

Hastings Old Town and it's quaint High Street

With its ancient churches, slightly askew Victorian buildings, unique fishing quarter, independent vintage stores, gorgeous window displays and a profusion of atmospheric pubs, eateries and antique shops, Hastings' Old Town is genuinely timeless and untouched. Along the Old Town's High Street there are more than a hundred listed buildings, making this narrow quarter-mile stretch ideal for a browsing stroll.

Shimizu Flowers (No 22a) is a temple to bespoke Japanese floral art. Stand outside Shimizu's large shop-window and watch Mao Bramall create beauty in a vase. Mao's floral design talent was an organic inheritance from her grandfather and mother, who is an Ikebana teacher. Balfour & Byrom (No 32a) specialises in all things fabulous from antiques to collectibles, interiors to furniture. You'll be sure to find something you

didn't know you needed.

The American-born proprietor of the Goods Depot (No 86) has been dealing in antiques since the mid-70s. Together with his Fine Art degree and extensive industry knowledge, he has a sharp eye for the unusual, and is a deft hand at restoration.

From 1920s pharmaceutical bottles, silver-plated cake knives, rare 1930s Susie Cooper tea sets and hand-woven rattan carpet beaters,





you'll be surprised what you'll find at AG Hendy (No 36). Peruse the shelves, find vintage next to new, and fondle the profusion of ostrich-feather dusters in the umbrella stand. It's wonderful to look at – it's a labour of love, a work of art, a living museum of Georgian domesticity, part curiosity shop, and part seafood restaurant, which is tucked away at the back of the store and opens for lunch on the weekends in the summer months.

Then there's the Moroccan inspired interiors of House of Habibi (No



38), mid-century furniture and vintage clothing at 20th Century Fashion & Design (No 39), which is opposite the Old Hastings Club Cinema (No 39a), Up the Garden Path (No 74), who sell garden furniture and ornaments; and Little Treasures Vintage (No 73) who are primarily focused

on affordable vintage. Spread over two floors, they have a huge collection of lamp shades and cushions. Across the road is Roberts Curios (No 42) who specialise in oriental antiques. It's jam-packed with interesting finds.

At the Stone Corner (No 42a) you'll find



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everything related to precious and semi-precious stones; at Vintage Bird (No 48) there's a great display of retro-themed fabrics. Browse through their two floors of delectable fabrics, wallpapers, and quirky throws. Shop House Hastings (No 49) sells a carefully curated mix of things you'd like in your home – it's a touchy-feely mixture of new and vintage.

Penbuckles Delicatessen (No 50) specialise in artisan British cheese, charcuterie, wines and Monmouth coffee, complete with a small tea room serviced by trained Baristas. If you're lucky you'll catch them on a tasting day. On my visit I met a local chocolatier, Sophie Meyer, of the Chocolate Note. Showcasing her handmade, high-end single estate dark chocolate in their tasting room, Sophie spoke of her chocolates that are free from chemical, preservative, sugar cane and child labour.

Judge's Bakery (No 51) is a Hastings institution with a proud reputation since 1826 of baking breads that contain only organic flour that's been stone-ground by Shipton Mill. They have a gorgeous little tea room that serves, amongst others, handmade New York Cheesecake and mouth-watering pastries – both I can corroborate as being superb. They do seasonal bakes too and keep things interesting with daily specials like Rye and sea salt cookies, and beetroot and goats cheese sourdough.

For fun and funky accessories there's Hatz 'n Thingz (No 52a), a milliner selling gorgeous hats, umbrellas, scarves, retro American prints, dinky bow ties and vintage leather goods. For fine art there's Gallery 53 (No 53); Hastings Antique Warehouse (No 54) has several

floors heaving with particularly good vintage furniture and display cabinets – all locally sourced.

For everything vintage there's Browsers (No 57) - a big shop worth exploring. They have a beautiful Art Deco dressing table just inside the door that I have my eye on. Seagate Menswear (No 58) blends several household names - GH Bass, Edwin Jeans, Fred Perry, with brands like Country of Origin for British-made jumpers, Swole Panda for bamboo socks and 40 Colori for hand-tailored waistcoats. Roberts Rummage (No 68), is brimming with great value vintage and high-class junk.

Made in Hastings (No 82) is a delight in art, craft and everything handmade by local designers like one-off greetings cards, wooden spoons, textiles, notebooks, gloves, pottery, paintings. Particularly eye-catching are Claire Fletcher's limited-edition mermaid themed water-colour prints, elegant stationery by Sophie Azimont, and pottery by Judith Rowe. There's a gorgeous organic aroma about the place too, making it even more pleasing to browse.

Here exotic tat and designer chic live comfortably side-by-side, and even on a cold and wet winter's day, the Old Town is a blast of colour. It's like Brighton, but without the tourists; and there's always something the locals are celebrating – usually a festival of arts and crafts, the theatre, music and of course, the sea and everything that comes from it. ^{AC}

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Written and photographed by
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Where to drink: Starting at the top of the High Street, your first stiffener of the day should be at First Inn Last Out Pub (No 14). It's a beer drinkers' pub, with five ales brewed on site. There are no fruit machines or jukeboxes in sight, so you're able to peacefully take in the old beams and swirly plaster.

Where to eat: At the bottom of the High Street, turn right onto George Street and find Marrakech Artisan (No 16). It's a tiny café with only a few tables, plus a small and sumptuous souk-inspired dining area in the basement. Fatima serves genuine Moroccan cuisine and for dessert the best baklava and mint tea you've ever tasted. It's the perfect place for an informal family meal.