

SEANKELLY

de Pury, Simon. "Simon de Pury Spends Night Inside Antony Gormley Sculpture," *artnet news*, February 2, 2015.

artnetnews

Simon de Pury Spends Night Inside Antony Gormley Sculpture



The exterior of the Beaumont Hotel.

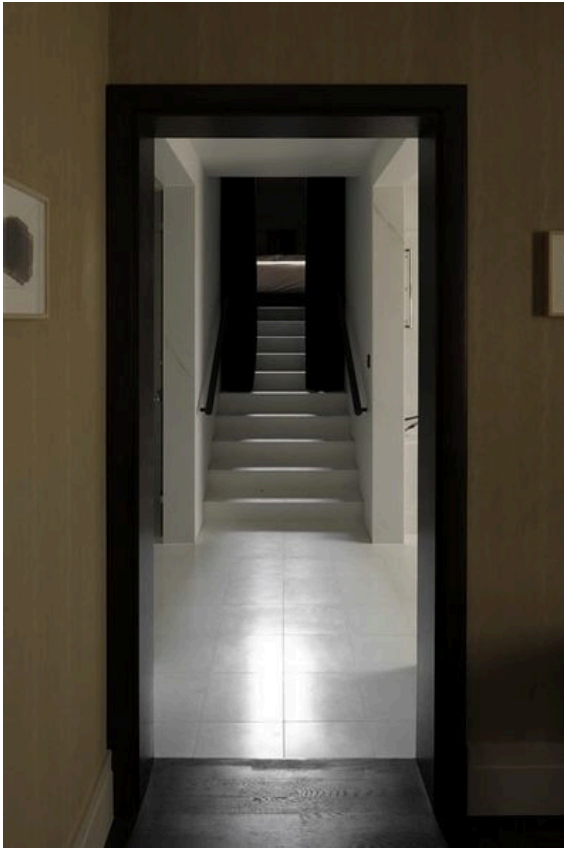
© Corbin & King Limited, photographer Nick Ingram, all rights reserved.

Having never practiced any sport, I believe it would be highly dangerous to suddenly do so at my not so juvenile age. I do, however, occasionally accompany my very sporty wife to her fitness studio and may have a coffee nearby while she exercises. While doing so I discovered sometime last summer a very elegant Art Deco building being refurbished on 8 Balderton Street in the heart of Mayfair, London.

My curiosity was piqued when I saw that on one of its sides what looked like a monumental Antony Gormley sculpture was being erected. At an opening dinner given by Jay Jopling at Little House a few days later, I was seated at the same table as Antony Gormley and his wife Vicken Parsons. I asked them if indeed it was one of Antony's sculptures that was going to grace the house I had admired. Not only did they confirm that this was the case, but Antony explained that it was going to be part of a new hotel, the Beaumont, and that his sculpture was actually going to be one of the hotel rooms. He went on to describe very eloquently, in a way that I could never replicate, the experience he wanted to create for the guests who would stay in his Room. Listening to him, I imagined that the demand to stay in that particular room amongst the constant stream of art lovers descending all year long on London—and in particular in October during the Frieze art fairs—would be considerable. Being an auctioneer, my "déformation professionnelle" made me suggest to Antony to sell by auction the right to spend the first night inside his sculpture, once the hotel would open. The proceeds could benefit a charity of his choice. The idea did seem to appeal to him, and Vicken promised to explore it with the owner of the hotel. Shortly after that, she let me know that she had done so, but that he wasn't interested in doing it.

Fast-forward a few weeks, my wife Michaela came back enthusiastically from her fitness session, saying that upon leaving her gym, she bumped into Antony outside of the now completed and opened Beaumont

Hotel. He spontaneously offered her and a group of friends he was with a tour of the new building and in particular his sculpture room. Her description was ecstatic.



The ascent to Antony Gormley's Room.

© Corbin & King Limited, photographer David Grandorge, all rights reserved.

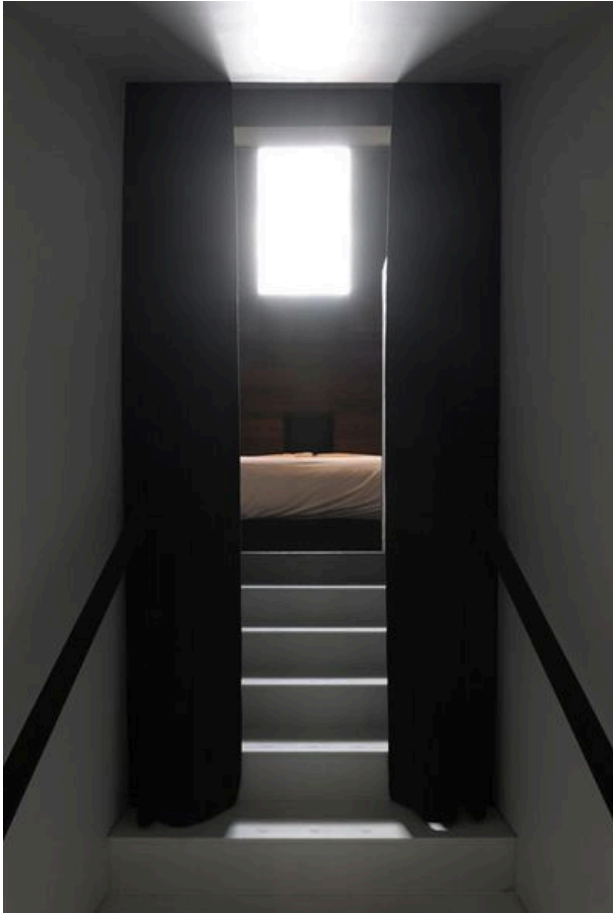
I was upset for my lazy streak having prevented me from accompanying her to her fitness studio that day. For someone who has spent a substantial part of his life sleeping in hotel rooms around the world and more importantly has admired and collected Antony Gormley's work, not being able to see the room from the inside was very frustrating. When I commiserated with my wife about my missed opportunity she told me: "Why don't you write an article about it? This will surely get you access to the room."

That sounded like a sensible plan, so I immediately wrote to Jeremy King, the owner of the Beaumont Hotel, outlining my desire. Very swiftly his office responded and an appointment was fixed. I arrived in the very smart lobby of the hotel and instantly a very tall and elegant man introduced himself as Jeremy King. He was impeccably dressed and looked like a 1920s movie star. His manners were equally polished and I couldn't help feeling I had entered a time machine that threw me back nearly hundred years to the heydays of Art Deco.

He first showed me the bar; it was packed by a fun-looking crowd and there was a prevailing atmosphere of warmth that made you want to linger and order a stiff drink. We then went to the restaurant, which also looks as if it has been there forever and has survived the decades without losing anything of its original flair and glamour.

Jeremy King subsequently took me up the elevator to go to the top floors. The walls of the elevator are plastered with sepia-toned photographs of elegant and handsome characters taken in the prewar years. I was therefore all the more surprised when I asked Jeremy what building actually had stood in this place before he opened the Beaumont Hotel, and he answered "a garage."

This hotel doesn't feel like a movie set or a Vegas-type replica of a bygone era; the patina and everything you look at is too convincing and makes you feel as though it has been there forever and must have been a rival establishment to Claridge's ever since that other distinguished establishment was built. That feeling was only reinforced when Jeremy showed me the best suites, on the top floor. He led me to the balcony from which we could look down at the front of the hotel, where a vintage Bristol car was parked near an equally vintage Aston Martin. Looking towards the building's right wing, I could see Antony Gormley's sculpture from above. It is a gigantic crouching figure, a bit like a geometrically simplified King Kong that has decided to rest for a few moments atop of this Art Deco building before leaping onto the next building.



A peek into Antony Gormley's Room.

© Corbin & King Limited, photographer David Grandorge, all rights reserved.

All this was the prelude for going to see what was the real reason of my visit. Jeremy brought me to the suite that houses the Gormley giant. He pulled out another key and we entered a very cozy room that still made me feel more in an early Hitchcock movie than about to discover the long anticipated Gormley sculpture from the inside.

We then stepped into a very chic, predominantly white bathroom from which a little staircase led up to a dark curtain. Pushing the curtain aside one enters the inside of the body. There is a window placed at the "origine du monde" of the figure. Ever since entering Niki de Saint Phalle's gigantic sculpture of a female "Nana" through the "origine du monde" opening in Knokke-le-Zoute many years back, this was the first time I was experiencing a sculpture from the inside.

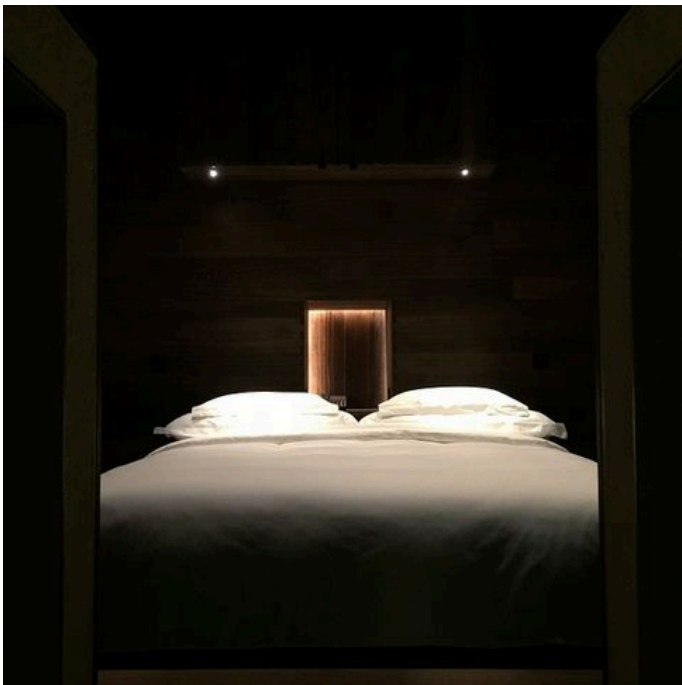
What struck me first was the darkness and beauty of the fumed oak wood that covered the walls and the smell that as a Swiss instantly made me feel at ease since it reminded me of the scent in old Swiss chalets of the Berner Oberland. Gazing up I could see the very tall ceiling and the shape of the figure from the inside. I frantically snapped pictures with my iPhone but realized that this was an artwork you definitely had to experience in the flesh and that no image from either the inside or the outside could do it

justice. Concerned, therefore, that I didn't have the elements to write an article, I told Mr. King that I felt the only way to properly experience the Gormley room was to spend a night in it. This didn't faze the distinguished owner of the Beaumont. He told me to send him some suitable dates and said he would try to accommodate one. I was really looking forward to doing so, because simply by standing five minutes inside the Gormley, I already felt completely calm and de-stressed. The Zen simplicity coupled with what must be optimal feng shui had taken almost instant effect.

Back home I told my wife that we had to fix a date to spend a night inside the Gormley. That led to immediate stress, since our globetrotting gypsy lives would not make it an easy task. This fell smack into the pre holiday season, a time of the year where one feels one still has to accomplish so many things. The only day I could find in the diary was the night before our departure for the Christmas holidays. My wife was not amused and on top of that I heard that our nanny was leaving on holidays a day earlier and that meant we would need to take our three year old daughter DD along. So much for a romantic night together with her mother! Nevertheless I felt that if I didn't do it then I would never do it.

My daughter was not enthusiastic either. When I told her we would spend a night inside a sculpture she misunderstood and kept repeating that she did definitely not want to spend a night inside a painting and that she was fed up with art!

In that frame of mind, the three of us showed up at the Beaumont. The reception staff was exceptionally courteous and helpful. The cozy-looking period room that works as an antechamber to the Gormley room had a beautifully decorated Christmas tree in it. My daughter's spirits improved, and once she had climbed into the Gormley room, she leapt on to the large and very comfortable bed on which she immediately began a long trampoline session. My grownup daughter Loyse then called me telling me that she was nearby and could she come by with her boyfriend. So very rapidly the well-aired Gormley room (which am still convinced is the perfect place for a magic intimate weekend) began to crowd up.



The bed inside Antony Gormley's Room.
Courtesy Simon de Pury.

We discovered different ways to light the room; this added even further to its extraordinary visual impact. Also the wood paneled sleeping room is absolutely empty, without any decorative chichi standing around, which makes it absolutely pure and—together with the refined lighting—focused on the volumina.

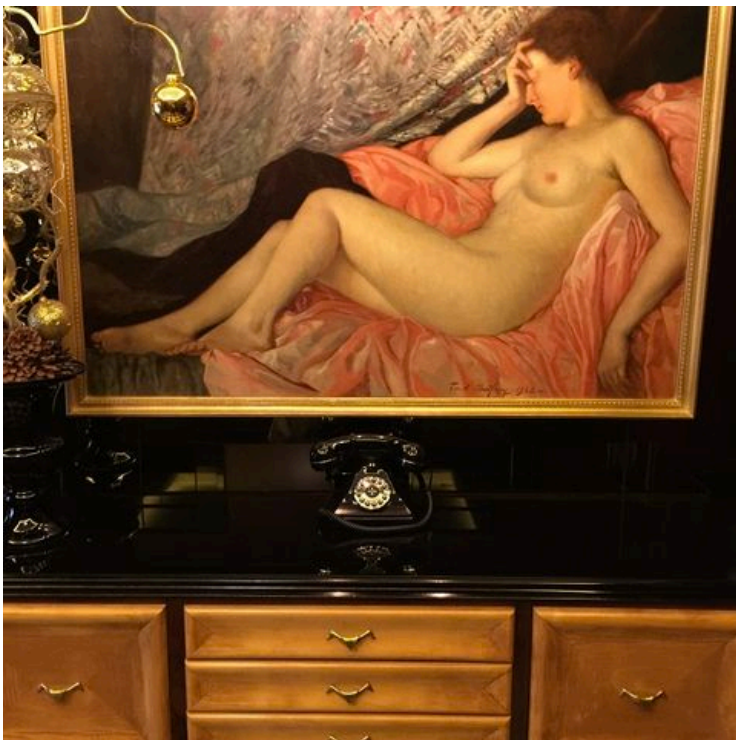
My little daughter played with the switches as if they were an electronic game.

The lighting system I learnt from my wife was extremely important as an inner body in the body for Anthony. After you turn out the lights, with gradual time, the eyes adjust to the darkness and define the heights of the sculpture, which makes you feel sliding from your comfortable, cozy, small chalet room perception to a cathedral feel, experiencing the height of the building up through the darkness.

There is one light switch with a very minimal, diffuse light high up, making the whole a Turrell-like experience. So with the darkness and the absolute silence, the room becomes a sort of meditation room about silence, space and light, and their boundaries—very beautiful and poetic, mindcalming.

Gradually we all started to feel more relaxed, and a feeling of well-being took over. After my older daughter and her friend left, we went to bed very early and slept incredibly well.

Although you are at the heart of London, it is completely quiet in the Room exudes a positive energy which I am certain will provide many happy moments to its future guests.



At the Beaumont Hotel.
Courtesy Simon de Pury.