




LONDON DESIGN GUIDE

Edited by Max Fraser



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Shops *make* streets

YVONNE COURTNEY



period living abroad, in countries where neighbourhoods are next to non-existent, hit home how special London's streets are; exploring the city's diverse shopping areas was one of the things I missed most about not being in London.

Speaking about our bricks and mortar retailers, retail guru Mary Portas puts it particularly succinctly: "use them or lose them!" While her campaign is for the nation's high streets, this guide's call is more niche: cherish and nourish London's cult shopping destinations if you don't want to be left with online or Westfield as your only options.

After all, shops do more than simply sell stuff. They create places where people want to meet, hang out with friends, get things cleaned or repaired, or simply pass the time. They are places where you get to know the shopkeepers and service providers, who can play a key role in local communities – and therefore our lives. Without that, we would lose our sense of belonging, and a social infrastructure that is vital to us as human beings.

It might be easier these days to slot in some online retail therapy between work and play... but nothing beats a leisurely stroll around one of London's shopping nooks, stumbling across a cluster of outlets, all there to be discovered.

Many of London's neighbourhood enclaves have become desirable shopping destinations in their own right, such as those highlighted here: Lamb's Conduit Street, Elystan Street, Chiltern Street, Mount Street, Great Titchfield Street, Redchurch Street, Exmouth Market, Golborne Road, Bermondsey Street, Camden Passage and Lower Marsh.

From the splendid grandeur of Mayfair's Mount Street to the quirky eclecticism of Waterloo's Lower Marsh, these shopping destinations are extremely diverse, yet share certain ingredients, which make these vibrant hubs so attractive and full of character.

While most are distinctly middle class, they are places where people from all social groups would feel comfortable and have reason to go there. Another recurring feature is that these streets aren't overrun with global brands, instead featuring independent stores which are thriving. To add to the mix, a lot of

these streets also have a market and are pedestrianised or have restricted access to vehicles.

These areas have been built to a human scale, which is instinctively appealing, and the properties are spatially and financially more conducive for small businesses. The areas tend to feature specialist or niche services alongside shops and eateries, making for a more fulfilling and rewarding experience.

However, a by-product of successful shopping enclaves are the dangers that gentrification brings. This was witnessed with the changing face of Westbourne Grove, which ten years ago was a design destination, filled with galleries, antiques dealers, furniture outlets and showrooms, but has since become a predictable fashion strip for Notting Hill's smug hedge fund-financed families.

This threat currently looms over Redchurch Street, partly triggered by the opening of the Boundary Hotel and Shoreditch House. The arrival of brands like APC, Jack Wills and Boxpark have signalled the departure of the outfits that made the area so edgy and unique in the first place.

This is a pattern being repeated across town, couched in developerspeak clichés like 'regeneration', 'flagship', and 'public realm enhancements'. No sooner praising an area's special identity, developers, estate agents and landlords proceed to banish all character, rendering it virtually unrecognisable.

Of course, progress is inevitable. Cities can't stand still. Attempts to resist the might of the developers to protect local character and history merely results in the preservation in aspic of an idealised past that possibly never really existed.

In the meantime, there are an increasing number of initiatives that seek to highlight an area's USP. Clerkenwell Design Week, Brompton Design District, South London Art Map, Fitzrovia Now design trail and Hackney Wicked are all attempts by local businesses and players to create or cement a concept of community – both within the neighbourhood and in the wider domain. Some have been enormously beneficial in establishing a new reputation for a particular postcode. However, they risk laying the foundation for developers to exploit the area's individuality, inflating residential prices and commercial rents in the process.

Shops impose a sense of identity onto a locality, providing a social anchor in our day-to-day lives. So it is up to us, the consumer, to play a part in supporting these special places and spaces, the heartbeats of London's evolving communities.

Shops do more than simply sell stuff. They create places where people want to meet, hang out with friends, get things cleaned or repaired, or simply pass the time

Yvonne Courtney is a design PR advisor, retail & cultural broker, curator and writer
DESIGNTASTIC.NET

Streetwise

When did you move to this street?

In 1998.

What originally attracted you to it?

Apart from being a very central location, it felt very real at the time. I was fed up with all the tourists in West London. I remember walking home from the West End, crossing the old Hungerford Bridge and there was hardly anyone walking along the South Bank. It was a forgotten spot that was still affordable. Obviously things are now very different.

How has the area changed since you've been here?

When I moved here, 'Cardboard City' [where the BFI IMAX cinema is now] was still very much in evidence. There were bonfires every night and I would often find a drunk homeless person sleeping on my doorstep. Lower Marsh has always had an interesting mix of shops. Very individual, run by eccentric owners. I'm glad it has managed to maintain its character. The market in the street has always been there but has changed in the type of things that are sold. The clientele has also changed, as more people have discovered this hidden spot.

What does the street offer the community that is unique?

There is an amazing sense of community around the area. It feels like everyone knows each other, which allows for an interesting mix of shop owners, market vendors, residents and people that work in the neighbourhood. This does not really exist in many places in London.

Tell us about some of your neighbouring hotspots.

Scooterworks (moped garage-turned-café), the Anchor and Hope (gastropub), Gramex (secondhand bookshop run by a retired architect and his wife), Radio Days (1950s vintage store), Marie's Café (a cheap Thai restaurant serving great food) and the Young Vic (theatre).

What has recently changed on neighbouring roads that has alarmed you?

I've spotted Caffè Nero and Pret A Manger appearing on The Cut, further down the road from us. This usually spells bad news, which I hope won't spread.

If you could change one thing on the street, what would it be?

The multicoloured granite resurfacing that is about to be completed. They used to shoot films here all the time, but I doubt this will still be the case.

Michael Anastassiades

Michael Anastassiades Ltd

122 LOWER MARSH SE1 7AE

020 7928 7527 MICHAELANASTASSIADES.COM



LOWER MARSH

Streetwise

When did you move to this street?
December 2009.

What particularly attracted you to it?

Lamb's Conduit Street was a big catalyst in making Darkroom the shop it has become. My business partner Rhonda Drakeford and I were familiar with the street, but it wasn't until we cycled past an empty location on it that we started to consider it as a possible option for our shop. We decided it was ideal because of its unique nature – the whole street is owned by one of England's oldest private schools, Rugby, and has been for several hundred years. They have a policy of only renting spaces to independent retailers and are careful not to allow too many crossovers in terms of stock.

How has the area changed since you've been here?

The area has become more popular in the time we've been here, both from the point of view of retailers wishing to move here, as well as general footfall. There has also been a spurt of men's clothing stores opening, which has brought a younger weekend crowd.

What does the street offer the community that is unique?

The fact that the street only houses independent retailers is itself unique in London. There is a fascinating mix of old and new boutiques, restaurants, cafes, tailors and even London's oldest funeral parlour (which incidentally buried Lord Nelson).

Tell us about some of your neighbouring hotspots.

The Espresso Room is a tiny coffee bar serving the best coffee in Bloomsbury – if not London! Folk Ladies sells casual clothing and footwear, as well as other designers such as Acné, and they also stock Aesop beauty products. Ben Pentreath for its unusual mix of gifts and things for the home, and Persephone Books, which reprints neglected classics by (mostly women) writers.

What has recently changed that has alarmed you?

The closure of the only chain, Starbucks, was a big surprise, but hopefully means a change in people's habits as The Espresso Room on the neighbouring street has a thriving business.

If you could change one thing on the street, what would it be?

The popularity of the street has definitely grown in the time we've been here, but it still lacks a certain amount of footfall. The general awareness of Lamb's Conduit Street is relatively niche and as a community we need to work harder to raise the profile of the area as a whole, as once customers find us they're always converted!

Lulu Roper-Caldbeck
Darkroom

52 LAMB'S CONDUIT STREET WC1N 3LL
020 7831 7244 DARKROOMLONDON.COM



LAMB'S CONDUIT ST

Streetwise

When did you move to this street?

In 2010 when we opened menswear store Hostem.

What originally attracted you to it?

We were attracted to the rough and tumble of the street. Development was minimal at the time and only Shoreditch House and the Boundary Hotel had recently opened. A feeling of authenticity pervaded this corner of East London. The street reeked of history, but it was certainly a risk as it appeared so rundown and nothing like it is today. The street is one big building site at the moment and is essentially in a profound state of flux.

How has this shopping thoroughfare changed since you've been here?

Some of the galleries have moved out, but we have gained the likes of Allpress for coffee, Labour & Wait utility store, and food from the inimitable Les Trois Garçons. Some retail has been welcome, but equally, other developments have highlighted the downside of all the attention the street has received since 2010.

What does the street offer the community that is unique?

Ultimately the street is only as strong as its inhabitants. The artistic, creative core is still intact and people, clichéd as it may sound, genuinely look out for each other. This becomes really apparent when larger developments are proposed which provoke some debate. Some of the historical elements to the street are truly unique, from being on the fringes of Britain's first social housing scheme, the Boundary Estate, built in the 19th century, to the fact that one of the oldest rifle makers in the country, Watson Brothers, is still in-situ and going strong.

Tell us about some of your neighbouring hotspots?

Allpress for caffeine, Leila's for breakfast and provisions, Rochelle Canteen for lunch, and Brawn for dinner.

What has recently changed on neighbouring roads that has alarmed you?

Unfortunately, I don't feel that Boxpark has benefited the area. The retail, cultural and entertainment mix needs to be much better thought through on many of the local streets in general.

If you could change one thing on the street, what would it be?

If we could just divert some of the weekend's socially inspired invaders, the area would shine a little more brightly!

James Brown
Hostem

41-43 REDCHURCH STREET E2 7DJ
020 7739 9733 HOSTEM.CO.UK



REDCHURCH STREET

Streetwise

When did you move to this street?

We moved to Great Titchfield Street in 2009, although my wife had been working in the area since the year before.

What particularly attracted you to it?

The high demographic of media, fashion, design and advertising people. The proximity to Oxford Street and the opportunity to create a business that was more of a match to the local clientele than what was already on offer.

How has the surrounding area changed since you've been here?

Our coffee shop Kaffeine brings over 3,000 people a week to our little section of Great Titchfield Street and our long term workers and residents say that Kaffeine has helped to change the area into a neighbourhood that is much more enticing, welcoming, modern and community focussed. More people are now aware of Great Titchfield Street as a village of central London that still has more potential to develop.

What does the street offer the community that is unique?

The street is quiet, safe, friendly, hospitable and clean, and there is a good mix of independent shops, restaurants and pubs.

Tell us about some of your neighbouring hotspots.

Riding House Café at all times... The Crown & Sceptre pub on a sunny afternoon... and The Green Man pub (in Riding House Street) for cider.

If you could change one thing on the street, what would it be?

Fitzrovia has been donated over 500 trees through a community group on Portland Place, but the only street in the area not to receive them has been Great Titchfield Street. We would like to see more trees planted in our area.



GREAT TITCHFIELD ST

Peter Dore-Smith

Kaffeine

66 GREAT TITCHFIELD STREET W1W 7QJ
020 7580 6755 KAFFEINE.CO.UK