

I'm starting at the only place you can in Finnieston. Down by the lifeblood river. Under the billowing sails of a tall ship launched here on the Clyde when Glasgow burgeoned as the 'Second City of the Empire'. The halcyon days when Clyde-built ships sailed the world's oceans may be gone, but reflected in the water I can make out another Finnieston. This modern-day incarnation sparkles with Zaha Hadid's ultra-modern architecture, the district's once coal-fired energy now replaced by a lively cultural and restaurant scene that recently saw *The Times* hailing reborn Finnieston as the UK's hippest place to live.

### Industrial decline to reinvention

The story of Finnieston on the northern banks of the Clyde in Glasgow's West End is inexorably bound up with the days when Scotland's largest city was the fulcrum of global shipbuilding. Beneath clanking cranes and vast warehouses, an army of workers busied themselves. Finnieston was also awash with warehouses that stockpiled outgoing goods and embraced exotic teas and spices from the colonies. The nefarious streets of the Finnieston hinterland bristled with dockworkers in search of less salubrious entertainment.

In the decades following the Second World War, Finnieston spiralled downwards as the Clyde shipbuilding industry receded, plunging to new depths in the 1980s as Thatcherite economics eroded Glasgow's heavy industries further. Even as a Scot, I wouldn't have been keen on walking through Finnieston late at night during those years when social decay set in. Few, then, would have predicted a rosy future for Finnieston.

After easing down the gangplank of the Glenlee Tall Ship, I trace the rise and fall of the city and Finnieston's shipbuilding heritage at the late Zaha Hadid's remarkable, spiky, steel Riverside Museum. The most striking structure on the Clyde is home to the city's museum of transport, acclaimed as 'Museum of the Year 2013' by the European Museum Forum. Highlights include a recreation of a Glasgow street, the chance to ride an old subway car and the revolving display of models of ships built on the river.

I follow the banks of Glasgow's 'other river', the lesser-known Kelvin, from its mouth by the Riverside Museum upstream to Argyle Street, whose western fringes form Finnieston's emerging 'Strip'. Here I find the Kelvingrove, not the district's world-class gallery and museum, but the retro Kelvingrove Café ([www.kelvingrovecafe.com](http://www.kelvingrovecafe.com)).

This Kelvingrove is part-diner, part-cocktail den and



also serves as an unofficial Finnieston social club, where you can snare information on the one-off events and pop-up venues that now ripple through the area. I grab one of the coveted booths by the windows and order the barman, Drew's recommendation – a vermouth, heavy-stirred, not shaken. He jokes that the locals now dub hip Finnieston 'WeMo', standing for 'West of Motorway'. In Finnieston, a reassuringly self-deprecating sense of humour always keeps things the right side of becoming too hipster.

The M8 may be close, but for now the world of slick, corporate hegemony couldn't be much further away. You won't find a Waitrose in Finnieston. The revival has been nothing short of miraculous, especially given that it has been grass-roots-led, not business or government driven. Finnieston took its chance, as the owner of the Finnieston gastro bar, Graham Suttle, explains: "All the action used to be on Byres Road, but when the rents rose and the chains moved in, the savvy people moved into all the empty spaces in Finnieston, where there was already a lot of underground creative energy. Things have just mushroomed from there."

*The Times* puts it even more succinctly, enthusing that "Finnieston, once home to docks and warehouses, is now a buzzing neighbourhood". It is. Finnieston is on the up, fuelled by low rents and an influx of younger blood, with 'The Strip' bursting with pop-up bars and restaurants, plus myriad creative ventures and a smorgasbord of events. The word I keep hearing the more I delve is 'community'. Finnieston has a real sense of one.

The Hidden Lane is very much in sync with the Finnieston zeitgeist. This raffish collage of galleries and studios is more seditious than slick. I chat to Italian designer Silvia Pellegrino, who started her business

**Opening:** Finnieston at night  
**Above:** Kelvingrove Café  
**Below:** Crabshakk; Silvia Pellegrino of Chou Chou Couture



>>