



ENGLAND

AS TOLD TO NICOLE SOLIS
 PORTRAIT BY STEPHEN McLAREN
 CITY PHOTOS BY GRAHAM MARKS
 MAP BY BROWN BIRD DESIGN



“East London is a source of tension and wonder.”

NAME: Sophie Howarth **AGE:** 34

NEIGHBORHOOD: East London (aka the East End) **LIVED HERE SINCE:** 1999

OCCUPATION: Founder and director of the School of Life (theschooloflife.com), which she describes as “an apothecary for the mind.” The school offers courses in Love, Work, Play, Family, and Politics, as well as Sunday “sermons” on pessimism, punctuality, curiosity, and other topics delivered by the likes of writers Alain de Botton and Geoff Dyer.

I LIVE JUST BEHIND COLUMBIA ROAD in East London, which, if you’re going to be glamorous about it, you call Shoreditch. I moved there because I loved the community and the simple domestic Victorian architecture. Now my brother, sister, and mum have all moved in within a few streets, so we have a real sense of family there. You can walk through my back garden to visit my sister’s back garden.

East London is full of contradiction—a source of tension and wonder. London’s financial center, the City, is possibly the richest square mile in the world; it butts up against a part of the East End that has a level of poverty we should be ashamed of today.

This was where waves of immigration came through in the 17th century. There are a lot of

people here in their 20s, 30s, and 40s, as well as families that have been here for generations.

In a really good way, East London is in flux. This area is en route to where the Olympics are happening in 2012, so transport links are getting better, things are smartening up. The house that I live in was declared uninhabitable in the ’70s, but my street is one of the most coveted places now.

My house is mainly filled up with odd finds from the shops on Columbia Road. I always find funny old pictures that are out of fashion. It’s like art—though you’d hardly call it that now. My favorite shop on Columbia Road is **Vintage Heaven** 1 [82 Columbia Rd.]. If you wander through to the back, you’ll find Cakehole, a little café where the walls are packed

with inexpensive art, and cakes are served on an assortment of 1950s china.

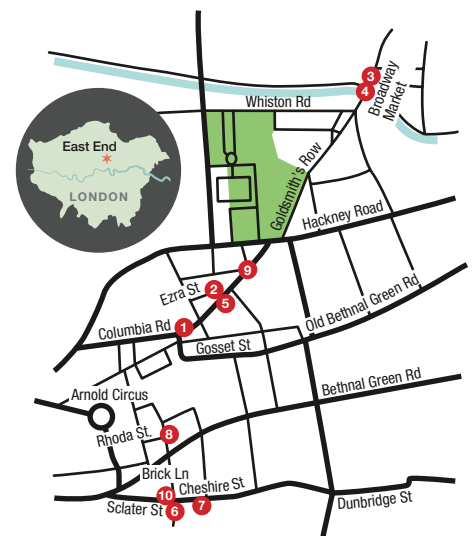
The East End is a great place to do street photography. It’s got such an eclectic mix of people and such a strong history of photography, like bits of Manhattan.

Sunday Shoots 2 [7 Ezra St., sundayshoots.com], near Columbia Road, is a kind of pop-up photography studio. Every Sunday morning, Seamus Ryan picks a theme—like “film noir” or “windswept”—and people come and get their portraits taken for free. Then he puts the pictures up on his Web site the next day.

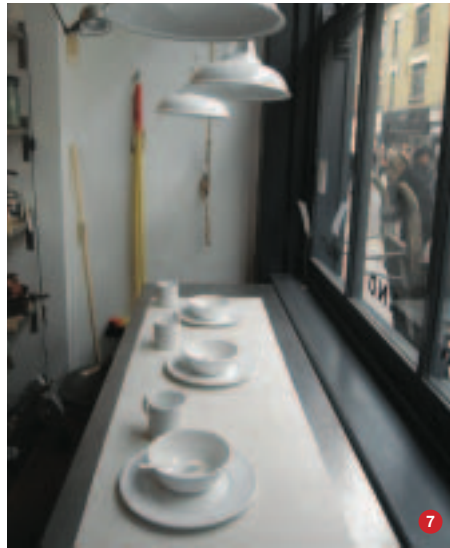
But it’s the markets that really make East London. There are three fantastic markets within three minutes of where I live. Columbia Road is London’s main flower market. On Sundays, it’s totally filled with flowers. It’s an amazing place.

Brick Lane Market has everything from bric-a-brac to high-end design. **Broadway Market** 3 [Broadway between London Fields and Regent’s Canal] is a lovely foodie market every Saturday. I always head to the far end by London Fields, where a stall sells mushrooms on toast. Five or six amazing varieties of mushrooms—some only for the brave—are fried up in front of your eyes with fresh parsley and garlic. The smell haunts the whole market.

Lots of people don’t know that there’s a canal, **Regent’s Canal** 4, that winds through the middle of London. Hire a bike at Broadway Market, and you can carry on down the canal to Olympic Park. I want to get everyone rambling around London on back roads on bikes. **A**



MORE ON THE EAST END: East, a festival held every March, celebrates the creative side of East London with 300 events featuring performance, art, history, fashion, design, film, and food. Artists Gilbert and George have their studio in the Spitalfields area of East London.



5. ROYAL OAK PUB

“There’s a lovely little courtyard behind the Royal Oak. On a Sunday morning, you can get coffee from the pub, tucked away from the flower market.”

73 Columbia Rd.
44/(0) 20-7729-2220
royaloaklondon.com

6. BRICK LANE RESTAURANTS

“There are Somali and Bangladeshi communities in the East End, so there’s a strong element of that. Brick Lane is the curry center of London.”

Brick Lane, south of Cheshire Street
visitbricklane.com

7. LABOUR AND WAIT

“There’s a lovely street called Cheshire Street. Labour and Wait sells old-fashioned homewares: twine and string and gardening tools and glasses, all beautifully laid out like a ’50s housewares store.”

18 Cheshire St.
44/(0) 20-7729-6253
labourandwait.co.uk

8. UNTO THIS LAST

“Unto This Last, named after a John Ruskin book on craftsmanship, is a micro-factory where they make all the furniture—sideboards, tables, etc.—right in front of you.”

230 Brick Ln.
44/(0) 20-7613-0882
www.untothislust.co.uk

9. COLUMBIA ROAD FLOWER MARKET

Columbia Road
Sundays, 8 a.m.-3 p.m.
columbiaroad.info

10. BRICK LANE MARKET

Brick Lane between Bethnal Green Road and Wentworth Street
Sundays, 8 a.m.-3 p.m.