



Grand plans: architects Squire and Partners are relocating to the listed Bon Marché Centre, below and inset, a business block that in 1877 was Britain's first purpose-built department store

On the curve: Brixton's Electric Avenue and its market, left, is the heart of SW9



Other new builds are already making a mark. The Junction, looming over a prominent corner, brings contemporary architecture and smart interiors. There are 92 light-filled flats across three

includes refurbishment of an old fire station and stables, which are earmarked as studio space for local start-ups and creative businesses. This is not the only big scheme in bustling Brixton town centre. Lambeth council is moving into a new town hall and freeing up land and historic buildings for 275 homes and a better public realm. **Hambrook House**, a 14-storey tower, will have 94 flats (musedevelopments.com). Other new builds are already making a mark. **The Junction**, looming over a prominent corner, brings contemporary architecture and smart interiors. There are 92 light-filled flats across three

mellow brick buildings with roof terraces and gardens. Two-bedroom apartments start at £570,000. Call Network Living on 0844 809 2027. **Park Heights**, a new 20-storey tower on the site of a former council estate, lies next to a coveted conservation quarter. Good-value, generous-size flats come with big wraparound balconies. Prices from £420,000. Call 0344 809 2026. Brixton used to be a cheap alternative to Clapham, but now buyers move there because they prefer it. It is a truly urban place – probably the nearest thing in London to a downtown district of an American city, with all that implies. Brixton was once a sedate railway suburb, with Victorian department stores attracting shoppers from across south London.

Electric Avenue, so named because it was one of the first streets to have electric lights, was built in 1880, while the splendid vaulted arcades that form Brixton Market, now a "cauldron" of hip foodie outlets and cafés, date from the Twenties. Music halls and late-night trams to the West End gave the area a bohemian flavour but after the Second World War, Brixton fell on hard times. Cheap rooms made it a destination for the Windrush generation of Caribbean immigrants. Riots in the Eighties turned it into a no-go residential zone for many, but also threw a political spotlight – and Whitehall mega-bucks – on Brixton, eventually sparking a turnaround. The revival gathered pace in the Noughties. Yuppies still feared to tread there, but a street-cred generation of young and relatively prosperous buyers and renters joined the local cosmopolitan mix. Brixton became liberated London, a magnet for the unconventional and a crucible of new ideas. The area self-



New look: Lambeth's old town hall and other council buildings are to be replaced with new retail space, a brasserie and 275 new homes, including 94 flats in a 14-storey tower, Hambrook House

From £420,000: left, apartments at Park Heights, a new residential tower block, have big wraparound balconies



We'll take that one: families are flocking to Brixton for its cheaper houses, food markets and urban buzz

Will jerk chicken give way to

Boho chic?

Cheap and alternative Brixton, loved by yuppies and in Zone 2 – it was too good to resist, says **David Spittles**

PART of the London Design Festival, Brixton Design Trail kicks off on Saturday for nine days of free events, installations, exhibits and talks showcasing the area's creative talents and colourful street life. It's a timely opportunity to familiarise yourself with a famous and fast-changing London district that has moved from fringe to fashionable and is even being trumpeted as the "new Clerkenwell". Architects Squire and Partners – whose high-profile projects include Canary Wharf skyscrapers and the Shell Centre redevelopment – are the latest arrival, crossing the Rubicon, or rather

the Thames, by relocating from north London to SW9. The move brings a significant new presence to Brixton and is tipped to trigger a flow of architects and design companies to the area. The firm is setting up shop in listed Bon Marché Centre, the UK's first purpose-built department store and the country's first steel-frame building, in a tall-tale sign of Brixton's grand past now being rediscovered. A disused Edwardian annexe to the original store, built in 1877, is set to become a new creative hub, with a gallery and exhibition space, a bar and café and rooftop pavilion. The project

consciously launched its own currency, the Brixton pound, or BE, to encourage local trading and production. Notes – the tenner features the image of local boy David Bowie – can be used at more than 200 outlets. But is Brixton's character changing again with the seemingly relentless march of gentrification that is engulfing inner London? You can still buy Jamaican jerk spice, saltfish and ackee at market stalls, but trendy Soho-style eateries, watering holes and boutiques are sprouting up, and some locals fear that Brixton, a glorious urban success story, is in danger of losing its soul. This year, the

local branch of Foxtons estate agents was targeted – its windows smashed and walls daubed with graffiti – by affordable housing campaigners. Such groups claim the area is losing its social diversity and that loyal local businesses are being driven out by rising rents imposed by corporate landlords who have swooped on the area. Property values have reached £800 a square foot, and big Victorian houses in the conservation area east of Brixton Hill fetch up to £2 million. "The changes have been astonishing since I moved here in 2008," says Gemma Shah, a public relations

manager who works in Marylebone. "Back then there was only Franco Manca pizza parlour and Rosie's Café in what's now the 'village', and probably two decent spots for a night out. "Windrush Square, the public space in front of Ritzy Cinema, was pretty dire, too. Now it feels like people from all over London want to visit Brixton. It's incredible how property prices have risen. I wouldn't be able to afford my flat now. "The transformation has made Brixton a fun and interesting place to live, but one always hopes a balance is kept, that it retains its independent spirit and remains accessible to people earning

normal salaries." Squire and Partners is convinced that Brixton will get better – and remain inclusive. For London Design Festival, the firm is creating an "outdoor street gallery" featuring 10 large-scale canvases by local artists, and is using its huge range of design skills to engage with the community. Part of Brixton's appeal is its Zone 2 status at the end of the Victoria line – one reason why newcomers continue to arrive from pricier parts of town. You do have to spend time in Brixton to get to know it. Indeed, estate agents say that the most typical buyer is someone who has rented locally first. Other buyers are heading up the hill to

Streatham, a couple of bus stops away, where prices are lower and a town centre upgrade is helping to re-establish it as a welcoming inner suburb. **Streatham Park** has become a new hub in Streatham High Road, with 250 new homes alongside a new supermarket, leisure centre with ice rink, bus terminal and a refurbished listed church. **The Print House** is a block of 35 apartments priced from £399,950 – call 020 3542 2749 – while **Norwich House**, in the same street, has 98 apartments priced from £250,000. Call estate agents KFH on 020 8222 7200. brixtondesigntrail.com

The best seat in the house

visit us at arloandjacob.com
call us on 03331 309 346
or pop by our Fulham Showroom

Arlo & Jacob
Sofas for life

A range of styles starting from £735

ST AGNES PLACE

a

PERFECT LOCATION

ST AGNES PLACE
LONDON SW11

A STUNNING COLLECTION OF 3 & 4 BEDROOM TOWNHOUSES AND 1, 2 & 3 BEDROOM APARTMENTS ON THE EDGE OF KENNINGTON PARK

LAUNCHING AUTUMN 2015

REGISTER YOUR INTEREST WWW.STAGNESPLACE.CO.UK

A development by **L&O**