

SURFACE

DESTINATION: LONDON

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A GUIDE TO THE UNIQUELY INTERNATIONAL CITY.

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Unorthodox architecture continues to dramatically reshape London's silhouette. Ask anyone to draw an iconic London skyline and, aside from Big Ben and St Paul's, most of the buildings they'd choose weren't here 15 years ago: Gherkin, Shard, Cheesegrater, Walkie-Talkie, and, coming soon, Can of Ham. (Together they'd make one hell of a picnic.) It's hard to think of another old occidental metropolis of which the same could be said. But London has its own rhythms; time passes more quickly here.

Much of that has to do with how it fits into the global conversation. London is not just one of the most global cities, but one of the best integrated, and, on a good day, it feels as though the contents of this particular melting pot have long since melted.

The geography works both ways, of course. Like a lot of locals, I moved here upon graduating and planned to stay a year or two, but one of the things that has kept me here for more than a decade is, ironically, the fact that it's so easy to leave. Londoners attend the art fairs, film festivals, and sporting events of cities around the world. We fall in love with their citizens; eat in their restaurants; sleep in their hotels then bring it all back home.

The food scene, once a punch line for snickering denizens of European culinary capitals, is now a vanguard of food trends. It's also internationally tinged, whether Indian or Japanese, Ethiopian or Afghani. One of the most lauded new restaurants in Soho right now specializes in a particular type of Sri Lankan pancake, while Marylebone boasts a well-established Icelandic burger bar.

The world's influence is being felt in other realms in Blighty as well. Artists and makers who left for the floor space of Berlin or Leipzig reliably return to exhibit and sell here throughout the year, and October's Frieze remains one of the most influential fairs on the culture calendar. Ultimately, no subset is too niche to be sustained. The city's Polish film festival is in its 14th year.

Yes, rising rents are pushing residents even further out on the city's periphery; but the result is the emergence of new pockets of energy. In the East, Stoke Newington now has a shopping stretch for your organic hand soap and Fjallraven backpack needs. One of the best pop-up bars of the summer each year is above a multi-story car park in South London's Peckham. We're not always sure where that leaves us at any given moment, or what the skyline sketch will look like in 50 years. But you can't shake the feeling that, whatever the future holds, it will happen here first.

HOTELS

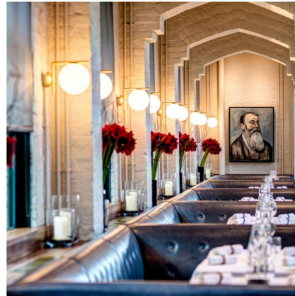
Sure, chintzy décor touches, antique furniture, and white-glove service still attract visitors looking for classic British eccentricity. (The best in category is **Rosewood London** (rosewoodhotels.com), designer Tony Chi's masterful interpretation of Edwardian luxury.) But the energy these days emanates from the new arrivals pushing a modern design ideology and redrawing the travel map to uncharted enclaves. On the Thames' South Bank, designer Tom Dixon's Design Research Studio is behind the 315-room **Mondrian London at Sea Containers** (morganshotelgroup.com), formerly a shipping company headquarters. The lobby's curved copper wall resembles the hull of a ship, while chef Seamus Mullen and barman Ryan Chetiyawardana's concepts are a throwback to midcentury cruise liners with moody lighting and Art Deco-inspired banquettes. Further east, another Dixon project, **Shoreditch House** (sohohouse.com), kicked off a wave of development in the now-booming neighborhood when it opened in 2007. (The 26 rooms, situated in a refurbished pub, were added in 2010). It's since been joined by the **Ace Hotel Shoreditch** (acehotel.com) where the 258 cork-ceilinged abodes by Universal Design Studio come outfitted with magnetic shelving by T Nevill & Co., Martin guitars, and daybeds sleeved in reverse-denim upholstery. Comprising a row of stucco Victorian townhouses in West London, **The Laslett Notting Hill** (living-rooms.co.uk) tapped architect Tom Bartlett of Waldo Works to refresh the interiors while maintaining a residential feel. The 51 rooms are appointed with shopable artwork and furniture from leading British-made brands like Pinch. But Ian Schrager's **London Edition** (editionhotels.com), in Fitzrovia, is still the gold standard of hotel style. Yabu Pushelberg preserved landmark stained-glass windows and put Salvador Dalí-inspired lamps in the lobby, which leads to the fumed-oak Punch Room in the back.



(Photo: Courtesy Jidori)



(Photo: Courtesy Sexy Fish)



(Photo: Courtesy German Gymnasium)



(Photo: Courtesy The Ivy Kensington Brasserie)