

# Town & Country TRAVEL

## Getting Away From It All

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# My London



from the "ready-to-wear" line.

As American designer Barbara Barry brought a new look to two London landmarks, she discovered inspiration in the city's special shops and haunts.

By Erika Lederman Portraits by Oberto Gili

Keeping up with Barbara Barry as the heels of her smart crimson flats click briskly over the ancient paving stones outside Westminster Abbey is a challenge. Trying to outpace the menacing clouds, we slip in through a back door, far from the crowds of children and tourists. A quick right takes us into a dark vaulted tunnel, then suddenly we're in a beautiful arcaded cloister. But this is just an appetizer. We follow another tunnel into the College Garden—an unexpected open field of green dotted with flowering shrubs, flanked on one side by the spires of the abbey, on the other by the unmistakable profile of Big Ben's tower. The site was originally the abbey's infirmary garden, established in the 11th century, and some of the medicinal herbs the monks planted are still grown there today. "Here one can regain a sense of place in this city," says Barry. "London's amazing history is often clouded by the realities of everyday life. This is a place to ponder." But it's hard to imagine Barry sitting still for any length of time.

A Los Angeles-based interior designer, Barry is often in London for her work, and this trip has her putting the final touches on her

latest project, Gordon Ramsay's Boxwood Café at the Berkeley hotel. This is Ramsay's first foray away from seriously formal dining, and Barry has been working closely with the triple-starred chef, setting the scene for a London version of an upscale New York café. Starting with Rodney Smith's witty black-and-white photographs of an English boxwood garden, Barry has come up with a crisp, chic setting with low-slung furnishings and walls lined with silver tea paper. This tailored jewel box is the perfect backdrop for simple, modern dishes such as Parmesan-fried zucchini flowers with Norcia ham.

The Savoy Grill, another outpost of the expanding Ramsay empire, has also been given the Barry treatment. While honoring the history of this room where Winston Churchill regularly dined, she has turned the Grill into a stylish, Deco-inspired space with boldly striped banquettes. Even the stodgy gentlemen who treat the restaurant as a second home are impressed—a testament to Barry's ability to design a space ruled by simplicity and balance.

That Ramsay and the Savoy Group—which owns the Savoy hotel and the Berkeley, as well as the legendary Claridge's and Connaught hotels—would enlist an American designer might be surprising if it were anyone other than Barry. But her knack for using contemporary design to complement traditional forms has brought her a residential client list that includes some of L.A.'s heaviest hitters (Eli Broad among them), as well as a portfolio of commercial projects (the very smart A.O.C. restaurant in Los Angeles and the Avon Salon & Spa in New York) and a range of licensing agreements that spans a best-selling line of furniture for Baker, plumbing fixtures for Kallista and crystal giftware for Baccarat.

Besides, it's hard not to fall under her spell. Barry is so passionate about good design and how it can affect people's lives that after only minutes in her presence, even the Savoy's stuffiest gentleman might consider hiring her to renovate his ancestral home. "Being a designer is both a curse and a blessing, because it's in everything you do," Barry says. "There is no escaping your opinionated eye and your awareness of detail." In Barry's world a perfectly proportioned enamel teapot can be a compelling reason to get up in the morning. The simplest object—a bone tool to create crisply folded notes, a scrap of Japanese paper to line a journal—inspires her.

So it's no wonder that Barry responds to London, home to like-minded aesthetes who champion beautifully made products. She loves prowling its many singular shops—from bespoke perfumer Miller Harris to L. Cornelissen & Son, the old-world art-supply store where she buys her sable paintbrushes—and often discovers things that can be found nowhere else in the world. Here she shares her favorite places to stay, eat and shop.

### BARBARA BARRY'S LONDON A-Z

Telephone numbers listed below, when dialed from the United States, should be preceded by 011-44-20 (unless otherwise noted).

**NOTTING HILL Summerill & Bishop:** "A shop like this proves that the everyday acts of life can be elegant," Barry says of this

#### SUMMERILL & BISHOP

Country kitchens are the inspiration behind this culinary store, where a bicycle reminds city shoppers of life lived at a slower pace.



ST. PAUL'S CATHEDRAL



SUMMERILL & BISHOP



VV-ROULEAUX



LABOUR AND WAIT (AND AT RIGHT)



EGG



CLARIDGE'S



THE BERKELEY



3 FOURNIER STREET



L. CORNELISSEN & SON



TOWN HOUSE (AND AT RIGHT)



EGG



BARRY AT BUCKINGHAM PALACE



ON THE TOWN BY TAXI



JANE SACCHI LINENS



SIMON FINCH RARE BOOKS (AND AT RIGHT)



BOXWOOD CAFÉ

Barry at the restaurant she designed for Gordon Ramsay at the Berkeley. Its clean lines are a perfect match for its unfussy cuisine.

Jane Sacchi now sells antique linens as well as her own line of luxurious contemporary fabrics woven in Scotland. Her Deco Dice damask authentically reproduces a pattern designed for the ocean liner *Queen Mary*. There is ticking based on 19th-century Danish patterns, and piped and buttoned cushions that can be customized with antique monograms. Barry is a fan of the shop's large, informal linen damask napkins, which she calls "the ultimate Monday-to-Friday napkin." Her favorite shade: Bleu de Pâtel, a pigment derived from the woad plant. *Worlds End Studios, 132-134 Lots Rd.; 7349-7020; www.janesacchi.com.* **Core One:** In a rambling warehouse at one of London's old gasworks, Core One is a cooperative of some of the city's more original dealers. Barry loves the fact that objects are in artful rather than orderly displays, mixing periods and styles, because, she says, "it frees one to invent their history." Recently she eyed a pair of oversized 1930 globe lanterns, a strikingly simple but beautifully formed silver-glazed teapot, stripped-metal bookcases and a set of glamorous mirror-paneled standing lamps. *The Gas Works, Michael Rd.; 7371-7422.*

**PIMLICO Hilary Batstone Antiques:** At this 20th-century-antiques dealer, one might find aged Venetian mirrors, lamps with cast-stone bases and 1950s chrome chandeliers. Barry relates to Batstone's ability to discover "the fine in the funky and

the funky in the fine." A pair of Batstone's armchairs covered in rough calico and often with a slight edge—a quirky shape, perhaps, or well-turned legs—can make a room. Thankfully, they're always in stock. *8 Holbein Pl.; 7730-5335.*

**MAYFAIR The Parlour at Sketch:** The very expensive restaurant Sketch has been the talk of London since it opened last year but what few know is that a visit to the Parlour, its couture tea room, allows you to enjoy the extravagant design without paying a fortune for a so-so meal. In this postmodern oasis, the teas are steeped from fresh loose leaves, and wonderful éclairs hardly bigger than your little finger are lined up in a glass case. *9 Conduit St.; 011-44-87-0777-4488.* **Claridge's:** When Barry wants to feel as if she's staying in her own grand London residence, she retreats to this palace-like hotel, where she can ask friends to come visit. Of course, with a fabulous new Thierry Despont-designed lobby and Gordon Ramsay's nearly impossible-to-get-into restaurant, there's little risk of a refused invitation. The 203-room property, founded in 1812, has been completely redone over the past several years. Barry prefers Suite 216-217, the epitome of Art Deco glamour. Another plus: her favorite masseuse, Sally. *Double rooms from \$600 to \$780, suites from \$1,100 to \$3,170. Brook St.; 7629-8860; 800-63-SAVOY; fax: 7950-5484; www.claridges.co.uk.*

**KNIGHTSBRIDGE Egg:** Housed in an old dairy, Egg was started by two former Issey Miyake colleagues and is known as much for its ever-changing displays as it is for its very simple clothes. Most are made at a workshop in India, and their appeal lies in the subtlety of the designs. "These clothes make us realize that when we have better quality, we need less," says Barry. *36-37 Kinnerton St.; 7235-9315.*

**Maroush II:** Each time Barry visits London, she makes a point of having at least one late-night meal at this Lebanese restaurant. "There is only so much 'fine' dining a California girl can do," she says. The great salads and fresh raw vegetables served here are a healthful alternative. *38 Beauchamp Pl.; 7581-5434; www.maroush.com.* **The Berkeley:** When Barry wants to get out and about in London, she checks into this more modern sister of Claridge's. The 214-room hotel (pronounced "BAR-lee") recently underwent a renovation of its public spaces and added fifty new rooms. Gordon Ramsay's Boxwood Café, designed by Barry, opened in April in the space once occupied by Vong and complements the hotel's intimate and urbane atmosphere. Her favorite guest rooms are the new ones by designer Alexandra Champalimaud, with their Deco-esque large walnut desks and mirrored clocks. She does warn that the hotel's location is "dangerously" close to Harvey Nichols and Sloane Street. *Double rooms from \$360 to \$610, suites from \$650 to \$5,380. Wilton Pl.; 7235-6000; 800-63-SAVOY; fax: 7950-5484; www.the-berkeley.com.*

**WESTMINSTER Shepherds:** This traditional bookbindery produces custom photo albums, address books and journals in

CORE ONE

Some of the wonderful items you might find in D.N.A. Design's showroom (opposite). Photograph by James Merrell.