BERMONDSEY STREET

If we were giving out awards for cool streets, the gong for funkiest newcomer would be scooped by SE1’s Bermondsey Street. Bisecting that lost world between London Bridge and Tower Bridge Road, in the past five years it’s developed from drug-dealing hellhole into a model of inner-city regeneration. The mile-long Zone-One stretch is now HQ to design studios, fashion houses, galleries and some great restaurants, bars and cafés. With a multi-million pound ongoing development, there’s plenty more to come…

Fifteen years go, the thoroughfare that runs between Tooley Street and Tower Bridge Road was a grim wasteland, full of drug-dealers and dodgy pubs. Even the weekly antiques market only seemed to attract fusty dowagers searching for their burgled silver. My, how things have changed. Today, the area is the model of modern regeneration, and a fitting testament to the property developer’s mantra that an area first gets hip when the creatives move in (in search of cheap rents), followed by the gays (never shy of living on the edge). The area is home to the Jam Factory loft development, fashion designers Eley Kishimoto, Zandra Rhodes’ Fashion & Textile Museum and some funky boutiques, galleries, cafés and restaurants. A casual stroll on any day might see you bumping into Placebo, Dirty Vegas, Faithless, Marc Almond, writer Jonathan Meades or sculptor Andrew Logan, all of whom live in or frequent the area.

What’s more, regeneration hasn’t been at the expense of the locals. Trendy but friendly lofters regularly rub shoulders with tenants from the local authority blocks. And everyone gets along just fine. Browse long enough in a boutique, and someone from the mini market next door will nip in for change for a fiver, just as, in our domestic dreams, a neighbour might drop by fora cup of sugar. Local suits have been known to stop into Cockfighter after work to buy a T-shirt to wear on a night out at The Garrison over the road. And many of the hip young urbanites working in the coffee shops and bars actually live in the area and wouldn’t seem to have it any other way. Currently, they’re worried about what the Southwark Council’s multi-million pound development of local green area might mean. Local faces screw up at phrases like ‘the new Clerkenwell’. But, although there are occasional complaints of lack of infrastructure, nobody really wants a Sainsbury’s. However, a florist and a decent deli would be nice. Then they’d then never have to leave.
HOW TO GET THERE
Unless otherwise stated, London Bridge is the nearest tube, followed by a ten-minute walk down St Thomas’ Street. Bermondsey and Tower Bridge stations are also handy. The RVI, SE1 and 47 buses all run down Tooley Street, or take the 42, which goes along Tower Bridge Road.

SHOPPING

Bermondsey (New Caledonian) Market

This weekly event is beloved of collectors and novices searching for some heirlooms. There’s mostly bric-a-brac in the open-air section, but you’ll also find jewellerly at good prices and useful period stuff for keen DIYers, like brass doorknobs at £1 a pair. The covered market has everything from cutlery to chandeliers and great art-decoish lamps. Dealers like to keep a low profile, so if you can’t seem to find them, or if a stall is empty, they are back for another week.

Cockfighter of Bermondsey

Up-and-coming design duo Kate Linden and Damien Wilson design and sell their cult Cockfighter collection of witty T-shirt, sweats and knaitwear from a cute boutique in the heart of the street. Their colourfully printed ‘hunk-if-you-had-it-last-night’ T-shirts are a key piece for spring-summer, but there’s also delicate, Swarovski-crystals-tailed cashmere knitwear for the less adventurous and cool men’s patchwork leather coats. Cockfighter of Bermondsey, 96 Bermondsey St, SE1 (020 7357 6482/ www.cockfighter.co.uk). Open Wed-Sat 11am-7pm.

Eley Kishimoto

When style aficionados like husband-and-wife print design duo Mark Eley and Waiko Kishimoto set up shop in an area, you know it’s on the edge of something interesting. The couple, who are at the forefront of the reemergence of print design, have produced cheeky prints for the likes of Zandra Rhodes finally realised her long-term ambition to create a space dedicated to innovative exhibitions of fashion a year ago, and so created a landmark at the heart of the street. Its launch exhibition, ‘My Favourite Dress’, continues to attract everyone from design students to Armani-clad ladies on experimental forays east of Selfridges. Inside, there’s a small but interesting shop, and an educational division with an extensive research archive. The landmark fuchsia pink and Vitamin C exterior, by Mexican architect Ricardo Legorreta, makes the building unmissable. Literally. Fashion and Textile Museum, 83 Bermondsey St, SE1 (020 7403 0222/ www.ftmlondon.org). Open Thu-Sat 11am-5.45pm. Adults £6, concs £4, family £16.

fr drizgn

This furniture shop cum showroom cum workshop specialises in sourcing, refurbishing and selling art-deco furniture. Mid-century chairs by the likes of Verner Panton and Eames are popular, as are rarer and more interesting versions of the Jacobsen art chair, which go for £150. Their hit lamps, made from French wallpaper print paper cylinders, aren’t cheap at £50, but are unique. Quirlier pieces currently on show include a 1970s Tokyo dentist’s chair (£650) and a very English cream and navy leather Tounder sofa. fr drizgn, Globe House, 2a Crucifix Lane, SE1 (020 7057 0722/ www.frdrizgn.co.uk). Open Mon-Sat 10am-7pm.

SeBo Art Gallery Espresso Bar

Open only once a month, with the aim of bringing a bit of cafe culture to the barrio, this art gallery espresso bar owned by Peter Leonard is already popular with Jam Factory residents. Revolving exhibitions mean they can also admire the affordable art and add any favourites to their collections. SeBo Art Gallery Espresso Bar, 83 Tower Bridge Rd, SE1 (020 7403 5080/ www.sobogallery.co.uk). Open Mon-Thur 8am-6pm, Fri 7am-6pm, Sat 9am-6pm, Sun 10am-4pm.

EATING & DRINKING

The Bermondsey Kitchen

The road to regeneration often starts with a cappuccino machine and a decent sandwich bar and this street isn’t lacking in either. The Bermondsey keeps local workmen filled up on mozzarella and pesto ciabatta or pastry fancies. There’s the usual range of coffees, salads and sturdy fast food and they also do outside event catering and can organise everything from a quiz night to a tutored wine-tasting. Oh, and it’s also nice to hang out in the window with a latte and watch the world go by. The Bermondsey, 63 Bermondsey St, SE1 (020 7407 1096). Open Mon-Fri 7.30am-5pm.

The Bermondsey

As the name suggests, the preparation area dominates this modern, funky restaurant with lots of ingredient-grabbing and saucepan-hanging from the high-maintenance chefs. Rib-eye steak with sweet potato and blue cheese butter (£13) followed by coton tart (£4). Tempted? The Bermondsey Kitchen, 194 Bermondsey St, SE1 (020 7407 5719). Open Mon-Sat 12noon-3.30pm, 6.30-10pm, Sun 11.30am-4pm.

Champor-Champor

Little gem of a restaurant tucked away between London Bridge and Bermondsey Street that offers an inventive take on Asian fusion. Recently expanded, it has vibrant interiors and is reasonably priced (two courses for £19.90) with some tasty Asian fusion dishes such as jackfruit soup or satay and lemongrass-spiced ostrich. Champor-Champor, 62 Weston St, SE1 (020 7403 4600/ www.champor-champor.com). Open Mon-Fri 12.30-2pm, 6.30-10.30pm, Sat 6.30-10.30pm.

Delfina Cafe and Gallery

Established light, airy and spacious cafe and gallery space that’s long been established as a site of events but is also a reliable stopping-off point for anyone in search of a quiet sit down. There’s a sensible menu with daily specials and plenty of wine by the glass. Ideal for a racycu lunch, with some often very interesting art on the side. Delfina Cafe and Gallery, 50/Bermondsey St, SE1 (020 3579 0244/ www.delfina.org.uk). Open Mon-Sat 8am-5pm.

The Garrison Public House

The owners of this corner pub have managed to straddle the tricky style divide between cosy local and hip destination. With a bit of cafe culture to the barrio, this art gallery espresso bar owned by Peter Leonard is already popular with Jam Factory residents. Revolving exhibitions mean they can also admire the affordable art and add any favourites to their collections.
bar. It has the vibe of a dark-wood-and-
burgundy-booth boozer but set within a
stylish, light and airy decor, inspired by
Provençal France with a little bit of
Scandinavian beach house thrown in.

Less formalistic than gastro pubs, the food
is good – with classically unfussy
European and British food served
throughout the day. There’s a private
room downstairs, which doubles up as a
weekend cinema club, screening contem-
porary film where locals can drink, smoke,
enjoy a meal and a movie and not have to
wash up afterwards.

The Garrison Public House, 99-101
Bermondsey St, SE1 (020 7089 9355).
Open Mon-Sat 11am-11pm, Sun 12noon-10.30pm.

The Hartley
Newly opened gastropub on the site of
the former Pagoda pub, which was the
kind of place where the only thing guar-
tanteed on the menu was a fight. Things
have changed, though. In keeping with
the local penchant for refurbishment,
the once-tawdry site has been given new
life and a stunning menu. Organic
meats feature on the changing daily spe-
cials (Aberdeen Angus in a porcini
mushroom sauce for £10.95, say). Laid-
back, easy eating and drinking for the
noughties.

The Hartley, 64 Tower Bridge Rd, SE1
(020 7394 7023/www.the-hartley.com)
Bar open Mon-Fri 12noon-11pm, Sat
11am-11pm, Sun 12noon-10.30pm.

Meals served
Mon-Fri 12noon-3pm, 6-10pm,
Sun 12noon-6pm.

Manze’s
Just to show the area hasn’t completely
given itself over to ciabatta and cappuc-
nos, this old-school pie-and-mash shop
attracts lunchtime queues of local busi-
ness workers, sitemen from building
works and the occasional curious tourist
all after an authentic flavour of the old
East End.

Manze’s, 87 Tower Bridge Rd, SE1 (020
7407 2983) Tower Hill tube. Open Mon
11am-2pm, Tue-Thur 10am-2pm, Fri
10am-2.15pm, Sat 10am-2.45pm.

ON THE MARKET

What’s the deal on property?
If you’re so struck with Bermondsey’s
fresh vibe that you want to move there,
you’ll find that property developers have
anticipated you and a lot of others doing
the same, and have been busy since the
Jubilee line station opened. Galliard
Homes alone has two projects under way
around Bermondsey Street, and has
already completed three more. While it’s
not dirt-cheap, it’s still pretty affordable
for its Zone One location.

Not only is the area a village-like
anomaly in the centre of town, but it has
plenty of character, which is in stark
cost contrast to the nearby (and more
expensive) Shad Thames area, which is
feeling a bit sterile and even neglected
these days. Professional couples are
filling up new-build flats and paying
between £300,000 and £350,000 for a two-
bedroom, two-bathroom flat. If you insist
on a car, you’ll find that parking spaces
are at a premium and you might pay up to
£20,000 extra to secure one.

For those after a touch of period
character, many of the Dickensian
warehouses around the street, such as the
Tower Bridge Road Jam Factory (due for
total completion in 2006 but already
partly occupied), have been converted
into office or residential space. Beware,
though – not all come with high vaulted
ceilings and acres of uninterrupted space
– some are poky but will still set you back
a lot of money.

If your pockets are shallow but you’d
still like to get in on the action, you could
go for an ex-local authority property. One-
bedroom flats within 30s or 50s blocks of
about five floors start at £130,000. There
are some high-rises too, but it’s difficult to
get mortgages on anything concrete
above ten floors high and surveyors aren’t
keen either.

The nearby Spa Road area is midway
through a ten-year regeneration plan that
began in 1999. In addition to more than
900 new homes – many falling into the
bracket of ‘affordable housing’ – there’ll be
a GP’s surgery, car share scheme and
nursery.

Renters start at £100 a week for
something really basic – the student
population is big round here (from Guy’s
Hospital mostly) and they won’t pay
more. A more chic one-bedroom flat will
be around the £230 mark.

While students, professionals and the
socially mobile are well represented, you
won’t find many kids here. This is no
nappy valley – despite some newly
regenerated green spaces just off
Bermondsey Street (including free tennis
courts). For some of you, the lack of kids
might just swing it for SE1. Kate Riordan

‘This does remind me of Clerkenwell
ten years ago. It has loads of potential
and there’s still plenty of room for
growth. It’s an exciting time to be
around. All the right ingredients are here.’

Kerwin Browne, chef

The Garrison

‘Tused to live here, and wish I still did.
It feels like true London to me, just
the right mix of the old and the new.
I’m worried that it’s changing and hope
it doesn’t get too overdeveloped.
That would be such a shame.’

Chloe Thomas,
TV director

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