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London Shopfronts

Emma J Page and Rachael Smith



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A photographic tour of the capital's most iconic shopfronts, from historic façades to beautiful, modern typography.

Walking through the streets of London provides a glorious miscellany of history and design, past shops that have stood for centuries and those that popped up just last week. This book is a visual celebration of the capital's most interesting stores: a vibrant compendium filled with original photography and fascinating write-ups. It explores the artistry behind each façade's unique signage, delves into the sites' past lives and includes personal stories of ingenuity, community and resilience from London's shopkeepers. For shops are no longer just somewhere we buy things – you can do that online, these days – but places to connect with others, browse creative objects and gather inspiration.

'Shops remain the lifeblood of our city; squeezed by the virtual world, yes, and sometimes at the mercy of an area's changing fortunes, but ultimately an enduring, beautiful expression of a dynamic capital and its rich history.'

Emma J Page, from the introduction

Emma J Page is a journalist and editor who writes for publications including *The Times Magazine*, *Architectural Digest* and *House & Garden*.

Rachael Smith is a renowned interiors and portrait photographer; she regularly contributes to many of the UK's leading newspaper supplements and luxury lifestyle magazines.

Hoxton Mini Press is a small indie publisher based in east London. They are dedicated to making collectable photography books that are accessible, affordable and playful.

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London Shopfronts

Sample spreads

HELLO DARLING

Theatrical bar and restaurant

You'd be hard-pressed to miss this larger-than-life façade, with its playful neon graphic greeting, hand-drawn naked ladies and colour-clash front doors. The irreverent feel of the experimental space was dreamed up in 2019 by Harriet Darling and Elise Edge, set designers with a knack for transporting the imagination.

Thanks to the efforts of a small band of scenic artists, carpenters and set designers, it took just three weeks for the four-storey Victorian building to be transformed from bog-standard bar to magical drinking den.

Given that the building is owned by The Old Vic next door, its theatrical air is unsurprising. 'We wanted to find a space that felt like a natural progression from the events we're known for, like supper clubs and immersive pantomimes, which are playful, queer and

inclusive,' says Harriet. 'So the look is very spontaneous and not over-thought.' Inspired by the creative interiors of Charleston House, there are painted lemon groves on the landing, vintage knick-knacks in the upstairs flat (which is accessed via a secret door), murals, marbled walls and swagged drapes throughout.

And yet this is something of a 'blink-and-you'll-miss-it' project, because the former pub is reportedly earmarked for demolition to make room for a much-needed extension of The Old Vic. 'That has actually made us bolder,' says Harriet, whose own handwriting is captured in the building's exterior graphic. 'When you create something fleeting, you lose a sense of preciousness, and that can be very freeing.'

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BRAMBLE & MOSS

Florist in a former chemist

The full history of this ornate Victorian shopfront is, tantalisingly, just out of reach. Its mosaic doorstep is inscribed with 'Blanchford', and a recent restoration of its fascia led to the discovery of original carved, once gilded lettering revealing it to have been a chemist, but that's as much as can be gleaned of the building's early life. The façade, with its elegantly curved windows, was likely added to the existing building around 1850; the same time the mysterious Blanchford is thought to have set up shop.

By the time florists Ella Sarafian and Jo Antrobus moved in from the tiny store next door, a multitude of businesses had occupied the premises – from a wine shop to a picture framer's and fabric specialist's. Ella and Jo commissioned Ash Bishop of The Brilliant Sign Co. to craft new signage, and he settled on a bespoke type based on a Victorian fascia he'd

seen on a Brighton pub. With a technique called glue chipping, which creates a subtle textural pattern, he designed an inscribed plate-glass fascia finished with gold leaf. 'Victorians were innovative and entrepreneurial when it came to their shopfronts, quickly championing plate glass when it became available,' he says. 'It was a way of showing modernity and celebrating craftsmanship.' Fittingly, this vintage-style signage remains the shop's calling card, complemented by original stained-glass panels and a Victorian forest-green tile surround: a palette perfectly suited to Ella and Jo's display of flowers, plants, foliage and vintage vessels.

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