

WORDS BY CAROLINE SHAW

YORK & ALBANY

LONDON



Gordon Ramsay Holdings' first hotel operation is housed in a Regency-period John Nash building, reimaged by designer Russell Sage.

He's 'done' fine dining restaurants, grills, cafes and even an airport eatery (Plane Food at Heathrow's Terminal 5). And he's certainly familiar enough with hotels, currently operating restaurants in three of them in the UK, and five more overseas. But running a hotel is new territory for chef Gordon Ramsay and his operations company Gordon Ramsay Holdings. So it is with much interest that we visit the York & Albany, the GRH bar and restaurant operation, with its own deli, and ten individual bedrooms above.

First impressions are good, as the venue occupies a prime spot on the corner of the busy Parkway thoroughfare in Camden, and has a well-scrubbed,

Regency façade that gives it a particularly distinguished appearance. The building was originally designed in 1827 by John Nash – the architect who created Regent's Park and the modern day version of Buckingham Palace. Indeed it was he who named the original Camden coaching inn after Prince Frederick, the Duke of York & Albany, more commonly known as the Grand Old Duke of York. As a venue with such heritage, not to mention royal associations, the renovation of the site needed careful consideration and a sensitive touch – enter designer, antiques specialist and history enthusiast Russell Sage. Having worked in his previous life as a successful fashion designer, Sage is relatively new to the interior

design scene, although he has been involved in the creative industries for many years. However with heavyweight projects like Stapleford Park, and now the York & Albany, under his belt, as well as new and exciting concepts for the Goring and Savoy hotels on the way, he is quickly making his mark second time around. With the York & Albany the designer worked closely with both Ramsay and chef Angela Hartnett, whose name has been put to the venture. Meeting Sage in the hotel's sun-drenched bar, he explains the significance of the project, both as a historical renovation, and for GRH as the company's first foray into hotel operation (although rumour has it they are scouting new sites as we speak).



OPPOSITE PAGE AND ABOVE: The main dining room at York & Albany is light and spacious, offering a mix of muted tones and classic furniture. RIGHT: A pewter bar runs through the main bar space.



"It has been an interesting journey. The hotel thing is new for Gordon Ramsay Holdings so, with the York & Albany, we had to create something beyond food, and a new image of something that is outside of what they are known for.

"The restaurant, and concept as a whole, is very personal to Angela Hartnett. The deli and restaurant in particular are her own vision. And there are certain themes with the food which we have aspired to with the interior design. The mantra at Gordon Ramsay Holdings is 'always keep the customer happy' and so we have tried to create a really luxurious, but comfortable interior that does this, and facilitates customers having the best time possible."

Already having a knowledge of Nash, as well as a passion for the history of buildings, and this building in particular, Sage did a huge amount of research into the background of the site. This, along with the needs of the client, provided the starting point for the interior design.

"I really wanted to weave a narrative into the scheme, as well as creating a classic interior that has the same timelessness as the site it is housed in," he explains. The result is a traditionally styled interior, but one which has contemporary touches and the odd hint of good old British eccentricity. The main bar and dining room are a subtle mix of muted tones and classic furniture pieces, with a brushed pewter bar running

through the main space. Meanwhile the basement dining room is an altogether more raunchy affair, dressed from head to toe in seductive red. Luxurious but far from showy, there is an underlying feeling of quality to the whole place that is very British in its essence. Furniture is well made, and solid but stylish, (each piece being hand-picked or bespoke made), set against a backdrop of hand-stitched, lined wallpaper by Royal Warrant company Gainsborough, and a wealth of original features.

This theme continues upstairs in the bedrooms, the majority of which, although not overly grand, still have an air of luxury about them. Just as with his fashion work, Sage believes that the devil, or perhaps



ABOVE AND RIGHT: All bedrooms feature bespoke furniture pieces, and hand-stitched, lined wallpaper ABOVE RIGHT: The delicatessen retains an original door opening onto the street

that should be 'joy', is in the detail when it comes to interior design. All sorts of 'secrets' have been worked into the scheme, to surprise and please guests. Inside the dressers handcrafted drawers and wardrobe linings lie waiting to be discovered. Bespoke, handwoven silk headboards, again from Gainsborough, cunningly hide the in-room technology while the bathrooms come with freestanding baths and Miller Harris toiletries as standard.

One area the 'bijoux bedroom' label does not apply is the suites, of which there are two – both coming with room to sleep, work, dine and bathe. The most pleasing of these is Room Four which is accessed by going outside and round the back of the building, and

up a set of stairs to a Borrowers cottage style door. Once over the threshold the room opens out into a vast living space, with a vaulted glass ceiling allowing light to stream in. Antique pieces of furniture from various eras, ranging from Victorian to Sixties and Seventies, work effortlessly together, and you get the feeling that every item had its own journey to its place in the room.

Sage has achieved his goal of creating an interior with a sense of heritage and a story to tell. By mixing decades, styles and influences, but keeping the focus always on quality finishes, he has produced a look that is refined, without being austere, classic without being pastiche. Oh, and the food isn't bad either.

EXPRESS CHECKOUT

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- ↳ 10 bedrooms
- 🍴 Restaurant
- 🍸 Bar
- ✦ 2 Private Dining rooms
- 🍷 Delicatessen