

The Quarterly review. New in the Northern Quarter.



The Northern Quarter remains a one-stop shop for all things creative, finds Creative Tourist's Sarah-Clare Conlon. Read the insider's guide to Manchester at www.creativetourist.com

When the iconic Afflecks Palace opened its doors back in 1982, Manchester's Northern Quarter signalled its intention to become the spiritual home of all things creative. Over the years it has become just that, largely thanks to the eclectic mix of independent Manchester bars, galleries and eateries that have mushroomed up all over the Oldham Street/Thomas Street crossroads – including leftfield institutions such as Matt & Phred's or the winningly old-fashioned Market Restaurant. Cultural hangouts in the

'Quarter haven't been far behind – think about the jewellery-box sweetness of the Craft Centre, or the Chinese Arts Centre (whose current show, by Stanley Wong, heralds a return to form for this Manchester gallery). And so, as the Northern Quarter sticks two fingers up to the recession by continuing to add to the number of venues that populate its narrow streets, here's our latest walk through Manchester's own vintage-and-vinyl paradise.

ART



Richard Goodall is a long-term resident, purveying prints and posters from Thomas Street for 10 years, with a second space opening round the corner on High Street in 2007, and described by the gallery's Mark Powell as being "more like White Cube". Recent shows here have included John Lennon doodles and the Marie Antoinette-meets-Borg

Queen digital paintings of Ray Caesar. On the eastern edge of the Quarter is Bureau, a small gallery that recently relocated from Salford's Islington Mill, while those of an adventurous disposition (or at least don't mind wandering round the back streets with a map) should head to Kraak, an art space that's shoved up a back alley behind the Hula Tiki Lounge on Stevenson Square. With a focus on found sound, video and installations, the gallery - open only a few months - also hosts performances and workshops. Along from here, on the other side of Oldham Street, is new art gallery-cum-coffee shop Grindsmith, where Peter Carrington's technical drawings of flora and fauna will become the third of the gallery's monthly changing exhibitions. You can also buy work by Neil Grindsmith, secondhand Penguin Classics (Creative Tourist got a lovely dog-eared copy of Aldous Huxley's *After Many A Summer*) and a crisp cup of elaborately siphoned single-origin filter coffee.

FOOD



All that caffeine put cake next on the list, and although Teacup serves up a tasty slab or two, we were after

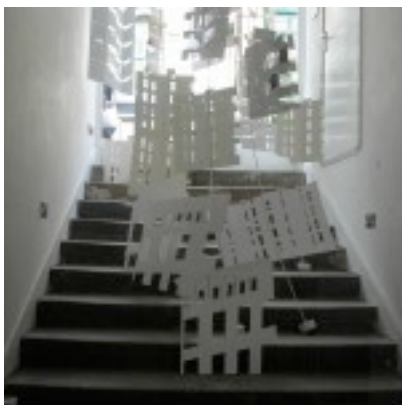
something more fairy-like. Despite the eagerly awaited second branch of Sweet Tooth Cupcakery landing on Oldham Street, we took Ben Grindsmith's advice and headed for The Cocoa Emporium in Afflecks, where offerings include the fantastically named Terry (a chocolate and orange number) and a gorgeous concoction called Ginger Crunch. More substantial grub can be had at Bulb, a "stylish Italian eatery" in The Light ApartHotel, where an express lunch menu offers pizza or pasta for £6, while new opening Thomas Restaurant & Bar does two courses for £11.95 (Midday-6pm), and a Sunday roast for a fantastic £8.95. With the owners of Cord, The Bay Horse and Soup Kitchen as its parents, Thomas is blessed with good genes and looks, and positive reviews are coming in thick and fast.

DRINKS



If it's drinks you're after, Common on Edge Street has a well-stocked bar, free Wifi, nice staff and a Wednesday-night quiz (Common Knowledge), and its popularity has recently seen it double in size with the Kestrel Suite extension. There's a gaggle of drinking holes where Edge, High and Thomas Street meet – from cocktail parlours such as Socio Rehab, Bluu and Apotheca (sister bar to the Dough pizzeria) to fun places like Trof, Odd and Keko Moku. Hotly anticipated, however, was the Marble Brewery's latest establishment, 57 Thomas Street. Newly open, the tiny bar is dwarfed by the slogan "beer and food – food and beer". Head brewer Dominic told us there are four stills for the organic, handmade ales, including local favourite Ginger.

AFTER HOURS



Many places have taken advantage of the later licensing laws, and the edgy graffiti-adorned NoHo on Stevenson Square rustles up cocktails until the wee small hours. Going on even longer is Black Dog Ballroom, where the boys can shoot pool for £5 an hour while the girls get the chance to hide out in the special speakeasy room when it all "falls to the gunnells", as manager Tom Sneesby explained. Just ask what time the train leaves for the code to the secret door. And finally, rounding off a Saturday-night trip to the Northern Quarter is the chance to wind down and grab a late-night snack at Nexus Art Cafe, where you can listen to musicians and play Scrabble until the sun comes up.

Sarah-Clare Conlon is a freelance writer and editor, and has worked for a number of glossy magazines, including ELLE and Nova. Her blog, Words & Fixtures, is about language, literature, arts and culture, and won Best New Blog in the 2009 Manchester Blog Awards. Images (top to bottom): Kraak, Grindsmith, Bulb, Common & Nexus Art Cafe, all Sarah-Clare Conlon except Common (courtesy Tim France).