

WORDS | BRITT COLLINS

AS LONDON'S CARNABY STREET PREPARES TO CELEBRATE 50 YEARS AT THE CENTRE OF THE BRITISH FASHION SCENE, WE TALK TO SOME OF THE DESIGNERS, MODELS AND MUSICIANS WHO WERE THERE IN THE BEGINNING

THE BEAT GOES ON

THE HEARTBEAT OF THE SWINGING '60S IN LONDON

Carnaby Street became an enduring symbol of youth culture. It was where the good, the great and the rebels gathered: the Beatles, the Rolling Stones and Jimi Hendrix hung out and shopped among the artists, hipsters and models who made the street what it was.

Once home to a Dickensian pest house for plague victims and a burial ground, Carnaby Street has had a long and varied history of more than 500 years. But until 1960, this undistinguished alley consisted of little more than a row of rundown warehouses. It was in the early '60s, when youth culture evolved to be so different from what came before, that the street came to prominence.

Bands such as the Byrds and the Who all got their crisp button-down shirts from Carnaby Street and a revolution in music and style flourished. The arrival of John Stephen, a dashing Scotsman credited with introducing beltbottoms and flowery shirts and bringing Levi's to Britain, established the area as the epicentre of flamboyant male fashion. Setting up shop on Beak Street in 1959, his velvet jackets and embroidered kaftans flew off the rails so that by 1963 he had 18 boutiques across London and eventually spread to Paris and Rome.

Stephen – the 'dedicated follower of fashion' advertised in the Kinks song and often photographed with his silver Rolls Royce and white Alsatian dog – had shops with racy window displays, sexy store assistants, loud music blaring and garments spilling out on the pavements. Following in his wake, wonderfully named shops like I Was Lord Kitchener's Valet, Pussy Galore, Tom Cat and Mr Fish sprung up catering to the exotic new tastes.

When *Time* magazine proclaimed London the 'Swinging City' in April 1966, with its cool threads and groovy tunes, its Soho street had come to symbolise the style and attitude of an entire generation. By 1973, Carnaby Street was pedestrianised and had a new look with bold black, yellow, white and orange ties. Once the cult film *Quadrophenia* came out, it became the destination for narcissistic mods. The street experienced

a renaissance with the mod revival in the late-'70s and early-'80s, spearheaded by bands like the Jam. Today, indie boutiques co-exist alongside global luxury brands and concept stores.

Tucked away behind Regent Street, Carnaby Street has now rediscovered its vitality. This year, the 100-odd shops in and around Carnaby Street are marking half a century of trailblazing, sub-cultural style by recapturing the sights and sounds of its '60s heyday with a series of street events.

Throughout June, there will be a Summer of Love music festival inspired by the sounds that rocked the world decades ago and, in September, a fashion show will link the era of the mini-skirt and the mod suit with the modern boutiques that now line Carnaby Street. >

www.carnaby.co.uk



LEADER OF FASHION: Lord John set the pace for the other men's fashion stores on Carnaby Street

THOSE ON THE LONDON SCENE IN THE SWINGING '60S REFLECT BACK ON THE SIGNIFICANCE OF CARNABY STREET

Donovan

Folk-pop star Donovan became a sensation with classics like *Mellow Yellow* and *Colours*, and was among the influential songwriters of the decade

When I arrived in London in 1964 as a scruffy 18-year-old from Scotland with a cap and guitar, I used to wear pea coats and rollneck fishermen's sweaters from Norway as I was sleeping rough. I ended up playing in the London clubs where the British folk scene was booming. I was discovered in a jazz club in Southend.

Carnaby Street already had a great style with teddy boys and Italian suits. Then the rockers, mods and the kids on Vespa scooters came and the scene exploded.

I was at the top of fashion in the 1960s and designed my own clothes. We dressed up in the dreams of the songs. The Kinks were mods, the Stones were jazz hipsters, the Beatles Hamburg cool, the Who were Pop Art and I was Pre-Raphaelite. Every three weeks we released a new single and needed a new look. You'd go to get your hair done in salons that had an extraordinary mix of classes in those days – you'd have the hairless, the East Enders from the building site and rock stars like the Small Faces.

By the late '60s, I discovered psychedelia. I was also the first to get basted in the London drug raids; after me they got the Beatles and then the Stones. When the drug squad came, I was ready for bed and naked, so they had to take me out in a sheet.

The '60s cast a long shadow but that's no bad thing. It was such a creative decade that it's had an act to follow for any generation coming after it.

Donovan headlines the Moseley Folk Festival on 3-5 September in Birmingham



Pattie Boyd

Model and muse Pattie Boyd was a Beatle wife and immortalised in songs like *Something* and *Layla* by lovers George Harrison and Eric Clapton. She became the ultimate 1960s It Girl

My abiding memory of the '60s was an incredible sense of freedom that there doesn't seem to be now. Money wasn't a huge issue then; creativity was the thing. It didn't matter where you came from as long as you had something new and different to offer.

I was working for [make-up retailer] Elizabeth Arden and it was really boring and this Fleet Street editor wandered in and asked if I ever thought of being a model. Not long after in the cover of Honey magazine. One of my first castings was with the legendary photographer Norman Parkinson, who took one look at my portfolio and sniffed: "Come back when you've learned to do your hair properly." But modelling transformed my life. I got to go to amazing places and meet fascinating people. I met George [Harrison] when I was 19 on the film set of *Hard Day's Night* and within weeks we were house hunting.

My sister worked for [fashion house] Foale & Tuffin around 1968 and whenever I went to see her, there were always these eccentric and amazing-looking people pouring in and out. I loved hanging out around Carnaby Street, but George was getting shy about being recognised and we couldn't relax or just go shopping.

I realised at the time that this was the start of something very different and were entering a new kind of age. People blame the '60s for just about everything these days, but it was the decade when all that post-war furtiveness and small mindedness was blown apart and everything was open to infinite possibilities.



ROCK AROUND THE SHOPS: Carnaby Street was the heart of Swinging London's fashion scene and the likes of the Beatles and the Rolling Stones could regularly be seen shopping there



Pam Hogg

The Scottish designer, artist and musician has dressed the queens of rock as often as she has appeared among them – as a support act for The Pogues and Debbie Harry. She had a boutique near Carnaby Street in the '80s and recently returned there to open a pop-up shop

Carnaby Street was the first fashion mecca but I was at primary school in Glasgow in the '60s, so could only read or hear about it later through the bands I was into. The Kinks, the Stones and the Small Faces were dressing from those tantalising boutiques and it struck a chord, just as the sight of a gang of Teddy Boys had shown me the excitement of dressing up for the first time when I was a small kid.

I'd been making my own clothes from a very early age and it was probably what the guys in bands were wearing that was my source of inspiration, so it could be said that the Carnaby revolution had an influence on my decision to become a fashion designer, although that was the last thing on my mind at the time.

When I was looking for a shop in the mid-to-late '80s I was immediately attracted to the area, with its great history and perfect location snuggled between the sleaze of Soho and class of Mayfair, but it was the tiny cobbled Newburgh Street running parallel which I opted for as I felt it retained some of the original vibe.

Of course, I would have loved to have hung out in Carnaby Street during its '60s heyday. But in 2009 I was given a pop-up shop a few doors down from my original location as a welcome back to fashion. It was great to be back, but I was acutely aware of the uncertainty and survival of the individual trader. Unfortunately I think for the foreseeable future Carnaby Street can only be remembered for what it once was.

Philip Townsend

Philip Townsend was a photographer who lived and worked around Carnaby Street and shot Twigg, the Kinks and the Rolling Stones

I got into the Carnaby Street scene as a teenager. At 19, I was already working for *Tatler*. My mother was eccentric – she took me to play poker with priests in Ireland when I was eight years old and on gambling trips to the south of France. It served me well later when I was sent to the Cote d'Azur for my first assignment to photograph Aristotle Onassis, Maria Callas and the Raniens.

I met Andrew Loock Oldham there and he said he was going back to London to find the best rock'n'roll band in the world. A year later, he called and said, "I found them," and I took the first pictures of the Rolling Stones and became a permanent fixture on Carnaby Street in the process.

Before 1960, Carnaby Street was dreary with a scattering of little shops and derelict warehouses. They shut on Saturday afternoon and all day on Sunday, it was completely different from what it is now. But Carnaby Street was just meant to happen. People who had never done things like run boutiques before suddenly got liberated and decided to do it. None of us knew what we were doing, we just went and did it – and that was the beauty of the time, there were no rules.

In those days, you were also allowed to drive on Carnaby Street and park on it. I had a Mini but it was impossible to get through the crowds. You would always see the Beatles and the Stones, who had their offices off Regent Street, wandering around. We didn't have celebrities in those days, we just had interesting, creative people, they didn't have minders and cars following them.

You would also see all the models, who were always posh girls. I was one of the first photographers to get out of the studios and go outside and use real life as a background. The European and American magazines loved it and couldn't get enough.



Celia Hammond

At 19, Celia Hammond became one of the fabled faces of the '60s. A decade later, she gave up her glamorous life to devote herself to animal rescue and now runs three sanctuaries

After I was discovered by Norman Parkinson, I was doing the Paris collections within weeks and on the cover of *Vogue* and suddenly thrust into this thrilling new world of exotic travels and fascinating people.

Soho was a wonderful little village all those years ago. I loved the social scene and would frequent the Ad Lib club near Carnaby Street. You could listen to music until 7am and I'd always see Mick Jagger and [his girlfriend] Chrissie Shrimpton, Paul McCartney and Joanna Lumley.

Wandering down Carnaby Street, too, was always an experience. The shops changed their stock every week: one week the windows would be greens and yellows, the next everything was reds and blues. I went to Carnaby Street to buy Levi's. What made Carnaby Street so special was that it was original. The atmosphere was electric. I remember seeing Tom Jones walking down there with a jewel-collared cheetah.

I had a great time in '60s, but now it all seems a world away. My obsession with rescuing animals began in 1962 when I saw a distressed cat in the window of a boarded-up house. I tried to combine modelling with rescuing strays, but gradually my love for animals took over. Sometimes when I'm cleaning out a cupboard, I'll come across an old photo and think: "Goodness, was that really me?"

www.celiahammond.org



70 Voyager



John Rendell

John Rendell ran a shop called Sophistocat. Now a conservationist, he co-wrote a book called *A Lion Called Christian*, about raising a cub in '60s London

A group of us came over from Australia in 1969. London was everything we expected it to be. From the moment we arrived we rushed to Carnaby Street to get some of these fabulous clothes, which we couldn't buy in Sydney. It was incredible to be able to see Jimi Hendrix, Bob Marley and the Who performing these small Soho clubs.

About the same time, a friend had been to the Exotic Animals department at Harrods and announced, grandly, that she wanted a camel. To which the manager replied: "One hump or two, madam?" My friend Ace and I thought this was the funniest thing, so I went along to check it out, and there was a lovely lion cub. We looked at each other and said we must rescue him. Harrods was keen to be rid of him as he'd escaped one night, snuck into the rug department and tore up the goatskin rugs. We bought him and Christian began his life as an urban lion.

We lived above the shop where we worked, which was aptly called Sophistocat. Christian spent his days lounging in the shop. He had a giant kitty-litter tray. We drove him around in a convertible, he ate at King's Road restaurants and played in the local church graveyard. I remember taking him to a party and a friend was there wearing a new Mary Quant dress. Christian leapt up and put his paws on her shoulders, and one of his claws caught on the straps and the whole dress was on the floor. Raising a lion in central London seemed natural back then. An exotic animal in London was a part of experimental London.

A Lion Called Christian is out in paperback now



▲ Celebrate 50 years of style on Carnaby Street with a limited-edition coffee-table book *Carnaby Street: 1960-2010*, chronicling the rise, fall and resurgence of this classic shopping street (£16, www.carnaby.co.uk)

