



STORY BY
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PICTURE PERFECT

Legendary London-based hotel designer, Anouska Hempel, speaks with *Gentry Destinations* about her glamorous new design of The Franklin Hotel in Knightsbridge.



Anouska Hempel, New Zealand-born and long a London resident, is one of the most influential hotel designers in the world. First, she created the opulent private hotel Blakes in South Kensington. It was London's first boutique hotel. Her curtain-swagged beds and luscious colors sent traveling style-seekers into rapture. Everything was opulent and boldly romantic. Then, she dreamed up The Hempel, a dream of all-white interiors. This ode to minimalism was emulated around the world.

Hempel recently completed a dramatic new design for The Franklin Hotel in London. The décor, sparkling with mirrors and artfully directed in subtle and tranquil tones of poetic gray, will once more set trends.

It was Elisabetta Fabri, president and CEO of Starhotels, the Florence-based family company that owns The Franklin, who engaged the designer and worked closely →

Situated in an ultra-private London neighborhood, The Franklin Hotel is a serene escape from the capital's clamor. Rooms and suites overlook Egerton Gardens to the south, and the neo-classical façade of Brompton Oratory to the north. Designer Anouska Hempel, in-demand for super-luxe hotel décor, created a calm, monochromatic color scheme in artful tones of gray.



with Hempel to create breathtaking interiors. The Starhotels Collezione luxury properties also include the Castille Paris, the Splendid Venice, and the recently acquired Hotel d'Inghilterra and Helvetia & Bristol Firenze.

The red-bricked facade of the hotel, just a few minutes walk from Hyde Park, is decorated in tones of gray and ivory, with plush velvet upholstery, mirror-framed botanical illustrations, and mirrored furniture. The refined gray tones of the interiors are enlivened by graphic gray and white Ikat-woven pillows on charcoal sofas. The effect in the 35 rooms and suites is striking and chic. Embroidered white Frette bed linens dress four-poster beds. The hotel, a series of classic Edwardian townhouses circling Egerton Gardens, is now a civilized and calm escape. "It was inspired by the romance of Venice," Hempel relates. "Every floor looks like a Venetian piazza, and every room makes you dream—pure romance."

GENTRY DESTINATIONS: *Anouska, congratulations on The Franklin's transcendently beautiful design. Tell us about your concept.*

ANOUSKA HEMPEL: The vision was of a very beautiful girl in a floating pale gray dress wondering through Venice, lost in the mist. I could see the soft watery colors, and an old stone well, and a marble floor pattern. This inspired the idea of Venice in a small hotel in the heart of Knightsbridge. →



Anouska Hempel's artistry is fully evident in the tone-on-tone bar at The Franklin Hotel. At twilight, a series of arched mirrors creates majesty and a hint of mystery. Chairs are upholstered in gray velvet. The floor is gray slate. In a bedroom suite, charcoal, ivory, and dove gray are deployed to great effect. The cloud mural was hand-painted. And just a five-minute stroll away, guests reach the famed Victoria & Albert Museum.



Intricate patterns, inspired by a historic Venetian palace, and chapel floors add a sense of grandeur to the floor and tabletop in the study of The Franklin. A series of noble oaks and floral parterres in the private Egerton Gardens is visible from the windows. The graphic charcoal and white ikat pattern was created exclusively for the hotel. The meeting room is popular with international guests.

GD: *The inspiration for The Franklin?*

AH: Yes, gray on gray on gray. A little bit of chalky white. Pale limestone. I love entertaining people. I have had the great experience of owning and running luxury hotels. I would like to go back to wearing my hotelier's hat again and do everything from the sublime to the ridiculous. I love to look after people. That's what I'm doing at The Franklin.

GD: *Your concepts, using the charcoal gray background with mirrors and the Venetian gothic shape of mirrors, seems to create a very residential feeling.*

AH: That was the client's request, to make it look like an Italian living in London. My fantasy is perhaps a nice rich contessa living in great style in London and flitting back to Florence and Venice in the summer, taking her English boyfriends with her.

GD: *Every inch of the hotel is new . . . but it feels historic.*

AH: I worked with all the talented decorative artists I know to be able to do this. We layer and layer. I stand there and watch, and then I get the right one and I encourage that to be done again. It is all individually done with a lot of very clever artists from my London group of out-of-work actors.

GD: *Your use of color is magical.*

AH: Gray on gray! Earl Grey, Dorian Gray, very, very, gray, dove gray, off-white, dust, charcoal, the older-you-go gray, any gray you like—it's blurred and soft.

GD: *Your use of mirrors throughout is elegant and transformative. Placed beside windows, mirror 'screens' add dimension to suites.*

AH: That was the plan. Thank you for noticing. Reflection, reflection! Life cannot be boring. Change the mood and rearrange the mirrored shutters. Just pure magic. Smoke and mirrors.

GD: *The entry is welcoming, with its large table. Guests can sit there, read a newspaper, chat with a friend, take tea.*

AH: That was the idea, so that it looked like our contessa with all her books in whimsical splendor. I encourage the staff to imagine the same, and to treat all guests as though they were the guests of a great contessa. ➔



GD: *There's very little pattern. There's a decorative monogram.*

Who is that?

AH: The monogram is Lord Egerton's lover, Joseph Hermann. That was in the day of Oscar Wilde and friends. Lord Egerton was the original owner of this estate. It's a little bit of heritage, and I thought it belonged beautifully to Egerton Square and The Franklin. And Franklin was the name of the scientist who discovered DNA. She was part of the research team who did the first DNA tests in the science museum just up the road.

GD: *Which aspect of the design are you most pleased with?*

AH: I love the use of big tables. I've placed an enormous table in the lobby and in meeting rooms. Sitting around a table, talking around a table, eating at a table is energizing. Gathering around a table is always enjoyable.

GD: *Guests love to discover and hide away in the small study/office/library/gathering place just off the lobby/entry.*

AH: I positioned a large banquette beneath the bay window, and threw in more natural linen and a dash of emerald velvet to give it a softer, relaxed feeling. It's somewhere to meet a friend and have a chat or play board games after a day of museums and galleries.

GD: *Everything is planned and intentional, but the overall feeling is relaxed and inviting. How did you achieve that?*

AH: With a very talented international team of designers and artists, fine craftspeople, and specialists in flooring, upholstery, framing, and decorative painting to attain a sense of luxury, refinement. www.thefranklinlondon.com ♦



A collection of 19th-century botanical specimens pressed on parchment is framed in faceted mirrors in a simple bedroom on an upper floor. The view: the columned stone façade of the Brompton Oratory, a grand setting for many celebrity weddings. Swathes and swags of charcoal silk add opulence and luxury to a sun-filled bedroom suite (below) complete with Frette Italian linens.

