

# THE EXCHANGE.

A CUT ABOVE  
Architect Sophie  
Hicks in London.



TRACKED

## SOPHIE HICKS

The architect is applying her signature style of minimalist cool to more personal projects.

BY NED BEAUMAN PHOTOGRAPHY BY JULIA GRASSI

SOPHIE HICKS recently built herself a house. That might not sound unusual for an architect, except that the house is located in the London borough of Kensington and Chelsea, one of the most expensive and densely populated areas in the country—and one of the fustiest. So even after she'd found the site—a row of run-down garages—she had to wage a protracted battle against a planning committee that recoiled at the thought of Hicks's raw, minimalist style intruding among the neighborhood's Italianate terraces. But she was prepared to fight. Having made her name designing stores for fashion brands like Chloé, Acne and Yohji Yamamoto, Hicks, 58, was impatient to start a building project from the ground up. "It's extremely difficult as an architect in the U.K. to build," she says, "because this country is very conservative. And it's especially difficult for a woman—I feel there are a lot of jobs that I would have got if I had been a man." So she had to become a developer in her own right. "The only way to get anything built was to do it all myself."

Before she became an architect, Hicks, who was born and raised in London, had a high-flying career in fashion. In 1977, at the age of 17, she was a guest fashion editor of *Harpers & Queen* (now known as *Harper's Bazaar*), and then worked as a fashion editor with Grace Coddington at *British Vogue* and later with the designer Azzedine Alaïa. But at 26, feeling burned out, she decided to switch fields, and by the time she received her diploma from the Architectural Association in 1993, she already had two children and a small practice of her own. Soon old acquaintances from the fashion world were calling on her. "When Paul Smith first walked through my studio door, I knew him anyway from years back," she says of working with the fashion designer. "I speak the same fashion language, so it helps a lot." The Paris store she designed for Yohji Yamamoto in 2008 is cloaked in folded shoji paper, while the Seoul flagship she designed for Acne in 2015 has translucent polycarbonate walls. "How do you make a shop that looks different? It's almost impossible. So that's what I love."

However, with the exception of a retail concept for the Australian beauty brand Grown Alchemist, slated to open in Melbourne in 2019, Hicks has tightened her focus to projects that allow her to carve out her ideas from scratch: Her new house will be followed by stables and a house in Northamptonshire for one of her two daughters, the model and amateur equestrian Edie Campbell ("One of the best clients I've ever worked for," Hicks says), and after that, a larger residential project for herself on a second site in west London. The struggle over that one has proven to be even more hard-fought, but Hicks does not intend to back down. "I question everything," she says. No matter how much resistance she meets, she remains—to adopt the language of the skeptical London planning bureaucracy—"anomalous," "jarring" and "unashamedly contemporary." >





11:20 a.m.

Below: Hicks swaps footwear in preparation for a site visit. Right: On site with Tom Hopes (at left), senior architect at her practice.



5:11 p.m.

Below: On the ground floor of the former warehouse that also contains her offices, Hicks designed this swimming pool with tiling by Richard Woods.



7:30 a.m.

Far left: Breakfast at home with her younger daughter, Olympia Campbell. Left: An interior from Hicks's house.



2:16 p.m.

A design meeting with her elder daughter, Edie Campbell, about riding stables and a house they plan to build.



7:32 p.m.

Above: She catches up with an old friend, the artist Tom Sachs, as he prepares for an opening at the Thaddaeus Ropac gallery.

127  
shops

The number of Chloé boutiques her practice has designed, from Tokyo to Milan.

85  
gigabytes

The digital size of renderings, statements and technical reports submitted to Kensington and Chelsea council to apply for permission to build her house.

12  
months

The time it took to design and build Acne's Seoul flagship.

30  
guests

The number of people she regularly cooks for at dinner parties in her home—her best dish is roast haunch of venison with homemade medlar jelly.

40  
laps

The length she swims a few times a week at her health club.

2  
minutes

The total time she appears on-screen as an actor in Federico Fellini's 1987 film, *Intervista*.

34  
years

The amount of time she has owned a cottage in Northamptonshire without ever redecorating.

500  
logs

The wood she chops every year for the cottage's fireplace and boilers.

2  
supermodel children

Her daughters, Edie and Olympia. Her son, Arthur, is a math teacher. ●