

HEADS UP | MANCHESTER, ENGLAND

# An Entrepreneurial Spirit Revives 2 Neighborhoods

A resurgence of a former industrial area has brought the heart of the city back to life.

By ROOKSANA HOSSENALLY

Emily Dixon still recalls the horrified reaction of Manchester residents when she told them in the early 2000s that she lived in the Northern Quarter, then a dicey industrial pocket in the heart of the city. “They’d say, ‘You live where?!’” said the 34-year-old Ms. Dixon, drinking coffee at a wooden table in the housewares/art shop and coffee bar **Fig and Sparrow** ([figandsparrow.co.uk](http://figandsparrow.co.uk)), which she co-owns. Now an artsy hub of trendy cafes, restaurants, bars and boutiques opened mostly by independent entrepreneurs, the Northern Quarter and its next-door neighbor, Ancoats, are blurring the lines between gentrification and regeneration. Both neighborhoods are seeing revivals as locals increasingly have returned to settle there.

Manchester has been in the spotlight for its two Premier League football teams and faded rock and house music scenes. It is also one of Europe’s largest university towns. Even so, the city has long been seen as down-at-the-heels, suffering from gang culture and poverty, especially after the decline of the textile manufacturing industry and the 1996 I.R.A. bombing, which destroyed much of the center. However, with rebuilding over the last 20 years, the city of Manchester is a booming postindustrial metropolis, and the Greater Manchester region is the country’s second most populated area with 2.5 million residents.

Young entrepreneurs, with their stylish establishments, have completely turned around the Northern Quarter, while change is emerging in Ancoats. And breaking the traditional gentrification mold, much of the evolution in these neighborhoods hasn’t fallen into the hands of the big brands. Longtime institutions like **Piccadilly Records** ([piccadillyrecords.com](http://piccadillyrecords.com)) subsist among the newer spots including Fig and Sparrow. “Our landlord had the choice between us, two independent photographers who were going into business for the first time, and the big retail chain American Apparel. And he chose us,” said Ms. Dixon. “There’s a real consciousness about how this part of Manchester should evolve. The locals put up a real fight for integrity.”

What’s missing for many of the area’s habitués are more art and live music venues, but even that is changing. The music space **Band on the Wall** ([bandonthewall.org](http://bandonthewall.org)) recently reopened in the Northern Quarter, and the entrepreneurs Sophie Jarvis and Bryan Regan, both 32, have brought back **Stage and Radio**, a popular music and dining spot that introduced modern jazz to Manchester in the ‘50s ([facebook.com/stageandrado](http://facebook.com/stageandrado)), replacing the Cuba



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Cafe that played Latin music for 18 years. Stage and Radio, as before, will host live bands. The two are also undertaking several privately funded projects in Ancoats, which Mr. Regan described as being previously “dangerous and derelict.”

A mural of a multicolored bird on the outskirts of Ancoats acts as a marker of the transformation. The mural, “The Guardian of Ancoats,” by the Brazilian artist Mateus Bailon, was commissioned by the local street art association Cities of Hope ([citiesofhope.global](http://citiesofhope.global)) run by James Spencer, 37, and James Mearns, 28, and based nearby at the government-funded **Manchester Creative Studio** ([mcastudio.co.uk](http://mcastudio.co.uk)). The two-year-old school for youths aged 14 to 19, headed by Peter Ramsay, 45, focuses on the digital creative industries. Here, students are hard at work on Apple computers designing logos for start-ups and learning how to make videos.

Farther into Ancoats, deserted streets re-



There’s an almost palpable sense that the Industrial Revolution began here underneath the polished new facades.

Clockwise from top left: Ancoats Coffee, left, in a former cotton mill; “The Guardian of Ancoats” by Mateus Bailon, commissioned by Cities of Hope, a charity street art organization; the Cutting Room, a cafe and bar in Ancoats; Blossom Street, in Ancoats; Fig and Sparrow, a housewares/art shop and coffee bar in the Northern Quarter. Left, cappuccino at Fig and Sparrow.

main lined with vestiges of old textile mills. As you walk past patches of fenced-up wasteland, a boarded-up pub and renovated red-brick workers’ terraced houses, there’s an almost palpable sense that the Industrial Revolution began here underneath the polished facades.

On Cutting Room Square, one of the renovated facades belongs to the **Cutting Room** cafe-bar ([cuttingroommcr.co.uk](http://cuttingroommcr.co.uk)), which was the first cafe to open in the area and is owned by Sophie Jarvis and Bryan Regan of Stage and Radio. “There was practically nothing here apart from a load of derelict buildings until the property boom of the last few years,” recalled Ms. Jarvis. “And with all the new flats — about 6,000 people live

here already — and offices we were wondering why there wasn’t anything else.” Later this year, the two are set to open **Goose Fat & Wild Garlic** ([facebook.com/goosefatandwildgarlic](http://facebook.com/goosefatandwildgarlic)), an industrial-chic restaurant with an organic farm-to-table focus and brewery.

Next door to the site, Jim Morgan, 29, and Kate Wilson, 27, opened **Rudy’s** ([rudyspizza.co.uk](http://rudyspizza.co.uk)) last year. Rooted in Mr. Morgan’s passion for Neapolitan pizza, the simple retro-meets-warehouse restaurant has a real fire oven and is already packed with locals most lunchtimes. “It’s an exciting place to be in Manchester,” said Mr. Morgan, beaming at the prospects for the area. “And it’s only the beginning.”

FORAGING | SINGAPORE

# Design Gains a Foothold in a Financial Center

A homegrown design scene is emerging in Singapore, which last year celebrated 50 years as an independent state. A smattering of 19th-century buildings from its days as a British colony conjure up images of steamy afternoons when Stamford Raffles, founder of modern Singapore, would be seen at the original Raffles Hotel on Beach Road, which the owners named after him. But get a taste of Singapore’s cultural mélange by delving into vibrant enclaves like Little India, Chinatown and Arab Town. Look even further and you’ll find local designers setting up shops across the island city-state, increasingly giving this global financial center a reputation as a design hub.

ROOKSANA HOSSENALLY

VIBRANT ENCLAVES TIED TO MANY CULTURES.

**In Good Company**

► This neo-modern clothing brand doesn’t follow trends or seasons. It was established online in 2013 by four Singaporean friends for whom being “in good company” is essential. The brand’s boutique opened in 2015, selling well-designed minimalistic yet classic casual lines for women and children. **ION Orchard**, 2 Orchard Turn, B1-06; 65-65-09-47-86; [ingoodcompany.asia](http://ingoodcompany.asia)



**Mondays Off**

► This multilabel home decoration boutique was opened by the local graphic designer Leyna Poh last year on Haji Lane, an indie shopping hub with colorful street art and trendy boutiques and bars. The boutique sells affordable cushions and Carrara marble kitchen items, international skin-care products, locally made tea, and delicate Scandinavian stationery, as well as bold graphic posters designed by the owner. 76 Haji Lane; no telephone; [shopmondaysoff.com](http://shopmondaysoff.com)



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**Noden**

▲ Modern Danish vintage furniture is the focus of this concept shop opened by Marko Dylan Yeo and Tawan Conchonnet in 2013. Though its emphasis is on Danish pieces from the 1940s to the ‘70s, including pieces by celebrated furniture designers such as Hans Wegner, it also sells candles as well as ceramics and artwork. **Block 65**, Ubi Road 1, 03-75 Oxley Bizhub, #03-75; 65-67-02-64-75; [nodenhome.com](http://nodenhome.com)



**Naiise**

◀ Dennis Tay’s online business was such a hit that he opened brick and mortar stores offering locally designed home decoration pieces, high-tech gadgets and leather goods. Mr. Tay now has six shops, including this flagship store featuring more than 800 local and international brands. **2 Handy Road**, The Cathay #B1-08; 65-62-52-77-01; [naiise.com](http://naiise.com)



**Supermama**

▲ Edwin Low and Mei Ling Lee started Supermama five years ago, but opened this restful space stocked with porcelain and home wares last March. A platform for local designers, the shop commissions and showcases their work. **265 Beach Road**; 65-62-91-19-46; [supermama.sg](http://supermama.sg)