

INTIMATE TRADE —Global

Preface

When visiting a city it is rarely the streets lined with department stores or chain shops that we remember: it's the tiny retail gems that we hold dearest. As part of our style issue, we look at how small retail spaces are an entrepreneurial trigger for urban success.

While city planners and developers seem increasingly to favour retail writ large – glass-and-steel behemoths housing spaces too big for all but global brands – the case for small-footprint shops is being drowned out. But smaller spaces are perfect for entrepreneurs who may not have vast sums of capital or want to set up shop part-time. We take a look at three retail concepts giving starters a bit of room to breathe. — (M)

01 Columbia Road, London

On a bright Sunday on London's Columbia Road, the aroma of rose blossoms and freshly brewed coffee mingles with shouts from flower-stall vendors and the bustle of pedestrians strolling along the street that has hosted a market since 1869. Today it is lined with vibrant independent retailers squeezing into the smallest of spaces. Big businesses are undesired and not one chain has set up shop here.

- 01 Stationery shop Choosing Keeping
- 02 Oliver Guy sells Monmouth coffee from his shop The Odd Lot
- 03 Flower stalls line the street on Sundays
- 04 Perfumer Angela Flanders

One of the main factors keeping big businesses at bay is the road's offer of small retail spaces: measuring an average of 26 sq m, they are too small for many of the conglomerates gentrifying east London.

Oliver Guy, Columbia Road resident for 12 years, owns the smallest shop by far (it's only just broader than his shoulders). Eighteen months ago he transformed his narrow brick-walled hallway into coffee joint The Odd Lot, selling Monmouth coffee through a window hatch to help fund his freelance journalism career. "I'm never not making coffee on a Sunday," says the entrepreneur. "A lot of areas are under threat from big businesses. The East End Trades Guild [a collective of over 200 small east London traders] and community are ensuring that ours doesn't get watered down by chains."

Unlike Guy's business, which is open all week, the one-room design store Captured By adheres to the market's traditional opening hours. "It's a weekend project," says Anita Freeman, who works full-time for the National Health Service and splits her shop shifts with identical twin sister Emma. "We like the idea that the weekend retail space works here," Anita says. "It's a hobby. It's not going to make us billionaires." Nonetheless, the shop had a successful first year of trading.

While Columbia Road offers newcomers and young entrepreneurs a shot



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REPORT
Small retail spaces

at building a business, it's also a place many never want to leave. "It's a schizophrenic street; blissful during the week and a party on Sundays when the flower market's open," says artisanal perfumer Angela Flanders, who is in her eighties and first welcomed guests into her intimate wood-paneled shop-cum-home in 1985.

For Julia, who opened her stationery shop Choosing Keeping two-and-a-half years ago, these small shops are more than just businesses. "They are not born from the desire to make money," she says. "But as a way to make a living from creativity and passion for culture." — MSS

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Knez Mihailova, Belgrade

If there were an award for Capital of Kiosks, Belgrade would be a strong contender. People here prefer their shopping experience small-scale and walk-up; an open-all-hours cabin selling quotidian essentials is rarely further away than the next street corner. "My clients fight for distribution in the key kiosks around the city," says Katarina Kostic from media agency Universal Media.

Kiosks have been part of the retail mix for some time but they boomed during the chaotic 1990s, when refugees from the conflict sweeping Yugoslavia poured into Belgrade. Trading black-market goods on the street was a way to survive; by the turn of the millennium there were around 2,000 kiosks.

Many of them were never officially sanctioned and in recent years the city has been clamping down on those it considers an aesthetic blight. But this only applies to unlicensed outlets – around three in 10 of the current total – with the remainder in line for a makeover as part of the wider vision for the capital.

"The kiosk of the future looks like one from the past; it should fit in with the old town," says Milutin Folic, who has been working on a book of standards for Belgrade's street furniture since becoming city architect last year.

The tiny cluttered April flower kiosk on pedestrian boulevard Knez Mihailova is a prime example. Manager Dunja



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- 01 Captured By on Columbia Road
- 02 Flower Kiosk on Knez Mihailova, Belgrade
- 03 Aleksandar Obradovic sells comics, vinyl and books from his kiosk
- 04 April manager Dunja Beric at the flower kiosk
- 05 A friendly hello at Artesana, Los Angeles
- 06 The work of Leigh Johnson on display at Farago
- 07 LAEX's sign says it all
- 08 Vintage comics for sale at a Belgrade kiosk
- 09 Tower Theater building, on the corner of Broadway and 8th Street, downtown Los Angeles

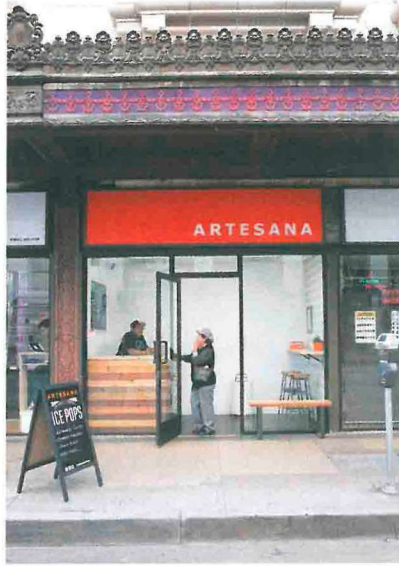
PHOTOGRAPHERS: ANDREW UPMW... INFANTIA... FANCTE... AARON... MOLACHE



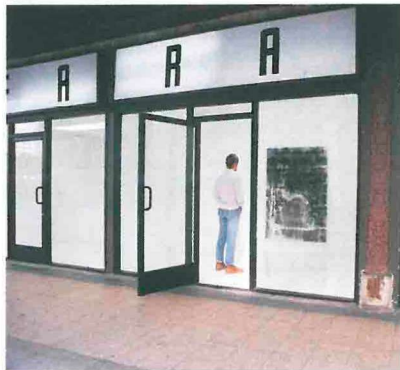
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Beric says they collaborated with the municipality on the log-cabin design, which stands out among its more prosaic neighbours. A little further along, Aleksandar Obradovic has been selling vintage vinyl and books for a decade. He believes the visual impact of the kiosk is the key to attracting customers. "I work hard to arrange the display so you can see as much as possible at a glance," he says.

The authorities have recognised that kiosks can potentially offer more than simply low-cost retail. Folic says they form part of his plans for the beautification of the capital. "You feel it in Athens or Istanbul as well. As long as it's controlled, kiosk culture contributes to the atmosphere of the city and it is good for the citizens." — GDL



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THE TINY FLAGSHIP STORE
(SIZE DOESN'T MATTER.)



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03 Tower Theater, Los Angeles

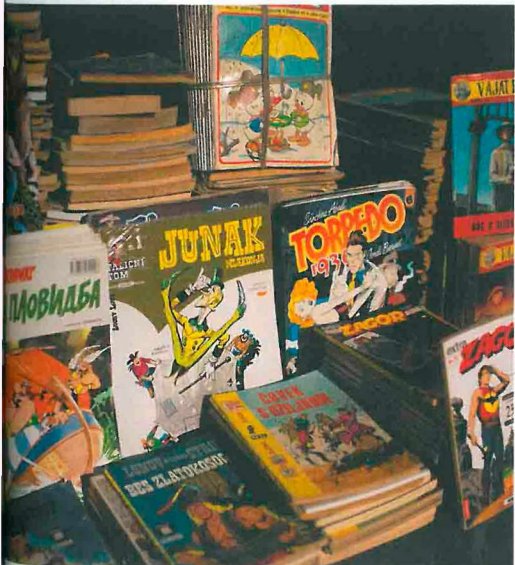
On a busy corner of downtown Los Angeles the Tower Theater rises above 8th Street as an ornate reminder of the neighbourhood's bygone golden age. Over the past few months, part of the historic cinema's ground floor has become home to a string of tiny businesses that are helping to enforce the area's independent spirit and overall rejuvenation.

Max Farago opened his namesake gallery last November. Occupying three individual units, each about 10 sq m, the gallery's narrow configuration and floor-to-ceiling windows put the art on display to anyone walking by.

Next door, Aaron Camacho and his wife Veronica run Artesana, a sliver of a shop selling handmade Mexican ice lollies. The small unit suited their limited capital while offering a bricks-and-mortar space to establish their brand. Midday queues of people waiting for *paletas* in flavours such as Vietnamese coffee and tangerine-honey regularly spill out onto the pavement.

The area has also experienced an influx of designers launching labels and shops thanks to its proximity to the Fashion District. One example is Alexandros Khater, who sells menswear and accessories from his menswear line LAEX. Khater wanted a flagship space that would represent the brand and the pint-sized boutique at the base of the theatre is expertly merchandised. "It's not my personality to go big," says Khater.

The developers behind the Tower, one of a dozen historic theatres that line Broadway, own three others that they are similarly trying to preserve. It's an inspired approach to urban growth that allows small businesses to flourish and gives a neighbourhood the opportunity to define itself. — MPR



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