

Norwich

Local girl **Gemma Seager** delves into her city of cobbled alleyways, Art Nouveau arcades and rhubarb cocktails – and tells us why there's more to Norwich than Alan Partridge

WORDS: **GEMMA SEAGER** ILLUSTRATIONS: **RAE EDWARDS**

The first time I visited Norwich, I was on holiday. We stayed in a secluded country cottage and, in need of urban entertainment, we took a trip to the city. As we drove down a wide, tree-lined street, flanked by beautiful Georgian houses, I already knew I liked it. Six months later we moved there and have stayed ever since. One of the great things about Norwich is that its best bits are hidden away. There's a sense of discovery and belonging as you unearth its mysteries.

Visitors head straight to the city centre with its glorious Art Deco City Hall, the flint Guildhall, where Caleys Cocoa Café now resides, and the famous outdoor market (norwich-market.org.uk). I could spend half a day wandering the maze-like market, browsing fabrics or flowers, chatting with traders and enjoying a cup of tea at one of its cafés. Normally I head straight for the back row, where I find UpMarket Vintage, a collective of neighbouring market stalls selling vintage clothing. I rummage through Ruby Tuesday's 60s mini dresses, or buy tweed and knitwear from Taxi Vintage.

A KNIGHTLY REFRESHMENT

For refreshment, it's a short walk to the newly refurbished Sir Garnet (36 Market Ave, sirgarnet.wordpress.com), the last of the 13 pubs that used to be dotted around the market to refresh weary shoppers and traders. They do the best burgers, made with local beef: everything, including the buns, is made on the premises. I like to walk up the flight of stairs, almost hidden at the back of the pub, and choose a table in the semi-circular room at the top. There I can enjoy a pint of ale while taking in the stunning view over the brightly striped rooftops of the covered market and the bustling crowds on Gentleman's Walk.

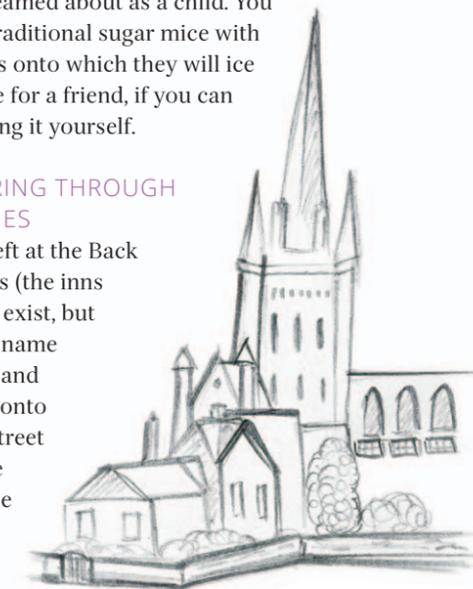


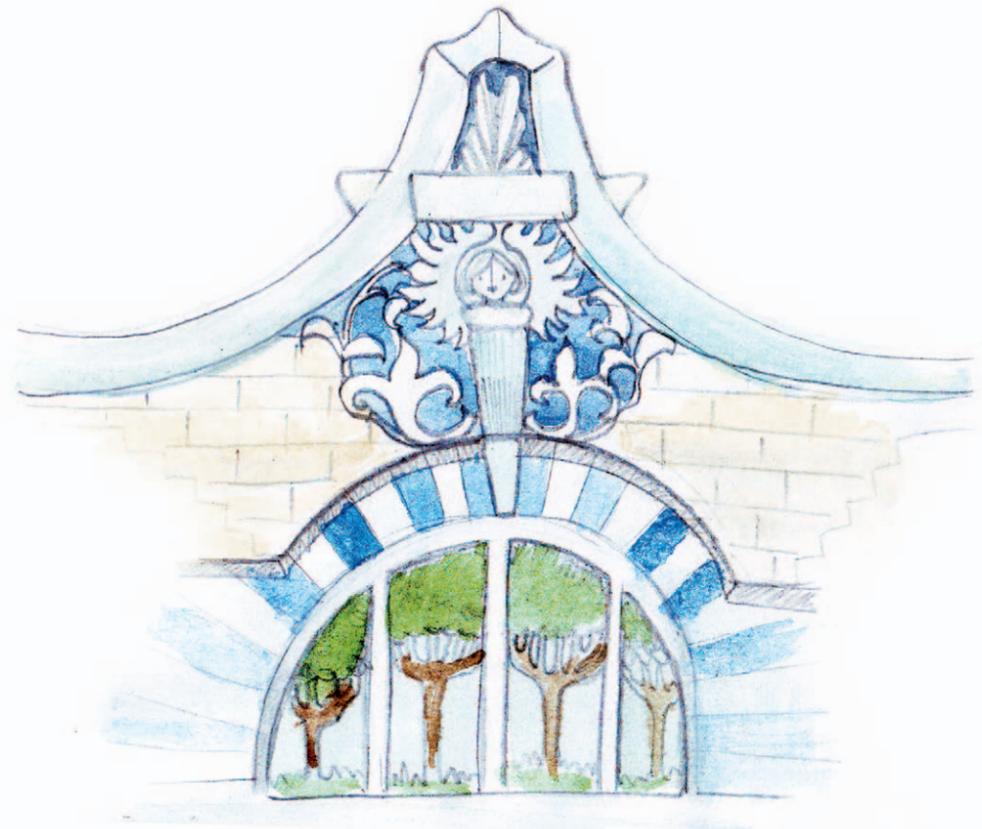
After leaving the pub, I wander through the Art Nouveau extravaganza that is the Royal Arcade. The shops have bow fronted windows

with rich varnished wood frames. Take a look above the shop fronts for a series of tiles with designs of peacocks, flowers and fruit by WJ Neatby and crafted by Doulton. Inside the Arcade, Digby's Chocolates (2 Royal Arcade, digbyschocolates.co.uk) is the kind of sweet shop I dreamed about as a child. You can buy traditional sugar mice with string tails onto which they will ice a message for a friend, if you can resist eating it yourself.

WANDERING THROUGH THE LANES

Turning left at the Back of the Inns (the inns no longer exist, but the street name remains), and left again onto London Street I'm on the edge of the





Norwich Lanes, an area of winding cobbled alleyways that is packed with independent shops and boutiques. I walk past department store Jarrold (1-7 London Street, jarrold.co.uk), which has been a local institution since the 18th century and has an excellent basement delicatessen, and then find myself on St Benedict's Street.

I pop into luxury boutique style vintage shop Prim Vintage (14 St Benedict's St, primvintagefashion.com) with its bright pink and white spotted shop front. Owners James and Shona have filled it with a mix of beautiful dresses from the 30s to the 80s and wound brightly-coloured silk scarves around the stairs down to the menswear basement. Just down the road, the imposing St Andrews and Blackfriars Hall is home to a monthly vintage and antiques fair (cloistersfair.com) and a weekly fair on Wednesdays.

THROUGH FORGOTTEN STREETS

It's not a fair day so I continue on down to historic Elm Hill, a picturesque medieval cobbled street, boasting more timber framed Tudor buildings than the whole of the City of London. In the fading afternoon light, the bench that surrounds the tree in the square is a dreamy place to rest my weary feet. Sadly the tree is no longer an elm, thanks to Dutch elm disease, but is instead a London Plane, with its weird camouflage style bark.

While I sit, the glass button eyes of hundreds of teddy bears peer at me through the windows of a shop that looks like it has leapt straight from the pages of a Dickens classic. The Bear Shop (18, Elm Hill, bearshops.co.uk) is crammed with the sort of teddies you see in period dramas, with over 300 handmade bears, plus those from renowned makers like Steiff. Suitably refreshed, it's time to explore

the antiques shops of Elm Hill. Antiques and Interiors (31-35 Elm Hill) is an Art Deco furniture lover's dream, piled with enough pieces for me to furnish the Art Deco mansion of my dreams. Fortunately my Art Deco mansion is still a fantasy and my bank balance sternly warns me I can't afford that glamorous black leather and chrome armchair, so I leave empty handed.

Crossing over, I browse Elm Hill Antiques (28 Elm Hill), where I admire a boxed set of cake forks and wonder if I have space for yet another china trio. Back across the cobbles is the wonderfully named Dormouse Books (29 Elm Hill) where you can breathe in the smell of old paper and hunt for vintage copies of PG Wodehouse novels or have a chat with the friendly owner.



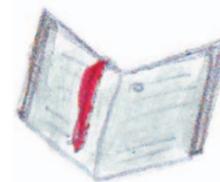
Further down the road is Lulu Vintage (32 Elm Hill) a flurry of feathers and sequins, stuffed with glamorous vintage trappings for chaps and chappettes alike. It's an excellent place for those after pieces from the 1930s and 1940s.

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At the end of Elm Hill I take a turn down Magdalen Street, another hot spot for vintage hunters. Aladdin's Cave at 52-56 has a huge selection of collectables – it's great for German fat lava glazes and also has stalls displaying more esoteric items. Further along the road, behind the timber framed windows of Looses Antiques Emporium (23-25 Magdalen Street), is a huge warehouse full of furniture, china, vintage clothes and collectables. Also on Magdalen Street are Shade of Pale (No. 67-69) and Junk & Gems (No. 149), meaning you're spoilt for choice if you want something unique for your home.

I decide that today I can pass on the shrunken heads and Victorian medical curios



for sale in Aladdin's Cave and retrace my steps up Magdalen Street, popping into the rock 'n' roll bad boy of Norwich's vintage shops – Retreat Vintage (26A Magdalen Street) – to rummage through their suitcases stuffed

with gloves for the finishing touch for my outfit. I arrive in Tombland (probably the oldest part of Norwich that has seen many a historic riot) just in time for a wander through Tombland Antiques (14 Tombland), where the sparkle of costume jewellery under the lights in their glass cabinets keeps me hooked until closing time. For the bibliophile you can find Tombland Bookshop (8 Tombland) opposite the Maids Head hotel, where Queen Elizabeth I and her entourage once stayed. It has an outside shelf of old books and leather bindings for just £1.

RHUBARB COCKTAILS

As my stomach complains that it's time for more food, I wander across the top of the bustling Prince of Wales Road, admiring the grand buildings, and into an unassuming side

street that hides one of Norwich's treasures. 42 King Street is understated from the outside, a simple chalk A-board announcing its presence. Inside it's equally understated, no glamorous chrome or plush velvet, but it serves the best cocktails to be found in Norwich. The space is small, so you need to time it right or book ahead, but it's worth the forward planning to round off the day with freshly-cooked tapas and a cocktail. I enjoy a Rhubarb Manhattan, but hosts Grace and Matthew are always ready to suggest other cocktails for you to try, or chat about the ingredients they use. As I settle back on the cushions and sip my Manhattan in the dimly lit bar, I know that I've still barely scratched the surface of the independent and vintage honeypots to be found in Norwich. That's why I settled here, and why I've stayed. ✨

