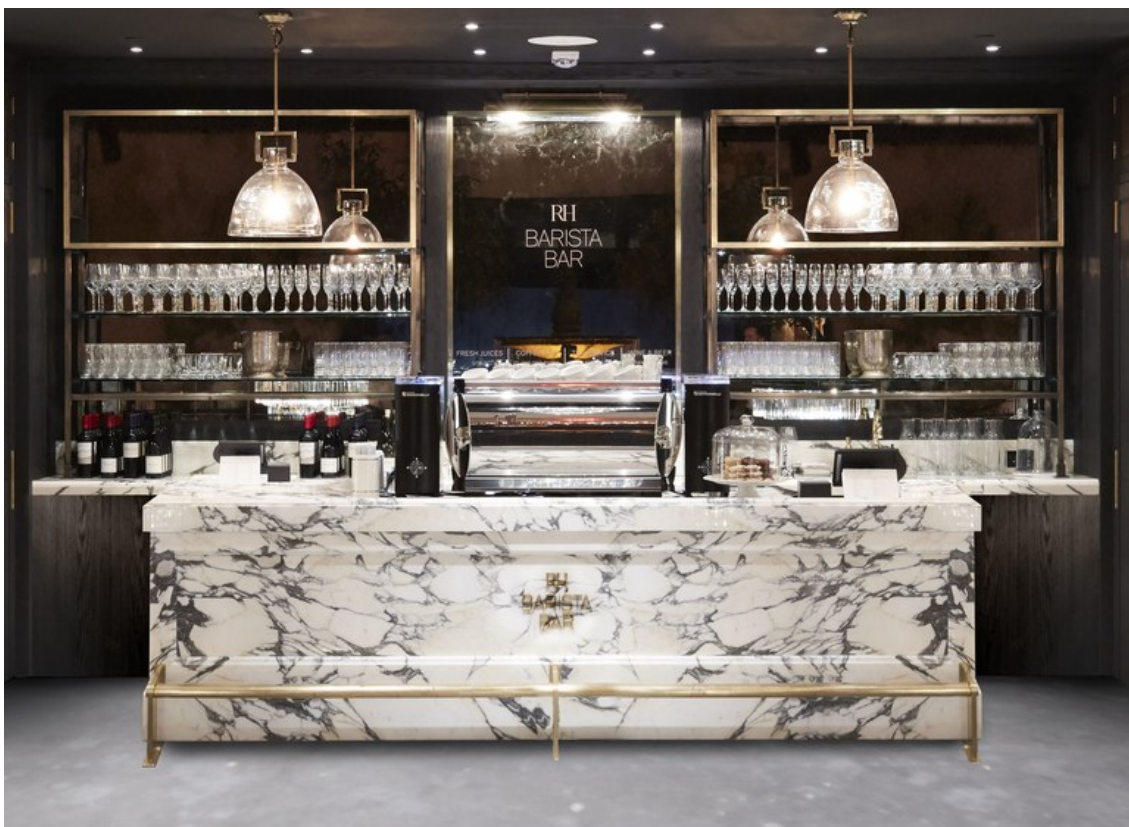
The gallery's RH Modern section.

"You can't fit your whole aesthetic experience into a screen," says RH CEO Gary Friedman with a dismissive shake of his head over a burger in a banquette of the café at his company's latest store in West Palm Beach, Florida. It's the morning after the official opening with a flashy party featuring Cipriani Bellinis, a raw bar, and a guest list including the likes of Karolina Kurkova, Matthew McConaughey, and Camilla Alves. RH West Palm is the newest example of the brand's gallery strategy, a staggering 80,000 square feet of RH furnishings in a centrally located building RH created from the ground up with James Gillam of [Backen, Gillam & Kroeger](#). It's a crystal-clear statement that at a time when critics decry the decline of brick-and-mortar, RH sees no such threat—at least not with the right kind of store.





The rooftop restaurant.



The barista bar.

The brand's move to shutter many of its older, smaller storefronts in favor of experiential temples to RH's specific brand of vintage-inspired, neutral-tone luxury decor is, in many ways, in keeping with [the direction of retail outposts](#) in an e-commerce world. Venerable analog brands and digital start-ups alike are eschewing practical shopping destinations in favor

of interactive experiences—showrooms where you can eat, drink, and lounge. RH West Palm is the model example of that. Of its 10,000-square-foot outdoor space, Friedman says, "We encourage people to think of this as an outdoor park. Bring a paper, get a coffee, and hang out." On one façade of the mammoth building, RH enlisted artist RETNA to create a graphic mural, which serves both as an attention-grabbing accent for the store and a defiant assertion of art and culture in West Palm (which is often looked over for the more art-centric Miami). Inside, visitors will find wine and coffee bars, and in a rooftop enclosed with a greenhouse-like glass ceiling and encircled by terraces, a café whose menu boasts lobster rolls and a burger once voted best in the country (the work of chef Brendan Sodikoff, whom Friedman personally enticed to head the new RH Hospitality division).



The design atelier, where customers can view swatches and samples or consult with one of the company's in-house designers.

"While we enable our customers to shop online, we're physical

creatures," Friedman says. "We still like to congregate. We like to see each other so we don't feel alone. Our vision is to bring back the tradition of great gathering spaces. When I was a kid, we'd go to the café at the department store, and that was a highlight for me. It was such an experience, and I think that's been abandoned. The sense of humanity in physical retail has been lost, and we'd like to bring back that spirit of congregation."

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It's all part of creating that beloved buzzword of late: a lifestyle brand. Without sharing details, Friedman also hinted at hospitality and dining projects that could be in the company's pipeline.

A mural by the artist RETNA covers one façade.

The unspoken yet very present reality of this, of course, is that this type of retail costs a lot of money—especially compared to the lower overhead of operating online. So, the decision to focus on quality over mass expansion is both a strategic and necessary one. So far, RH has galleries in Atlanta, Chicago, Denver, Tampa, Leawood, Austin, Las Vegas, Seattle, Toronto, and West Palm. Next year it will open a much-buzzed-about iteration in New York's Meatpacking District, just steps away from the Renzo Piano–designed Whitney Museum. Time will tell if these investments prove successful in maintaining RH's value, but for now this much is true: There's no better furniture store in which to have a burger.