

VOGUE

An Exclusive First Look Inside Guild New York, the Bustling and Beautiful Flagship Store of Roman and Williams

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by ELISE TAYLOR



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Roman and Williams Guild in Soho, on the corner of Mercer and Howard Street.

Photo: Adrian Gaut / Courtesy of Roman and Williams



Robin Standefer and Stephen Alesch, the duo behind interior design powerhouse Roman and Williams, are the first to admit there are a lot of furniture stores in New York. In fact, there are about a dozen in the 10-block radius of what used to be a Chase Bank in Soho, where the pair is standing right now. But none of them has a bed, which, according to Alesch, looks like Gerard Depardieu. Or a table that, with its “strong, chiseled jawline,” is like a cross between George Clooney and Ryan Gosling (Standefer and Alesch believe that every object has a personality—“it’s like a person.”) Or buckwheat crêpes. Or wine. Or a flower shop. Or a library. Or just a corner where you can take a breath, relax, and shed your giant puffy coat. None of them is like Roman and Williams Guild New York, the firm’s 7,000-foot flagship store, which opens this week.

You’ve inevitably seen the work of Roman and Williams. The Standard Highline, the Chicago Athletic Association, the Ace Hotel in New Orleans, the New York restaurant Lafayette—all of those interiors were designed by the duo, as will the Metropolitan Museum of Art’s British Galleries, set to open in 2019. The firm is the design darling of New York, of Hollywood (Gwyneth Paltrow and Blake Lively are clients), of the South, of...everywhere. Which is why the anticipation for its first brick-and-mortar store—the only physical place you can buy Roman and Williams’s furniture—has had the creative world in a tizzy since it was announced earlier this year.

Inspired by the grand cafés of Paris and the wild imaginations of Standefer and Alesch, Guild bursts with creative energy: part showroom, part restaurant, part city reprieve.

First, the showroom: It’s filled with furnishings, lighting, accessories, linens, furs, fabrics, and all sorts of must-have *objets d’art*. They’re divided into three collections: “Founding,” comprising Roman and Williams’s own designs; “Community,” objects from places as far as Japan, Sweden, and Denmark; and “Found,” or antiques with a story. Why sell work from other makers? “There’s no home we do that there’s no collection, or conversation, between our objects and found objects,” says Standefer. Everything, they say, is not meant to be trendy or

decorative, but to last a lifetime. “They get better with age and when they get beat up and cut,” says Alesch of their furniture. “One coffee ring on a chair looks really awkward. But 40,000 coffee rings on a chair? Looks super cool.”

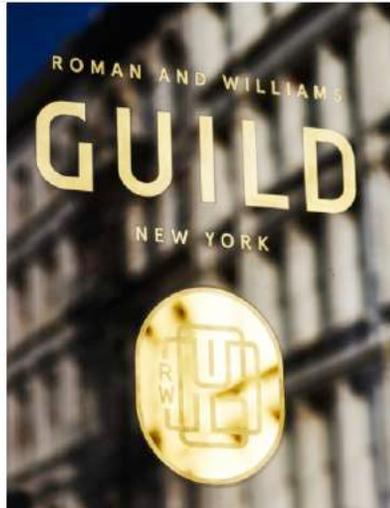
Next, the restaurant: La Mercerie Café, which is open for breakfast, lunch, and supper, serves French comfort food like beef tartare and buckwheat crêpes. It’s helmed by Marie-Aude Rose, the former chef at Spring in Paris, whose husband, Daniel Rose, is two blocks away at Le Coucou (which is also designed by, yes, Roman and Williams). Right now it’s only open for coffee and pastries, but full service will come this January.

Why mix food and furniture? Well, Standefer and Alesch wanted the Guild to mimic the feeling when you walk into a really great home or dinner party—“beautiful, and fun, and refined”—where you have a glass of wine in your hand, imagines Standefer, and “you can all of a sudden dream, Ah! This is what it is going to be like to have this be my table.”

Lastly, the oasis. “We knew we wanted it to be a place where people could spend the day,” says Standefer. “That’s why we decided to have a café, a bookstore, and flowers. All these things to activate your senses.” Tucked away in colorful corners are Emily Thompson’s wild flower shop, and a Phaidon library filled with books from the creative arts publisher.

Although Roman and Williams is also launching a website where you can buy select pieces online, investing in physical real estate when even the most prominent of retail shops are shuttering may seem like a risk. But Alesch shrugs at the suggestion. “When we see people moving in a certain direction, we always have this instinct to go in the opposite direction,” he says. “I love New York so much. I am so proud to take out a bank and put it in a dumpster. There is still a tremendous amount of creative energy in New York. I refuse to believe that it is gone, that it’s just Internet. Standefer adds, “I don’t think retail is dead. But it’s a bit boring.”

With its floors of varied delights, the Guild is many things—but boring is certainly not one of them. Wander its floors for yourself at **53 Howard St., New York, NY.**



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The sign out front, bearing the shop's insignia (made out of initials).

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La Mercerie, helmed by chef Marie-Aude Rose.

Photo: Adrian Gaut / Courtesy of Roman and Williams



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The flower shop, by florist Emily Thompson.

Photo: Adrian Gaut / Courtesy of Roman and Williams



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Tables at La Mercerie.

Photo: Adrian Gaut / Courtesy of Roman and Williams





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Emily Thompson flowers.
Photo: Adrian Gaut / Courtesy of Roman and Williams



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Whimsical Emily Thompson flowers in Roman and Williams vases.
Photo: Adrian Gaut / Courtesy of Roman and Williams



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Table settings at La Mercerie.
Photo: Adrian Gaut / Courtesy of Roman and Williams



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The counter at La Mercerie—with the flower shop in the background.
Photo: Adrian Gaut / Courtesy of Roman and Williams





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Pastries, pastries, and more pastries!
Photo: Adrian Gaut / Courtesy of Roman and Williams



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The archway, separating La Mercerie from the Roman and Williams showroom.
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Roman and Williams furniture from its Founding Collection.
Photo: Adrian Gaut / Courtesy of Roman and Williams



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It's all about the details.
Photo: Adrian Gaut / Courtesy of Roman and Williams





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A mixture of objects in the showroom.
Photo: Adrian Gaut / Courtesy of Roman and Williams



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Just some of the dinnerware offered at Roman and Williams Guild.
Photo: Adrian Gaut / Courtesy of Roman and Williams



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Vases in every shape and size.
Photo: Adrian Gaut / Courtesy of Roman and Williams



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A beautiful hodgepodge of Roman and Williams Guild objects.
Photo: Adrian Gaut / Courtesy of Roman and Williams

