



HAUTE HOTELS

## BOUTIQUE HOTEL TRAILBLAZER

*by Andrew Sessa | March 13, 2017*

Step inside the designer's latest project: the Franklin, a Venetian-inspired London hotel that brims with moody, romantic elegance.



**T**he creative talents — and ambitions — of New Zealand-born, Britain-based aesthetic arbiter [Anouska Hempel](#) know few limits. She has imagined fashions for members of the royal family and dealt in antiques on Portobello Road, masterminded the schemes for restaurants and residences, developed her own home-furnishings collection and indulged her passion for gardening with landscape design.

She also all but invented the boutique hotel when she opened London's Blakes in the 1970s — a hot spot she not only decorated but owned and operated, too. Since then, she has created more hotels in the British capital (The Hempel, La Suite West), as well as in Amsterdam (another Blakes) and the Brazilian rainforest (Warapuru). Most recently, she's been back at it in London, where [The Franklin](#) debuted in the city's Knightsbridge district this fall, tucked amid a row of elegant redbrick [Victorian](#) townhouses on Egerton Gardens, not far from the Victoria and Albert Museum and Harrods.

In the case of The Franklin, the former Bond girl — yes, the beautiful and poised Hempel was an actress, too — may not own the hotel, but she was given rather free rein by the proprietor, Starhotels. The company has properties in London, New York and Paris but focuses especially on Italy, where it is based. And so, Hempel took much of the inspiration for The Franklin's 35 rooms and suites, homey

[Anouska Hempel](#)'s design for London's new [Franklin](#) hotel draws inspiration for its palette and its overall style from Venice. The gray hues used throughout are meant to recall the mists hanging over Venetian canals, while the opulent decor reflects the city's palazzos (portrait by Lord Snowdon). Top: The living room of the hotel's Grey Garden Presidential Suite features walls hand painted with cloud motifs. All photos courtesy of The Franklin

could have been a cold or ascetic palette. Soft velvets, honey-hued wooden floors, ikat prints and gilded details add an element of the cozy to the overall coolly glam look of the interiors, which are awash in marble and mirrors.

"The hotel is beautiful and feminine, and it also has a sturdy feel," Hempel says of her scheme. "It knows it's beautiful and sits there rather proud of itself."

Here, Hempel shares her own pride in the place with *Introspective*.

## The Project:

The client, Elisabetta Fabri, of Starhotels, is Italian, and I had been dying to do something Venetian. She and her team told me, "Get on with it, and do what you feel like!"

## The Inspiration:

The spirit of the hotel is Venetian — from the beautiful hexagonal floor designs to the hexagonal slate and Carrara marble tables to the ornate mirrors, just like the ones from the old palaces in Venice. I also drew some inspiration from café society, which I think London is missing. The whole place is theatrical — you dream up your own dream there, and I've given you the stage to have your own dramas and inspirations.

Having visited Istanbul all my life, I borrowed as well from those beautiful gray kiosks you see all over that city, with gold knobs on top like little hexagonal hats. I've been impressed and inspired by them always. The little gold knob says, "What a wonderful world," and picks up the light from the dark sky. These knobs also appear throughout the hotel in different forms, a visual motif found in everything from the floor patterns to the tables.

## The Palette:

The predominant colors are pale gray, dark gray, off-white and a bit of bright white. There are wonderful areas of gilded mirrors and other gilding all over this dark gray stuff.

The floor is made of gray limestone, which looks old, as if it's been there forever, and it's punctuated with Carrara marble.

Getting the lighting right was also very important. It shows the spaces off to very great effect, highlighting the small spaces, for example.

## The Devilish Detail:

I want guests to notice the effect of the hotel overall, of course, but if there's one detail I'd especially like them to be aware of, it's that they can see everybody every which way they turn because of all the mirrors.

common areas, restaurant and hammam-style wellness area from *bella Italia* in general and Venice in particular.

Working almost exclusively in grays and whites that recall the mists hanging over the Venetian canals and lagoon, Hempel managed to find warmth and richness in what easily



The hotel occupies a redbrick Victorian townhouse in London's Knightsbridge neighborhood, near the Victoria and Albert Museum and Harrods.



The honey-hued wooden floors and floor-to-ceiling windows of this junior suite warm up what could be an otherwise overly cool interior.





The Franklin's setting on Egerton Gardens makes guests of the hotel feel as if they have their own private urban park.

## The Custom Commission:

Pretty much everything has been made for us — nothing was purchased off the shelf. Much of the furniture is Anouska Hempel Couture.

## The Vintage Find:

Many, many pieces in the hotel are vintage. There are plenty of antiques, too. One major standout piece is a mother-of-pearl Syrian chest of drawers in the lobby. All the little lamps with frills were bought at antiques shops all over — Portobello Road, Scotland and, of course, Istdibs. They're beautiful and rickety all at the same time. I sourced some of the lampshades throughout the hotel on Istdibs, too.

## The Favorite Space:

There's a tiny green room just off the lobby adorned with green ikat and mirrored within an inch of its life. We brought the green from Egerton Gardens inside. We had gray ikat made for us in Istanbul for the hotel, and in this room I changed it to green. It's a tiny, cozy little room, with only enough space for about three people.

## The Comforts of Home:

The whole hotel is supposed to feel residential, and it's set right on Egerton Gardens, which gives it the feeling of a townhouse with its own green space. It's a big dream of an old London house with the flamboyance of the Italian way of life.

When people stay at The Franklin, I want them to feel like they are rich Italians who are in residence at one of their three houses and entertaining day and night. Come for breakfast with a good story. Play the violin and read something aloud. I want to have elegant, intelligent and beautiful people in and out of the drawing room. Tell a story to each other, and if you put the window up, you can even smoke a bit.

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