

[SMALL]

TALK



Community

'I think the difference between maybe London and all these other places in the UK is Glasgow is the one that people are actually quite nice...'

Duty

'Weather doesn't really bother me that much. The cold doesn't bother me and the snow doesn't bother me...'

People

'For us, it was really helpful and actually, I think as well it helped us feel safe where we weren't.'

LETTER FROM THE EDITOR



Welcome to the first issue of Small Talk Magazine. Small Talk is the embodiment of how random encounters that can change someone's life.

The inspiration for this magazine struck me on a particularly hard day when I popped in for a cup of coffee in the local coffee shop. I often see the owners Gillian and Ross behind the counter and got quite familiar with them. When I entered, visibly disheartened, Gillian started a lighthearted conversation. By the time my coffee was ready, I found myself laughing at the crossword puzzle she had been pondering all day. That's when I left the coffee shop I realised I wanted to imprint these beautiful experiences of random interactions so that they don't go unnoticed. I decided to create a magazine about how people and places like my local coffee shop can bring joy and familiarity to life.

I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to my team, Viktoriia Prokopiv and Marta Leslie, without whom this idea would not have been possible.



VIKTORIIA PROKOPIV

Viktoriia Prokopiv is an art director of the magazine. Being an artist and now developing her passion for photography she contributes to the visual content of the magazine. Her unique perspective of the world adds up to the magazine with vibrant colours and compelling images.



MARTA LESLIE

Marta Leslie is on our social media team. She is an aspiring musician who sets the tone for Small Talk. She composes all the music for our digital content. Her upbeat dynamic tunes not only bring a personal touch to the magazine but breathe life into each of the stories.

A handwritten signature in black ink, likely belonging to the Editor-in-Chief, Gillian.

Editor-in-Chief

WATCH PROMO



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The story behind the coffee shop that inspired the creation of Small Talk

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The shopping experience that is not about clothes but about human interactions

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Street music for the crowds of hundreds and thousands of people

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The flower shop where the owner believes bringing joy to someone's home is the utmost reward.

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The lollipop lady whose job evolved into way of life

PAGE 36

Scottish heritage in a bottle of whisky but not only.



COFFEE SHOP

Where Every Cup Tells a Story

We have all heard the saying, "But first, coffee". Making a cup of coffee is a no-brainer, though for many that morning cup is a lot more about habit than a simple caffeine buzz. A morning cup of coffee is a ritual – a moment of calm before the day's chaos. This sentiment rings especially true at the family-owned Toro Coffee Shop, where a cup of joe is more than just a beverage — it's a community experience.

Gillian Walker and her husband, Ross, open Toro Coffee Shop near Pollok Park on the Southside of Glasgow six years ago. With its cosy wooden interiors, pillow-stuffed chairs, and mouth-watering homemade desserts, the café manages to grow into a successful community-based spot favoured by many. Toro's regular customers are locals from the area who come not just for a refreshing drink but for the conversation,

laughter, and the warm feeling of being known. "We try and get to know people, maybe after they've visited three or four times, and we know what they're up to. Then we sort of ask their name and if we feel they might be comfortable it means the next time we can be a little bit more personal," explains Gillian.

The COVID-19 pandemic hit a year and a half after Toro opens and while a lot of businesses took a fall, Gillian says it turned out quite well for them. As they open a takeaway window people keep coming, allowing them to continue serving their loyal customers. This change not only sustains their business but also provides a new normal during challenging times, says Gillian.

The couple gets positive feedback from customers as everyone enjoys the café being





"WE GOT TO KNOW ONE OF OUR CUSTOMERS WHO LIVES LOCALLY. HE LIVED ALONE AND WAS HAVING A REALLY HARD TIME [DURING THE PANDEMIC]. A YOUNG GUY IN HIS 30S, HE SAID IF IT HAD NOT BEEN FOR US – SEEING A FACE AND SPEAKING TO SOMEONE – HE MIGHT NOT HAVE MADE IT THROUGH THAT TIME."

— GILLIAN



"IT'S ALWAYS ME AND MY HUSBAND. WE LIVE TOGETHER AND WE WORK TOGETHER. IT WAS NICE TO BREAK UP OUR ROUTINE AND SEE PEOPLE, TO HAVE CONVERSATIONS WITH THEM. FOR US, IT WAS REALLY HELPFUL, AND I THINK IT ALSO HELPED US FEEL SAFE WHERE WE WEREN'T."

— GILLIAN

MORE
THAN
JUST
a cuppa

on in in

there through the long days of Covid -19 pandemic. It is obvious everyone enjoyed the idea as many comes by for a cuppa and a small talk as a change of the routine of being confined at home during lockdown.

With a background in retail since the age of 16, Gillian has a natural knack for connecting with people. She can easily define whether the customers are up for a little chat or just want to quietly relax with a book. As entertainment, she and her husband often do crosswords getting customers involved.

In an age where online interactions often overshadow face-to-face communication in real life, Toro Coffee Shop stands out as an island of genuine connection where customers are not interested in social media accounts and beautiful pictures but are looking for genuine connections.

By Anna Konovalenko
Photography by Anna Konovalenko



Gillian recalls she always wanted to build something special, not just another business but a hub – be authentic.

"YOU ALMOST FEEL YOU'VE GOT AN EXTENDED FAMILY. PEOPLE FEEL THAT YOU ARE HERE NOT TO JUST FLING OUT SOME COFFEES,

"YOU THINK YOU'RE JUST HERE TO SERVE A COFFEE AND A CAKE BUT, TO SOME PEOPLE, IT MEANS A LOT MORE. AND I THINK NOW THAT WE CAN ACTUALLY HAVE PEOPLE IN AND HEAR WHAT THEY'RE UP TO AND ENGAGE WITH THEM, IT SHOULD BE A SAFE SPACE. WE PRIDE OURSELVES ON IT – BEING A SAFE PLACE WHERE ANYONE CAN COME IN HERE EVERY DAY TO JUST OFFLOAD AND HAVE A HOT CUP OF COFFEE. IF SOMEONE MAYBE DOESN'T WANT TO SPEAK TO FRIENDS OR FAMILY, THEY CAN ALWAYS SPEAK TO US."

— GILLIAN

MORE THAN RETAIL

In the heartbeat of busy Glasgow, among vinyl and music shops, there is West Vintage. Located on King Street, West Vintage isn't just another vintage store —it's a lifestyle — a venue for self-expression, connections and an excellent fashion sense. Clothes from all over the world sorted and arranged in seasons and colours not only attract the eye but quickly become an addiction.

Joining the team in 2021, right after a wave of the COVID-19 pandemic Nicholas Anderson 23-year-old works here as a sales assistant and store manager. Nicholas juggles his university studies with his role at the shop and when

graduating last year, he starts working here full-time.

Despite the challenges brought by the COVID-19 pandemic with sales dropping across the board and people turning to online shopping to cut costs, West Vintage continues operating at full capacity, explains Nicholas.

In today's online interaction world, face-to-face interactions can feel rare. The sense of coming to the shop to feel the textures and fabrics in your hands, trying on a myriad of outfits admiring yourself in the mirror fades away. There is the whole world that is missing out on because people turn to online shopping. Colourful mesh tops and skirts, with

jumpers brought from America and jackets from Japan, West Vintage offers customers to narrate their unique styles. But more than that it offers a chance to get yourself out into the world and have a real talk.

That's why many customers treasure their visits to West Vintage, not just for the unique fashion choices but for the authentic conversations it encourages. It's a sanctuary where customers and Nicholas alike find solace amidst the chaos of reality.

"It's nice because you quickly learn you're not alone with your problems, everyone has them. You're walking down the street and you'll see 50 people and



everyone is fighting their own battles in their head."

The beauty of these conversations lies in their spontaneity and ease. Nicholas says there's a unique freedom in sharing one's joy and concerns with a stranger and comprehends this might be the first and the last time you see them.

As the seasons change, so does

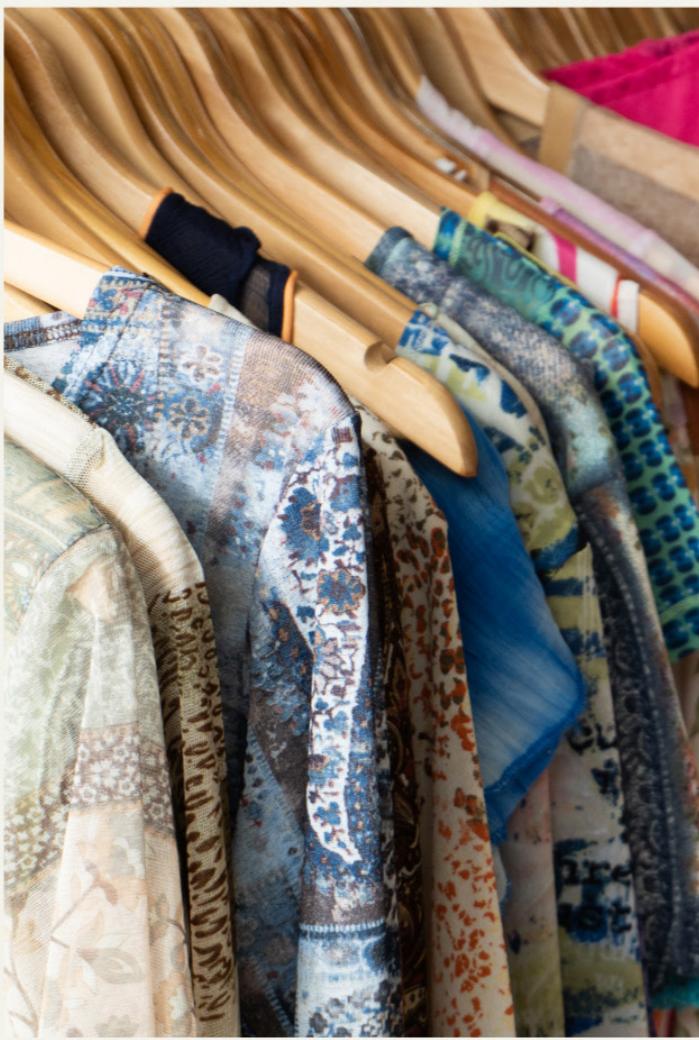
the shop's clientele. While autumn and winter might be a little too quiet, spring and summer see splashes of customers, particularly students who are looking to touch up their wardrobe. "A lot of people in this vintage store are students and a lot of students come from abroad," notes Nicholas. He also says there is a range of everyone like tourists and freshmen who come and ask

around about Glasgow and the area. "They want to know people from Glasgow, and what the city is like.

"Just yesterday there was a couple of Americans who were very interested in this area you know, they were here studying for uni [university] so I would give them my Instagram or contact details to keep in touch," says Nicholas.

“ IT'S A SAFE SPACE TO TALK AND PEOPLE ARE VERY CHILLED OUT. I THINK THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN MAYBE LONDON AND ALL THESE OTHER PLACES IN THE UK IS GLASGOW IS THE ONE THAT PEOPLE ARE ACTUALLY QUITE NICE.

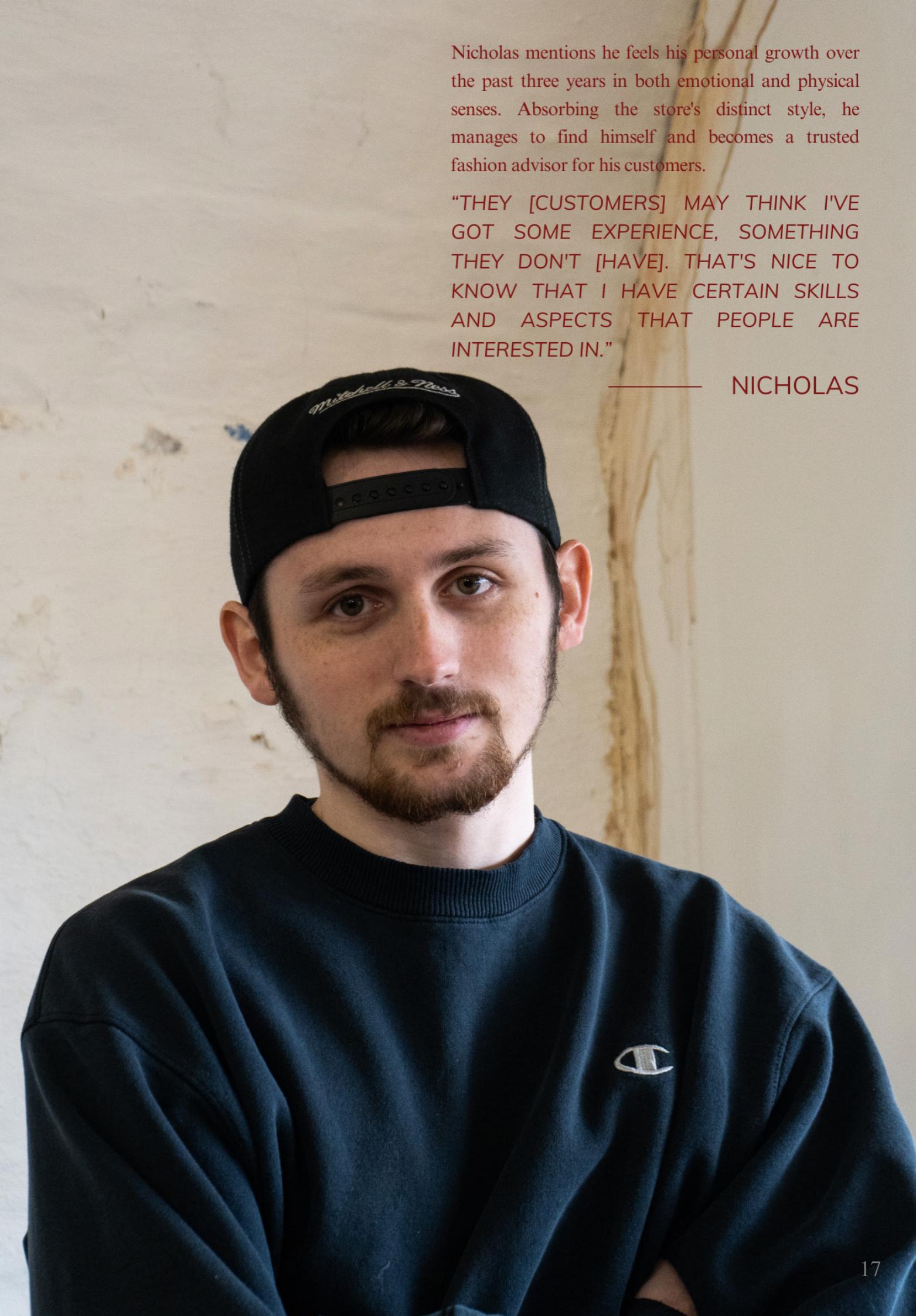
———— NICHOLAS ”



Nicholas enjoys the ambience in the shop, especially because it boosts his confidence and helps him socialise in the university after Covid-19. He recalls: “If you’re doing presentations or you’re speaking in public you don’t know everyone. It’s the same to working here because you don’t know anyone who comes in and out of those doors.”

As online platforms are reshaping the shopping culture, this vintage shop stands as a testament that even in the 21st century people need casual human interactions to stay intact with their feelings and one another.

By Anna Konovalenko
Photography by Anna Konovalenko



Nicholas mentions he feels his personal growth over the past three years in both emotional and physical senses. Absorbing the store's distinct style, he manages to find himself and becomes a trusted fashion advisor for his customers.

“THEY [CUSTOMERS] MAY THINK I’VE GOT SOME EXPERIENCE, SOMETHING THEY DON’T [HAVE]. THAT’S NICE TO KNOW THAT I HAVE CERTAIN SKILLS AND ASPECTS THAT PEOPLE ARE INTERESTED IN.”

— NICHOLAS

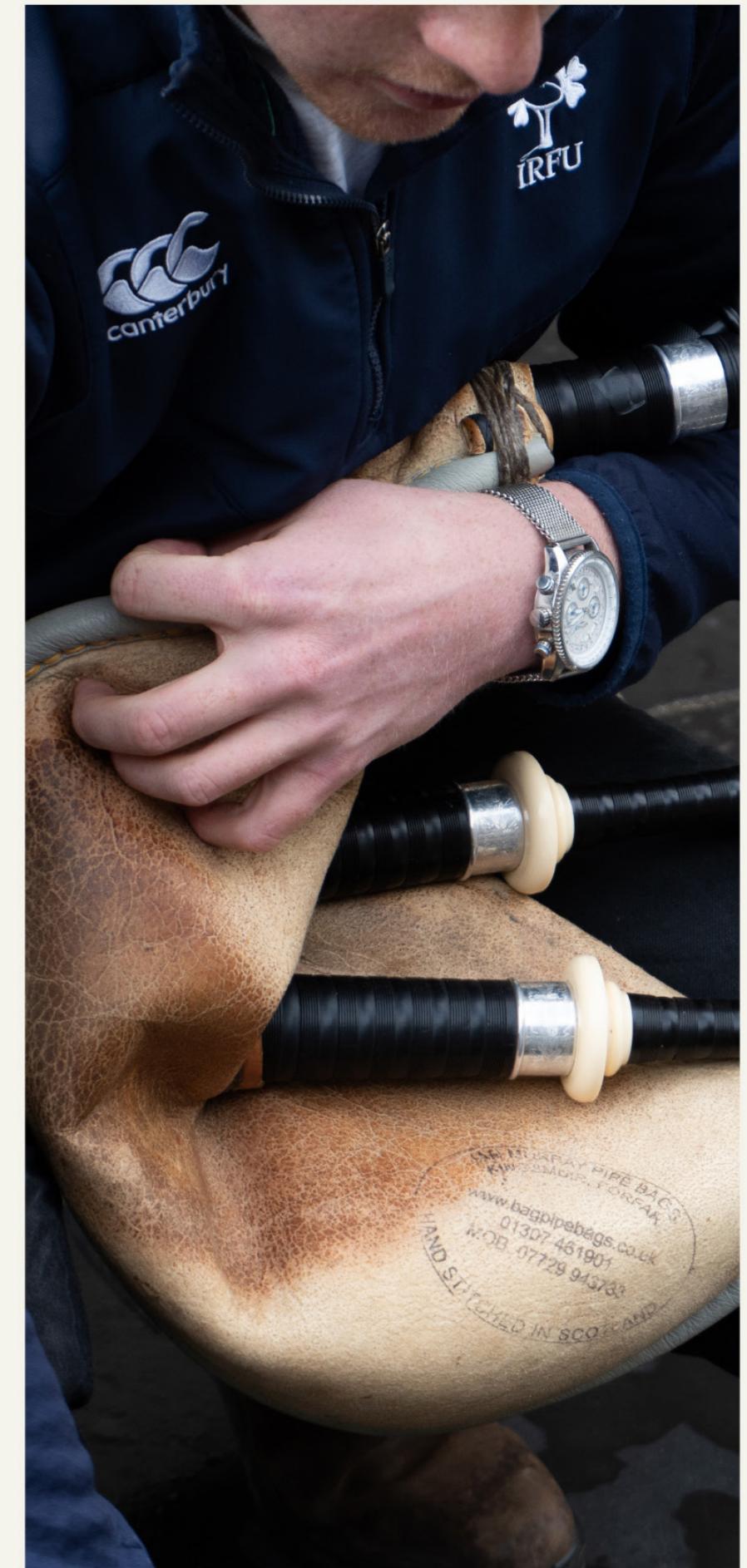
PASSION FOR BRIGNING JOY

In the heart of the rush on Buchanan Street, in Glasgow, stands Andrew Nelson playing bagpipe and bringing joy to everyone who passes him by. Busking on the bagpipes in his hands, his presence not only represents Scotland but also brings vibrancy and cultural richness to the heart of the city centre.

Andrew is originally from a family of farmers from Northern Ireland, and he jokes about the irony that he plays the Scottish national instrument while being Irish to the core. He comes to Scotland in 2023 to pursue playing the bagpipe at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland, but his passion for the instrument blooms when he is only seven years old. Starting with the church classes, he soon starts playing bagpipes professionally.

“FOR ME IT WAS YOUTUBE. WHEN I WAS TWELVE, I COULDN'T GET ENOUGH OF IT. I COULDN'T GET ENOUGH OF MUSIC.”

— ANDREW



"THE MELODIES YOU CAN PLAY ARE REALLY LIMITED BECAUSE OF THE INSTRUMENT. THE PIPES ARE EXTREMELY MOISTURE SENSITIVE. IF YOU TRY TO GET THEM IN TUNE IT'S A NIGHTMARE. IF YOU PLAY FOR MORE THAN AN HOUR YOU JUST GOING TO RUIN IT [THE BAGPIPE]."

ANDREW

Andrew's presence lifts the atmosphere of the street, making it livelier and engaging. Andrew recalls many people, especially tourists making requests to play a song. "Usually, it's Americans that get the moves and ask me to play a song. Sometimes I get photographed with tourist groups, which is also quite nice," notes Andrew.

He starts busking last year in September only for the reason of getting some extra cash, but in some time, it grows to be a little bit more than just a simple part-time job and since December 2023 he comes out here once or twice a week.

Andrew says he sees hundreds of faces every day, and all of them are smiling. "It seems people do get quite a reaction out of it. There's been a couple of times you get nice stories. Last week I was busking, and a girl came down to me, and she said she just buried her mum and that me and my music really cheered her up," he recalls.

Andrew stands as living proof of how cultural heritage can resonate within urban life. His tunes have the power to soothe sorrow and encourage a mood of joy, all within the streets of Glasgow.

"US PIPERS AS A COMMUNITY CAN BE QUITE NEGATIVE AND MANY DON'T UNDERSTAND WHY I AM DOING IT [BUSKING]. THE REASON I AM DOING IT IS BECAUSE IT'S QUITE ENJOYABLE TO BRING A BIT OF MUSIC INTO SOMEONE'S LIFE."

ANDREW



THE BLOOM OF CENTURY



Barvas & James isn't just a flower shop — it's a century-long legacy carefully nurtured by its owner, John Cooper.

With two locations in Glasgow: one on the West End has been open for six years and the other one, its younger counterpart in Shawlands, on the city's Southside Barvas & James has quickly garnered its loyal customer base in just 18 months.

Though Barvas & James has been in business for six years, its origins stretch back over a century. John explains that floral design has always been a part of his life. His mum was a florist, and John has been passionate about flowers from a young age.

"The shop that we have in the West End we've had in the family for about 105 years, so it's been passed down from my great-grandmother right down to me. James is a family name where Barvas is the place where my great-grandmother's parents came from, so when they moved to Glasgow that was why I called it that," says John.

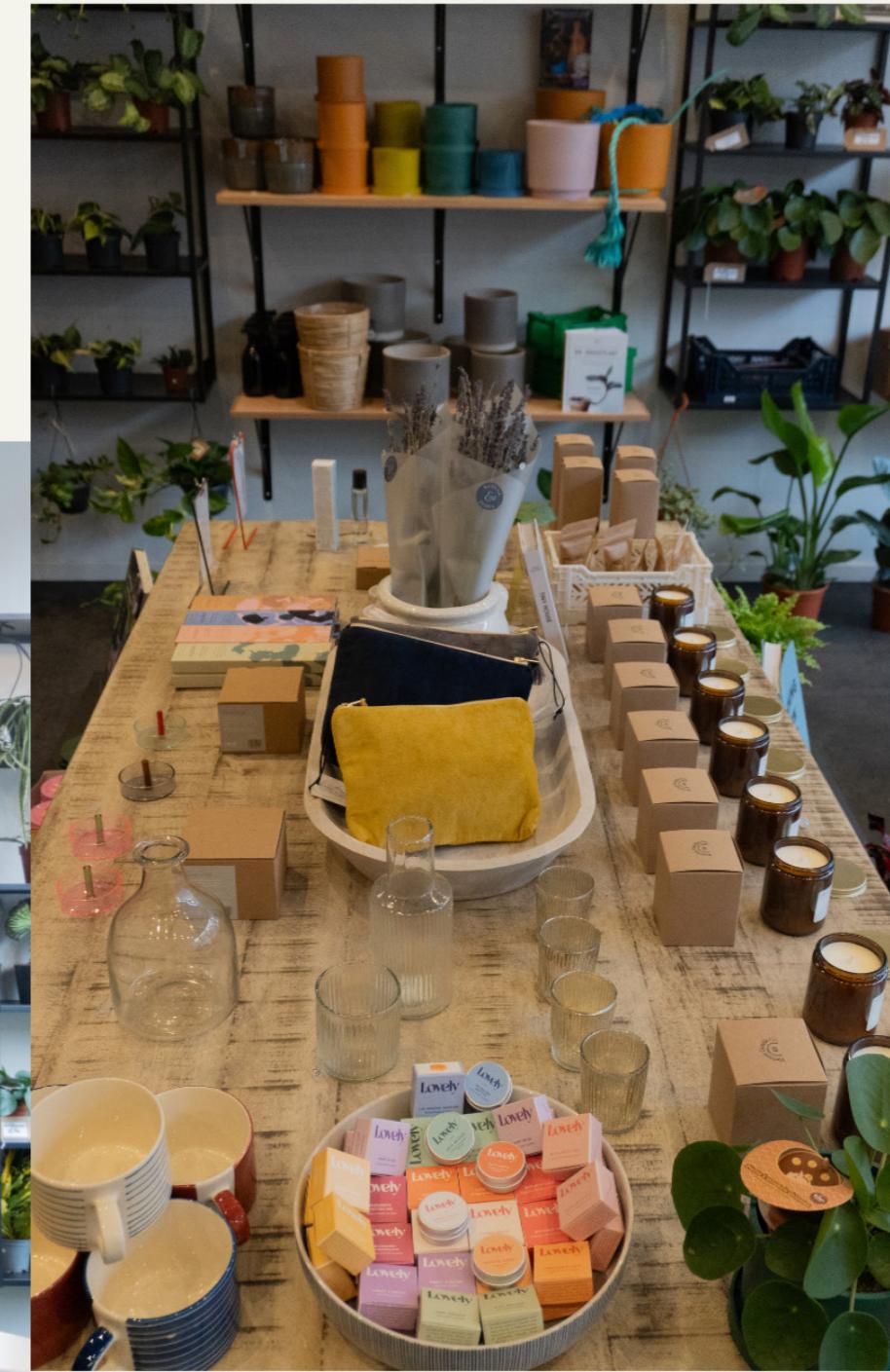
Stepping into Barvas & James, everyone can feel the shop has a soul. The candle smells and dim lights immediately wrap you in a sense of familiarity. The long family heritage of Barvas & James is witnessed in its interior choices and decorations. John has spent much effort to make it look like a comfortable space where everyone can find something for themselves.

John explains: "I think it's really in that sense that we're really community-based and we're adjusting to a customer as well, we are listening to them. The big companies, big chains of people or the stuff you buy online, there's not the same personal feel to it."

BARVAS & JAMES



COZINESS for home



"YOU DON'T NEED TO BUY BEAUTIFUL THINGS, IT'S NOT LIKE FOOD OR WHATEVER ELSE YOU HAVE TO BUY FOR A HOUSE. THAT'S WHY OUR JOB IS TO PRODUCE SOMETHING THAT'S BEAUTIFUL AND MAKE SOMEBODY THINK IT'S BEAUTIFUL. WE NEED TO MAKE THEM WANT TO BUY IT EVEN IF THEY DON'T NEED IT OR, FOR EXAMPLE, THEY WANT TO MAKE SOMEONE ELSE HAPPY AND BUY THIS SOMETHING FOR A PRESENT," SAYS JOHN

Starting primarily as a florist and plant store, it then expands its offerings to a selection of lifestyle and homeware goods. Their assortment has plants, pots, candles, pottery, and many other special designs. John stresses they sell their handmade pot selection, but they also provide areas where customers can design their own and get them painted too. The team

continuously challenges themselves to stay ahead of the curve each time coming up with the latest ideas. Ordering different flower varieties and crafting bouquets is not just about visual appeal but also about creating a safe and comfortable environment at home. "I always there's a bit of showmanship in floristry and a bit of artistry, of course. At the end of the day, you can buy all the

flowers in the world, but the buying isn't a secret. How you put it together is key. What I say to everyone who works for me or works with me is that the reaction of the person you pick the flowers for is the most important, so it's not easy. Our job is to produce something that's beautiful and somebody thinks is beautiful. They [customers] take it [plant/bouquet] home

LARGER THAN LIFE

of the products but also the affordability for everyone. "When they go home, it improves their life and makes them happy," explains John. That is the reason behind the success of Barvas & James. At Barvas & James, it is more than just a purchase. Whether you are a regular or a passerby, its wonderful blooms bring joy from being part of a community that values quality, authenticity, and connection and leaves a warm feeling, reminding you of home and comfort.

By Anna Konovalenko
Photography by Anna Konovalenko

"I REALLY ENJOY MY JOB, ESPECIALLY WORKING FOR MYSELF. BUT I'M NEVER SATISFIED. IT'S ALWAYS TRYING TO DO SOMETHING DIFFERENT, TRYING TO DO SOMETHING BETTER. IF YOU HAVE THAT MINDSET, THERE ARE TIMES WHEN I'LL GO 'OH THAT'S BEAUTIFUL', AND THERE ARE TIMES I WANT TO DO SOMETHING BETTER, MORE BEAUTIFUL. THAT'S THE FUN OF THE JOB. I LIKE THE FACT THAT TOMORROW IS GOING TO BE ANOTHER DAY, NOT HOW IT WAS TODAY. AND THE INTERACTION WITH PEOPLE WHEN HAVING A LAUGH AND A JOKE WHILST ALSO MAKING THEIR LIFE HAPPY IN TERMS OF THEM COMING IN HERE BECAUSE IT IS A NICE EXPERIENCE. FOR THEM, IT'S NOT JUST ABOUT THE PRODUCT OR A PURCHASE, IT'S JUST GETTING IN HERE AND LOOKING AT ALL THIS BEAUTIFUL STUFF AND BROWSING AROUND."

JOHN

FOR URBAN LIVING



THE GUARDIAN OF SUMMERTOWN ROAD

Many parents are familiar with the uneasy feeling of watching their child rush to school on a Wednesday morning trying to make it to the first class. Yet, the corner of Summertown Road and Copland Road in Glasgow is guarded by Katie Donnelly who ensures local school children stay safe crossing the street.

Katie has been a 'lollipop lady' for nearly three years. No matter the weather conditions, Katie is always on her post to help children and adults cross the road. Before coming to patrol crossing, Katie works in a retail shop in the city centre.



There, she enjoys her settled routine of working from 6 am till noon and when the shop closes and all the staff are cut, Katie is forced to find a new job. Her choice lands on the patrol crossing position. She takes over the post next to her house and compared to the always-flowing rhythm of the shop, this new job seems boring to Katie at first.

Meeting people only twice a day for an hour and a half in the morning at half-past eight and again at three o'clock, Katie swiftly integrates into the community acquainting with many fellow passers-by.



“ IT TOOK ME A LONG TIME TO GET USED TO IT BECAUSE WHEN I WORKED IN THE STORE IN THE DRIVE-THROUGH, I WAS ALWAYS BUSY, BUSY. AND I JUST FOUND IT A WEE BIT BORING AT FIRST. BUT ONCE I GOT TO KNOW ALL THE CHILDREN AND THE PARENTS, THEIR NAMES AS WELL...I REALLY ENJOY IT NOW.

WEATHER DOESN'T REALLY BOTHER ME THAT MUCH. IT CAN BE REALLY COLD, IT DOESN'T BOTHER ME, THE SNOW DOESN'T BOTHER ME, THE RAIN SOMETIMES WILL GET REALLY WET, I DO ENJOY IT. I HAVE BEEN OFFERED TO GO INDOORS AND WORK, BUT I'VE REFUSED THAT AT THE MOMENT. I LOVE IT,

— KATIE





Katie reflects: "It's the same corner for three years now. You always say 'Good morning and that how are you feeling today?' 'How are you?' and some people do tell you that something's happened."

"Even if people stop and ask you for directions. Could you tell me where the post office is? Could you tell me where the Govan Cross is? Could you tell me where the ASDA is?"

In no time Katie's job grows to be more than a simple road crossing and became a symbol for many people in the community. She talks to kids and adults whom she knows and first-time strangers. Bus drivers recognise her and car drivers wave at her offering a cup of tea for the chilly weather. The small talk with the parent lights up the tenor, and a casual chat with the Airbnb tenant leaves great memories

for the latter. The bits and pieces of those encounters brighten up the spirit at the end of the day, meaning Katie's job does not go unnoticed.

Just across her spot, there is a hotel which hosts a diverse array of visitors. Katie mentions she knows a lot of people from the place who regularly come up to talk to her.



“ ONE MAN CAME OVER THE OTHER DAY TO TELL ME THAT HE'S NOW GOT A HOUSE. HE'S BEEN LIVING IN THE COPLAND ROAD HOTEL FOR THREE YEARS... THE OTHER ONE, HE CUTS HIMSELF AND HE'S NOT DONE THAT FOR FOUR WEEKS AND I SAID KEEP UP THE GOOD WORK.

— KATIE

”



As years pass, Katie witnesses how children go from nursery to primary school and eventually to secondary school. “There are girls that come in from the school for a bus. I can see the bus coming and I’ll shout their names and I’ll go ‘Oh yeah, hurry up! The bus is coming,’” notes Katie.

Katie Donnelly takes over an unrecognised but vital role in the lives of many people. Spending several hours outdoors in the same spot for years she becomes a sign of community, familiarity and safety.

By Anna Konovalenko
Photography by Viktoriia Prokopiv

'THANKS FOR KEEPING ME SAFE
CROSSING THE ROAD'

— KIDS ON POSTCARDS



SCOTLAND IN A BOTTLE OF WHISKY



Nested in the heart of Glasgow, Taste of Scotland is more than just a souvenir shop — it is an ethnic footprint of Scotland. It serves as a cultural epicentre of not only whisky craftsmanship but also Scottish heritage and local picturesque destinations. Thanks to its charismatic shopkeeper, Kier Robertson, who took over the role of sales assistant six months ago, it attracts both locals and tourists.

The shop attracts a diverse clientele, particularly Americans and Japanese-Chinese businessmen. “American tourists mostly come during summers. You get more like Southern, a bit more cowboy-ish

type. They wear big funny hats and stuff like that,” explains Kier.

He also mentions that the language barrier is rarely a problem but if it becomes a case Kier bridges the gap as well as he can. “You just have to point and say things loudly, hoping they understand the emphasis,” Kier jokes. He says he enjoys talking to people who he probably wouldn't have got the chance to talk to otherwise. “It is nice to have people who aren't just Scottish coming into the shop to know a lot of new things while chatting to people,” he explains.

“YOU'RE LIKE EXEMPLARY THING FOR FOREIGNERS.
PEOPLE COME TO US TO GET A SLICE OFF LIKE THE
COUNTRY.”

— KIER



The Taste of Scotland is always packed with people greedily scanning the aisles in search of the best choice, either for themselves or as a present for their friends, relatives and partners. Beyond whisky, the shop offers a range of Scottish sweets and souvenirs. Kier notes that while tourists often gravitate towards alcoholic beverages, locals tend to favour items like shortbread and butter tablets.

Kier takes over various roles at the shop, explaining the whisky craft, providing translations, sharing insights about Scotland and inquiring about his customers' plans. “When people from other cultures come in, you kind of feel like a teacher sometimes. They're asking you questions about Scotland and where to go and what to do,” explains Kier.

The shop is exceptionally busy during the holiday season. Kier says a lot of customers seek a piece of advice. "A lot of people were coming in like earlier on in the Christmas period. That gave me the ability to manoeuvre their choices of what they could get so it's a bit more expertise-aligned. You get a pretty good fulfilment out of it," he says.

At Taste of Scotland, it is not just about whisky, it is a window into Scottish culture, where cultural differences are bridged with warmth and humour. Whether navigating language barriers with playful gestures or offering tailored recommendations during the holiday rush, Kier's work does not go unnoticed. His experiences at Taste of Scotland highlight the value of human interconnections. It reminds us that every brief interaction can deepen our understanding of the world and its diverse people.

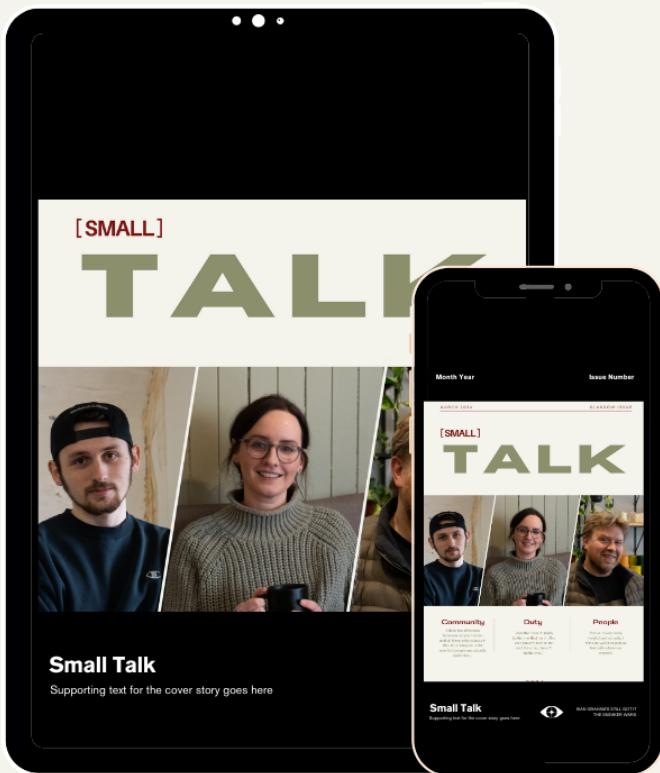
By Anna Konovalenko
Photography by Viktoriia Prokopiv



"SOMETIMES WHEN YOU'RE TALKING TO SOMEONE FOR A WHILE, THEY DO BUY SOMETHING A BIT MORE EXPENSIVE THAT THEY NOT HAVE GOT OTHERWISE. IT DOES GIVE YOU A BIT OF DOPAMINE."

— KIER





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