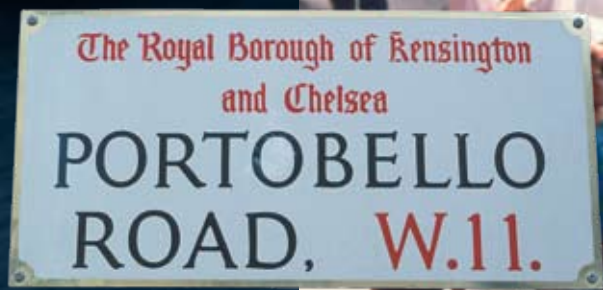


London

Calling



The history of cool Britannia, as told by one who saw the fading days of punk, the Day-Glo '80s, Chelsea Girls, and the rise of Kate and Sienna—only to come full circle and find herself, once again, rifling the racks at Topshop.

BY KAMIN MOHAMMADI

The Mini Cooper is cool on both sides of the pond. Far right: Teeming London markets.

MINI: PATRICK WARD/ALAMY. MARKET, SIGN: COURTESY VISIT LONDON





Veggie might on Portobello Road. Below, right: The look of Whitechapel.

We gazed in awe at Vivienne Westwood's World's End shop where punk had been born, and where the clock hands still spin backwards.

Even in the late 1970s, when the concept of multiculturalism and ethnic diversity was practically unknown in the UK (barring the requisite Anglicized curry house on every provincial high street), London was embracing and integrating its immigrants. Growing up in Notting Hill I participated in the greatest celebration of West Indian culture east of the Caribbean, the **Notting Hill Carnival**. Established in 1964, the carnival was launched by Caribbean immigrants to unite neighborhood residents—most of whom faced racism, lack of work opportunities and poor housing conditions. Carnival pulled the community together to celebrate its heritage. It soon became such a vital part of London's identity that, along with the more traditional events such as the Chelsea Flower Show and Wimbledon Tennis Championships, the event is an essential part of the city's summer season, held on

VEGETABLES: ALAN COPSON/VISIT LONDON; WOMEN: KATHY DEWITT/ALAMY



the last weekend in August and attracting more than 1.5 million people, making it the biggest street festival in Europe.

London is a series of villages, and as I grew up in the city different enclaves formed my playground at different ages. My early teens were characterized by thrilling expeditions to Oxford Street's flagship stores such as **Topshop** (216 Oxford St., W1; Oxford Circus tube) and **Miss Selfridge** (400 Oxford St., W1, Bond Street tube) where I wore down my mother's will and left owning my first pair of kitten heels and decked out in the fluorescent accessories that were so trendy in the early 1980s. I will never forget my first solo trip to the **King's Road** at the age of 13—a friend and I rode the tube from Notting Hill nearly hysterical with excitement. It might have been a few decades since the heyday of Biba and the Rolling Stones, but touches of the anarchy of the 1970s remained and the King's Road still promised punks and potential like nowhere else.

PUNKS: RICHARD OLIVIER/CORBIS; KATE & SIENNA: EVAN AGOSTINI/GETTY IMAGES; JUDE: NJ KIMGETTY IMAGES; CAFE: PAVEL LIBERIA/VSIT LONDON



washingtonflyer.com

When I first arrived in London as a child with my family of nine, the city's parks—huge oases of lush green spaces that stretched for acres—were, for me, the ultimate in cool. But I then discovered the open street markets of London, and that's when I learned the meaning of cool.

On my doorstep there was **Portobello Road Market**, a mix of antiques, fruits and vegetables and clothing racks that snaked up the hill from the Notting Hill tube station. Cockney barrow boys shouted their wares while the West Indian stalls blasted out roots and reggae. Out in the farther reaches of west London we visited **Southall** (North Road, Southall train station) with its largely Indian population, to buy brightly colored spices and massive bags of fragrant rice, passing shop fronts displaying a rainbow of saris, and, on Wednesdays, the horse market. A trip to south London revealed the glory that is **Brixton Market** (Electric Avenue, Brixton tube), with its yams, goat meat, jerk chicken stalls and thumping ska beats—it's still the closest I have been to Jamaica. North London's **Camden Market** (Camden tube) was all about Goths then—those dreary, pale, and black-draped youths—plus a sea of crushed velvet and heady smoke. **Church Street Market** (Edgware Road tube) had stalls piled high with Middle Eastern herbs and fruit, the shops sold *halal* meat and veiled women in voluminous black robes haggled over the price. I discovered a different London at every turn.

COOL LONDON SPEAKS

Actor Sienna Miller sets styles, and *Vogue* listens. The magazine reports that she favors **Matches** ("The last thing I bought there was Marc Jacobs boots..."; 60-64 Ledbury Rd, Notting Hill, W11; Ladbroke Grove tube); **Browns** ("They have really good buyers..."; 23-27 South Molton St., W1; Bond Street tube); and **Euforia**, where she likes the "quite Hoxton, Japanese-y style clothes..."; 61B Lancaster Rd., W11; Ladbroke Grove tube). —*Vogue*, January 2006



Artist Tracey Emin says: "I [live] in the East End because it's the most vibrant place in the world. I don't want somewhere all leafy. I want to know I'm living in the heart of London. We have the best shops, the best restaurants—my favorite is **St. John Bread & Wine** (94-96 Commercial St., E1; Liverpool Street) ... and my old-fashioned local, the **Golden Heart** (110 Commercial St., E1; Aldgate East). Come here on a Sunday morning and I guarantee you will be in the trendiest spot in the world". —*Evening Standard*, April 25, 2005.

Fashion designer Luella Bartley reveals her secret address book: **Relik** (8 Golborne Rd., W10; Westbourne Park) for vintage, **Labour of Love** (193 Upper St., Islington, N1; Highbury or Islington tube) for gifts, shoes, tea sets and beautiful but dark fairytale books. Pubs: **The Cow** (89 Westbourne Park Rd, W2; Notting Hill Gate) or the **Portobello Star** (171 Portobello Rd., W11; Ladbroke Grove tube). Her advice for tourists? "Go to the markets, **Tate Modern** (Bankside, SE1; Southwark and Blackfriars), and **St. John** (26 St. John St., EC1; Farringdon Station), the restaurant in Clerkenwell, for a very English dinner." —*Evening Standard*, Feb. 11, 2005.



Actor Jude Law standing on top of Primrose Hill: "This is probably the best view of London, unknown to most people apart from Londoners." —*New York Magazine*, October 25, 2004

Author Zadie Smith claims: "I can't really survive without [London]. I certainly couldn't write without it. And it's much more specific—it is the area I live in from about **Willesden** (Willesden Junction) up to about **Hampstead Heath** (Golders Green or Highgate tube) and back." —on a BBC Web site in the series, *Sense of the City*

Model Kate Moss loves a scene—scandal or no scandal. She's been spotted at **Lemonia** (89 Regent's Park Rd., NW1; Chalk farm tube), a Greek restaurant in Primrose Hill near where she lives; shops at **Matches** (see listing above) for groovy duds, just like her closest competitor in style, Sienna; and has been known to party at the ultra-posh **Claridges Hotel** (Brooke Street, W1; Bond Street tube.) Miss Moss has also held court at **The Prince Bonapart** (80 Chepstow Rd., W2; Notting Hill Gate or Westbourne Park), a favorite haunt of pal Stella McCartney's. —www.updates.absolutely.net and *Sunday Mirror*, June 16, 2002



People-watching from a sidewalk cafe. Above, left: '80s punks on parade.



The sexy Shadow Lounge in Soho.

paired with Doc Marten boots and, for the girls, London bus-red lipstick. We danced at Crazy Larry's and Paramount City in a set that included Amanda de Cadenet and Tamara Beckwith. As we got more into the music—hip hop arrived from Chicago and filled the dance floors—we ventured to **West End** club nights hosted by legendary Londoners such as Leigh Bowery, Steve Strange and Philip Sallon, rubbing shoulders with celebrity creations of London's fashion and club scenes, like Boy George.

After university I moved back to Notting Hill, living on one of London's lovely listed gardens—huge communal gardens protected from development and open only to those residents around it—just off the **Portobello Road**. Every Saturday, I wound my way through the market to eat breakfast with an ever-expanding group of friends at the **Portobello Café** (now called **Babes'n'Burgers**, 275 Portobello Rd., W11; Ladbroke Grove tube), picking up vintage

GETTING THERE

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suede minis on the way. Here we drank champagne, bleary eyed, the morning after Labour's election victory, toppling nearly two decades of Conservative rule. And here we also sat dazed on the day of Princess Diana's funeral and drank bubbly again, toasting her life.

Soon after, I found myself in leafy reaches of north London where I lived for several years in a flat overlooking **Hampstead Heath**, the whole of London laid out below. On free days I walked over the wild heathland up to the grounds of **Kenwood House** (Hampstead Lane, NW3; Hampstead Heath tube), once home to the Earl of Iveagh, and dropped into London's most secret little art collection, spending hours with fine paintings by Rembrandt, Frans Hals and even a rare Vermeer.

Now I live minutes away from the **British Museum** (Great Russell St., WC1; Russell Square tube) and its treasures, near **Bloomsbury**, the area made famous at the start of the last century by the likes of Virginia Woolf, Dora Carrington and Lytton Strachey. I can saunter to **Regent's Park** (Regent's Park tube), another gorgeous green space with a boating lake and the golden dome of a mosque overlooking the rose garden. Ten minutes to the south is **Soho** (Oxford Circus tube), where London's notorious sex shops co-exist with the ever-changing array of hip restaurants, bars and boutiques.

I can stroll to Oxford Circus in minutes to visit my childhood haunt Topshop—which is now cooler than ever, selling up-to-the-minute fashion at super-cheap prices with special collections from top designers such as Clements Ribeiro, Marcus Constable and Markus Lupfer. Down the road at **Marble Arch**, I pop into **New Look** (500 Oxford St., W1; Marble Arch tube), another inexpensive retailer that features an exclusive line from **Luella Bartley**, the London designer who recently took New York Fashion Week (and America's Target stores) by storm.

London's many villages have undergone a renaissance, and the gloss of prosperity is evident everywhere: The King's Road no longer breeds punks but it does have an eclectic array of grown-up stores and eateries that delight in a different way. Notting Hill and Portobello have gained too much fame to be the scruffy old Bohemian stomping grounds of old, but the area has somehow managed to keep its Boho cool among the chi-chi boutiques that have replaced the old drug dens, and Portobello Market continues to harbor young designers on their way to fame and a contract with Gucci. North London's **Primrose Hill** is so favored by London's famous faces that on a sunny day it is impossible to walk past the sugared-almond facades of its Georgian terraces without bumping into Jude or Kate or Sienna. Then there are grand old hotels such as **Claridges** (Brook St., W1; Bond Street tube), and the **Ritz** (150 Piccadilly; Green Park tube), which have reinvented themselves as celebrity-soaked hangouts for the cocktail-swilling paparazzi set.

But for undiluted London spirit you have to head east these days, to the streets around **Shoreditch**, **Hoxton** and **Clerkenwell** for clubs, hip art galleries and cutting-edge design. **Brick Lane** has seen waves of immigrants: First came the Huguenots in the 17th century, then Jewish traders in 18th century, and now it houses London's biggest Bangladesh community and the best cheap Indian restaurants in town. The street names tell you all you need to know about what used to be the major trade here: Fashion Street is just one example. On Sunday mornings, Brick Lane's street market brings the area alive as shoppers mix with clubbers queuing up outside the famous **Beigel Bake** (159 Brick Lane, E1; Shoreditch tube) for breakfast bagels. Eschewing the designer shops, you'll find some of London's trendiest boutiques around the **Old Truman Brewery** site, including **Rokit** (101 and 107 Brick Lane, E1; Shoreditch tube), one of the city's best vintage shops, which has a big outlet here, with other locations in Covent Garden and **Camden**.

London will always be the coolest city on earth. And its villages, bursting with multicultural individuality, Bohemian moxie, and Zeitgeist-making trends and personalities, will always be my playground. ☺

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