



## LONDON

*Forget stately and august. With its revitalized neighborhoods and a new generation of talent, London has become Europe's most fashionable and exciting city.* BY STEPHEN PATIENCE

Along the milled edge of the British £2 coin (the highest denomination in general circulation) you will find the phrase “standing on the shoulders of giants.” It’s a quote from Isaac Newton, describing with a certain humility how his scientific breakthroughs were based on the work of those who had gone before him—but it could almost be the motto of London in the early 21st century. The city has changed (it is always changing), but in contrast to the rather self-conscious futurity of the millennial years, there is a sense that Londoners have

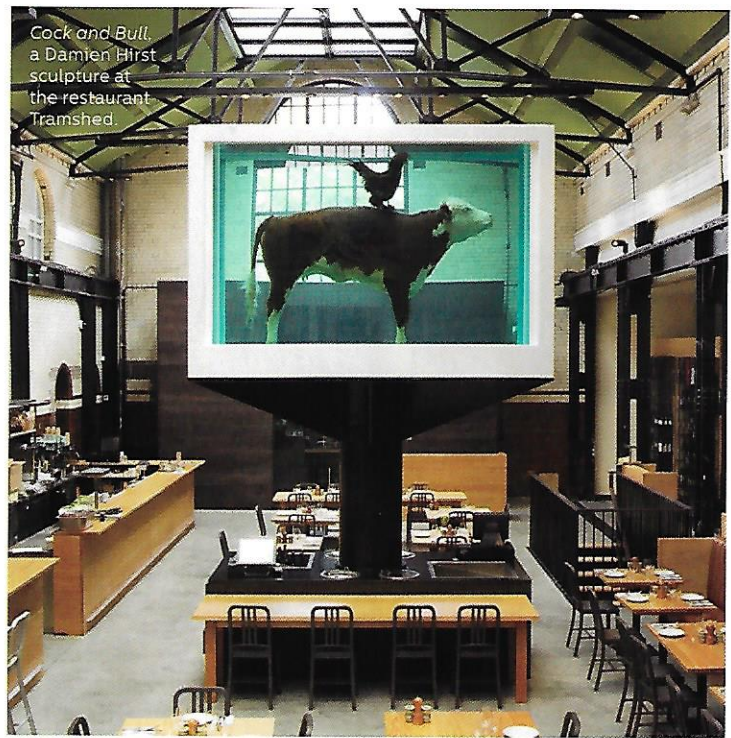
learned to couple their characteristic creativity and energy with a new appreciation of the value of what has gone before. Those who witnessed director Danny Boyle’s exuberant opening ceremony for the 2012 Olympics will have gained an insight into how the city now sees itself: polyglot and defiantly cosmopolitan, playful, eccentric, at ease with its past yet consistently innovative. It’s an approach that can be seen in everything from the sleek revamp of the famous double-decker bus, updated by the English designer Thomas ▶

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Heatherwick, to the triumphant revival of George Gilbert Scott's St. Pancras Station hotel, a majestic slice of high Victorian Gothic that had stood empty since the late 1980s.

Even the new skyscrapers that soar above the city stand upon a street plan that has remained substantially unchanged for a thousand years. And make no mistake, London's skyline is growing exponentially taller. The precedent set by Norman Foster's Gherkin in 2003—named for its ellipsoid silhouette, although the Pinecone might be a more accurate sobriquet—means that many of these high-rise projects have been accorded catchy nicknames. There's Rafael Viñoly's bulbous Walkie-Talkie, the wedge-shape Cheesegrater by Richard Rogers, and the helter-skelter Pinnacle, currently on hold but aiming to be the tallest tower in the Square Mile, London's financial district. (The current incumbent is the 755-foot Heron Tower, with an open-all-hours restaurant, Duck & Waffle, on its 40th floor for fans of panoramic eating.) And looking down on them all is Renzo Piano's Shard, a gigantic splinter of mirrored glass that looms over London Bridge as if superimposed by some kind of CGI effect. At 1,016 feet, it is the highest habitable structure in Western Europe, offering unrivaled views of the River Thames (capricious English weather permitting).

Other, less grandstanding architectural projects point to a widespread desire to spruce up, reclaim, or otherwise repurpose what's already there. Everything from 19th-century municipal buildings >



Cock and Bull, a Damien Hirst sculpture at the restaurant Tramshed



Renzo Piano's Shard, overlooking the Thames.



A pub in Covent Garden.

to disused industrial spaces is being adapted into restaurants, shops, and more—the wartime mantra of “make do and mend” given a high-glamour twist. Much of this is due to London’s center of gravity moving decidedly to the east; the Shoreditch-Hoxton axis, which at the turn of the millennium was still an edgy enclave of artists and clubbers, has now become a legitimate rival to the West End for fashion-forward shopping. “It’s always had a bit of a downtown New York feel about it, and so it attracts interesting people,” says chef Mark Hix, who opened his chicken-and-steak restaurant, Tramshed, in Shoreditch last year. Redchurch Street in particular has become an enticing mix of directional boutiques and neo-artisans; one of its highlights is the vintage-inspired housewares store Labour and Wait, set amid the glazed tiles of an old Victorian pub. Nearby, conceptual menswear emporium Hostem has updated the bespoke traditions of Savile Row to suit the rough-luxe styles of Shoreditch, offering a personal tailoring service from the father-and-son duo Casely-Hayford in its basement Chalk Room.



Gallery FUMI.

Meanwhile, it is in the borough of Hackney where artists, creatives, and many of the capital’s most adventurous haircuts are now to be found, driven farther east by rents that only a Russian oligarch could afford. Up in ultratrendy Dalston, kebab shops and nail bars coexist with the likes of LN-CC, an appointment-only boutique with an interior that resembles a set out of Stanley Kubrick’s *2001: A Space Odyssey*. The cream of Britain’s young fashion designers have made their base in the East End, from Christopher Kane and Roksanda Ilincic to Jonathan Saunders and Erdem Moralioglu; all share an interest in the traditional strengths of British fashion, such as tailoring and heritage prints, as well as the freewheeling experimentation of London street style. Similarly, the quirky interiors brand House of Hackney has put an ironic twist on classic English decoration with in-your-face updates of chintz upholstery fabrics, bed linens, and wallpapers. ▶



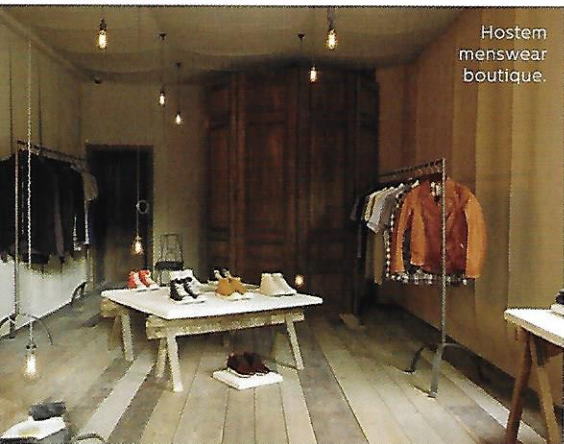
Ben Pentreath interior design shop.



Heron Tower.



London's new double-decker buses, by Thomas Heatherwick.



Hostem menswear boutique.



Sir John Soane's Museum.



Clove Club restaurant.

Food, too, is looking back to move forward. Almost any kind of international cuisine can be found in London—visit Hackney's Broadway Market for a truly immersive foodie experience—but homegrown flavors in particular are enjoying a renaissance. "I think people are realizing that we can add a more modern approach to traditional British dishes, resulting in something a little different," says Hix, who has been instrumental in updating the image of British food, along with chef Fergus Henderson of St. John, the Smithfield restaurant known for its offal-centric menu, replete with kidneys, liver, and sweetbreads. Everywhere, it seems, the emphasis is on carefully sourced ingredients; *provenance* and *seasonal produce* are the watchwords across the city, from the stuccoed Edwardiana of the Clove Club in Shoreditch to the vintage eclecticism of Brunswick House down in Wandsworth.

And while elegantly straightforward treatments of British staples are without doubt London's dishes of the day, there is certainly no shortage of innovation. At Brawn, a Victorian wood-turning mill converted into a wine bar in Bethnal Green, meaty local favorites are lightened with Mediterranean touches, such as black sausage with beet-and-watercress salad. At Story, a newly opened restaurant in the shadow of the Shard, diners can sample a tasting menu strong in English whimsy—chef Tom Sellers serves his signature "Three Bears" porridge, for example, in three separate bowls (one too sweet, one too salty, and one just right). It's a witty riposte to the one-time disparagement of familiar local dishes as "nursery food" and a sign of how London's tastes are changing. In its menus, as in so much else, the city is building on what has gone before—and gaining a new perspective in the process. ■

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