There's More to a Pub Than Meets the Lips: There's More to a Pub Than Sipping
By ADA LOUISE HUXTABLE
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There's More to a Pub Than Meets the Lips

By ADA LOUISE HUXTABLE

In London, church hopping and pub crawling are closely related, no blasphemy intended. Both are architectural experiences. One elevates; the other refreshes. Pub follows church as naturally as sun (sometimes) follows rain.

For the student of cities and what makes them great, a knowledge of both is essential. Picture London without its churches. Picture London without its pubs. It can't be done. One is as much an expression of a people and a place—raised to a true art—as the other.

The churches of Wren and Hawksmoor have been discussed at other times and in other places. They are as heady as draught Guinness. This time let us turn to London pubs—much loved, and much misunderstood on our own side of the Atlantic.

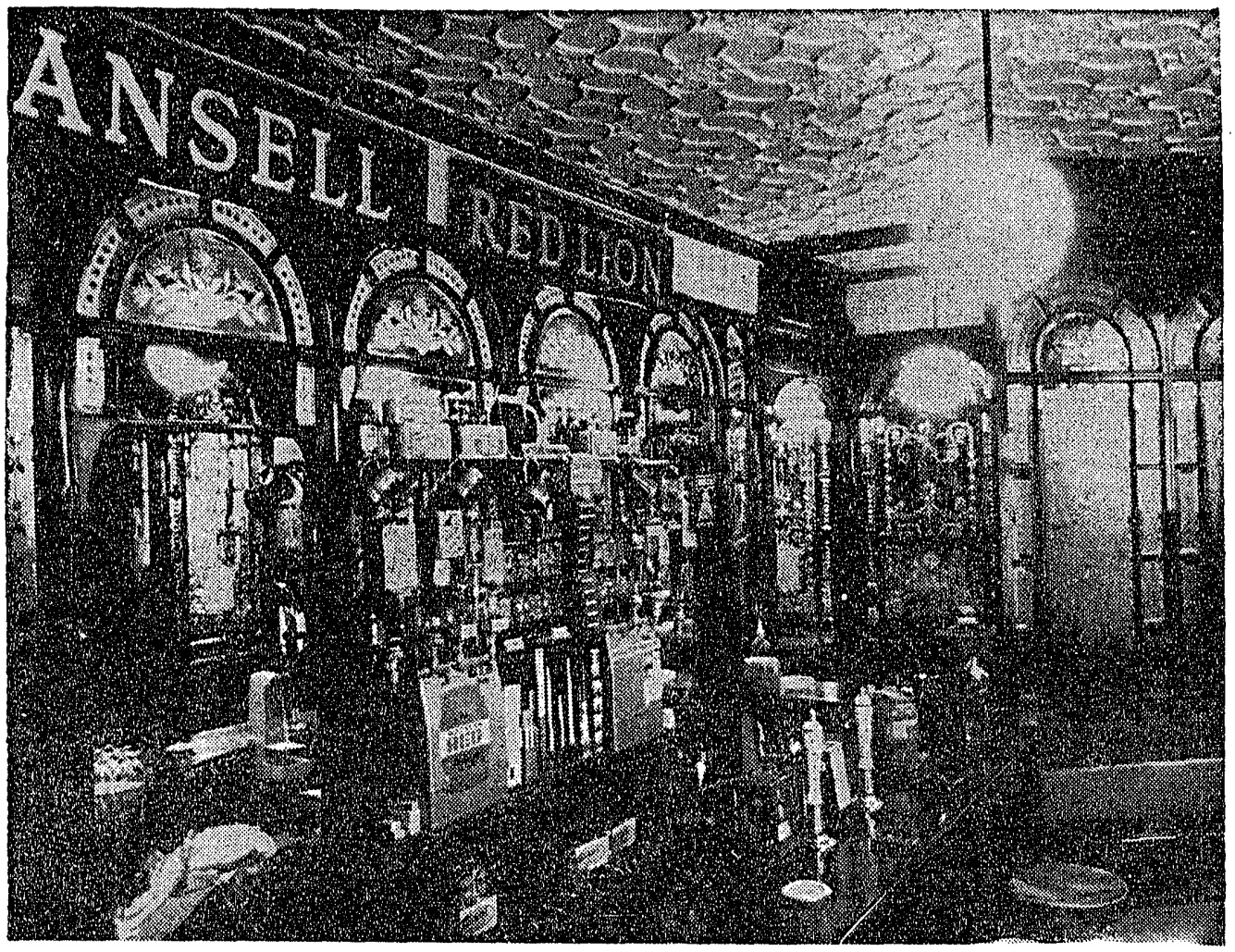
New York is having an epidemic of pubs. Every large new midtown building has a bank first, and something called a pub second. But they are pseudo-pubs—flashy, gimmicked up, dedicated to the hard sell of the authentically unreal.

Actually there are two kinds of New York establishment—bars and pubs. Bars are legit. They grew under the Third Avenue El and in dim corners of old buildings, dispensing beer, hard stuff and quick lunch in an atmosphere of plain dark wood and tinned walls and ceiling in the back room.

A good number still exist, pure or adulterated. There are the basic Irish bars on upper Third, and the not too much grander midtown establishments such as P. J. Clarke's, now standing in splendid isolation on the plaza of a new skyscraper where it has been preserved like Williamsburg by some real estate deal.

The first, dark and plain to the point of baldness, are filled with older, sad-faced, shirtsleeved men. The latter attract the Cardin-sideburn set. New York bars, plain or fancy, are real.

Then there are the New York pubs. They are phony. They did not grow anywhere. They have been manufactured by restaurateurs.



A pub in London, such as the Red Lion . . .

The New York Times/Robin Laurance

They are designed in terms of something called "merchandising" and "presentation," based on the psychology of creating crowd discomfort (togetherness) with a recognizable faddish décor of a kind that convinces the drinker or diner that he, and the place, are "in." The effect is created by jamming in the facilities and adding some English pub window dressing. It usually has a jolly name.

Old pubs in London are in old buildings. That is not only nice, but necessary. It is part of being real. Outside, paint and graphics are used tellingly to emphasize genuine period architectural details.

Fake old pubs in New York are in new buildings. Fake old pub details—"period" lighting and signs — are grafted onto glass and aluminum facades. Fake half timbers cling to the interior walls of "club pubs" on the upper floors of steel-framed skyscrapers.

But that is only part of the difference. What makes the London pub genuine is that its plan and appearance are the product of a long evolution of closely linked functional design and social need. It had to be English. It is a direct response to English character, weather and life.

The English pub is English the way the French café is French and the open, sunny, southern plaza with its languid life is Latin. One of the most wrongheaded beliefs of architects and planners is that what works for one climate and country will work for another. This is the fallacy of outdoor-caféism.

Transplant a Latin plaza to a northern city and you have a sooty, windy wasteland for eight months of the year. The seasonal tables set out for *dolce far niente* exists in high-priced, precarious pollution. Pubs don't travel well either.

London is damp, gray, formal, punctilious and businesslike. (This may not sound as if I love it, but I do.) Much of the time it is drab and chilly

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. . . differs from a bar here, such as P. J. Clarke's

The New York Times/Donal F. Holway

There's More to a Pub Than Sipping

The New York Times

Mooney's in the Strand exemplifies pub characteristic: nothing is superfluous

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as well. The pub is an inside place of warmth and cheer, intimate and mellow with old woods, bright with glass and mirrors after the sunless street.

The English are traditional, reserved and class conscious. The tradition of the pub says that everything must be as it has been for a long time, molasses-hued with age and use. A controlled camaraderie, of privacy and class, is defined with screens and saloons.

The English pub is an indigenous, totally successful work of architectural and social art and a solid delight. It is dedicated to the proposition that its purpose is to provide drink, and frequently food, with logic and style. But the style comes from the logic. Its success is due in part to the fact that its plan is pure reason.

The bar is located without tricks. It is, obviously, focal, the centerpiece of the room. It goes flat along one wall when that is the most logical space for it, or forms an island or oval within easy reach of every part of the place. There may also be a bar for eating, and the planning of both stresses functional efficiency.

The doublesided bar usually dispenses drink on one side, food and drink on the other. Two parallel bars may do the same. There can be additional tables to stand at, or benches or booths to sit on or in, of varying degrees of posh.

The long, straight bar is the serious drinking bar. The classic example is Henekey's Long Bar in High Holborn, its straight, continuous counter marked off for drinking and eating, with all available wall space filled by barrels, kegs and bottles right up to the steep, sloped beam ceiling. It is austere, purposeful, and magnificent.

In real pubs, everything starts and ends by being useful. Glasses and bottles above the bar supplement back bar space; barrels on the back bar are often placed high and contents piped down to put every inch to work. Even the most elaborate Victorian overlay only embellishes purpose, as defined by the pub, is a continuing functional tradition.

The High Victorian pub is the practical plan at its most supremely stylish. "It was not all display," said Maurice Gorham and H. McG. Dermott in that landmark architectural study, "Inside the Pub," put out by the London Architectural Press in 1950.

They tell us that "the tremendous efflorescence of applied ornament that was glo-

Nothing is for "atmosphere," or for that pinkie vulgarism, "ambience." Style, rifed in the great exhibition of 1851" — Prince Albert's cozy international display of decorative excess—reached a dazzling apogee in the saloon bar of the Victorian pub.

According to Maurice and H. McG., who must have had a fine time researching the subject, "beneath this fantastic and exotic setting it is clear that considerable thought was given to planning."

Every ornamental detail had its purpose. Mirrors not only reflected and dramatized light, but also put the solitary drinker in company and aided staff surveillance. Elaborately cut and etched glass "snob" screens made intimate sections of the bar and seating areas.

Back bars, counter stands and center islands were turned into miracles of glazing, woodworking, graining and brass fitting. Embossed ceilings and walls made to look like high or low relief through processes with maidenly names like Lincrusta and Anaglypta still evoke the 19th century.

The pub—the house that became the public house — had evolved from the alehouse kitchen to a palace. And the Victorian publican was a practical man. All this magnificence marked the advent of the stand-up bar—drink up or leave.

By the first decade of the 20th century, 90 per cent of England's pubs were owned by the big brewers. Between the wars, an unconscionable number of Victorian examples were destroyed as "tasteless" and out of date.

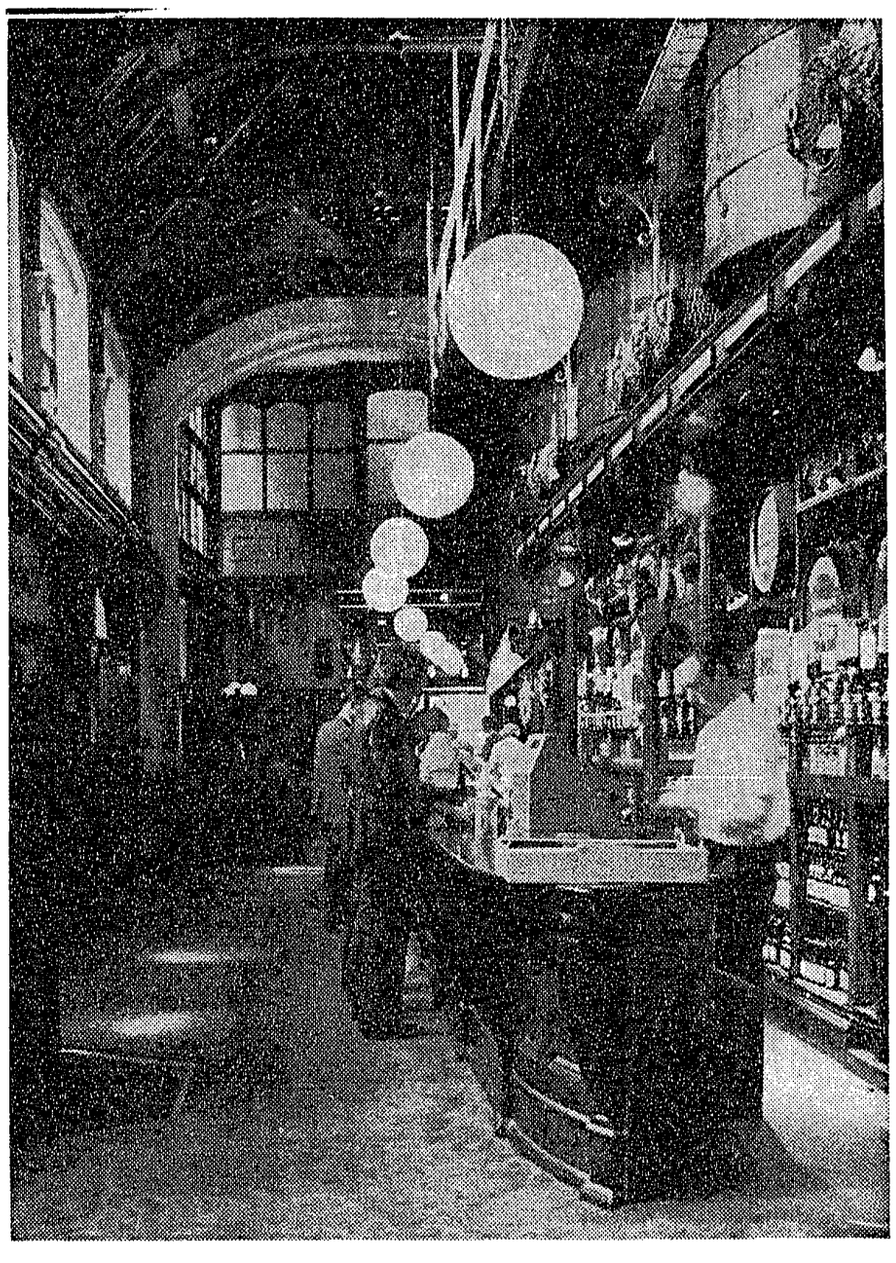
In their places, the brewers built Brewer's Tudor, Brewer's Pseudish, Brewer's Modern and slightly out of town, Brewer's Roadhouse. (Thank you, Maurice and H. McG.) They had one thing in common — architecturally they were all stale ale.

After the war came Brewer's Revival. The big companies began to polish up the old pubs. Their interiors were restored. New graphics were added. A certain homogenization resulted, but the Victorian pub bloomed again.

The best are splendid. The Salisbury in St. Martin's Lane is a plush period piece glittering with cut glass and warmed by a pink marble-topped bar and red velvet banquettes. The Red Lion in the Duke of York Street is a small, square, mirror-lined room of brilliant reflections focused on a dark wood island bar, as close to through-the-looking-glass perfection as a pause for a small bitter and hot sausage can be.

Transplant the London pub to New York and you get chichi, all ersatz and a yard-of-ale wide. At its synthetic best, it makes a pretty good stage set.

"The art of the pub is one of the few living arts," J. M. Richards, the distinguished British historian, has said. But not in New York. See you at Mooney's (I hope that's a Lincrusta ceiling) in the Strand.



The New York Times

At Henekey's Long Bar in High Holborn, barrels, kegs and bottles fill wall space