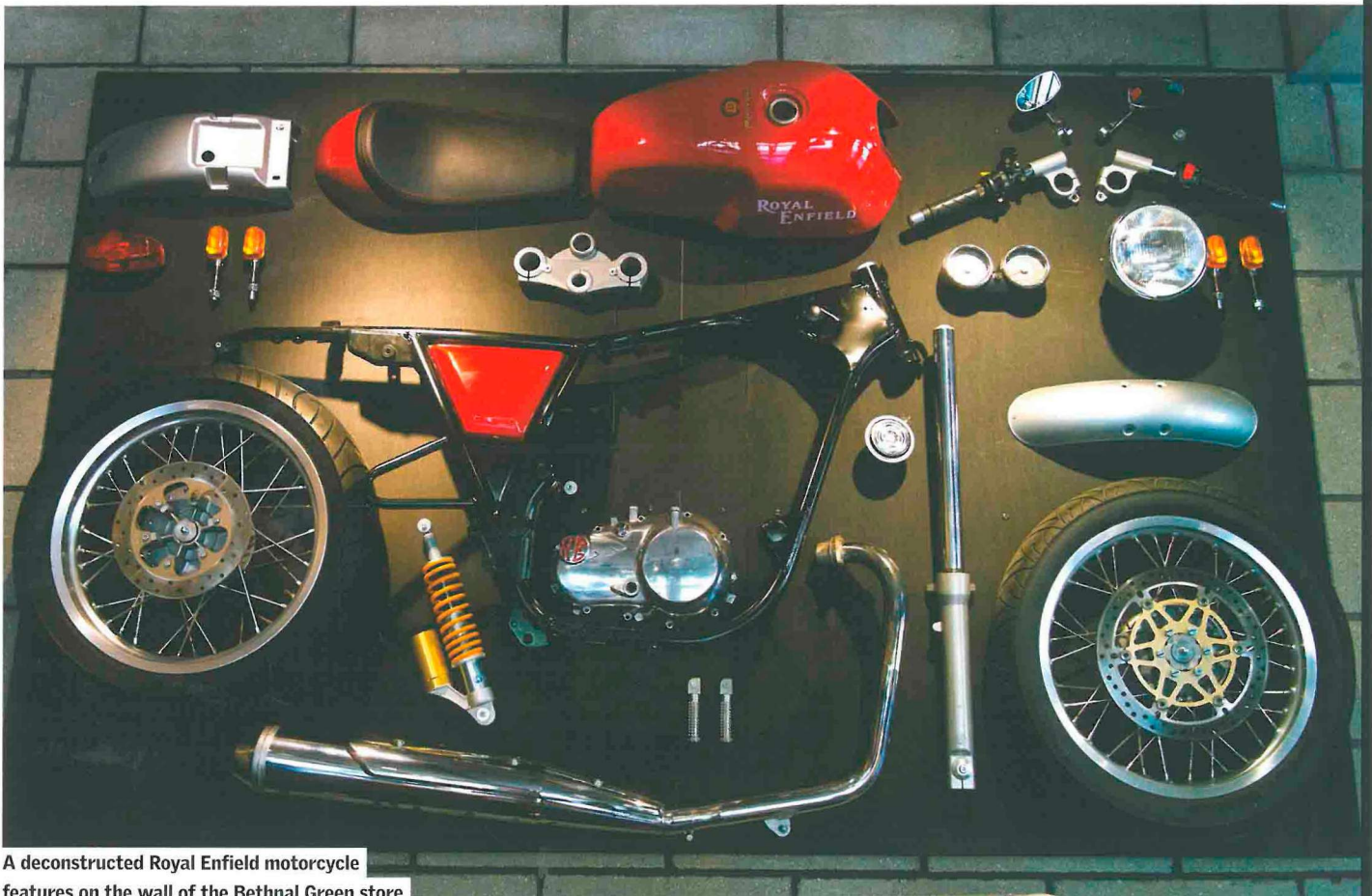


THE EMPIRE STRIKES BACK



A deconstructed Royal Enfield motorcycle features on the wall of the Bethnal Green store

Royal Enfield was sold to an Indian company in 1994. Now it is back in the UK, courtesy of a new shop in east London. John Ryan reports

A long time ago, motorcycles looked like motorcycles rather than satellite-guided cars that just happen to have two wheels. Back then, riders wore leathers, goggles and gauntlets, and there was little sense of the comfort demanded by today's riders. Names such as Triumph, BSA and Royal Enfield were icons of pioneering fun for generations; then suddenly they were gone.

Lately, however, they have made a reappearance. At the better end of the market, Triumph

ROYAL ENFIELD, POYSER STREET

Royal Enfield is a subsidiary of Chennai-based Eicher Motors

Address Poyser Street, Bethnal Green, London

Size 850 sq ft

Ambiance Motorcycle enthusiast's flat

has been rescued as a brand and its machines have been re-engineered to meet the demands of the modern rider who craves a measure of retro credibility. BSA has yet to make a return, but Royal Enfield is back and firing on its single-cylinder engines, which sets it apart from the off.

BACK IN THE GAME

But Royal Enfield never really went away. It was acquired by an Indian company in 1994 and, for a while, everything that was associated with the ▶

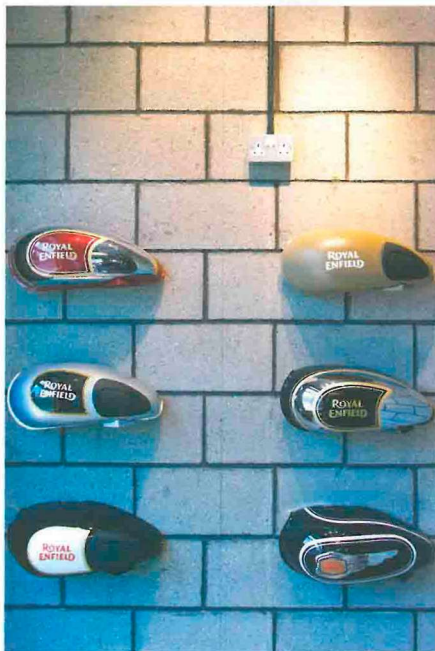


The store is designed to look like a motorcycle enthusiast's home

brand disappeared to the subcontinent, where it flourished. Royal Enfield motorbikes that look exactly the same as the machines of old have, in fact, been produced in Chennai and sold across India for the past 20 years.

Now the Empire has struck back and, last month, Royal Enfield reappeared as a brand in a standalone shop in east London. This is, in fact, not a big shop and neither is it in a particularly glamorous location – a unit underneath the arches in what might, in a previous life, have been a lock-up garage or storage space.

Look at it now and it's all glass and steel, with a jaunty Royal Enfield logo in red neon above the main window that faces out on to the busy Cambridge Heath Road. And in the window is the hardware – a shiny, spanking new Royal Enfield motorbike, looking pretty much the same as the machines that ton-up boys might have ridden in the 1970s. There is, however, rather more to this shop than just being a showroom for motorcycles.



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FEATURE WALLS

According to Royal Enfield management, this is a store that is intended to mimic the interior of a flat or house, which is home to a motorcycle enthusiast who has, in effect, brought his enthusiasm indoors. For this reason, the breeze-block walls are covered with bits of motorcycle that have been organised to function as 3D graphics.

This means that behind the cash desk there is what amounts to an exploded diagram of a Royal Enfield motorbike set against a black background. It's a very simple device, but hard to ignore, as is another wall panel that features the petrol tanks from the brand's motorcycles, arranged once more on a panel that acts as a backdrop.

Now move to the mid-shop and the use of bits of motorcycle is a feature here as well. The wooden table used as a display vehicle is illuminated by strings of motorcycle lights. There is nothing terribly clever about what has been done, but so well executed are the displays and graphics that it is hard to imagine the shop without the point of sale material.

Royal Enfield is probably a brand for a minority audience among the motorcycling fraternity, but what has been done in this store shows what is possible with a little imagination and a go-ahead management. The store is a template for others that will be opened across Europe, although specific dates and locations have yet to be confirmed. ●

