





or nearly every magnificent country-house estate in England, there was once an equally palatial residence in London; it was de rigueur during the 18th and 19th centuries for wealthy aristocratic families to maintain a metropolitan mansion, too. As a result of economic imperatives and the devastation of the Blitz, only a handful of examples of this building type remain out of the hundreds that once stood, and these have long since been carved up and converted into apartments, embassies, offices, clubs, and the like.

Dudley House, at 100 Park Lane—the London residence of the Ward family since the 1730s—suffered such a fate, too, but thanks to a Croesus-like fortune originat-

ing in the Persian Gulf, it has recently been bought and restored

to perhaps even more than its original glory.

After a painstaking six-year refurbishment, the 44,000-square-foot, 17-bedroom domicile—which features an 81-foot-long picture gallery and a

50-foot ballroom—is London's only surviving aristocratic palace that still functions as a private, single-family home; reportedly, it is also Britain's most costly private

residence, valued in the neighborhood of \$400 million, which presumably does not include the tab for the extraordinary art and antiques that have been installed inside. More impressive than these prices, though, is a remark from Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth when she visited Dudley House for supper some months ago. "This place makes Buckingham Palace look rather dull," the sovereign reportedly joshed to her genial host.

That would be His Highness Sheikh Hamad bin Abdullah Al-Thani. A member of Qatar's royal family, he is the 33-year-old son of Sheikh Abdullah bin Khalifa Al-Thani (a brother of the country's former emir Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al-Thani) and a first cousin of the current emir, Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani. Since moving into his new residence, in 2012, Sheikh Hamad has remained press-shy, like his fellow Qatari royals. But Britain's royal family and top-drawer peers sure seem to know him; many of them (including-in addition to the Queen-Prince Charles, the Marquess of Cholmondeley, the Duke of Devonshire, and Lord Rothschild) have come to call at Dudley House, which is staffed and run according to standards rarely seen since W.W. II.

But the true royal seal of approval came earlier this year, when the Queen allowed QIPCO (Qatar Investment & Projects Development Holding Company), which was founded by Sheikh Hamad in 1999 with his five brothers, to become the first commercial sponsor of Royal Ascot in its 303-year history. (QIPCO is reportedly worth about \$5 billion.)

Through January 25, the public can take his measure by viewing an exhibition at the

Metropolitan Museum of Art, in New York, of some of his recent acquisitions, "Treasures from India: Jewels from the Al-Thani Collection," a show of spectacular decorative objects formerly owned by the great maharajas, nizams, sultans, and emperors of India from the 17th to the 20th century.

The exhibition, curated by the Met's Navima Najat Haidar, should establish Hamad as more than just another staggeringly wealthy sheikh. "He has joined the ranks of the great collectors," says Haidar. "He's bought top, top things."

As remarkable as the quality of his holdings is the speed at which he acquired them, adds Haidar: "He just started his collection five years ago. I'm really impressed by how many great things he has been able to buy in a short period."

Seemingly unlimited cash must help, but Sheikh Hamad appears to be propelled more than anything by incredible enthusiasm and passion for art and antiques. It is this fervor that has led him to consent to this first-ever profile, and open up the doors of Dudley House to photography.

he words Comme Je Fus ("As I Was") are easily visible from Hyde Park, on which Dudley House fronts. The motto, newly re-gilded, is emblazoned upon the sizable Wardfamily coat of arms, which hangs atop the stately colonnaded, three-story granite building. The Wards, a venerable old family whose abundance of titles date from the time of

Charles I, in the 17th century, became very rich and very grand in the early 19th century, when vast coal reserves were discovered on their Staffordshire estates. In 1827 the family's stature was raised when John William Ward, fourth Viscount Dudley, was created Earl of Dudley by King George IV.

Lord Dudley (whom Madame de Staël thought "the only man of sentiment in England") initiated a major enlargement of the house at 100 Park Lane, which his family



DUDLEY HOUSE IS BRITAIN'S MOST COSTLY PRIVATE RESIDENCE, VALUED AT AROUND \$400 MILLION.





had occupied since the 1730s, commensurate with his increased wealth and position. According to Great Houses of London, by James Stourton, the expansions continued—in a heavily gilded Louis XVI style-under successive heirs. In 1855, when the family was at the zenith of its mining wealth, they commissioned the magnificent mirrored, chandeliered, gilded ballroom and top-lit, marble-columned picture gallery, whose treasures included two paintings by Raphael. Such opulence made Dudley House a favored trysting spot for Bertie, the amorous Prince of Wales (later Edward VII), and his mistress, actress Lillie Langtry.

By the turn of the century, the exorbitant cost of running an establishment as grand as Dudley House became prohibitive even for a still-wealthy family. "Unlike the great country houses, these London houses had no economy of their own and required vast outside fortunes to support them," Stourton writes. In 1895 the second Earl of Dudley sold 100 Park Lane to South African diamond magnate Sir Joseph Robinson, one of the notorious "Randlords" of the day. Robinson entertained ostentatiously in the house, with singers such as Nellie Melba, and, like fellow plutocrats, he filled the place with major paintings by such artists as Gainsborough and Romney: "Beautiful eighteenth-century portraits of the class they have conquered," remarked one social observer of the day.

> n 1912, the Old Guard staged a surprising return, when Sir John Hubert Ward, the younger brother of the second earl, bought back Dudley

House using the fortune of his American heiress wife, Jean Templeton Reid (whose grandfather Darius Ogden Mills became California's wealthiest citizen after he joined the Gold Rush). The Dudley-Wards held court here for almost 30 more years, while many of London's other family palaces-now white elephantswere sold and demolished. (The destruction in 1924 of Devonshire House, the magnificent London seat of the Dukes of Devonshire on Piccadilly, was a watershed moment.) This last efflorescence was shattered in 1940 when German bombs badly damaged Dudley House, and it was subsequently converted into an office building.

Though the Al-Thani family is of Bani Tamim descent and originated in central Arabia, they migrated to Qatar in the mid-19th century, and subsequently forged an association with the British empire: a treaty negotiated by the British in 1868 recognized their control of the sheikhdom, whose wealth at the time came from trading and pearl fisheries.

In 2005, when he was just 24, Sheikh Hamad heard that the building might be for sale. "I had seen old photos of it in a book a few years before," he recounts during an afternoon chat in one of the house's reception rooms. "It was a great beauty, though by that time it was in very bad shape."

He has never been able to resist a pretty thing. "It started at a young age," he says, as if speaking of an addiction. "I used to drive my mother mad. When I was seven years old I would run all through the Louvre, looking at objects. When I was a few years older, I wanted to see all the fantastic Renaissance castles in France. Luckily, my mother took me."

Though his father was Oatar's prime minister from 1996 to 2007, his family (Hamad is the eldest of six brothers, and he has a half-sister born to his father with his first wife) spent a good deal of time in France. where they owned a château outside Paris.

While studying political science at Coventry University, in England, Hamad maintained a suite at Claridge's and found himself increasingly drawn to the English capital. "So, I said

to my parents, 'I think we should have a family seat in London," he recounts. "Then one day, when I heard Dudley House might be available, I called my parents right away."

Sheikh Hamad shares Dudley House with his immediate family, but he is clearly its châtelain and driving force. The Al-Thanis, however, seem to be in constant motion. The family-including Sheikh Hamad's

seven-vear-old son, Sheikh Khalifa (from his marriage to a Oatari national that ended in divorce)-

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rotates between Dudley House, their palace in Doha, and various properties in France. which now include arguably Paris's most maiestic residence, the 17th-century Hôtel Lambert, on the Île Saint-Louis, which they purchased from the Rothschild family for \$110 million in 2007 and are currently renovating.

#### "I Have a Runner"

amad's most frequent cohabitants in Dudley House are two of his brothers, Sheikh Suhaim. 28, and Sheikh Fahad, 26. (His three youngest brothers are Sheikhs Khalifa, Tamim, and Mohammed.) Recently, these boys have emerged seemingly from nowhere to become "the new superpower," as they have been touted, in British horse racing.

It all began just a few years ago, when, somewhat naughtily, Sheikh Fahad, while still in school, bought a horse without informing his family

and entered him in a race. "One day, we were home in Oatar, and he was concentrating on the TV, which was broadcasting the race," recalls Hamad. "He said, 'I

have a runner.' I said, 'Since when?' I was shocked!"

Fahad soon persuaded his big brother to establish Qatar Racing, which now has more than 300 horses continued on page 118



# DUDLEY HOUSE

"MAKES BUCKINGHAM PALACE LOOK RATHER DULL," THE QUEEN REPORTEDLY SAID.

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## Met vs. MoMA

because we want to get it right." Liz Diller told me that the retractable glass wall is "no longer there" and that a more developed design should be ready later this winter. I also interviewed three top MoMA curators-Klaus Biesenbach, Ann Temkin, and Laura Hoptman-all of whom emphasized the museum's desperate need for more space. The expansion plan will provide 40,000 more square feet of galleries. "We speak with one voice," Biesenbach told me, explaining that the chief curators meet every two weeks for a halfday retreat "to think about the architecture and to provide parameters for what we think is needed to pay tribute to the ever growing collection. If you're interested in contemporary art, you have to grow. Otherwise, you have to stop collecting."

Among painters, sculptors, and other "objectmakers," and those who show, sell, and collect their work, the suspicion is that the voice that will be heard loudest is that of Biesenbach, the man who brought Marina Abramović's staredowns and naked guardians to MoMA. (Not to mention Tilda Swinton's sleepovers.) That Diller Scofidio + Renfro is known for creating socially interactive spaces has only heightened these fears. This, not the Folk Art Museum teardown, may be the real crux of the controversy over the museum's expansion plans. Biesenbach is undeterred: he has a Björk retrospective opening in March, to be followed by a Yoko Ono show in May.

"For me Björk and Kraftwerk [who showed at MoMA in 2012] are as important as Doug Aitken and Julian Schnabel and Matthew Barney," he said. "They're groundbreaking artists of their generation, and that's the reason I'm doing these exhibitions." In December, MoMA opened "The Forever Now," curated by Laura Hoptman and featuring paintings by 17 artists, among them Rashid Johnson, Julie Mehretu, Kerstin Brätsch, Joe Bradley, and Mark Grotjahn. It was the first survey exhibition of contemporary painting mounted at MoMA in several decades.

#### Art and Soul

he new Whitney will open on May 1 with the largest display ever of its permanent collection, filling more than 60,000 square feet of indoor and outdoor space with everything from Georgia O'Keeffe and Edward Hopper to Cindy Sherman and Vik Muniz. Adam Weinberg says of the new building, "I want people to say it feels like the Whitney, whatever that means . . . that it feels right for the site. That it has a sense of adventurousness and openness, but is not just a total fantasy space. It has Renzo's sense of refinement and care. But we didn't want slick, sleek, cold, or anything like that." When asked about the heightened competition among the three New York museums that are aggressively expanding their contemporary-art collections and the real estate to house them, Weinberg is suitably modest. "It's a great moment for all of the museums in New York and for the arts community. We're all in a much larger cultural project here—to support artists and art. That's the bottom line."

Lowry takes the high road, too: "I think having both the Met and MoMA often interested in similar artists, if not the same artists, offers a unique opportunity to see those artists either as part of a long historical continuum, which is what the Met can bring to the game, or through the filter of the present, which is what we can bring to the game. That's a huge win for New Yorkers."

"It will be cast as a rivalry," says Campbell. "Inevitably, sometimes we're frenemies, because we're working on common ground. We have donors and supporters in common. but I think we've got very complementary goals. I'm a great believer in the notion that a rising tide lifts all boats."

Perhaps I should leave the last word to the Über-dealer Larry Gagosian: "I love expansion!"

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# Sheikh Shack



CONTINUED FROM PAGE 89 in training all over the world, and Oatar Bloodstock, which owns more than 150 stallions, broodmares, and foals. Both are subsidiaries of OIPCO, which has become British racing's biggest sponsor. Its large sponsorship portfolio includes QIPCO British Champions Day at Ascot, run in October-the most lucrative racing day in Britain (drawing a \$6 million purse this year). But it was the Queen's decision to allow OIPCO to become the first official commercial partner of June's Royal Ascot that put the Al-Thani boys in the top echelon of British bloodstock owners, and society.

"I am very honored," says Hamad about the Queen's choice.

How did it happen? "I think they saw the seriousness and dedication in our efforts," says Hamad. "I have a passion for British history, and racing has always been one of the great traditions in the country. I am very happy we could do something to help preserve the heritage of racing."

However, for OIPCO, horses are only a hobby. The holding company has a diverse range of interests, including real estate, construction, oil and gas, trading and services, and finance. Geographically, its investments span from the Middle East and Europe to the U.S. and the Far East.

QIPCO has no connections to the Q.I.A. (Qatar Investment Authority, one of the world's largest sovereign-wealth funds, worth \$300 billion), or the business activities of the emir's family. "Ours is a family company, completely private. OIPCO is a business that just happens to be based in Doha," Hamad clarifies.

As some \$15 billion of trophy assets in London alone have been snapped up by various Qatari interests, it has often been assumed everything (including, for example, Dudley House as well as Hôtel Lambert) was bought by the emir or Q.I.A. Some of the confusion may be understandable; Qatari royals generally remain secretive and do not respond to press inquiries.

#### Princes Among Men

Today in London it is Sheikh Hamad of 100 Park Lane whom everybody is talking about, at least in certain circles. His elaborate dinner parties are among the hottest tickets in town. The Queen has apparently been multiple times. ("A few," admits Hamad, cagily.) Other members of her family seem to be regulars, too. "Mama gets along very well with Prince Charles and Prince Philip," Hamad adds.

"His entertaining could not be more perfect," says Lily Spencer-Churchill, the Dowager Duchess of Marlborough, who, as châtelaine of the 187-room Blenheim Palace, knows about these things. "The caviar, the wines chosen, the flowers-he creates the most magical ambience, and guests respond to that. Women come in long dresses, and they wear their jewels. So you come out after dinner flying. He takes you into a whole other world-a world of absolute perfection."

Others rave about the extraordinary restoration and decoration job, which was conceived by the late Alberto Pinto and overseen by his Paris studio in a style that Sheikh Hamad describes as "Louis Seize à l'anglaise . . . a mix of French and English, which was very much the taste in English country houses and London residences after the Regency, led by George IV, who bought much of the furniture that had been in Versailles."

Museum-quality art and furniture abound inside Dudley House. In the entry hall is one of the most important pieces of furniture in Britain: a rosewood-veneered, ormolu-mounted commode attributed to Pierre Langlois; its mate is in Windsor Castle. Equally precious are decorative objects, such as an enormous obelisk-shaped, neoclassical, gilt-metal, bronze-and-silver automaton clock, made in 1777 for the Duc de Lorraine.

The magnificent collection of paintings, meanwhile, includes rare works by Lucas Cranach the Younger, Tiepolo, Gainsborough, and Van Dyck. "He's brought back to its full glory one of the great houses of London," says Jacob Rothschild, the fourth Baron Rothschild, proprietor of Waddesdon Manor. "It's a brilliant restoration, and a brilliant adornment."

"Everything is of the highest caliber, of a quality one rarely sees today," says David Cholmondeley, the seventh Marquess of Cholmondeley, owner of Houghton Hall. "He has put together so many diverse collections in the house—silver, silver-gilt, ormolu, marbles all informed by his great knowledge. It is wonderful how he has resuscitated the house."

"He runs it like Downton Abbey," says Lady Elizabeth Anson, who is England's most exclusive event planner and a first cousin to the Queen. "At six P.M., the staff changes into white tie and tails. But he is not showing off. He has no need to show off. He just does things in the style of the house—in the way you saw things done up until the war."

"He has the taste of the gods, by which I mean there is no vulgarity," adds Anson, who has planned numerous events with Sheikh Hamad over the past three years. "It's the ultimate taste. He's a perfectionist, extremely interested in every detail."

#### Treasures of Hamad

A ccording to the collector himself, his philosophy is simple: "If you want to do something, either do it properly or not at all." In October 2013, when he hosted a lavish reception at the Frick Collection, in New York, to launch *Beyond Extravagance*, an aptly titled book about his Indian jewels, he flew his considerable household staff over from London to serve as butlers and waiters in their white ties and tails. "I thought, He's used to seeing white tie and tails, so that's what we should have," says Anson. "But if we hired local waiters who had to rent tails, it would have looked like the Philharmonic."

But even that event paled compared to the private viewing and dinner Sheikh Hamad hosted at the Met on October 27 to open "Treasures from India," for 150 A-list guests. Augmenting the 12 staff members flown over from Dudley

House, Lady Elizabeth oversaw the casting and wardrobing of 104 model-handsome male waiters, all of whom were meticulously outfitted in white tie and tails, as well as white gloves.

The high staff-to-guest ratio was just one of the elements that made the night surely one of the most splendid private opening dinners ever seen at the Met.

In the Great Hall, monumental vases of ice (hand-carved by craftsmen flown in from England) were etched with the Al-Thani crest and held towering arrangements of green hydrangea.

"No expense was spared," said guest Judy Taubman. "It was so exquisite and divine, but all so refined and in such good taste."

Being something of a present-day maharaja himself, it's fitting that Sheikh Hamad felt an affinity for these magnificent imperial objects. He began collecting them in 2009, after he toured the Victoria and Albert Museum's exhibition "Maharajas," which featured a number of stunners. "I thought, How wonderful if I could own one such piece," he remembers feeling then. Five years later, he owns 300. "I have a big weakness for head ornaments and daggers," says the collector. To illustrate his point, he calls for staff members to appear with a few of his favorite items. "If I had to choose one above all the others I'd choose this jade dagger," he says as he fondles an exquisite weapon and then passes it to me. "It is made of the purest form of jade, and jade was considered by the Mughal emperors to be the most valuable stone. This piece belonged to two emperors-the hilt was made for Jahangir, and it was re-bladed for his son Shah Jahan, who built the Taj Mahal. It later was purchased by Samuel Morse, inventor of the Morse code."

Next he passes a *jigha*, a gold turban ornament set with diamonds, rubies, and spinels, with a hanging emerald. Such items are particularly lavish, as they functioned almost as crowns—which the Indian rulers did not wear. Precious as these objects are, Sheikh Hamad doesn't like them locked in cases. "I call them my children, and I like to hold them. I feel they talk to me. A piece must move me and talk to me before I buy it."

Locating these objects has not been easy. Few of them are in India anymore. Most were long ago sold off by India's princely families, especially after independence came to the country, in 1947, and royals were reduced to privy purses. "Maharajas don't live in the same way. You don't find this ancient jewelry in India

anymore, except in Hyderabad. In the 1930s the nizam of Hyderabad was considered the richest man in the world. But the nizam today does not display his jewelry. So sad for me."

Gorgeous as these items are, they also have great cultural and political significance. India's ruling nobility used their jeweled objects—which were frequently given as lavish gifts—to magnify their royal glory and enhance their prestige, as well as to foster alliances inside and outside India. In the early 20th century, maharajas took boatloads of their gems to Cartier and other Paris jewelers, to be recut and reset in Art Deco and other European styles.

Something of an insomniac, Sheikh Hamad often stays up late into the night poring over catalogues and research volumes to locate items he wishes to purchase, and he stays in constant communication with his curator, Amin Jaffer, who was the organizer of "Maharajas" at the V&A and is now Christie's international director of Asian art.

"When I wake up I usually have an e-mail from Sheikh Hamad sent around three in the morning," says Jaffer, "saying something like 'I saw a reference to this *jigha* being in such and such a collection in 1931. Find out where it is now so we can buy it.' When he sees something he is interested in, he pounces on it 100 miles an hour."

"I'm obsessive," admits His Highness, "but selective." Dazzling as his jewels are, and his house too, he eschews excess, he says: "The line between elegance and vulgarity is very fine. You have to know where it is, so not to cross it. Today, everybody seems to want to live in a white box. They want to buy the same artists and have the same things. I find that very vulgar. But I was lucky when I was doing this house—a lot of people thought they should go modern, so a lot of great antiques went on the market."

After casting his gaze around for a moment, he can't help but express some satisfaction after his years of labor on Dudley House and his collections.

"The result is not bad," he says.

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Vanity Fair No. 654 The magazine is published monthly by The Condé Nast Publications Ltd., Vogue House, Hanover Square, London W1S 1JU (telephone: 020 7499 9080; fax: 020 7493 1345). The full subscription rate to Vanity Fair is £55.20 for one year (12 issues) in the UK. Overseas Airmail per year: €99 to the EU, £90 to the rest of Europe, \$99 to the US and £99 to the rest of the World. Enquiries, changes of address and orders payable to Vanity Fair, Subscriptions Department, Lathkill Street, Market Harborough, Leics LE16 9EF. To subscribe on the Internet, visit www.magazineboutique.co.uk/vanityfair or e-mail vanityfair@subscription.co.uk, quoting code 7223. Subscription hotline +44 (0)844-848-8202 open Monday to Friday 8 A.M. to 9:30 p.m. Saturday 8 A.M. to 4 p.m. Manage your subscription online 24 hours a day by logging on to www.magazineboutique.co.uk/youraccount.

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