





BOHO *by the* BOSPHORUS

STRADDLING EAST AND WEST WITH
ITS PATCHWORK OF EXOTIC STYLE,
CRUMBLING OTTOMAN PALACES AND
COSMOPOLITAN ARCHITECTURE,
ISTANBUL IS BOTH HIP AND MAGICAL



LEONARDO JAMES



KATHRYN TOMASETTI



Ortaköy neighbourhood,
by the Bosphorus Bridge

White cotton blouse
(£183) from Seneca
Rising; printed silk
trousers (price on
request) from Betty
Jackson; scarf (£60) from
The Loft; double-buckle
suede belt (£165) from
Alberta Ferretti at
my-wardrobe.com



Left, behind the New Mosque; right, door of the Orient Express Station

LEFT

Shirt (£65) from Nougat; skirt (£665) from Moschino; cardigan (£173) from American Retro; golden sandals (£780) from Chanel; scarf (£199) from Mulberry at my-wardrobe.com

RIGHT

Shirt (£60) from Nümpf; tweed waistcoat (£1,635) from Chanel; olive linen trousers (£140) from 120% Lino; scarf (£199) from Mulberry at my wardrobe.com; bracelet (£165) from Pebble London

LAST YEAR'S PRESTIGIOUS mantle as European Capital of Culture 2010 may have kick-started Istanbul's modernisation, but it was also an opportunity to revive and nurture its enduringly bohemian soul. Throughout history, the spiralling fortunes of this city, where East meets West, have provided inspiration for writers, musicians, architects, artists and everyday visitors.

A fine place to start appreciating Istanbul's bohemian spirit is Gülhane Park. These former gardens of the Sultans are tucked underneath Topkapı Palace, the Ottoman Empire's HQ for over 400 years. The affluence of the empire meant that resources were poured into the arts, music,

calligraphy and even the delicate field of tulip cultivation. Today, this park is no longer home to court favourites. In their place, poets scribble anguished stanzas, brazenly courting couples sprawl on the grass, and a statue of Aşık Veysel, the famed early 20th-century poet and *saz* (lute) player, watches over picnicking students, their voices raised in debate.

In Topkapı Palace itself – Istanbul's most-visited attraction – the spirit of Pierre Loti abounds. This 19th-century French author and traveller became one of the city's most famous diarists, hookah pipe-smokers and all-round dilettantes. Loti returned again and again, immersing himself in the

Turkish language, exploring the city's underground cisterns and savouring its strong black tea. He also penned his novel *Aziyadé* here, based on the story of a harem girl he lusted after.

Among the imperial treasures and Ottoman-chic costumes of the Sultans, it's the Topkapı Palace's infamous harem that is most alluring. Once peppered with nubile concubines from across the empire and off-limits to everyone but royalty and the eunuchs who served them, it's been leaving visitors awestruck for more than 500 years. Visit today and you'll see the harem's kaleidoscope of ostentatious tile-work and stained glass. The massive >







Left, by the fountain at the Spice Market; right, the Kamondo Staircase

LEFT

Cotton blouse (£145) from Sister at Paul & Joe; flower trousers (£140) from American Retro; black leather peep-toe sandals (£121) from DKNY; scarf (£124) from DVF at my-wardrobe.com

RIGHT

Top (£220) from Marni at Brownsfashion.com; trousers (£56) from Nümpf; jacket with leather layers (£860) from Nicole Murray; cracked cream resin bangle (£60) from Pebble London



palace kitchens, which once served a light menu for concubine consumption, re-open to the public early this summer.

Go shopping between the Topkapı, the Hagia Sophia and the massive Blue Mosque – Istanbul’s big three sights – and you won’t find a single chain store. The nearby Grand Bazaar is the spiritual home of the one-off, a place where ready-to-wear clothing was only introduced as recently as the internet and the mobile phone. Claudia Wiens, a German photographer who calls Istanbul home, suggests: “Get yourself lost in the streets behind the bazaar and you can find small coffee shops where time passes slowly. There is always something quirky to watch, interesting sounds from workshops, children, street vendors...”

Visitors can also nose around the neighbourhood’s ancient *hans* (warehouses)

where long-distance traders would unload wools and reams of silk for the city’s vast, rich and ethnically eclectic middle class.

Hans also served as temporary inns for transient traders and travellers. Partially used and offering a unique peephole into the city’s past, some of these cavernous buildings have been renovated and others stand in stasis. Kürkçü Han (*Mahmutpaşa Yokuşu Sokakı*) is a craft-lover’s haven. In this vibrant bazaar – one of the city’s oldest – candy-coloured balls of wool and quality Turkish linens are displayed on a labyrinth of stalls at remarkably low prices.

Spanning the Golden Horn – the historic inlet that divides Istanbul – the Galata Bridge is the most famous of the four that cross the Bosphorus. This link between Sultanahmet (Istanbul’s old city) and Beyoğlu (the European quarter) has been

the city’s most cosmopolitan walkway for centuries. Today it’s alive with fishermen selling sardine sandwiches, and snap-happy tourists waiting for a boat across the Bosphorus. From the bridge, you can gaze across to Istanbul’s Asian shores, a watery view that has provided time-honoured inspiration for artists. Nermin Mollaoğlu, director of the prestigious Istanbul Tanpınar Literature Festival (held this year 3–6 October; itef.com.tr), gets most of her ideas on her daily commute by ferry across the straits. “I live in Kadıköy, on the Asian side of the city, and my office is in Beyoğlu, on the European side,” she says. “There are open spaces on these ferries and it gives your brain time to start working to create.”

Crossing the Galata Bridge past Karaköy Fish Market in Beyoğlu is the hexagonal Kamondo Staircase (*Bankalar Caddesi*). >



Left, outside the New Mosque; right, Galata Bridge, which spans the Golden Horn

LEFT

Asymmetric black jacket (price on request) from Miharayasuhiro; white linen long-sleeved tiered shirt dress (£160) from 120% Lino; black leather peep-toe sandals (£121) from DKNY; scarf (£285) from Dries Van Noten at Brownsfashion.com; necklace (price on request) from Chanel

RIGHT

Black leather jacket (£625) from DKNY; cotton blouse (£44) from Nümp; patchwork trousers (£570) from Antonio Marras at Kenzo; blue scarf (£250) from Burberry at Brownsfashion.com; cream scarf (stylist's own) vintage Paul Smith; black leather peep-toe sandals (£121) from DKNY



Yet another of Istanbul's unorthodox residents, Abraham Kamondo, designed it back in 1860, in such a way that it would protect his children from a downhill tumble on their way to school, or so the story goes.

Around the corner, the Pera Palace Hotel was the legendary final stop on the Orient Express train line. Opened in 1895, the hotel has recently undergone an extensive two-and-a-half year refurbishment; it reopened last autumn. Pera Palace was a hit with some of the early 20th century's best-known luminaries, including Ernest Hemingway, Sarah Bernhardt and Greta Garbo, and it also served as refuge for the *grande dame* of crime, Agatha Christie. The author is said to have written *Murder on the Orient Express* there. Today the hotel

is an enchanting, nostalgic retreat with antique furniture, a beautifully restored elevator (the oldest in Turkey) and glorious views across to the Golden Horn.

Around the corner, Istiklal Caddesi – formerly known as the European quarter's 19th-century Grand Rue de Pera – is a pedestrianised avenue still lined with elegant mansions and courts, including the Russian Embassy, which was designed 150 years ago by Swiss-Italian architect brothers Gaspare and Giuseppe Fossati, at the request of a late-period Sultan who wanted to add bourgeois flair to his city. Like the rest of Istanbul, Istiklal went through a stage when it was down and nearly out a century or so later, morphing into a >





Left, Galata

LEFT

Blouse (£44) from Nümp; scarf (£60) from The Loft; silver Afghan earrings (£145), silver Miao dragon heads open bangle (£195) and silver Miao flowers open bracelet (£165) all from Pebble London

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kenzo.com
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rustic reincarnation of its former self. But over the past decade, the street has again become a showcase for aspiring designers, fashionistas and artists, with theatres, studios and art galleries popping up next to exclusive boutiques and art nouveau cafés. Cool second-hand bookstores dotted along İstiklal brim with works by the city's most creative talents: volumes spanning Istanbul's 1950s to the present, by photojournalist Ara Güler, novels by Nobel Prize-winning writer Orhan Pamuk, and a weighty tome of holiday snaps by Sultan Abdülhamid II, who was also a poet. Art gallery Arter (arter.org.tr), which opened last spring, is a nod to the city's contemporary bohemian vibe. This cutting-edge exhibition space prides itself

on being a platform for new talent, showcasing work by Turkish and international contemporary artists.

Today's hippest bohos mill around Çukurcuma – Istanbul's answer to London's Portobello Road – an antiques area due south of İstiklal. Its winding streets are crammed full of old furniture, gorgeous textiles, antique jewellery and other Ottoman treasures. Sprinkled in between are a handful of combination workshops/womenswear showrooms, such as AntiJen (*9B Yeni Çarşı Caddesi*) and Leila (*Firuzaga Mahallesi*). Selin Can Ozdemir, manager of Izaz Lofts (izaz.com), a trendy cluster of loft apartments in Beyoğlu, recommends the area around Cihangir Square, a shabby-chic enclave

that's on the rise, with a buzzing café culture and a tangle of galleries, vintage stores and high-end boutiques. "You can meet an independent director sipping Turkish coffee there and end up with a little role in his or her next film," he says.

However, up-and-coming movie director Hakkı Kurtuluş sums up Istanbul's bohemianism best: "For a traveller coming from the West, Istanbul is without doubt a place where the East, or the Orient begins. Yet here is not the place for the clash of the civilisations, but an orgy of them!"

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