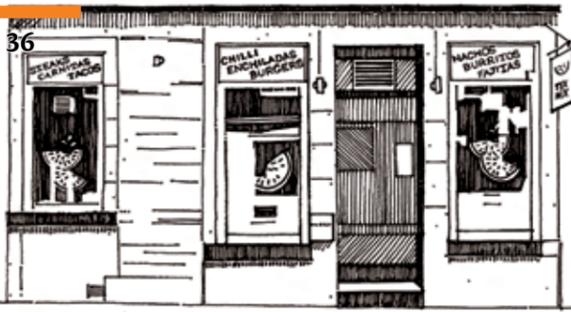


SCENES IN THE SHADOWS

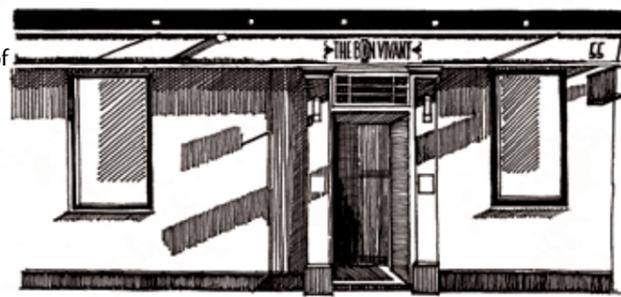
In our many journeys — be they in the neighbourhood, across town or overseas — we travel along many streets. We walk them, drive, ride and run along them. Sometimes, especially when you have wandered away from your familiar streets, some of them begin to look similar. And if you've traversed them often enough, even a landmark shopping avenue — like Orchard Road in Singapore, or the Champs-Élysées in Paris or Bond St in London — begins to become a little predictable. But sometimes you stumble upon a street more special. Where there's something about the light, the way it is laid out, the way the street curves or that curious mix of shops and services that co-exist in bonhomie, cheek by jowl. And after you've long since left, and life has overtaken you, memories of that street occasionally come to mind; snapshots of a moment. There are a few such streets around the world, that have the character to etch themselves into your memory. **STORM** walks through some of them.



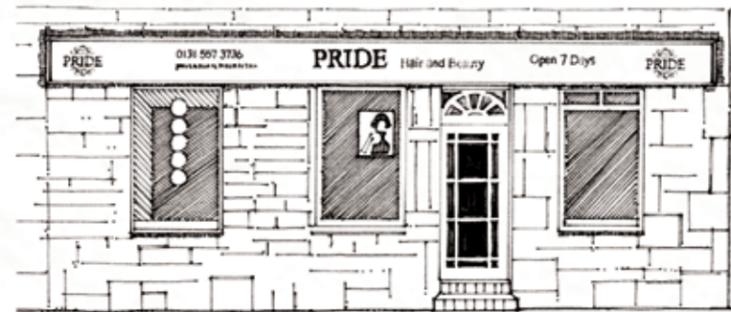
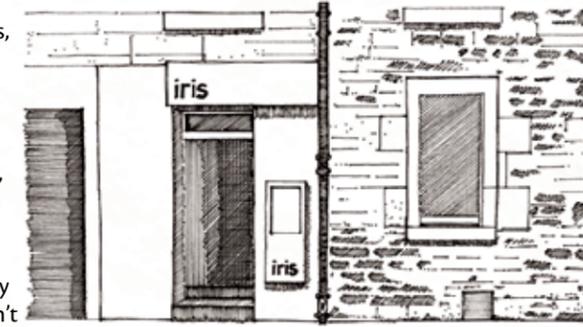
THE NEW IN THE OLD THISTLE STREET, Edinburgh, Scotland



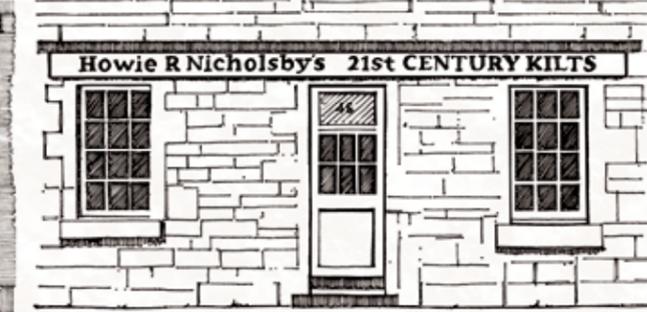
Art and culture, ancient architecture, parks, traditional pubs, contemporary restaurants, the sound of drifting bagpipes, and a dominating 12th-Century castle make up Edinburgh, Scotland's capital. Uniquely divided into two distinct sections — the Old Town and the New Town — the older side of the city is characterised by meandering cobbled wynds (paths), historical closes, intimate courtyards and medieval architecture, while the newer presents a completely contrasting face of wide open avenues and crescents, and an orderly infrastructure to its imposing neo-classical grandeur. These elegant streets play host to much of Edinburgh's commercial and consumerist activities, and lying in their shadows, just a stone's throw away, you will find a quiet and unassuming lane called Thistle Street. Narrow enough to only allow one-way traffic, its cosy and intimate charm is more reminiscent of its Old Town counterparts, its Georgian terraces muffling the nearby hustle and bustle.



reside here are run by some of Scotland's most forward-thinking entrepreneurs, providing shoppers with a discerning yet understated retail experience. First, there are several boutiques, including Jane Davidson and Pam Jenkins, both of which were recently named in *British Vogue's* list of the best 40 British boutiques — the only boutiques in the whole of Scotland to make the cut. Jane Davidson, has been a magnet to the city's well-heeled since the 1960s, but it wasn't until 2001, when Jane's daughter Sarah took over the business, that it became the fashion mecca that it is today. Just across the road, shoe boutique Pam Jenkins, provides the perfect pit-stop to complete your outfit with a snazzy pair of heels from designers such as Christian Louboutin, Jimmy Choo or Giuseppe Zanotti. But if you seek something more Scottish, it doesn't



And while Thistle Street's grander neighbours bear regal street names such as George, Hanover, Queen and Princes, this narrow cobbled back street modestly invokes Scotland's national flower — that prickly weed, the thistle. Twinned with nearby Rose Street, these two national emblems represent the Acts of Union, passed in 1707 by the parliaments of Scotland and England, in a pact of peace. Its beginnings may be steeped in history, but the wealth of treasures that Thistle Street safeguards are anything but antiquated. The thriving independent businesses that



get more traditional than a kilt, and at no. 48 you will find the controversial and newsworthy 21st Century Kilts. Since launching the company at London Fashion Week in 1999 with a collection of silver PVC snakeskin kilts, owner and master kilt-maker Howie Nicholsby's mission has been to modernise Scotland's traditional dress. He has since experimented with different fabrics including leather and denim, and has earned himself many famous clients in the process, including Madonna and Robbie Williams. When all that retail therapy brings on hunger pangs, you don't have far to stagger under the weight of your shopping bags. Thistle Street is as varied in the

culinary department as it is in the retail realm. A selection of restaurants offers a broad range of international cuisine. Among others, there's French fine dining at Le Café St Honore and Café Marlayne, what was Scotland's first Mexican restaurant in the form of Tex Mex II, Dusit with its contemporary Thai, and Fishers in the City, dishing up a comprehensive selection of fresh Scottish seafood, and named 'Scotland's Best Seafood Restaurant' by national broadsheet *The Scotsman*.

Of course a visit to Scotland's capital city wouldn't be complete without sampling their most famous export— 'the Water of Life' — whisky. The Thistle Street Bar, a typical Scottish pub, or what the Scots would refer to as a 'local boozier', is the perfect watering



Steven Mitchell, Website: <http://www.studio-aid.co.uk>

hole, with over 50 malt whiskies proudly displayed on its gantry. Here you will garner a glimpse of real local life, with its traditional dark wood features, real open fire, and a collection of locals popping in for a 'pie and a pint'. There are plenty of cosy corners in which to nurse your single malt, and even a small beer garden for those rarest of occasions — a sunny Scottish summer's day. — **Marianne Rogerson**



STORM  **CAPE**



The World on a Street

SYDNEY ROAD, Brunswick Victoria, Australia

This is an old and very long road with a very colourful history that seems to have come full circle.

As you stand and look down the length of its narrowness and its old blocks, it is easy to summon up images from its beginnings in 1837 as Brunswick Road and then Pentridge Road before it was named Sydney Road in 1850. It's less easy to visualise its pre-colonial incarnation when it was an expanse of grassy plains where animals roamed freely and the Wurundjeri people lived off the land.

Once the road was built, it would have been like something out of an oldest Western. With people passing through, commerce and life stepped in. Homes, churches, shops, council offices sprang up along the road. As land prices shot up, yet more commerce was attracted. Horse-drawn carriages, then trams, then cable trams arrived in tandem.

Soon it became a commercial centre, and a community's centre. As attachment to it grew, it became a place where political and religious ideologies were shared and contested, where people came to say their piece on street corners, where people mourned their dead troops during the world wars. The Great Depression didn't leave this street unmarked. As businesses failed and unemployment rose, the Town Hall

became the gathering place for the impoverished and the street a place where money-making schemes were hatched.

As waves of migration swept through Australia, so too did they wash over Sydney Road, bringing different skin colours, accents, attire, foodstuff, music...the works. As with everywhere else in the world, these stand-alone businesses faced the threat to their survival from one-stop sprawling malls...yet in this case, prevailed.

In recent years, Sydney Road has been enjoying a renaissance of sorts, even though it is not, as streets go, a pretty one. As appreciation for the personal touch begins to outweigh the merely efficient for many of us, it stands as a shining beacon for the un-manufactured. On the one hand, it is considered Melbourne's Middle East Strip for its large number of butchers, bakers, restaurants, cafes, pie shops and produce shops run by Lebanese, Egyptian, Turkish and Iraqi migrants. But on the other hand, it's an effortless global village which has grown organically. Some businesses have been there for decades, others moved in more recently, but none came as part of a "campaign" to internationalise the road.

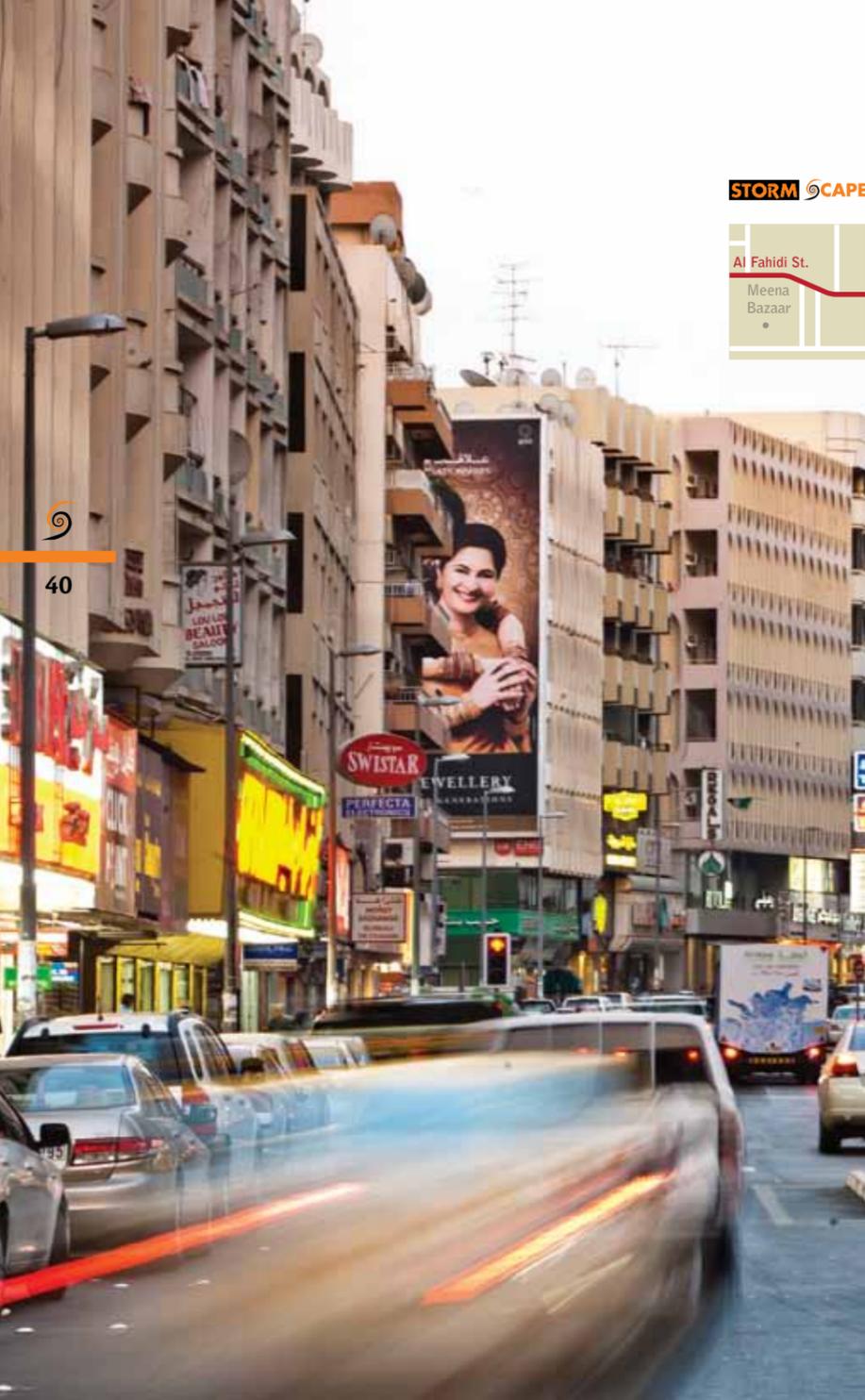
As I walk down one segment of this long street, I come across a Greek cake shop, a French patisserie, a hair salon that specialises in African hairdos run by a friendly stylist named Carlos, a Mediterranean wholesale market where I have a hard time keeping calm in the face of all the lovely cheeses, olive oils and meats, a Vietnamese tailor and a fabric shop stocked to the ceiling with bales of cloth and lace, buttons and ribbons and even

old-fashioned McCalls paper patterns, a store selling Indian and Pakistani apparel, and a South East Asian restaurant.

Interspersing these are one-of-a-kind Australian-owned stores: a stunning boutique which sells vintage-inspired apparel and accessories by independent designers, a T-shirt shop run by an activist named Andy who designs and prints t-shirts with pithy slogans which he silkscreens in the back of his shop, a cooperative of tailors, a stylish if somewhat over the top boutique that specialises in "Mother of the Bride" outfits, another that sells outfits for children to wear at special occasions such as christenings, First Communions and weddings. Its window display alone is a vision in ivory lace. I discover a book store which reminds me of a set of Chinese boxes, each book-filled room leading to another and another. An organic grocer, an Italian pizza parlour, a modern Greek taverna, a vintage/kitsch store and a vinyl store where I am transported to heaven. A shop selling nothing but an astounding array of nuts, another selling scooters, service and merchandise, Italian wedding shops which provide everything from the stretch limousine to the custom-made dress. And here I enjoy one of the best meals I had in Victoria, at an Afghan restaurant called The Lazy Camel.

I could not get enough of this street and I know that I will return, having only skimmed its surface. Sydney Road is asserting its modern-day relevance in no uncertain terms, and the result is a feast for the senses. — **Audrey Perera**





STORM SCAPE



Desert Dust and Discovery

Al Fahidi Street, Dubai

At first glance Al Fahidi Street is, at best, non-descript. An arterial route through downtown Bur Dubai, it's traffic-choked during rush hour with a patina of shabbiness cloaking the façades of its 30-year-old storefronts.

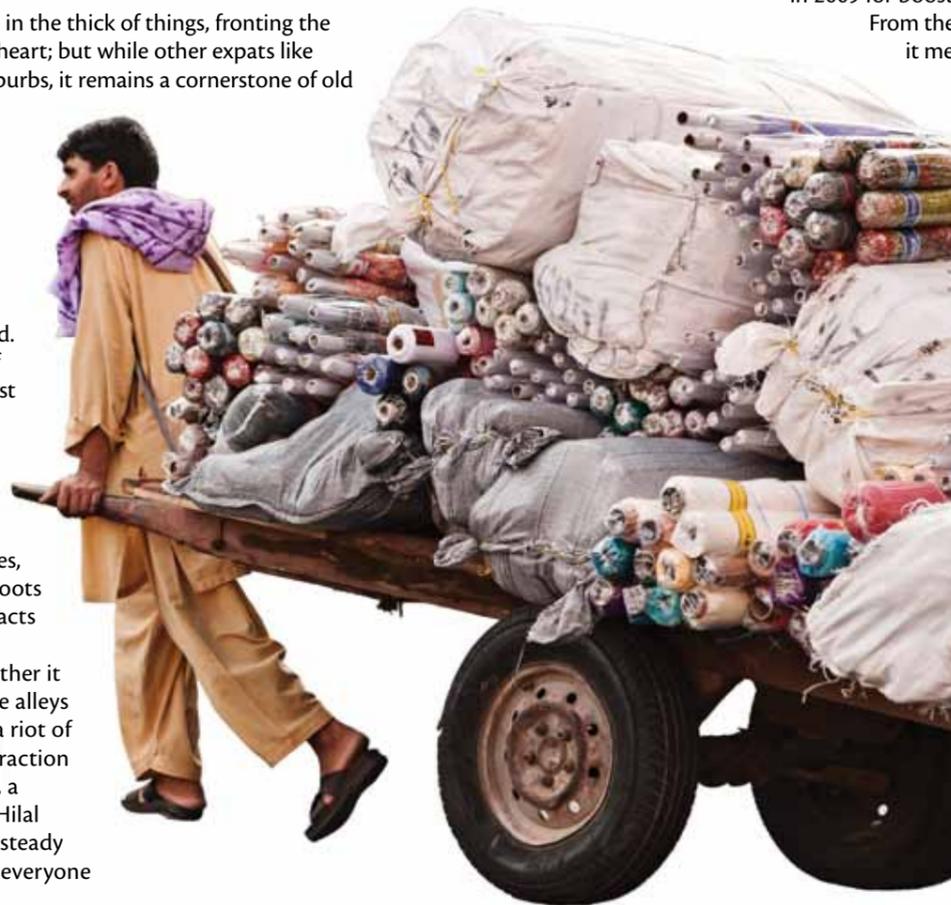
When I first moved to the city more than a decade ago it was in the thick of things, fronting the Dubai Creek and backed by the bustle of the city's commercial heart; but while other expats like myself have migrated to characterless shiny towers in newer suburbs, it remains a cornerstone of old school Dubai.

The charm of the Al Fahidi experience lies in its bi-polar diversity. Turn to your left and be seduced by the colourful clutter and chaos of Meena Bazaar, the textile district where India meets Arabia in one square block; or turn right and lose yourself in one of the narrow *sikkas* (alleyways) that epitomise the tiny Bastakiya heritage district.

It's also a stop-off point on every city tour itinerary, with the quaint fort setting of Dubai Museum dominating its eastern end. For me, however, its biggest attraction is the fact that it's one of the few spots in the city that still feels like the real deal, and most of its long-term residents agree.

Take Lalita, doyenne of Super Garments, a *salwar kameez* emporium, tucked away down one of Meena Bazaar's crowded lanes. "We've been here 18 years and it's still a nice area; it is a little bit of India and, personally, this gives me peace of mind," she says, referring to the majority Indian-run businesses, although many well-known Emirati families have their trading roots here. "Rents here are still reasonable and the Indian culture attracts tourists looking for gifts and souvenirs," she says.

The area is hardly the exotic bazaar setting of the movies, rather it is a combination of squat three-storey buildings and dingy side alleys gussied up with fairy lights and window displays stuffed with a riot of colourful fabrics, haberdashery delights or the magpie-like attraction of hand-wrought gold wedding jewellery. Mohammed Yaseen, a salesman at Emirati-owned tailor and abaya specialist Rashid Hilal Fashion, assures me that Meena Bazaar's reputation ensures a steady stream of visitors. "The local taxi drivers all bring people here; everyone knows to come to Meena Bazaar," he says proudly.



However, the effects of the global economic downturn are clearly visible with a number of blank storefronts evidence of the recent slowdown in inbound tourist numbers and the tightening of purse strings. Bhavesh Kapani, a manager at one of the bazaar's oldest tailor and fabric stores, Regal, shrugs this off as a blip in the economic life cycle of Dubai. "We've been here since 1952, and although we now have shops across the city we still have a very loyal customer base," he remarks, as he shows me hot-off-the-press pictures of the latest Bollywood star who popped in earlier.

"Meena Bazaar is as famous in Dubai as the Taj Mahal in India," he chuckles. You have to admire his confidence, and he reports that business levels have remained fairly constant over the last two years. "We have no need to worry. It's the same as it was 30 years ago and this is what people like," he adds.

The biggest problem for the area, according to most retailers, is traffic congestion and inadequate parking; but this is nothing new in a city dominated by motor vehicles. Even this doesn't faze the indefatigable Kapani who credits the launch of Dubai Metro in 2009 for boosting tourist numbers.

From the intensity of Meena Bazaar, the community feel extends across to the other side of Al Fahidi Street as it meets the banks of the Dubai Creek. Sheikh Rashid bin Saeed Al Maktoum, father of the current ruler, and the man credited with transforming Dubai from a small trading town into a cosmopolitan city, could often be seen driving himself to his offices within the Ruler's Court complex in the late '70s and early '80s; and both the Grand Mosque — which has the tallest minaret in the city — and the eye-catching Persian tiled exterior of the Iranian Shia mosque are thriving centres of worship.

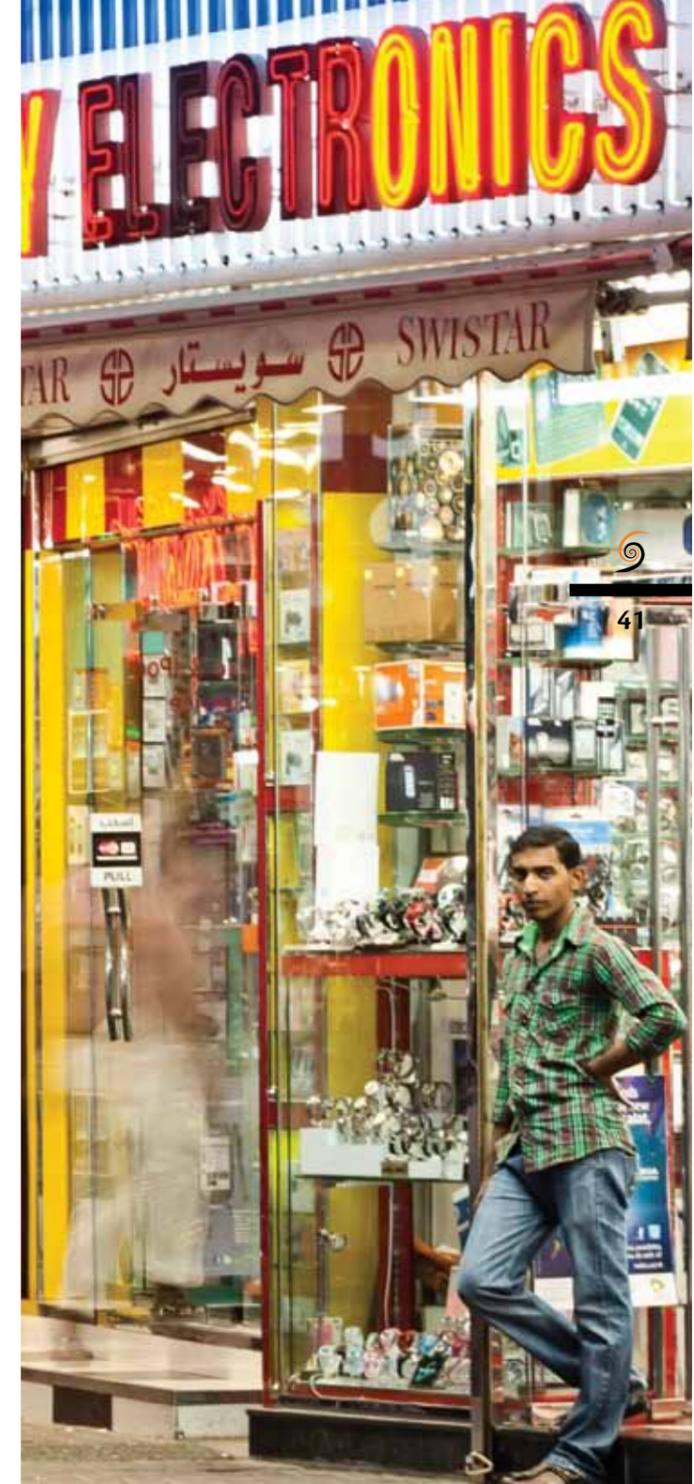
In the courtyards and cul de sacs of the neighbouring Bastakiya heritage district it is also possible to enjoy a tranquil moment; a rarity in the city. It's a rather grand name for a compact site where the remains of Dubai's original city walls (dating from 1800) and 20 or so traditional wind tower houses are home to a growing number of art galleries, handicraft shops and cafés.

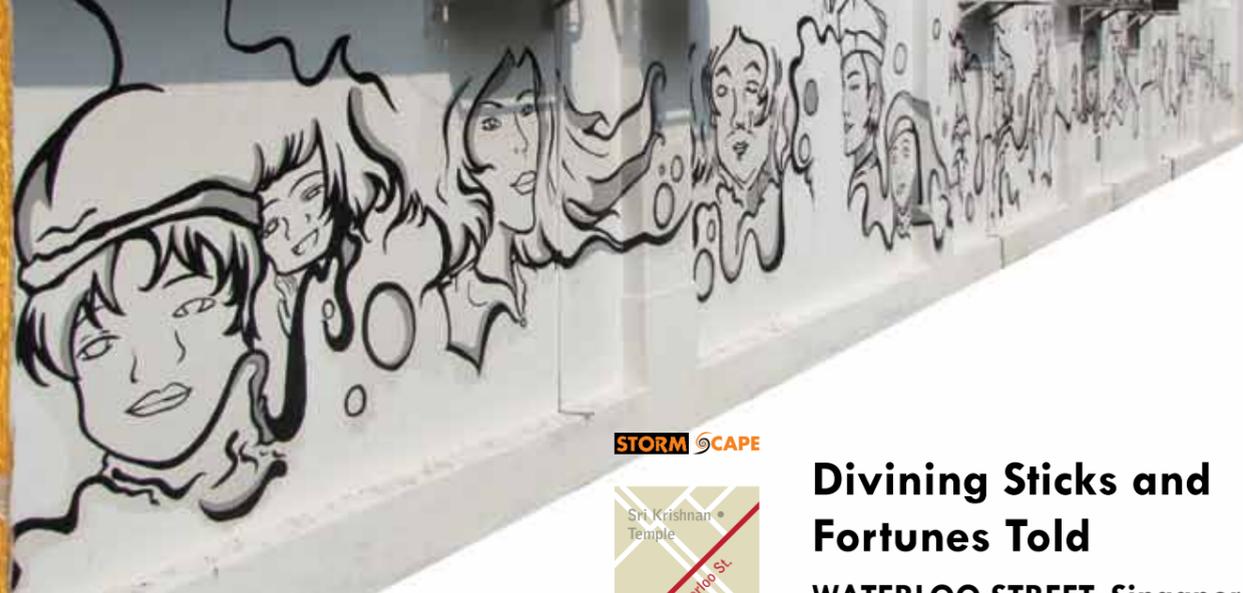
At Basta Art Café, where I sit sipping a fresh lemon and mint juice under the shade of a gnarled old tree, business is booming, according to the waitress who barely has time to pause for a chat. She points out two ladies enjoying a plate of Arabic *mezze*. "They came here straight from the airport," she says. As I leave I bump into a family of tourists scanning the menu at the adjacent Local House restaurant, which is reportedly enjoying a roaring trade in camel burgers.

In recent years, the Dubai government has opened up the area to the artistic community to build on the heritage theme and flesh out the existing cultural offering provided by established centres for local art such as the Majlis Gallery and XVA.

Mr Abbasi, from Iran, is the owner of Eastern Arts gallery, half hidden down a narrow *sikka* close to the Philately Museum. A specialist dealer in calligraphy and antique religious books, he relocated his shop here 15 months ago, after 18 years at one of the city's best-known hotels. "Here there is more culture and more tourists," he says. "The government is very active in encouraging galleries and other similar enterprises to set up here. It is a growing artistic community, plus rents are reasonable, so this is good for us and for Dubai," he adds.

Later that afternoon, as I tuck into a traditional North Indian vegetarian thali at the popular India House restaurant (a steal at USD4), I trade Al Fahidi reminiscences with a former Dubai resident, now living in Sydney. "Every time I come back I am somehow drawn to this part of the city. The smells, the people, the vibe; it's everything that I love about Dubai," he says. I couldn't agree more. — **Claire Malcolm**





STORM  CAPE



Divining Sticks and Fortunes Told

WATERLOO STREET, Singapore

For me, this has always been a place of unexpected delights with slices of life not encountered anywhere else on the island.

Waterloo Street was one of the first streets to be built in Singapore, in 1837 and was originally named Church Street. Following some confusion with another street, it was given its current name, after the 1815 battle.

Along its length are three ancient places of worship — the Sri Krishnan Temple built in 1870, the Kwan Im Thong Hood Cho, one of the oldest Buddhist temples in Singapore (1884), and the Maghain Aboth Synagogue, standing since 1870 and the oldest Jewish synagogue in South East Asia. In its immediate vicinity are several churches of different denominations, among them one declared a National Monument, the steeply-spired Church of Saints Peter and Paul. Just off the end of this street, at the street stalls and inside Fu Lu Shou Complex, is a parallel universe of crystals for luck and healing, and feng shui necessities — glass globes, brass lions and horses, coins, gourds, calligraphy, mirrors and octagons — to redirect negative forces, usher in good ones, deflect, override, neutralise, balance, tame or repel the forces.

This is a street of pedigree and spirituality, with an artsy spirit that comes along with Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts, Stamford Arts Centre, YMS Arts, Dance Ensemble Singapore, Singapore Calligraphy Centre, Action Theatre, Sculpture Square, Action Theatre, the Singapore Art Museum.

As streets go, it's not a long one, easily covered inside of 30 minutes at a brisk clip. It begins at the junction with Bras Basah Road, and it ends near Bencoolen



Link. A segment of the street closest to its end point was pedestrianised some years ago, and it is to this stretch that I return often. For here lies a kind of magic in practical, utilitarian Singapore.

Here are rosy-cheeked flower vendors with floppy hats and long-sleeved T-shirts peddling chrysanthemums and lotus flowers, for worshippers to make as offerings at the temples. Fortune tellers of different races and creeds, purveyors of medicinal oils and heated suction cups, people-watchers sitting on the sidelines surveying the street life and feeding the pigeons. And sometimes you might find a gentle Englishman who helps you focus your mind before he reads your destiny that lies written in the I-Ching.

This is where Hindu worshippers bow their heads in respect as they pass the Chinese temple, and vice versa. The intriguing sound of wooden divining sticks — Qian — with fortunes written on them, being shaken in brass cans and then spilled out, has been punctuating the air here since 1884, as worshippers and visitors seek to know what their futures hold.

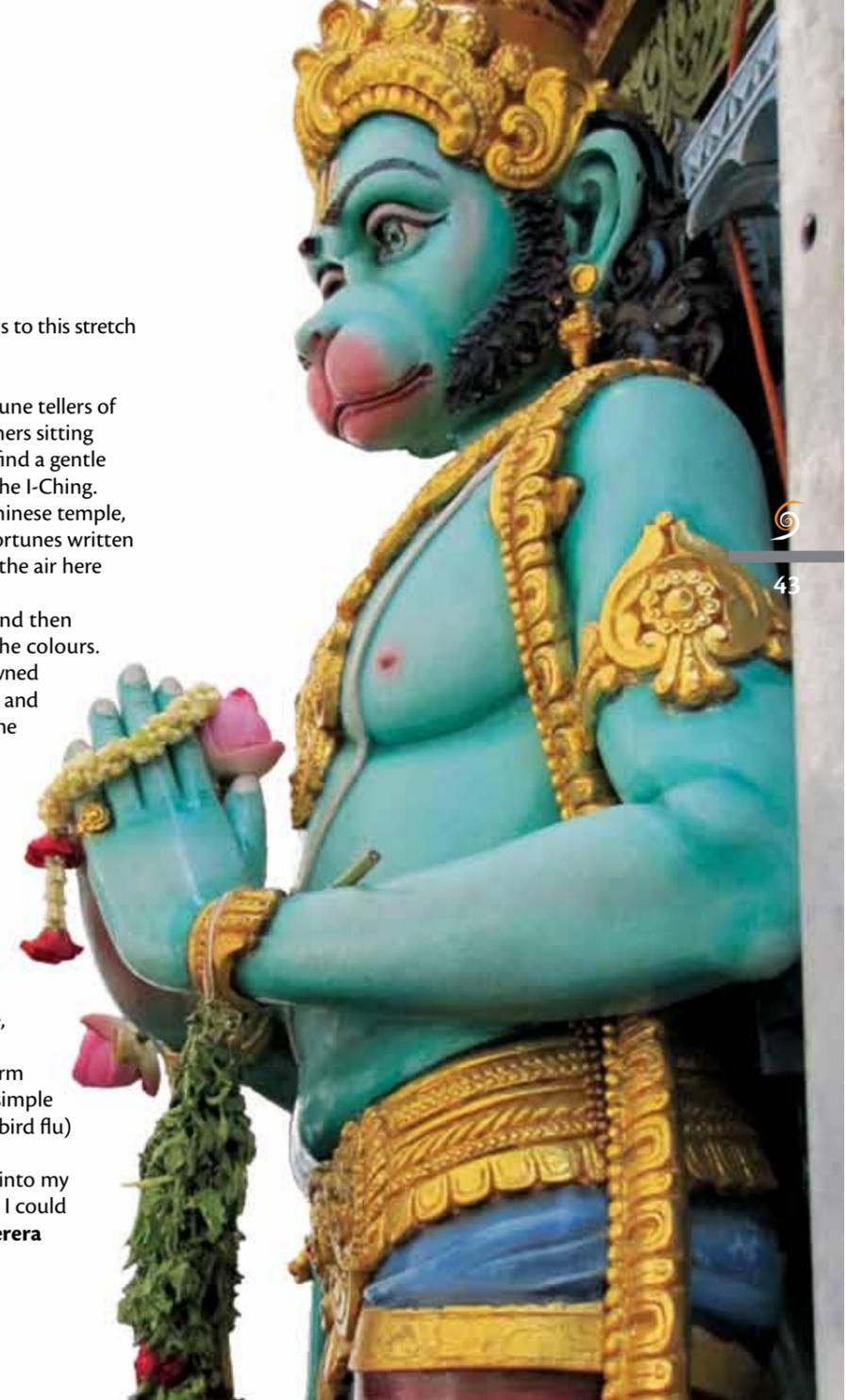
At the nearby Fu Lu Shou Complex, you can have your aura photographed and then explained to you, and you leave with a computer printout of the meanings of the colours.

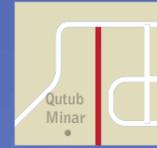
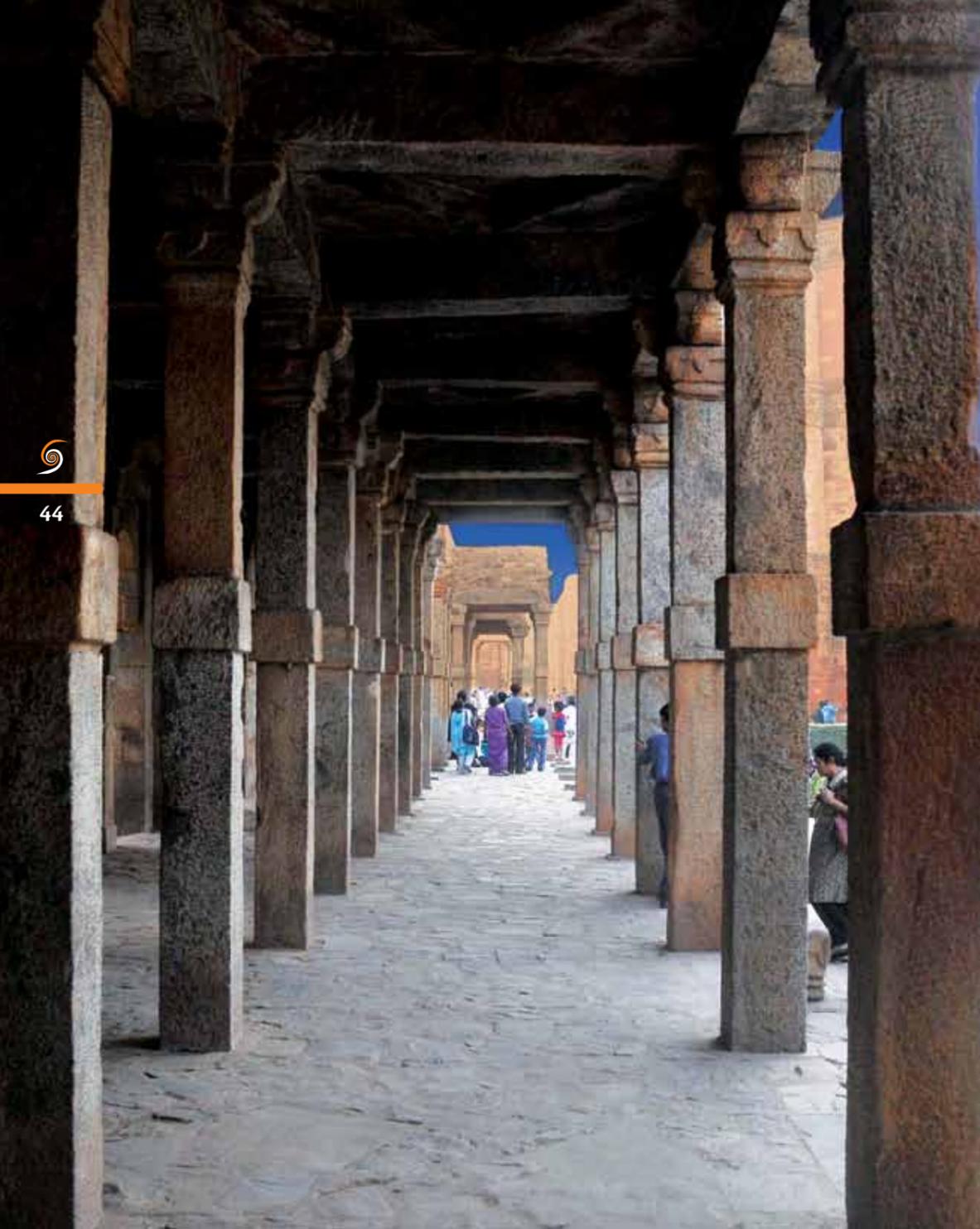
Here on this stretch of the street, you can choose to have your thoughts drowned out by the ambient noise — people talking, bells and chimes ringing, priests and monks chanting, temple drums — or you can tune it all out as you take in the sheer energy of the place which no doubt comes from the concentration of all the heartfelt prayers that have been said, felt and thought over the past century and more.

It is here that I have had many special moments over the years. The most recent occurred one late afternoon on a weekday in September. Shadows were lengthening as the sun dipped low and the soft evening light was falling over the warm cobblestones. For once I was not in a hurry, happy to linger or walk on as I pleased.

I remember that it was a noisy afternoon, but suddenly all the sound slowed to silence as I watched, mesmerised, a toddler chasing the pigeons, stopping and lunging, stealthily creeping, feigning indifference, then chasing at full tilt, with no success. All without a single thread of meanness in his gestures, so clearly wanting only to hold one of the warm feathered bodies in his little arms. And haven't we all yearned for that simple pleasure at some point before our egos and self-consciousness (fear of bird flu) killed the desire for good?

The innocent beauty of those minutes held me spellbound, reached into my heart to a place of purity, and for a while, I forgot where I was. And yet, I could only have been on this little magical corner of Singapore. — **Audrey Perera**





अहमदाबाद Memnoria Unnamed Street (where the Qutub Minar is located), New Delhi

Tucked away in the Mehrauli area of South Delhi, this unnamed little lane is quite insignificant when compared to the other focal streets of Delhi. But as you stroll down this street, you look up to take in the dominating landscape, where the world's highest brick tower, Qutub Minar — one of the finest examples of Indo- Islamic architecture — towers.

Built in the late 12th century and surrounded by ancient Hindu ruins, the 72m pillar stands close to the Iron Pillar built in the 4th century AD.

Also, within close range of each other, of the eight times Delhi was constructed capital of India, the first four of the cities stand in all their reflected ruined glory.

Qutub Minar is named after Qutb-ud-din Aibak, the first Muslim

ruler of Delhi, who was born to a Central Asia Turk family. He was captured and sold as a slave and fortunate to receive good education and training in archery and horsemanship by his benefactors. Being a favourite of his master, he rose through the ranks to become a general responsible for most of the conquests of Northern India. He founded what was known rather irreverently as the Slave Dynasty, as his successors were also slaves like him.

Wishing to surpass his love for the Minaret of Jam in Afghanistan, Aibak laid the foundation of the Qutub Minar and could only complete the base before falling off a horse. It was completed by his successor Iltutmush.

The tower originally intended as a minaret, was meant to remind the forgetful for calls to prayer. Work on it continued for over 300 years after his death, and to put it in perspective, the Qutub Minar was being built around the same time the Leaning Tower of Pisa was under construction.

Walking towards the imposing Qutub Minar under a canopy of ancient pillars as the setting sun's rays escape through the spaces, one is transported back into time as you walk in the steps of ancient kings and rulers who lived through troubled times. For, before the Muslim rulers came, with no clear central authority in sight, petty rulers, smitten by greed and power, foolishly dared to dream they could rule the vast land of India. Constantly fighting amongst themselves, it did not take long for the foreigners to stamp their authority on them.

Not wishing to change history, I am smugly satisfied that this amalgamation of cultures resulted in such majestic and visually attractive monuments. As I walk around, one can still see parts of the rubble-built 3m-thick walls of the mid-11th century citadel Lal Kot — close to the Qutub.

Interestingly, this is known to be the original Red Fort of Delhi, Lal Kot has an oblong plan with massive towers and three gates. Apart from brick revetment built over them, the walls have imposing local quartzite blocks and semicircular bastions at irregular

intervals. It is believed that of the 27 temples that existed here is where part of the Qutub Minar stands today.

Building of Lal Kot by the Tomar Rajputs was the second time Delhi became the capital having been deserted for over a thousand years after the Pandavas left Indraprastha — the first city of Delhi (where the University of Delhi stands today).

The Qutub, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, has 378 steps leading to the top which, if one is allowed to ascend, unfurls an exciting view of landmarks from Humayun's Tomb the walls of Firoz Shah Kotla, Tughlaqabad, Jama Masjid and Purana Qila. One can also see the red sandstone remnants of a second tower, Alai Minar with the top floor made of gleaming white marble by Firoz Shah Tughlaq in the 14th century. He was also responsible for adding two floors to the Qutub Minar. The development of architectural styles from Aibak to Tughlaq are evident.

Despite being built on the debris of the Hindu temples, a message engraved on the tower translates to "Conceived with the grace of Vishwakarma". Believed by the Hindus to be the presiding deity of all craftsmen and architects, Vishwakarma is said to be the "Principal Universal Architect" and the Lord of Creation. Over 800 years ago, these were much more evolved times!

I have walked through a few centuries of history within a span of a few hours, digesting facts and taking away memories. As I walk away from my unnamed lane to the bustling Delhi life, I wonder how much the stone monuments have seen and heard but not told. **S**

— Neelam Matthews

