

## KEEPING THE CREATIVE FLAME ALIGHT: SUSTAINABILITY



AN ECO-FASHION  
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Meet the area's sustainably  
fashion leaders



RECYCLE UPCYCLE: P6  
The blossoming of sustainability  
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The duo bringing colour, play and  
joy to the world of urban sculpture



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**Contributors**  
Helen Lax – guest editor  
Abbie Hedaux  
Tasia Montebello  
Solape Alatise  
Josephine Chime  
Martin Francisco Saps  
Simon Cole

**Photographers**  
Hannah Rajah  
Stephanie Galea

**Production Team**  
Creative Director: Daren Ellis/See Studio  
Commissioning Editor: Tom Kihl  
Project Director: William Chamberlain

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**Contact**  
Web: [thisisthewick.com](http://thisisthewick.com)  
Social: [@thisisthewick](https://twitter.com/thisisthewick)  
Email: [info@thisisthewick.com](mailto:info@thisisthewick.com)

**Cover Image**  
Fran Garajara by Daren Ellis

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The Wick is inclusive, collaborative and open.  
Here's how you can join in:

- Attend a monthly CIG meeting and participate in the planning and commissioning process (second Friday of every month), sign up here: [creativewick.com/network](http://creativewick.com/network)
- Suggest editorial ideas and tell us your feedback via this online form and we will consider for future editions: [wick.link/submit](http://wick.link/submit)

# Can we have it all?



Fashion. Sustainability. Environment. Climate change. Are these things compatible? Well, they have to be, but who will make them so? This issue of The Wick shines a spotlight on sustainability, something that should thread through every part of our lives. And that goes for the clothes we wear, or don't wear.

Hackney Wick is home to a whole host of fashion businesses, some with a long-seated history in the area. With the imminent arrival of the studio campus at The Trampery Fish Island Village, fashion is not only a local business driver, but also a point of expression and creativity for many local people.

Globally, the pandemic has rocked our lives and lots of us have adjusted our ways. The choices we make are now based on a whole different set of values. The methods of the fashion industry and its effect on the climate have been at the centre of the debate for many years, coupled with its working practices and the effect on workers. Local people care about that.

Now there is a movement within the industry that is on a conscious and determined journey to create a widespread, slow fashion economy that respects planet and people, while reflecting the beauty of deep-rooted cultures and our individuality. So, can we have it all?

Independent designers, fashion businesses 'on the fringe' and conscious brands have lived this plight for many years and now a greater number in the mainstream are taking account of what the customers and the community want. They are also making it easier and more pleasurable to live these new values. Everything is up in the air – the way we shop, the way we design, the way we make. Which also makes it an extremely exciting time.

The Fashion District Festival, 22-26th September in and around Stratford [fashion-district.co.uk/festival](http://fashion-district.co.uk/festival), is a celebration of all things good in fashion, profiling sustainable brands and ways of shopping. In the pop-up shop in Westfield, (until 3rd October), you can buy independent and local, upcycled designer or pre-loved. You can support the circular fashion movement and

join peer-to-peer marketplaces to rent your outfits, sell childrenswear or make the most of your current wardrobe. You can make it easier to look after your clothes, repair, re-style and give them a second life.

In The Lab E20 with Get Living and Futurecity, children can make a play cape with Making for Change from London College of Fashion UAL, or a phone case with the Princes' Foundation. Young people can re-model outfits with designers, post their creation on Instagram and party at Fashion Revolution's DiscoMAKE. There's an array of workshops for adults, too, led by designers in areas such as embroidery, knitwear, and jewellery. To help us make it a circular festival, the materialist, a new platform for surplus fabrics, alongside MAES London, a local atelier, will provide fabrics for our workshops and make use of any waste and fabric scraps.

The Trampery will pop-up at the British Council in Lendlease's International Quarter, bringing two days of support for fashion businesses, including a workshop on the Mayor's Good Work Standard for fashion, sustainable manufacturing and more. The festival will certainly provoke debate with events and fireside

chats at The Stratford Hotel on designing responsibly, supply chain transparency, digital garments and the Metaverse, plus topics such as diversity and ableism in fashion. Importantly, a workshop for young people from diverse backgrounds will highlight career pathways in fashion, building opportunities to bring on the next era of diverse and creative talent.

So, the festival shouts out for enquiry can re-model outfits with designers, post their creation on Instagram and party at Fashion Revolution's DiscoMAKE. There's an array of workshops for adults, too, led by designers in areas such as embroidery, knitwear, and jewellery. To help us make it a circular festival, the materialist, a new platform for surplus fabrics, alongside MAES London, a local atelier, will provide fabrics for our workshops and make use of any waste and fabric scraps.

And after the Festival? We hope you'll join the slow fashion movement and by balancing your buying – and not buying – options, while thinking about origin and authenticity, enjoy helping to make fashion and sustainability compatible.

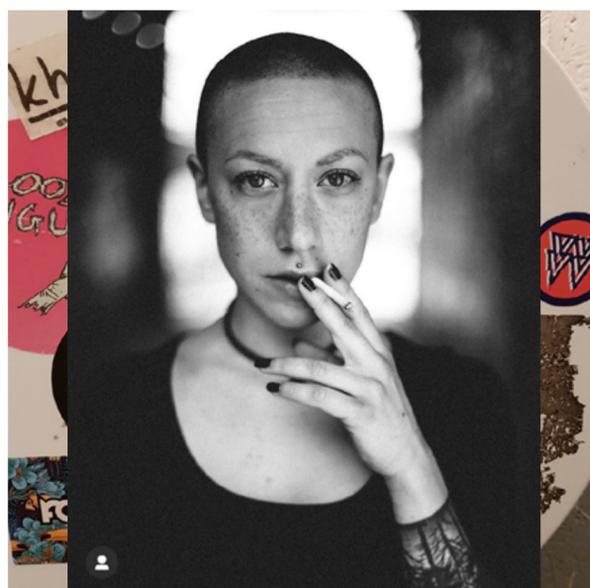
## GUEST EDITOR, Helen Lax, Director, Fashion District

Helen launched the Fashion District in 2018 backed by eighteen founding partners including London College of Fashion, UAL, the Mayor of London and LLDC, with the joint aim of supporting the growth of the industry and creating a global hub for fashion tech. She previously worked within the arts and creative industries as a Regional Director at the Arts Council of England, a Director at Dance East, and led community programmes to bring public sector transformation to local authorities.

# TheWick

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KEEPING THE CREATIVE FLAME ALIGHT



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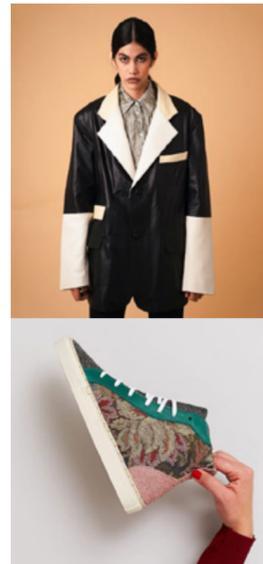
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# An eco-fashion community

From reworking second-hand clothes to using crisp packets and old tires to make fun garments, you can find it all in the neighbourhood

Words: Tasia Montebello / Main Portraits: Patrick Straub, Hannah Aiyana & Daren Ellis

How we do our bit to alleviate the effects of climate change is now at the forefront of many minds, and Hackney Wick is rife with innovative designers making a wide variety of exciting sustainable fashion. These include stunningly high end upcycled leather jackets from 'The Zur' all the way through to upcycling workshops courtesy of 'Love & Salvage', as many brands are giving back to the community in a sustainable way, too.



If activism is close to your heart you'll love the 'War is Illegal' project by dancer Mai Nyguen Tri and reggae artist Clapper Priest. For the past seven years they have been upcycling second-hand garments and adding bold prints in intricate layers, creating wearable street art with a powerful message. Inspired by the 'War is Illegal' cafe in Berlin they found a home in Hackney Wick's punk scene. Every weekend you can find their stall at Upmarket on Brick Lane.



style harnesses, you would never know they were once inside tractor tires.

These exciting designers are all moving fashion forward in unexpected and beautifully sustainable ways. It really proves daring to be different pays off.

One of the most successful designers who has been on the forefront of sustainable fashion here for many years is Christopher Raeburn.



Raeburn got his start in Hackney Wick when he began making garments using ex-military parachutes, not because he was thinking about sustainability but purely for their visual interest, sustainability being an unintentional added bonus - now it's informing his whole brand.



Recently he and his team opened The Lab E20 with neighbourhood operator Get Living in East Village which Raeburn calls a "creative call to arms" for the sustainable community, to see what we can do when we work together. It is a space for companies and creators to show their products and share with the community via free workshops, talks and a climate change based cinema. The Lab launched at the end of July with workshops on making bags and clothes from found materials and will continue to be

taken over by exciting progressive projects during the coming months. It's an integral part of the Fashion District Festival (see p.3). Here's Raeburn's take on the future of fashion.

**How do you think we make sustainability in fashion desirable?**

**Raeburn:** I always wanted the company to be design led. Our obligation as a company is to make as many right decisions as possible upfront - from the materials we use to how it's made, the durability of the product and the free repairs, all of those things that we could put into the product, but ultimately it has to be design led.

**Why is disruption a big part of your brand philosophy?**

I suppose my biggest fear in anything is that we become too comfortable. That's such a scary thing that all of a sudden your life disappears and "bam!" you're done. Maybe your brand works or maybe it doesn't but you've just done enough and maybe you've been comfortable. That is a big worry, but the idea of being comfortable with being uncomfortable and challenging things is something cool.

**Why have you said that the most radical thing to do would be to not make anything at all?**

Part of the collection is called "Raefound", it's all unissued military pieces which have never been worn. There are billions of things that are made every year and never used. What could be more radical than making nothing at all? Because all of this stuff is already out there. My good friend Orsola de Castro has an amazing quote which sums it up - "Waste shouldn't be a word, it's just things in the wrong place."

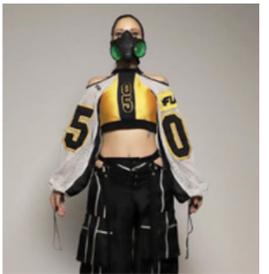
**In the modern world we have a problematic view of waste, how do you see the situation at the moment?**

I think now we're finally turning the tide to people realising that they have got enough stuff. I definitely think if there are any positives to be taken from the global pandemic at least we did all stand still for a minute and went "Oh my god what are we doing?!" Enough people have woken up to their impact and want to improve what they're doing, especially in fashion.

Now you see lots of innovation happening, going back to common sense. For me, the next ten years are the most important decade we will have as an industry, but also as people as a whole, because if we don't stop doing what we've been doing we're in big trouble.

I really want to be positive because what excites me about this is you're having the younger generation driving the agenda and demanding more from brands.

Find out what's going on at the Lab E20 @raeburnlab on Instagram.



One of these up and coming local designers driving the agenda is Fran Garajara, an upcycler originally from Chile. She began making clothes to disrupt the system and give back to her community.

**What makes the clothes you sell sustainable?**

**Fran:** The system I use to recycle is zero waste-based, so if I recycle something it's not that I just cut what I need from the garment, I use almost one hundred percent of the garment.

**Making your own clothes should be more accessible and you're doing that with your courses, could you tell us about that?**

That's the idea, I would like to see making or reworking your own clothes become more of a social thing, so just like we might gather to have dinner, we gather to make our outfits for the weekend.

It would be nice to reincorporate these skills back into communities because they're basics for our daily lives. We all wear clothes and instead of detachment from the people who are already making the garments, you get a bit closer to them.

You can create local economies based on what people make instead of buying from big companies; if we all go back to a tiny scale we can recover ourselves from capitalism.

Fran runs mending workshops at London Design Festival on 19th and 20th September. Find her on Instagram @Y.A.N.G.\_ or at the Hackney Wick Underground Market.

Top: G at Broke Boutique, Above & right: Fran Garajara at Y.A.N.G.

# Upcycle, recycle, full circle

As the waters rise and the fires rage, a more optimistic vision for the future is being carved out by all kinds of Hackney Wick businesses

Words: Simon Cole / Main Portraits: Hannah Aiyana

For some years, scaffolding boards and other 'waste' materials from the Olympic Park were used for mezzanine-building, warehouse modifications and much more in Hackney Wick. Almost a decade ago, Tom Fletcher created his Rejuce factory in a Fish Island warehouse, collecting discarded fruit from a wholesale market. Another warehouse-dweller I knew fantasised about closed-circuit hydroponic farms before heading to Kenya to build cooking stoves fuelled by their owners' toilet waste. The Wick was not only a playground but a testing ground too.

This year, flooding has alarmed Londoners while the world has looked with dismay at the latest report by the UN International Panel on Climate Change. For years I've showcased the social enterprise and sustainability ecosystem in Dalston, but Hackney Wick has grown its own cluster of businesses seeking to do things better. On the railway embankment, passing container trains invite us to ponder the scale of the resources we're using and the problem we face.

Underneath those same tracks at Grow, Extinction Rebellion met to make plans. But this arts hub is also trying to inspire the business response. Between freight trains, Pete Bennett explains: "Grow was founded in 2014 as part of an ecosystem of studios and is an experiment in ethical and sustainable business. That ethos informs our decision making, from using local and independent products wherever possible, to being powered by Ecotricity and paying all our staff the London Living Wage." But it's not just about the things sourced on site, like the chairs made from waste tyres and Kompassion Kombucha; free or low-cost cultural events remind us that community needs to be sustainable too.

Another Wick veteran is Neil McDonald of Stour Space, the Community Development Trust and now Hackney Wick Underground amongst other projects. His latest baby is a civic learning environment with studios, maker space, arts and food. There is also a classroom to kickstart ethical business for young people. Exploring ideas like land trusts as a practical way to mitigate the most voracious forms of redevelopment, he's mastering in Design for Cultural Commons. The Underground runs not on consensus, he says, but by



Top: the team @growhackney, Above: Tom Fletcher @rejuce, Right: Dax Patel @refilltherapy

consent: "It's about participation and redistribution of profits for regenerative business practice, a systemic shift in governance that builds inclusivity and empowerment into its core mission and activities."

Trust is important and customers need to do their research. One entrepreneur told me that they see greenwashing all the time. But even well-meaning businesses might unknowingly have their carefully collected recycling end up in landfill, or their compostable plates incinerated. Joined-up thinking from businesses and councils is required, along with due diligence from customers.

Several markets now vie for the ethical pound, including one attached to Silo restaurant in the White Building. Chef and writer Douglas McMaster shared his



motivation for this joint project with Crate: "I walk down the canal here and we're suffocated by waste. 40% of food is wasted too - an obscene amount of resources. It's catastrophic for nature so we're trying to mitigate that. We're a restaurant but you can apply these ideas to anything."

There is no danger of lip service here: "It's a system with no loose ends and we've really gone into detail. Produce arrives in reusable vessels and it's from regenerative suppliers. They're not just sustaining, they're actively putting back what's been lost and I've been to every single one. Afterwards, food waste and natural materials are composted. Glass is the exception - so now we're looking at how to make the tools we need from it."

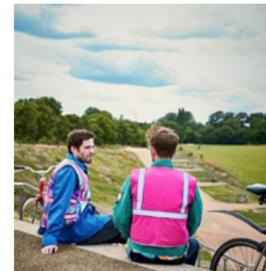
Nearby, Claire Nicolas of Pedal & Co plans to upcycle old hi-vis clothing for a range of conspicuous but stylish cyclewear manufactured in Hackney. The recent successful bid for the GLA's High Streets For All Challenge by the (Hackney Wick and Fish Island) Community Development Trust recognises this increasing entrepreneurship. Some



are already planning for the post-AI landscape, anticipating the next shift.

Forward-thinkers Echo (Economy of Hours) have taken money out of the equation, pulling in a socially-minded crowd with their timebanking and skillsharing network. Director Sarah Henderson is also part of Global Challenge Local Solutions, a triad of young women in business who ran a meeting at Grow this year addressing issues like plastics, waste, Net-Zero and inclusivity. The meeting was public, as their website points out: "You cannot tackle a systemic problem in isolation."

Once you've seen a ship carrying 20,000 containers, the abstract



nature of the resources we're burning through becomes more concrete. Reducing unnecessary purchases, The Library of Things at the Old Baths is a place to rent tools and other things we don't need very often. Buying and binning is old hat now, as The Wick's guest editor, Helen Lax of London Fashion District, explains: "With the Fashion District Festival, we aim to engage the community and customer to think about fashion in ways that will support sustainability and promote climate action: thinking about where their clothes are made, by who, and how; buying locally made and independent; caring for what's already in their

wardrobe, re-inventing it, or passing it on. We need to create a conscious and responsible fashion industry."

Covid has accelerated the move away from commuting and staying local. Projects like the Hackney Wick Circular High Street (see p.14) will be an area where everyone knows what's available: making better use of existing underused spaces, testing and trialling new approaches to circular economy and inclusivity.

Meanwhile, outside Hackney Bridge in a container you can find bike-recycler, low-impact living and gift economy advocate Lawrence Mohammed of Pro Bike Service. Neighbours Zhero are pedal power advocates too, helping artists, designers and galleries to move things by cargo bike. They may be unique, as co-founder and local lad Joe Sharpe says: "We're the first zero-emission art-handling and installation service in London - possibly beyond!"

Avoiding packaging is becoming much easier, with Refill Therapy, just opened on Wallis Rd, ready to fill



Above: the team @hwunderground

Far left: Hi-vis by @wearpedalando

Mid left: the @topuptruck

Left: The Old Baths @hackneywicklibraryofthings

Right: Joe Sharpe @zherolondon



your existing containers with food, household cleaning and personal care items, and Hepscott Rd's Burnt Umber Brasserie offering an innovative natural wine bottle fill service. The crowdfunded Tuck Shop on Fish Island encourages conscious consumption with container refills and a range of ethically sourced meat. Also on the refill tip, former milk float the Topup Truck is a regular sight parked up by the Pearl. As founder Ella Shone says: "Plastic was invented right here; now it's come full circle." For better and for worse, cheap plastic changed the world. Can the latest wave of East London changemakers do it again?

Simon Cole explores issues including sustainability and social enterprise on walks and blogs: [hackneytours.com](http://hackneytours.com)

With the continuing rise of fast fashion and the devastating consequences it is having on our environment, sustainable fashion is strengthening its offensive. Organisations like Swap Nation are being erected with the aim of making 'sustainable fashion affordable for women in the UK'. Clothes are being repurposed and vintage being back in vogue is further helping the sustainable cause.

Recent University of East London (UEL) graduate Yasmin Ibrahim is the proud creator of a fashion collection called Jirkeeyga, which means 'my body' in her Somali language. The collection puts in the spotlight Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), narrating through symbolic imagery the trauma faced by Yasmin, having undergone FGM herself at the age of just six years old.

The number six is featured on some collection items and the word jirkeeyga is written in spirals on others, representing the scream that Yasmin gave at the time of her procedure. Also reflective material is used on occasion as a way of reflecting the night and day nature of the fight against FGM.

"I used reflective material because I wanted to be seen. I wanted my message to be seen, not only in the day but during the night as well. I guess you could say it is representative of the fight against FGM, which should be day and night. I could have just written 'my body' in English but I wanted the text to be more personal. It was also my own handwriting," said Yasmin.

She describes Jirkeeyga as protest art, speaking out against a practice which she says is often veiled in secrecy. Her desire to be outspoken comes from recently having a baby girl, and only imagining the experience she would be due to have if she lived in Somalia. She hopes that the collection will educate



people and support those who have gone through the same experience, reminding them that they are not alone.

Although this collection wasn't 100% sustainably sourced and made, Yasmin has already started thinking about her next collection and what can be done to make it as sustainable as possible. Forward thinking and planning by this new generation of designers will be



## Jirkeeyga. My body

A University of East London graduate designer has created a fashion collection highlighting a very personal educational health message

Words: Solape Alatis / Photos:



Above:

really important for promoting sustainable fashion's future.

Yasmin said: "For fashion collections in future I will definitely be focusing on upcycling. We throw clothes away all the time that we could naturally dye to change their colour for example. Fast fashion is adding to problems like air and water pollution which are seriously damaging the environment. We want to live in this world for years to come, so looking after it is a number one priority, and sustainable fashion supports our efforts. We have to educate future generations to come, too."

The fashion designer has chosen to go with upcycling as a method of sustainability as a result of her own fond encounters with it, long before properly launching into the world of fashion. Yasmin talks about going into her mother's closet and browsing through items that weren't worn anymore yet her mother forbade from being thrown away. She talks about creating unimaginable new clothes from the old ones.

Not only is Yasmin making plans to incorporate sustainability into her new fashion collection ventures, but she is also making sustainable choices in building her personal wardrobe. Thereby practicing on a small scale what she is looking to



implement on a large scale.

"I don't buy fast fashion clothes anymore. I now think about the potential damage a product is doing and how important it is for us to not throw away our clothes. My husband introduced me to sustainable fashion and I now buy this type of clothing and also encourage my siblings to do the same. I'm shopping at second-hand clothes shops and its great that vintage is back in style. I love hand-picking vintage clothes with my sisters. They are quite young so I am trying to influence them positively in this area," said Yasmin.

Like many other designers Yasmin is seeking to do her part, future facing, for sustainable fashion on and off the catwalk. The quicker fast fashion goes out of favour and sustainability is embraced by the majority, the better our chances of breathing cleaner air and reducing the size of landfill. Another message worth shouting about.

### How did you come to HWFI?

We found the place I live at now when it was still a working factory. Around 2002 a developer had bought the site, he's showing us round and I think 'I would love to live here'. I got together with a few friends and we bought the whole back lot between us and divided it up roughly with the money we each put in.

### Can you see yourself staying here?

Yes, I am loathe to part with it now. It's very nice having a yard like this, and while the neighbours are really nice I'm happy to carry on living here. It would be horrible if we didn't have nice neighbours as you are slightly on top of each other here. I've seen children be born and grow up into young people and all that sort of thing. It has a lovely spirit about it; not too fancy and not too scruffy, it's just about the right thing for me.

### What aspect do you love most?

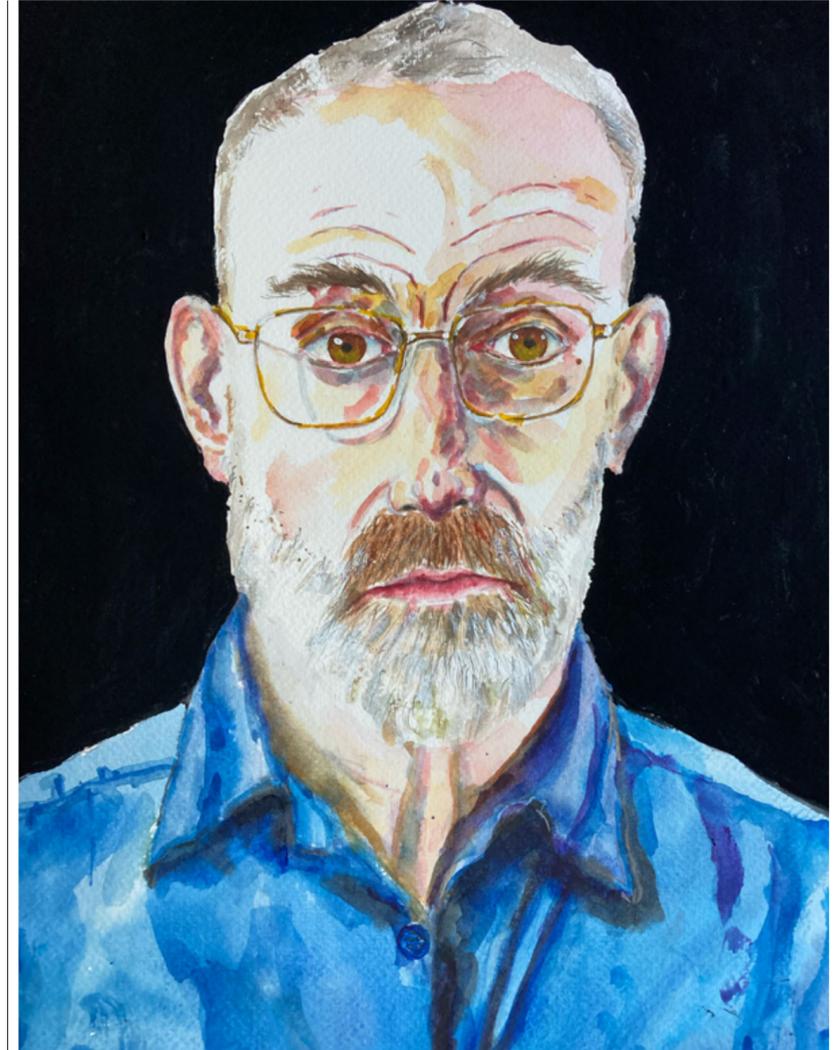
What I liked about it originally was the apparent freedom of space the area had. There were lots of relatively unclaimed spaces and lots of cheap empty buildings where loads of young people were doing interesting things. Some warehouses had near on 20 people living in one space. It was like a cauldron of other ways of living. I liked the street energy and the vitality.

### What changes would you make to improve things here?

I'm starting to see a repeat of what happened in Hoxton and Shoreditch - in that there are endless bars, with great squadrons of young people getting hammered at weekends. When you are looking in from the outside, it gets a bit depressing. I don't want to condemn anyone for what they want to do, but I do think being in an area where people come from outside London to socialise, get drunk, stagger round and go home again, is not a desirable aspect of life in the Wick.

### What has living in HWFI taught you about life?

I suppose an awareness that cities change and develop, and you can't freeze things. There was a writer who lived in this area, Iain Sinclair, he used to be very anti-the Olympic Park. He had a reasonable point in that a big organisation took over, scrubbed it clean and turfed everyone out. There were undoubtedly large losses, allotments and houses and such. Hardly anyone ever came here, the canals were full of rubbish and shopping trollies, but we had grown up on them. It became incorporated into this sort of romanticised ideal of post-industrial decay. There is a seduction about all that, but you can't freeze it and let it rot forever. For all the disruption, it has brought a beautiful park to the area that didn't exist before. It's bringing new culture too and has already brought lots of commercial opportunities.



## The Wicked One: Martin Richman

The local artist on his fascination with light and the lessons that living here have taught him

Self Portrait: Martin Richman



Top: Above & right:



### What's your greatest achievement?

Having two healthy kids. I had a pretty rucky early life and it would be fair to say it's been quite an achievement making a career and life for myself as an artist and finding some measure of success and gratification in the process. In the last 12 months I have also been rediscovered. I've gone from hardly getting commissions to having loads. I have a big commission for the Southbank Royal Festival Hall, the River Terrace Balcony over Christmas was a big installation of mine. There is a big one at Canary Wharf at the moment as part of a Summer Lights Festival. I was also commissioned by Rich Mix to create a piece called 'Illuminate: Shards of Light, the Feeling of Remembering' which explores the memories of the older East Londoners.

### What motivates you in your work?

I have a sort of restless energy. I've got a strong emotional and intellectual interest in things like perception, space, and light. I'm always interested in pushing the boundaries with what I think is interesting, possible, and desirable. There's something true about the saying that you fail and then you fail better. I'm always learning and I've got a lot of curiosity for somebody of my age. How we make art and what we do with it and how we see ourselves in relationship to city spaces are all areas of fascination.

### How did you start your career?

I was bought up in Southsea in Portsmouth and the beach we lived near became an extension of our home. We learnt that looking across to the Isle of Wight would give you an indication of what the weather would be like the next day. It was a popular seaside resort with coloured lamps along the seafront. The lights are what turned it into a holiday for people; a romantic promenade of light and colour. At one end was a funfair where the lights, sounds, colour and smells made a different kind of space altogether. It gave it a frantic and vibrant energy. I am Jewish, and light is such an important part of Judaism.

### Who is a HWFI hero?

Tracy Trimmer was instrumental in putting together the Hub 67 community centre for the Wick Award and the LLDC and used to chair the Hackney Wick Festival. And she has done a lot of good social work within the community.

### How would you describe HWFI as a sound, taste, and/or smell?

Is it drum and bass? Is it grime? Often the sound of Hackney Wick is musical with occasional bad-tempered shouts. It's also the sound of the motorways. It's even the joyous silence of butterflies landing on leaves in Hackney Woods. As for smells, I think pot and beer, the occasional smell of BBQ's and the new expensive coffee shops.

The enforced confinement of lockdown saw many strangely beautiful adaptations to the challenging circumstances. Photographer and fine artist Stephanie Galea produced the scorching images shown here for Vogue Arabia and Harpers Bazaar Arabia with the judicious placement of floaty backdrops and some planters up on the roof of her local residential block. "The weather was so hot during that early part of lockdown that we were able to work with the light and just improvise," she remembers.

Galea arrived in the area nine years ago, having randomly spotted an ad on Gumtree. "I had no idea what Hackney Wick was, but I was searching for an alternative way of living and when I came here, I knew this was it." The community



spirit reminded her of village life growing up in Malta, something that lockdown then served to amplify. "Despite now living in a new build because all the studios are so expensive, Covid really brought all the new residents together. It's all very Hackney Wick now," she grins. Meanwhile up on the roof, similar bonds and friendships were formed including on the Chanel shoot (pictured above). "Flo is a local musician and singer, not a model, and she is just such a nice personality to work with," says Stephanie. "When people are so amazing and we all get along, then it all comes together on the day. That's also very Hackney Wick."

The Harpers shoot contains bold colours and knits while the requirement for Vogue was the interplay of modern and vintage clothing, including hats, around a sustainability theme (below). "I try to have a lot of joy and an element of humour in my work,"



# Stephanie Galea

The Maltese fashion photographer travelled the world from her Hackney Wick rooftop

Interview: Tom Kihl / Photography: Stephanie Galea

she reveals. "Things are too serious all the time, so I want to make my images bright and for them to feel more airy." Opposite is a piece from Stephanie's latest exhibition, Bodies in Colour, where she explores more personal topics through her art practice. "It's a continuation of my 2019 black and white nude project," she tells us. "I like exploring themes of femininity and nudity having been brought



up in Malta in the hyper-religious, toxic frameworks of conservative Catholic guilt about the female body. The prints are first handmade in darkroom and then I paint directly onto them. Adding colour this time around was a reaction to lockdown; a focus on shape and form. A purely visual artistic expression of shape and colour."

See more of Stephanie's work at [stephaniegalea.com](http://stephaniegalea.com) and follow her @stefgalea

Left: Special shoot for Chanel, Top: Harpers Bazaar Arabia, Above: Stephanie Galea self-portrait, Right: sustainable vintage for Vogue Arabia, Opposite: from Bodies in Colour



# Hello DollyOlli

Marie Brenneis & Olivier Adam's invigorating, colourful sculptures encourage interaction and add humour – a vital antidote to London's often-predictable public art

Interview: Josephine Chime / Portrait: Daren Ellis

## How did you meet each other?

**Marie:** We met at a non-reality party, far, far away on the planet fantasy. Money doesn't matter there, its full of eccentrics, there are no grey square rectangular buildings, they're all round and colourful. Everything is illogical.

## How long have you been here?

**M:** The Olympics finished and we came with our suitcases. We were next door under the big tunnel for three months and then we got this space. I spoke to the landlord, I begged and begged and we got it.

## It was once said that Hackney Wick & Fish Island had the highest concentration of artists in Europe. But we've seen that dwindle.

**Olivier:** Not a dwindle, it's been a massacre. We were lucky with our landlord. He didn't sell out and kick everyone out. A lot of artists weren't so lucky. They're talking about bringing the artists back, but I don't really see that happening.

**M:** You have different creatives here now. This has been modelled for a technology creative, and we're more physical creatives. So the statement that Hackney Wick has the most artists, it's how you define the artists, I think. It was more experimental and physical and dance and music when we moved here. Now when I'm meeting new people, they're artists, but computer-based. We're very much sensory artists and we want you to get knowledge from your senses.

## What are you working on at the moment?

**M:** A pink odd-looking lamb. But I want to do it like 10 foot big. It will be a big inflatable up in the air.

**O:** We're also thinking of doing fashion out of patterns. Marie was doing a lot with patterns during lockdown. It was a bit dreary, so to perk us up we were doing colourful stuff on t-shirts and masks.

## The cute Japanese aesthetic Kawaii was supposedly a reaction to gentrification in Tokyo. Did what's happening locally draw you to use it into your own work?

**M:** Gentrification started in Japan a lot sooner than here, and one reaction is people dressing cute and colourful. Like here, juxtaposition is always happening. I took Olli to Japan and he was obsessed with the



colours and the cuteness, which then started to become more his thing in his own work.

**O:** It's an odd relationship because I had an idea of manga when I was growing up in the 80s, so I'm a bit retro in that aspect. At the beginning of my practice I was trying to replicate the perfection of the Japanese. Then I found I could keep the spirit of the happiness and grotesque of Kawaii, but I could make it the way I want to, which is slightly imperfect. I like the childishness and the colour of Kawaii. If you keep that and make it playful, then that works for me.

**M:** I studied architecture during my PHD, and the built environment really affects our



This Page:  
Clockwise from top

Opposite:  
Clockwise from top

behaviour. If a questionnaire is done in two years about the people living in Fish Island, it would be very interesting to see if their preferences have changed from before they moved in. Architecture affects beauty and order.

**O:** I can see the architecture is very stern, but when I look at the Bagel Factory, and I see people decorate the inside of their flats, it's quite creative. Maybe it's a reaction to so much sternness around them.

## What keeps you working together?

**O:** Well we tried to work with a lot of other people but that didn't work out. We don't judge each other either and we don't critique. I'm more technical and practical, and Marie is more conceptual. So sometimes she will come up with an idea and I will make it work within certain parameters. Or I will come up with an idea and Marie will push it further.

**M:** I think it's the imagination; we make it fun. We support each other, and it's good having separate practices, too. There's more humour in the DollyOlli than our separate practices, which go a bit darker.

## Do you have any particularly memorable moments from living and working here?

**O:** We did a lot with the Hackney WickED festival, and the first two years were great. People could come in and interact with the sculptures, so I really learned from that. When I did my show in Stour Space, I was building one of the sculptures in the space, so I could interact with the audience and I really enjoyed that.

**M:** I think for me it was the parties we used to have. Fear of Fluffing would set up and go out on the street and you'd get the general public in awe. There would be such a crazy atmosphere.

## Is there somewhere local that you'd like to exhibit your work?

**M:** I'd like to do something more comic in Fish Island with those big ugly buildings. I want to change it. So something like that lamb I'm working on, placed really high on top of a skyscraper. We did do a piece at the beginning of 2016 where we made three coffins out of London Brick called 'You Will Never Afford Me'. It was having a go at all the gentrification, and I was taking the mickey out of the word mortgage.



**O:** I don't want to sour the mood, but we were trying to get art into Hackney Wick Overground station, because they had that tunnel sitting empty for two years. We had one meeting and they never got back.

**M:** The architecture that they ended up with, I don't think is a good representation of the occupation of this area. It was a representation of the new builds; grey concrete with some lines in it.

**O:** If I had my say, I would do something in the old entrance for the Overground, where you've got those ramps that have been derelict with all the grass growing all over. I'd love to put something there and I think a lot of people would be interested in it.



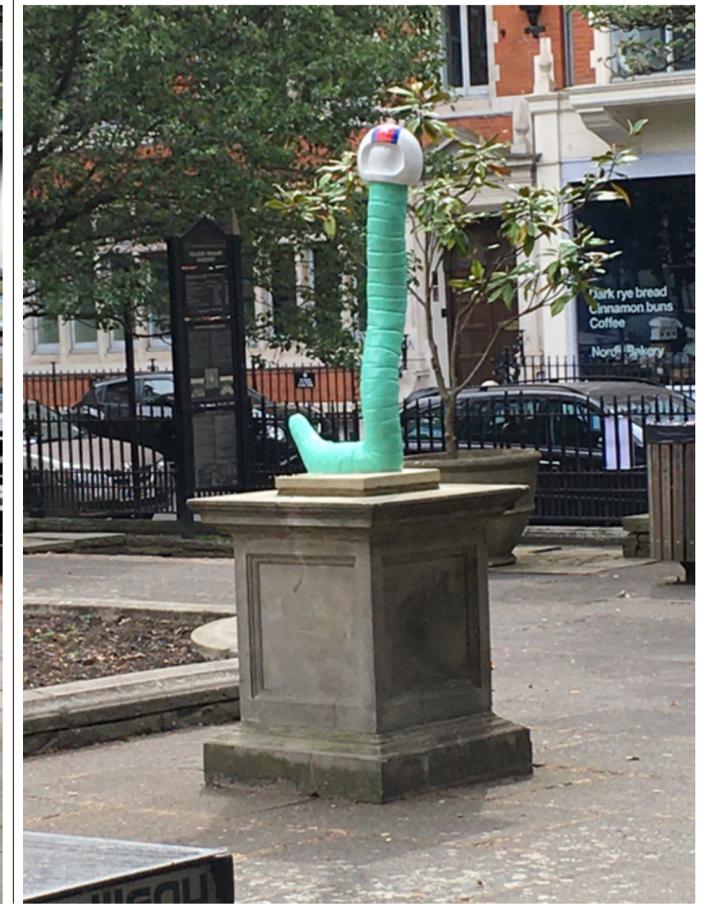
## Is there something that you really want people to get out of your artwork?

**O:** I'm trying to play on ambiguity and uncertainty. So sometimes you can't really get the meaning straight away. With Covid we all suddenly became quite aware that the certainty you have in your life can just shift completely. But that was something I was exploring before in my practice and lockdown reinforced everyone's sense of uncertainty and ambiguity. If I want people to get one message from our work, it's that if you're not too sure what it is, just use your imagination to make the meaning.

**M:** I think that's really important too. I have some work currently showing at the Bethlehem

Museum of the Mind, which is based inside in a mental health schizophrenia hospital. It's called 'The Rules are in your Head' that's to do with colour and beauty. I looked into order and minimalism a lot, and when you see order everyday it actually affects your behaviour. For example in that Fish Island architecture, you see order, squares, rectangles. That affects us when we then see non-order and chaos. I think the attraction in Hackney Wick is the warehouses and the graffiti. It's chaotic and we all need chaos. We want everyone to interact and smile with our work. I hate when people say you can't touch a sculpture, because my sense of touch might be stronger than my eyes. Our public spaces have become ridiculously serious, but why? It doesn't need to be like that. When you lighten up the public space, you'll find that people are happier.

Find out more about DollyOlli at [dollyolli.com](http://dollyolli.com). You can see their latest public art sculpture 'Lockdown' now on display in Westminster's Golden Square



From illegal-squat raves and graffiti to repurposed derelict buildings, Hackney Wick's history is written on its streets. And while the near weekly-opening of new businesses, coupled with the hordes of 'tourists' might appear to bring a sanitisation of the area, one local organisation is hoping to steer the neighbourhood towards a new unique future.

The Hackney Wick and Fish Island Community Development Trust (CDT), an organisation originally set up in 2017 by four local social enterprise businesses, was recently successful in the first round of the Greater London Authority's High Street for All Challenge. The scheme secures funds to design an innovative high street, awarding £20,000 to present a full bid in November.

This formerly industrial district has never had a traditional high street, and the CDT is embracing that in its designs; the vision connects a corridor of existing businesses, creating a new 'circular



high street' with a focus on the existing yards. In this sense, the CDT hopes that the model will serve as an innovative example for the UK.

Paul Reynolds, Director of the CDT and Tapestry, the firm tasked with the design explains that Hackney Wick is particularly well placed to deliver a 21st century high street. "Nationally we're seeing a shift away from high streets being about product consumption and it's more about experience." Reynolds, who is on the UK High Streets task force, adds that this trend "actually kind of suits Hackney Wick, the kind of place it is and why it's always been here." He adds that the trend towards pop-up markets, which are common here, is especially good for including young people due to their informal nature and low barriers to entry.

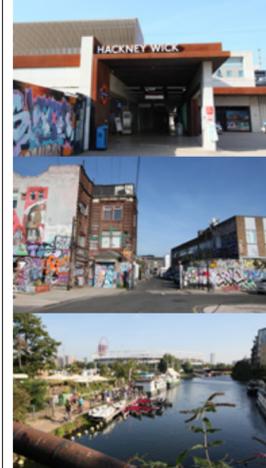
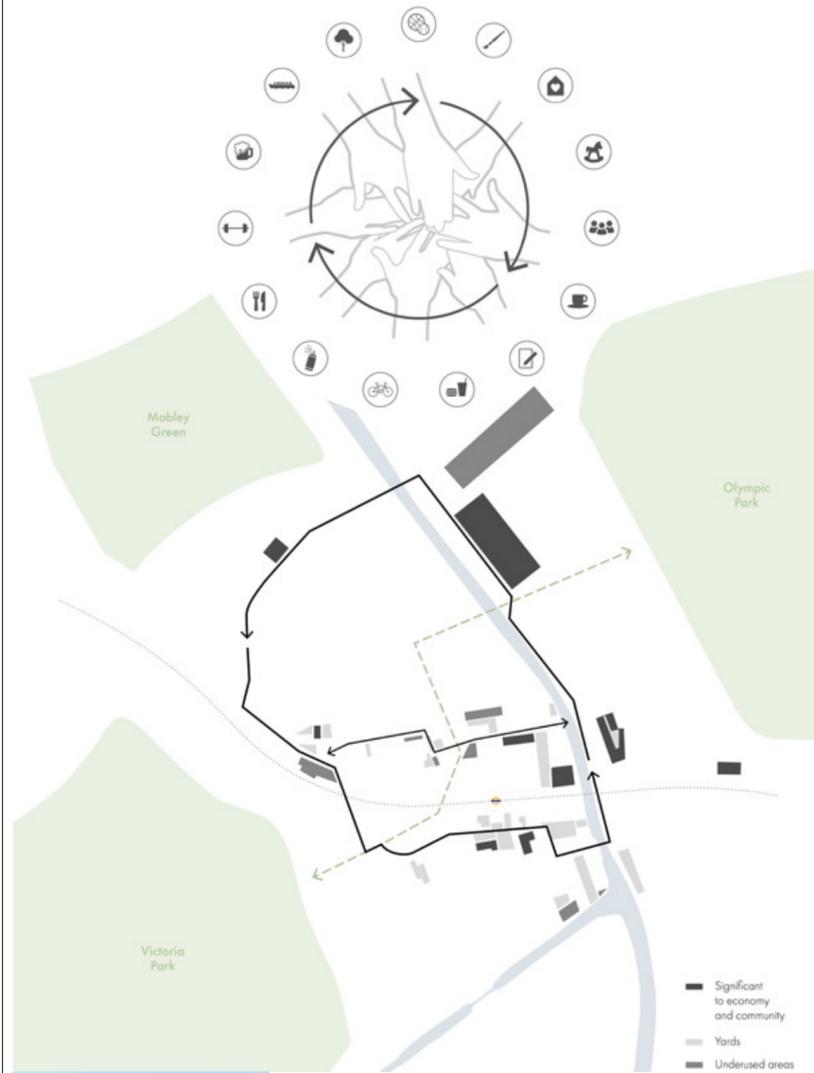
In many ways, the physical high street is a metaphor for a larger process of integrating the various communities within Hackney Wick and Fish Island, including warehouse-creatives, new-build residents, Trowbridge Estate residents and other groups; the CDT is using much of the £20,000 to fund youth engagement.

Beyond that, the CDT hopes that the high street will be a step towards making Hackney Wick a hub for sustainability (see p.6). Alex Russell, executive chair of the

# Reinventing the High Street

A new plan looks to transform Hackney Wick into a model for urban sustainability

Words: Martin Francisco Saps



CDT claims that sustainability can serve as a common ground for the diverse communities in the area. "We're getting people around the table who haven't sat there before," says Russell. "It's quite difficult to find any topic that everybody agrees on, but actually the concept of having a cleaner environment, less waste, that's one that everyone can get behind."

Sabinna Rachimova, who runs the local sustainable fashion brand Sabinna, agrees with Russell's focus. For her, bringing different communities together is key towards creating a local microeconomy. "This will encourage collaboration, which is a great opportunity." With UAL and the V&A opening campuses nearby, Hackney Wick is poised to be a leader in innovation in the arts and cultural worlds; Sabinna, who also lectures at the London College of Fashion and runs workshops and podcasts on circular economies, hopes the area can become an incubator for young talent, and lead a revolution in sustainability in the process. But she cautions against focusing too much on developing

businesses and institutions at the expense of local residents. "We do need to talk about negative gentrification when we talk about new economic developments," she warns.

New residential developments, which Reynolds calls "a fairly standard product", do not necessarily contribute to the area's economic inclusivity, character, or environmental sustainability. "These new flats with 99-year leaseholds are designed to decay within or just after they reach that point. They will forever be what they are and cannot be creative spaces," says Tom Fletcher, of Fish Island-based Rejuce (see also p.6).

It's Hackney Wick's warehouse community, which has been here for over two decades, that has breathed new life into formerly industrial spaces. In addition, shared living allows for resource sharing and bundles the fixed costs associated with conventional 3-4 bedroom houses.

Hackney Wick has never been a traditional place, and so has never had anything resembling a traditional high street. What it has had, however, is a unique and thriving arts scene which has challenged many of the



orthodoxies around the economy and sustainability. Through the sea of new markets now occurring in the Wick, residents are finding ways to sell their crafts without the high barriers to entry of traditional retail space. At a time when the classic high street model seems increasingly obsolete, this area stands well-poised to deliver a strong vision of the retail future. But in order to deliver a truly unique and innovative high street, the CDT must not lose sight of its roots; it must foster and harness the grassroots creative potential of the area's communities; the DIY culture which has made Hackney Wick so attractive in the first place.

*The Hackney Wick Community Development Trust would like to hear from young people who care about the future of the area and would like to join a group that will be paid to lead public engagement and shape the project. They are also keen to speak to businesses and organisations working on environmental sustainability and circular economy who would be keen to share their learning and understanding. Alex Russell can be contacted at alex@wickcdt.org*

Above: map of the proposed circular high street



## Wick First

Invitation to our online and public consultation events

Notting Hill Genesis, one of London's largest Housing Associations, will be holding three public consultation events to present proposals for three sites around Hackney Wick station, known as 'Wick First'.

These proposals will deliver new affordable homes, enhanced public realm, play space and a bustling commercial and creative hub of workspaces and shops to support the local community.



Overview of the Wick First sites

Come to our online or in-person public exhibition

We will be holding one online webinar and two in-person public consultation events so that you can hear about the proposals and have your questions answered by the project team.

Online webinar

Tuesday 21 September, 6-7.30pm

For details of how to register for the session please visit [www.wickfirst.co.uk](http://www.wickfirst.co.uk)

Public exhibitions

Saturday 18 September, 1pm-5pm

Hub 67 community centre, 67 Rothbury Road, Hackney Wick, E9 5HA

Wednesday 22 September, 3pm-7pm

Trowbridge Senior Citizens Club, Inglesham Walk, E9 5HN

Get in touch

Visit [www.wickfirst.co.uk](http://www.wickfirst.co.uk)

Phone 0800 644 6040

Email [wickfirst@newmanfrancis.org](mailto:wickfirst@newmanfrancis.org)

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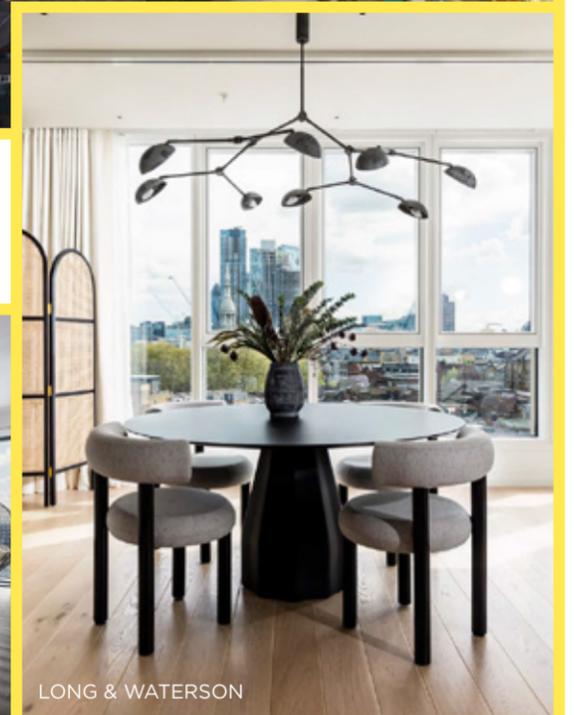
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