

# City Shapers London

The creative people  
changing the city

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“A city isn’t so unlike a person. They both have the marks to show they have many stories to tell. They see many faces. They tear things down and make new again.”

—Rasmenia Massoud, author of *Broken Abroad*

A city is shaped by the people who live in it. It's they who create a city's culture and give it its unique flavour, moulded by their needs, interactions, habits and ambitions.

A city is nothing without its communities of people who work every day to make the city more liveable, more inclusive and, essentially, more interesting. A city isn't just a reflection of the tastes of a distinct few, at the top of its proverbial pyramid, but rather a mirror of all its inhabitants, their distinct backgrounds, interests and skills. In the words of author Jane Jacobs, "cities have the capability of providing something for everybody, only because, and only when, they are created by everybody."

The ever-evolving shaping of a city is born out of necessity and desire: the constant need for change to accommodate new ideas, technologies and people, and the thirst for making things better. Without the people who are willing to put their all on the line, without the bravery to reinvent what's already there and think up completely new things, a city is just a collection of buildings, parks and rivers, with roads in between that connect them.

*City Shapers London* is a discovery of the people who are shaping one of the world's most dynamic and taste-making cities in the world. The people in this book are the ones who are imaginative enough to be turning London into an inspiring playground for others to play, experiment and relish in. Their innovations and *modi operandi* are changing how Londoners drink, eat, dress, work, enjoy art and are entertained.

These City Shapers are not an exclusive list of people, of course. Rather, they are a sample of the incredible and generous minds that make this city what it is and what makes other cities around the world look to it. In choosing these creatives and entrepreneurs, one criterion was key: to pick people with a true vision of how to do things differently, to change things for the better. This book celebrates those who had the guts and vision to try something new, in the belief that the city would be better for it.

London is hailed by many as one of the most diverse and inclusive cities in the world. While this is something to be proud of, it's clear that a lot of work is still ahead to ensure everyone has an equal place and voice in this sprawling metropolis. But things are changing, and people of all ages, colours, gender or sexual identities, and belief systems are increasingly carving out places that reflect them.

This book celebrates them: the game changers, the change makers, the boundary breakers, the brave, the crazy ... those who make London one of the most creative cities in the world.



# Liv Little

gal-dem

Bringing  
under-  
represented  
voices to  
mainstream  
media





For the past three years, Liv Little has been introducing a new voice to mainstream journalism. With *gal-dem*, the online and printed magazine created by women and non-binary people of colour, Liv and her expansive network of contributors add an often underrepresented point of view to the world of publishing, discussing anything from politics, finance, business and mental health to dating, family, entertainment and fashion.

**“It’s not just about who you see presented in media; it’s about who is in control of who you see.”**

Their content spans topics from ‘Navigating dating as a Muslim gal: lies, alibis and imposter syndrome’, ‘Porn and the racial pay gap’ and ‘Afro hair: why all the fuss?’, to ‘A prince visits Africa: white conservation, colonial conversations’, an article that followed on the heels of the Duke of Wellington’s (aka Prince William’s) visit to Tanzania. The *gal-dem* team has interviewed the likes of media mogul Oprah, actor Lupita Nyong’o and Reni Eddo-Lodge, the author of *Why I’m No Longer Talking To White People About Race*, attracting the attention of readers far beyond

UK borders. Today, 50% of its reader base is in the UK, 23% in the US (where *gal-dem* organises regular events) as well as in Canada, Australia, India and France.

“The concept of *gal-dem* isn’t mindblowing. The difference between me and everyone else who has had this idea is that I found people who just went ‘Yeah, let’s go.’” While studying politics and sociology at Bristol University, Liv, who is of mixed Jamaican and Guyanese background, was desperate to connect with other women of colour. “I didn’t see anyone who looked like me there and definitely didn’t see different types of people reflected in the curriculum.” She started posting on messaging boards and Facebook to try to connect with others who felt similarly. Her efforts led to her connecting with the like-minded souls she so needed, including Leyla Reynolds. They met in a feminism class and bonded over a joint frustration with the fact that the class was taught by a white man. Another was Antonia Odunlami, now a founding member of *gal-dem*. The three of them started prototyping what a *gal-dem* site could look like. “The name came easily—it’s what I’ve always called my group of girls. Initially, we just shared existing content that resonated with us. The original content came a bit later.”

At one of *gal-dem*’s first-ever meetups, Liv met Charlie Brinkhurst-Cuff, now the magazine’s deputy editor as well as a regular contributor to *The Guardian* and author of *Mother Country: Real Stories of the Windrush Children*, a book about the generation of people who came over to Britain from the Caribbean after WWII. “We all have second and third jobs here,” Liv explains. She herself wears different hats: as executive producer for BBC’s factual commissioning team, she works with the digital team to create original, factual, digital content for younger audiences, and she is also a contributing editor for *Elle*, *The Guardian* and *Wonderland*.

Once a year, *gal-dem* publishes its printed magazine. The first issue came out in 2016 and focused on the notion of ‘galhood’ and growing up. The second talked about home as identity and the third delved into the theme of secrets. For the latter, *gal-dem* worked exclusively with





beauty brand Glossier to produce an eight-page advertising spread featuring five black women with luscious afros, accompanied by the specially created tagline ‘That’s why her hair is so big, it’s full of secrets.’ At £10 per issue, the physical magazine is affordable enough to reach its desired audience, but expensive enough to feel like a collectible. A relic of a moment in time.

*gal-dem* has collected a stew of accolades, including the Comment Awards’ Site of the Year, an Honour for Media from the *Gay Times*, and a Georgina Henry Award for the recognition and promotion of female talent in journalism. “That was a special one for us, because it’s basically the BAFTAs of the press world. Awards don’t mean too much to us personally, but they are important for how others perceive you.”

In August 2018, *gal-dem* reached a new audience with the takeover of *The Guardian* newspaper’s weekend magazine. The *gal-dem* team generated ideas for the articles and commissioned writers, illustrators, photographers and stylists. The issue was exclusively created by—and only featured—women and non-binary people of colour, with actor Michaela Coel gracing the cover (shot by Rosaline Shahnavaz, see p.209) and contributions by vlogger Dina Tokio, author Chidera Eggerue and politician Diana Abbott. It received a huge response from social media, including tweeted photos from the ‘Hamilton the Musical’ cast of themselves reading the issue in their dressing rooms. It was a great success for *The Guardian*, resulting in more requests for back copies than they had seen in years and the first time they sold standalone copies. The magazine sold 7,000 more issues that weekend than on any other given weekend. “If that doesn’t prove that there’s money to be made from giving voice to people of colour, I don’t know what does. When people see themselves represented, they invest,” Liv points out.

The collaboration between the two publications started as a conversation between its deputy editors: Charlie from *gal-dem* and Ruth Lewy from the newspaper. It was six months in the making. In an article on *The Guardian* website, Melissa Denes, the editor of *Guardian Weekend*

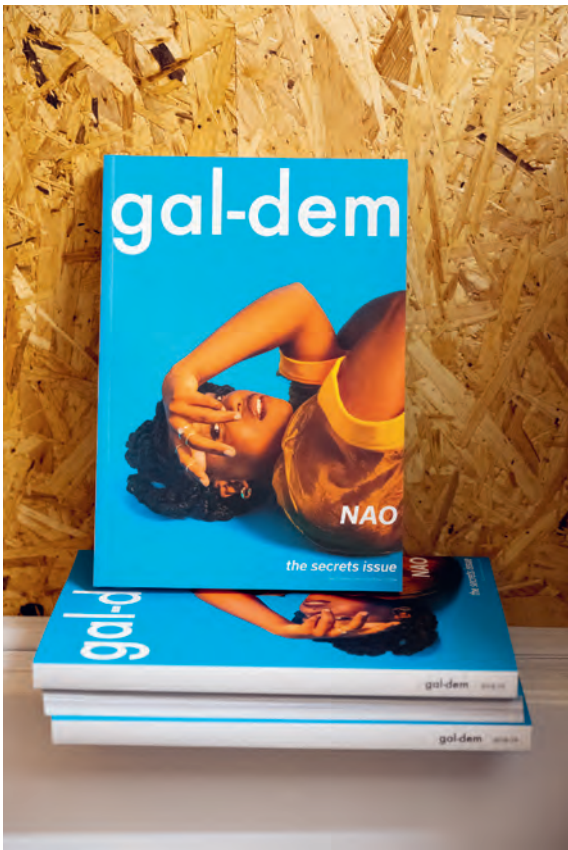
**“There’s money to be made from giving voice to people of colour. When people see themselves represented, they invest.”**

*Magazine*, describes what the newspaper learned from the experience: “We could do much better when it comes to commissioning writers and creatives of colour—not just because we want to better reflect our readership and the people that don’t read us yet, to produce a richer magazine, but because there is so much talent out there. This was a strong reminder that it’s a megaphone and it matters who you give it to.”

These days, aside from producing the online and printed magazine, *gal-dem*’s business model allows the team to tap into other skill sets: providing marketing insight and content to brands such as Nike and Ace&Tate, who are keen to reach a different, younger or more diverse audience, and programming events at established cultural venues, including The British Film Institute, Barbican, Victoria&Albert Museum and the Tate.

To coincide with Penguin Random House’s release of Michelle Obama’s book *Becoming* in late 2018, *gal-dem* launched a pop-up bookstore with books written exclusively by women and non-binary people of colour. The temporary structure also hosted a variety of events, including a panel discussion on black motherhood, workshops on mental health and confidence, and an exhibition of photographs from Obama’s life. The proceeds were donated to the Black Cultural Archives, the UK’s only repository of black history.







Editors Letter  
**LIV LITTLE & CHARLIE BRINGHURST-CUFF**

Secrets can be fun, necessary, toxic or a delicious combination. We wanted to use this special issue, featuring our two incredible cover stars, Ravena and Naia, to explore every meaning of the word. Each year, we tackle a theme which feels pertinent to the time that we are living in and as women and non-binary people of colour living in a world which is increasingly fractured, it felt timely to explore some of the things we want to say but don't always feel able to. In 2018, everything for gal-dem hit roller coaster speed. Less than three years after launching we've taken over the Guardian Weekend magazine, started working on a book project with Walker and showcased a Windrush Women exhibition at City Hall. At times it feels hard to keep up, but in the midst of it all, we don't want to keep quiet about our achievements, 2018 has been a year where women and non-binary people of colour have shaken the world. For this, print issue, gal-dem's editors have done an incredible job of curating personal content that speaks to our guilty pleasures, the stories of immigration our parents and grandparents don't always share and the anonymous letters that we have struggled to send or say aloud. Our features include the secret lives of beekeepers, repair work poet Gemfied, a look into the perceived sexuality of women in the music industry, the hidden histories of stolen art in UK galleries (inspired by Black Panther), and interviews with Fatima, Paloma Ebesser and Travis Alabanza.

We really hope that you enjoy this third iteration of our print and find a little something in it which speaks to you directly. A huge thank you to Glossier, who are the sole advertisers within this issue. It has been a pleasure working with you to produce an Afrocentric editorial based on our favourite Mean Girls quote: "That's why her hair is so big, it's full of secrets".

Lots of love,

*Liv x Charlie*



## “London is rich in diversity but poor in diversity of thought.”

For Tate Modern’s Late nights with UNIQLO, *gal-dem* programmed the music and visuals, focusing on black suffragette Ida B. Wells. In its 2017 takeover of the V&A, *gal-dem* commissioned 100 women of colour to produce elements and activities for the museum’s huge space, ranging from Bollywood dance workshops and a night of Caribbean cinema to anime sketching classes.

“It was quite profound: we knew that what we were doing was resonating with people because of the messages we were getting and the amount of people reading our online content. But when you see 5,000 people queuing around the block for the V&A, it really brings it home. These were people who might have never felt comfortable coming to the museum before, supporting artists who had previously been absent from these spaces.”

This is, in essence, what Liv is doing: giving space to people who have previously been denied, ignored, left out or repelled from, mainstream spaces. For example, even though over 30% of Londoners are people of colour, a Reuters study from 2016 painted a disheartening picture of UK newsrooms, finding them to be 94% white. It found that only 2.5% of British journalists are Asian and 0.2% are black.

“It’s not just about who you see presented in media; it’s about who is in control of who you see. Equally, it’s not just about hiring more diverse talent; it’s also about how to retain them. In TV there are certain rules about diversity needed in the makeup of the crews, and journalism could do with similar guidelines. Because despite the fact that London is rich in diversity, it’s poor in diversity of thought.”







How to get stuff done in London:

You need to surround yourself with people who understand what you need done. You need a community.

What makes a Londoner?

We're all a little neurotic and we're always in a rush.

London in a nutshell:

London is changing all the time.





# Morag Myerscough

Studio Myerscough, Supergrouplondon

Bringing colour  
and community  
to London  
through design







“I make work that belongs to people and where people belong; work that lives in the public domain and that builds community.”

Morag Myerscough’s signature colourful, type-heavy design can be found all over the city and beyond, creating temporary and permanent spaces for exploration and interaction—and they bring colour to an otherwise rather grey city. “I’m a real Londoner and have lived here all my life. The work I create is a direct response to London’s urban environment. I just love the juxtaposition of brutalism and colour.”

Morag inherited her love of colour from her mother, who was a textile artist. “She used to dye her textiles with things like elderberries and let me help and experiment with colour. When I was studying, everyone was obsessed with yellow, red and black and I thought to myself that there had to be other colours to work with.” She certainly found them. Her work is instantly recognisable for its oranges, pinks, blues, greens and neons. “It’s not always easy to sell people on colour. Brits feel that colour isn’t as sophisticated as more monochrome choices. Then when you go to India, for example, people feel that colour belongs to the lower classes. But I think colour is joy and everyone needs joy in their life.”

Joy was exactly what she brought to the city in 2017, in a collaboration with Luke Morgan around the Barbican Centre and in the Smithfield Rotunda Garden for the London Design Festival. *Joy & Peace* was a temporary installation in two parts and a response to the bleakness that Londoners often face. “It’s easy to get bogged down with the recent spells of violence, terrorism and knife attacks. I want to bring a burst of positivity to the city.”

Joy was also a theme in her work with Sheffield’s Children’s Hospital, for which she designed 46 en-suite bedrooms and six multi-occupancy suites for a new wing of the hospital, with the aim of making the hospital feel more homely. She made sure the designs worked for different age groups and created a space that parents would feel happy in, too. Some of the rooms needed a paler colour palette for children with

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autism or an intolerance to bright colours. The hospital’s strict clinical regulations meant Morag made everything in plastic laminate. To achieve the desired, friendly wood effect, she scanned wood grain and added patterns to it digitally, after which it was printed onto paper and laminated.

Morag creates a lot of her designs with the help of the community through running workshops with schools or community groups. One such group was Dalston’s Art Kickers, who asked for her help in designing a stage at the back of Dalston’s Curve Garden. She ran a patterns workshop with locals that she then incorporated into her final designs. “Pattern workshops are a good method because they aren’t reliant on language. Anyone can get stuck in. It’s a way to involve the community in a project. And it worked with the stage: now it just belongs to the local community. During Halloween they made it into a huge pumpkin display. I just love that it lives on, constantly changes and is a space that makes people feel that they belong to it.”

Belonging is an important part of everything Morag does, and is also the name of a piece she created on commission for the Brighton Festival and Ditchling Museum of Art + Craft in 2018. It celebrated 1960s Los Angeles artist Corita Kent whose work tackled social issues, such as poverty and racism, in a style reminiscent of demonstration aesthetics. *Belonging* consisted of a take-over of the museum’s Wunderkammer as well as a mobile bandstand that travelled to eight locations around the country. “One of which was a council estate. It drew hordes of people because it was













outside and was another sign that design really has the power to bring people together.”

Her work on the café and bar of architect David Adjaye’s Bernie Grant Arts Centre brings the creatives that the centre attracts closer to its visitors by taking their working processes right into the heart of the building. For many of them, their work is only visible occasionally, during exhibitions or seasonal shows. Morag created spaces for artists to add their own additional layers and textures as part of a planned commissioning programme spanning a couple of years. “I want to bring out the potential of what was already there and celebrate it with the people running and visiting the centre.”

For a designer who has worked so prolifically, her journey has not always been an easy one. “When I studied at the Royal College, I was continually told that I would never find a job.” She set up Studio Myerscough in 1993 with the aim of it being a multidisciplinary studio, initially producing numerous exhibition designs. Almost a decade later, she opened Her House, a gallery for artists who could not find space elsewhere and a shop that allowed her to sell her designs. In 2010, she founded Supergrouplondon with Luke Morgan, which collaborates with artists and architects.

Her contribution to British design won her a commission from the Design Museum to design its first permanent exhibition, *Designer Maker User*. The exhibition examines the development

**“I approach a lot of my work from instinct, but instinct is formed by years of experience.”**

of modern design through the lens of these three actors and includes around 1,000 items across different disciplines, from digital and graphic art to fashion, architecture and engineering. “The Design Museum was transitioning and I went through that transition with them.” Morag beat a lot of other well-established names in the industry to win the tender. “The Design Museum’s architectural designer, John Pawson, is famed for being quite minimalist and so he and I had quite a different aesthetic. I think I was chosen for that reason—there’s strength in difference. It felt like a project where I could bring together my many decades of experience. I feel that I approach a lot of my work from instinct, but that instinct is formed by years of experience.”

Morag’s work takes her to many countries around the world, and she undertakes about one London project a year. “The London audience is the hardest audience. They’ve travelled the world, have seen it all and are so in tune with everything that’s happening. You might be huge in Scotland but then you move down to London and you’re a tiny fish in a huge pond. There’s so much competition here and also so much potential. The 2012 Olympics woke London up and changed the local councils’ perception of art structures in public spaces, and that’s so exciting to me.” Despite the fact that she thinks about leaving the city from time to time, she says she probably never will. “Every time I think about it, I panic.”

She feels empowered by mayor Sadiq Khan’s commitment to championing design in the city. His *Manifesto for all Londoners* reads: “As Londoners, we are lucky enough to have access to some of the world’s best public spaces and world-famous streets and squares, but too many are blighted with poor design, clutter, congestion and pollution. I will work with communities, boroughs and the private sector to improve our public spaces and create more liveable streets and spaces.”

Morag adds: “That’s a mission that’s close to my heart. I want to bring people together around joyful spaces and then leave it to the community to own, change and inhabit, to create a sense of belonging, which Londoners so very much need.”



How to get stuff done in London:

You have to be proactive and open to collaboration. And if you have a more quiet nature, you need to get an agent to do the pushing for you.

What makes a Londoner?

A liberal mindset, bravery and acceptant nature. You experience so many complex situations here on a daily basis that teach you just to get on with it.

London in a nutshell:

It's not a city for wilting violets.