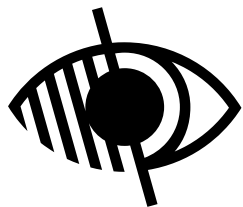


BLITZ: the club that shaped the 80s

Large Print Guide



Section 1, Introduction

BLITZ: the club that shaped the 80s

London, 1979. Punk is out, Thatcher is in, and a small but influential group of young creatives come together to create a scene that will change popular culture in 1980s Britain and beyond. Every Tuesday, they meet at the Blitz wine bar in Covent Garden, where co-hosts Steve Strange and Rusty Egan run a weekly club night for a daring, restless new generation. These club-goers reject both the dull conformity of mainstream culture and the rigidity of existing subcultures, instead pushing the boundaries of taste with their outrageous fashions and futuristic music. The media dubs them 'Blitz Kids' or 'New Romantics'.

Some of these Blitz Kids will ride the wave of publicity to global celebrity status, including chart-topping performers Spandau Ballet and Boy George. Many will establish themselves as leading designers, writers, artists and filmmakers, going on to shape the look and sound of the 1980s. This exhibition reveals how they got there – and where they went.

Timeline

July 1973

David Bowie appears on Top of the Pops as Ziggy Stardust, performing 'Starman'

June 1975

The UK holds a referendum on European Communities membership

August 1976

Rock Against Racism is founded

1977

Steve Strange and Rusty Egan meet by chance on the King's Road

June 1977

Queen Elizabeth II celebrates her Silver Jubilee and The Sex Pistols release punk anthem 'God Save the Queen' in response

January 1978

The Sex Pistols split up

February 1978

Strange and Egan start up a Bowie-themed night at Billy's Disco in Soho

June 1978

Bowie performs at Earl's Court, London, during his Isolar II Tour

September 1978

The Winter of Discontent begins, marked by widespread strikes across the UK

February 1979

Strange and Egan open their Tuesday club night at Blitz, a Covent Garden wine bar

May 1979

The Conservative Party wins the general election and Margaret Thatcher becomes Prime Minister

December 1979

Spandau Ballet play their debut gig at the Blitz

May 1980

Nick Logan launches The Face magazine

July 1980

Bowie casts four Blitz Kids in the 'Ashes to Ashes' music video

September 1980

Terry Jones, Tricia Jones and Perry Haines launch i-D magazine

October 1980

Strange and Egan run their last Blitz club night

November 1980

Steve Strange, Rusty Egan and Midge Ure's band Visage release their eponymous debut album

April 1981

Brixton Riots occur in response to heavy-handed policing of Black youth

May 1981

A group of Blitz Kids stage a music and fashion press trip to New York City

July 1981

Charles, Prince of Wales, marries Lady Diana Spencer

August 1981

MTV launches in the USA

October 1981

Culture Club play their debut gig, with Boy George as the lead vocalist

April 1982

Britain enters the Falklands War

April 1982

Steve Strange organises a catwalk show in Paris, featuring six Blitz Kid fashion designers

April 1982

Strange and Egan open their biggest club night at the Camden Palace, with a capacity of over 1,000

November 1982

Channel 4 launches in the UK

March 1984

London Fashion Week launches

July 1984

Sade releases Diamond Life

July 1985

Live Aid takes place in London and Philadelphia

Section 2 panel

Before the Blitz

The Blitz Kids came of age in the late 1970s, a time of economic and political turmoil. During their formative years, the conservatism of mainstream taste was challenged by pockets of subcultural rebellion – punk, soul and other scenes. The nascent Blitz Kids, largely drawn from council estates and lower-middle-class suburbs, looked to music and fashion as an outlet for their creative impulses and their longing for glamour.

The 1970s were notable for their many contrasting and overlapping subcultures, revivals and trends. It was an age of reinvention, in which stars such as David Bowie cycled through different looks and public personas with each creative evolution of their work. Bowie in particular would influence the Blitz Kids' own tastes well into the 1980s.

Sub-section panel

Glamour

Even amid the drabness of late 1970s Britain, there was glamour for those who sought it. The louche 'in crowd' included creative figures like painter Duggie Fields, filmmaker Derek Jarman, fashion designer Zandra Rhodes and – of course – David Bowie. Their decadent antics pushed the boundaries of taste and convention.

The soul scene offered an alternative, more accessible form of glamour, attracting young people who wanted to dress up, dance and have fun. Mainly playing music by Black American artists, soul clubs like The Goldmine and The Lacy Lady acted as conduits to the Blitz for suburban kids who wanted something more.

The star man

David Bowie dominated 1970s pop culture from the moment he appeared on television as the sexually ambiguous Ziggy Stardust. He adopted other personas, including Halloween Jack and the Thin White Duke, followed by a three-year stint in Berlin. In 1978, he launched the Isolar II World Tour, which included several shows at Earl's Court, London.

Many future Blitz Kids were ardent Bowie fans, and for those in the audience this concert became a formative moment. Bowie's elegant style and magnetic stage presence left a lasting impression on their own tastes.

1. David Bowie scrapbooks, late 1970s Iain R. Webb
Courtesy of Iain R. Webb
2. Handmade David Bowie felt patches, late 1970s
Iain R. Webb
Courtesy of Iain R. Webb

3. David Bowie concert tickets, 1976
Courtesy of Gregory Davis

↕ Located on wall opposite

David Bowie performing 'Starman' on Top of
the Pops, July 1972

Courtesy of the BBC

Duration: 3 minutes 30 seconds

Introducing THEM

In 1976, cultural commentator Peter York published 'THEM'. In this article, he identified a loose group of designers, artists and aesthetes that made up the avant-garde of the day. They shared a commitment to style and a common rejection of social and sexual norms.

The group featured heavily in society gossip magazines such as Ritz. It included many of London's leading designers, such as Manolo Blahnik and Anthony Price. Price collaborated creatively with Bryan Ferry, the lead singer of Roxy Music. He also designed for the pioneering Chelsea boutique Plaza, which promised 'clothes for studs and starlets'.

1. Plaza boutique advert, late 1970s
Courtesy of Iain R. Webb
2. For Your Pleasure, 1973
Roxy Music
Art direction by Nicholas de Ville, artwork by C.C.S., costumes by Anthony Price
Design Museum Collection

3. Country Life, 1976
Roxy Music
Artwork by Bob Bowkett and C.C.S.,
designed by Nicholas De Ville
Design Museum Collection

4. Ritz Newspaper, no. 1, 1976
Courtesy of Iain R. Webb

↕ Located in case, opposite

Cut-out dress, late 1970s
Swanky Modes
Lycra
Courtesy of Lindsay Alker

↕ Located in case, opposite

Double-strap shoes, 1982
Manolo Blahnik
Leather and metal buckles
Courtesy of Westminster Menswear
Archive, University of Westminster

→ **Continue to the wall case to the left
of the 'Glamour' section panel**

Soul and style

The soul scene drew many young people across the country, north and south, who wanted to dance and dress up in their best clothes. Many of the Blitz Kids had originally been ‘soulboys’ and ‘soulgirls’ – regular attendees of soul clubs like the Lacy Lady and the Goldmine, and seaside soul weekend events.

Club-goers embraced retro style, reviving 1960s Mod looks as well as Second World War-era fashions. Compared with most other musical subcultures in 1970s Britain, the southern soul scene was relatively diverse and inclusive.

1. British Hustle, 1978
Directed by Curtis Clark
Duration: 1 minute 3 seconds
2. ‘Stomping at the Goldmine’
Melody Maker, January 1976
Courtesy of Fiona Dealey
3. Lacy Lady promotional flyers, 1976
Courtesy of Lesley Chilkes

Following THEM

After influencing the young punks and student designers who would become the Blitz Kids, THEM were eventually absorbed into the Blitz scene. Fashion design student Iain R. Webb produced a graduate collection drawing on the work of THEM painter Duggie Fields. Fields' assertive female nudes reflected not only an upfront attitude to sexuality, but also a distinctly queer perspective on the body.

Julia Fodor, a Blitz Kid better known today as the DJ and writer Princess Julia, is portrayed here by Fields' friend, artist Luciana Martinez de la Rosa, in the guise of the Venus de Milo.

1. Miss-Conceptions of the Linear Mind, 1979
Duggie Fields
Acrylic on paper
Courtesy of The Modern Institute

2. Design mood board, 1980
Iain R. Webb
Courtesy of Iain R. Webb

3. Breasts appliqué dress, 1980
Iain R. Webb
Viscose, felt
Courtesy of Fashion Museum Bath

4. Princess Julia as the Venus de Milo, 1980
Luciana Martinez de la Rosa
Pastel and crayon on paper
Courtesy of Princess Julia

Punk provocations

Punks deliberately used offensive images and references, usually to shock rather than to express ideological sympathy. Designer Vivienne Westwood played a key role in bringing punk style into the public eye. This outfit from her King's Road shop Seditionaries incorporates a Nazi swastika and bondage trousers, which suggest both sexual fetish and violent restraint.

Blitz host Steve Strange was friends with Westwood and others in her circle, including band manager Malcolm McLaren. Alongside Chrissie Hynde, Strange joined short-lived punk band The Moors Murderers – provocatively named after the notorious child killers.

1. 'Destroy' t-shirt, trousers and boots, late 1970s

Vivienne Westwood and Malcolm McLaren
for Seditionaries

Cotton, leather

Courtesy of Westminster Menswear
Archive, University of Westminster

2. The Moors Murderers in rehearsal, 1977
Photograph by Sheila Rock

Temporary Hoarding, issue 1, 1977

Racism was endemic in 1970s Britain. The far-right National Front party capitalised on anti-immigrant sentiment in the polls. Police harassment of ethnic minorities, particularly Black and Asian youths, was widespread.

In response, grassroots protest groups such as the Anti-Nazi League and Rock Against Racism combined forces to shift public opinion away from the far-right. Rock Against Racism transcended subcultures and musical genres, with support from punk acts The Clash and X-Ray Spex, reggae groups Aswad and Steel Pulse, and many others.

Rock Against Racism
Courtesy of Bishopsgate Institute

Sub-section panel

Europhilia

The Blitz Kids rejected the insular mindset of previous generations, looking to mainland Europe for their cultural inspiration. Cabaret traditions, avant-garde cinema and synth-augmented music provided a rich palette of references. Europhilia was not about nostalgia but reinvention, combining an array of cultural influences into something wholly new.

A lucky few were able to visit the Continent and absorb European culture first-hand. Others consumed it at home through films on TV or at the cinema, trips to exhibitions and on London's dancefloors.

→ **Continue right along wall.**

European referendum leaflets, 1975

In 1975, the United Kingdom voted to remain in the European Common Market. In the period surrounding the referendum, the media extensively covered Britain's relationship with mainland Europe.

The referendum result signalled a wider shift in the public perception of Europe. A younger generation, with no memory of the Second World War, had joined the electorate. The UK was looking to Europe as a partner and friend, rather than a mix of foes and allies.

Designer unknown

Neue Sachlichkeit catalogue, 1978

Neue Sachlichkeit (New Objectivity) was an art movement pioneered by German artists such as Otto Dix, George Grosz and Max Beckmann in the 1920s. Their artworks showed the corruption and excess of Weimar society in a sober and unsentimental style.

In 1979, an exhibition at the Hayward Gallery in London introduced a British audience to this vision of a society in crisis. Amid Britain's own economic struggles and political unrest, the themes depicted resonated with a new generation of artists and creatives.

Wieland Schmied

Published by the Arts Council of Great Britain

European cinema

Not every night could be spent out clubbing. Many Blitz Kids occupied their free evenings with late-night film screenings at The Scala cinema in Fitzrovia, where works by influential filmmakers like Pier Paolo Pasolini and Luis Buñuel offered a window into European culture.

Films such as Cabaret, The Night Porter and Salon Kitty all offered a highly stylised take on the decadent and transgressive aesthetics of Weimar- and Nazi-era Germany. For many Blitz Kids, these films were a source of inspiration for costumes and makeup.

1. Cabaret UK promotional poster, 1972
Designed by Tom Chantrell
2. The Night Porter UK promotional poster, 1974
Designer unknown

3. Iain R. Webb and Christine Binnie
performing at the Blitz, about 1980
Photograph by Holly Warburton
Courtesy of Iain R. Webb

Eurodisco and electronica

In the 1970s, new synthesiser technology, pioneered by German band Kraftwerk, was transforming European music. Kraftwerk's unique sound was produced

with an entirely electronic instrumentation, matched with an equally robotic aesthetic. They laid the groundwork for synth-pop and techno. The Belgian group Telex and the Italian composer Giorgio Moroder followed suit, fusing metronomic beats with the popular sounds of disco.

Kraftwerk's futuristic sound inspired Rusty Egan's playlist for the Blitz, where he mixed familiar, nostalgic and futuristic sounds to the delight of a packed dancefloor.

1. Die Mensch-Maschine, 1978
Kraftwerk
Designed by Karl Klefisch (after El Lissitzky)

2. 'Moskow Diskow', 1979
Telex
Designer unknown

3. 'Chase', 1979
Giorgio Moroder
Designer unknown

Sub-section panel

Transgression

Despite the optimism and promise of the 1960s, social attitudes in 1970s Britain were still largely conservative. The punk movement developed as a counter-current, rejecting ideals of patriotism, hierarchy and 'good taste' in favour of a nihilist worldview that dismissed society as meaningless.

Punk overlapped with the drag and cabaret scenes, which offered an alternative, sexually liberated vision of society. Only a decade after the 1967 decriminalisation of homosexuality, phenomena such as *Alternative Miss World* and *The Rocky Horror Show* turned transgression into a spectacle by publicly questioning mainstream notions of gender identity and representation.

Camp and cabaret

Gender norms were increasingly questioned during the 1970s. This was achieved in part through political activism, as a burgeoning Pride movement brought public attention to LGBTQ+ rights.

Beyond activism, pop culture embraced all things camp, as glam rock and Richard O'Brien's 1973 musical *The Rocky Horror Show* influenced public attitudes towards gender and sexuality. In 1972, the artist Andrew Logan established the satirical *Alternative Miss World* beauty pageant. Many future *Blitz Kids* attended the 1978 edition, which was judged by American drag queen Divine.

1. *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* UK promotional poster, 1975
Designed by John Pasche
Design Museum Collection

2. Andrew Logan, 1978
Photograph by Robyn Beeche

3. Alternative Miss World programme and invitation, 1978
Designed by Andrew Logan
Courtesy of Sophie Parkin

4. Blitz cabaret act Biddie and Eve on the cover of New Sounds New Styles, September 1981
Courtesy of Ollie O'Donnell

Section 3 panel

Getting Ready

They came from far and wide – art students from the suburbs, striving creatives from council estates, and even from as far as Australia and the Bahamas. Before they came to public attention as the Blitz Kids, they came together through a word-of-mouth network. Friends of friends from the punk and soul scenes, people sharing draughty squats in derelict Bloomsbury mansions, former classmates... All gravitated towards the underground club scene that formed around Steve Strange and Rusty Egan.

United by a sense of purpose and self-belief, they were dedicated to style as a way of life. With little money and a lot of ingenuity, they fashioned themselves into something entirely new – ready for a new decade.

Sub-section panel

Time and Place

Despite the dreary economic and social conditions, late 1970s London was filled with possibility. Free university tuition gave many Blitz Kids the chance to study at Central and St Martin's Schools of Art, both then based near Covent Garden. Just a short walk away, vacant storefronts and underused clubs were ready to be filled by aspiring designers and club promoters.

Through necessity or choice, many young people, including punks, artists and students, turned to squatting to solve their housing needs. With so many Blitz Kids living, studying and working within a short distance of one another, proximity allowed the scene to flourish.

Getting around

The public first encountered the Blitz Kids en route to the club, on Tube trains and buses, dressed in theatrical makeup, extravagant hats and flowing gowns.

When the Blitz closed at 3am, the night bus was a welcome sight for those who weren't lucky enough to cram into a friend's car or crash on a convenient sofa. However, as it only turned up every hour at best, Blitz-goers were left vulnerable to harassment on Covent Garden's dark streets.

1. A welcome sight on a dark night, 1980
Designed by Tim Demuth for London Transport
Design Museum Collection
2. Student railcard, 1979
British Rail
Courtesy of Sophie Parkin

3. Michele Clapton, Clare Thom, Judith Frankland and Stephen Linard in Bloomsbury, about 1980
Photograph by Derek Ridgers

4. Blitz attendees at a London tube station, about 1980
Photograph by Andy Rosen

Student life

Alongside their dedication to nightclubbing, many Blitz Kids were studying, enabled by free tuition and maintenance grants. Art colleges like St Martin's, Central, Camberwell and Middlesex Polytechnic offered the opportunity to develop one's creative identity.

St Martin's School of Art enjoyed a prime location in the heart of London, on Charing Cross Road. This allowed its students to become immersed in the fashion, music and nightlife of neighbouring Soho and Covent Garden. Likewise, the Blitz attracted many aspiring writers and entrepreneurs from the London School of Economics, in nearby Holborn.

1. St Martin's Student News Bulletin, 1980
2. SMART student magazine, 1980
3. St Martin's prospectus, 1978/79

4. Stephen Linard, Iain R. Webb and Stephen Jones' student cards, late 1970s

Courtesy of Central St Martin's Museum and Study Collection, University of the Arts London

5. On the roof at St Martin's, 1981
Photographs by Emma Harrison
Courtesy of Emma Harrison

Spreading the word

Printed invitations and posters were essential for letting people know about parties and club nights. For house parties, which often had a theme, the hosts designed invitations combining hand-drawn and collaged elements. These were then photocopied en masse to share with all the guests.

For club hosts, it was important to create a recognisable brand. They printed promotional posters and placed adverts in magazines, like Ritz and VIZ. They also produced branded membership cards for regulars and matchbooks for partygoers to take home with them.

1. Handmade party invitations, about 1979–81
Courtesy of Sophie Parkin, Neil Mackenzie Matthews
2. The Snow Queen pantomime programme, 1981
Courtesy of Christine Binnie

3. Iain R. Webb at a house party, about 1980
Photograph by Gregory Davis
Courtesy of Iain R. Webb
4. Kim Bowen, Jeremy Healey, and Stephen Jones outside Chenil Gallery, 1980
Photograph by Mick Hurd
Courtesy of Mick Hurd
5. Myra, John Maybury and Lee Sheldrick, 1980
Photograph by Mick Hurd
Courtesy of Mick Hurd
6. Invitation to 'Come as your favourite Blonde' party at the Blitz, 1979
Courtesy of Peter Brown
7. Blitz matchbook, about 1980
Courtesy of Darla-Jane Gilroy
8. Sobranie cocktail cigarettes, about 1980
9. Blitz flyer, about 1980
Courtesy of Iain R. Webb

10. Blitz cocktail menu, about 1980
Designed by Rick Fawcett
Courtesy of Peter Brown

The Warren Street squat

Some Blitz Kids seized the opportunity to set up squats in Georgian houses on Warren Street and Carburton Street in Bloomsbury. These spaces became homes as well as design studios and sets for photoshoots and films.

Section Six of the Criminal Law Act 1977 made it harder to evict squatters, giving them a reasonable level of security. But squatting inevitably had its shortcomings. Indicative of its general state of disrepair, the residents of Warren Street recall making regular visits to their parents' homes in quest of a hot shower.

1. Kim Bowen in her bedroom, Warren Street squat, 1980
2. Stephen Linard in his bedroom, Warren Street squat, 1979
3. Spandau Ballet's debut photo shoot, Warren Street squat, 1980

Photographs by Graham Smith

Living together

In the mid 1970s, there were nearly 100,000 vacant dwellings in Greater London. For many Blitz Kids, squatting was an affordable way to move into Central London and away from the family home.

Some Blitz Kids lived in student accommodation, including the Ralph West Hall of Residence, a tower block in Battersea built by the London County Council and shared by students from various universities and art schools. Others lived in council flats, often with their parents, at a time when affordable social housing was still in plentiful supply across London.

1. House in Warren Street, 1975
Photographer unknown
2. House in Carburton Street, 1975
Photographer unknown

3. Student bedroom, Ralph West Hall of Residence, 1971
Photographer unknown

Courtesy of London Picture Archive

4. Steve Norman of Spandau Ballet, at his parents' council flat in Holborn, 1982
Photograph by Neil Mackenzie Matthews

Waiting by the landline

In the absence of a physical invitation, the shared landline phone was essential to disseminating party plans. Often found in a residential building's communal corridor, residents would take turns to stand by the phone, waiting for a call to find out where the night would take them.

Pick up the phone to hear Blitz Kids recall their experiences of the dangers and the delights of late 1970s London.

1. Interview with Christos Tolera
Duration: 3 minutes 50 seconds
2. Interview with Fiona Dealey
Duration: 3 minutes 30 seconds
3. Interview with Dencil Williams
Duration: 3 minutes 20 seconds
4. Interview with Steve Dagger
Duration: 4 minutes

Sub-section panel

The Look

All of the Blitz Kids had a look, but no two looks were the same. They rejected the anti-fashion stance and uniformity of the punk scene, instead adopting a bewildering variety of styles ranging from historical romance to futuristic elegance. From punk, they nonetheless retained two key elements: a belief in DIY and a disregard for established notions of taste.

Partygoers sourced second-hand clothes from charity shops and theatrical wardrobe sales, and many made their own from scratch. For the lucky few with money or designer friends, a vibrant network of boutiques offered unique, avant-garde and exciting styles.

Classic looks

With so many Blitz regulars arriving via the soul scene, there was a corresponding interest in historic fashions. Tastemakers like Chris Sullivan – who declared that ‘one look lasts one day’ – and Christos Tolera drew inspiration from everything from 1940s film noir to folk costume.

Exaggerated tailoring was popular among young working-class men, who adopted aristocratic clothing as an ironic commentary on social class. The style was captured in men’s fashion magazine *Camouflage* by young writer Perry Haines, who co-founded *i-D* magazine in 1980.

1. Black zoot suit with accessories, 1981
Chris Sullivan, tailored by Chris Ruocco
Wool
Courtesy of Christos Tolera
2. Purple suit with accessories, 1981
Chris Sullivan
Wool
Courtesy of Chris Sullivan

3. 'Suit Yourself'

Camouflage magazine, January 1980

Courtesy of Daryl Humphreys

Bowie Nights At Billy's Club, London, 1978

Before the Blitz, there was Billy's, where Rusty Egan and Steve Strange set up a Bowie tribute club night in 1978. The grubby Soho basement attracted flamboyant freethinkers who would follow them to the Blitz.

Artist Nicola Tyson took these photos while still a student at Chelsea College of Art. They capture the idiosyncratic looks that inspired Blitz style, worn by key personalities of the time such as Boy George, Princess Julia and singer Marilyn.

Photographs by Nicola Tyson

C-type print

Courtesy of Sadie Coles HQ, London

Posing and partying, 1979-1980

1. Michele Clapton
Photograph by Andy Rosen
2. Blitz attendee
Photograph by Ted Polhemus
3. Blitz attendees
Photograph by Andy Rosen
4. David Holah and Christine Binnie
Photograph by Robyn Beeche
5. Two Blitz attendees
Photograph by Robyn Beeche
6. Duggie Fields
Photograph by Robyn Beeche
7. Blitz attendee
Photograph by Andy Rosen
8. James Birch
Photograph by Andy Rosen

9. David Bowie and Toni Basil
Photograph by Robert Rosen
10. Stephen Linard
Photograph by Robyn Beeche
11. Kim Bowen
Photograph by Ted Polhemus
12. Marilyn at Club for Heroes
Photograph by Robert Rosen
13. Vivienne Lynn, Boy George, Chris Sullivan,
Kim Bowen, Theresa Thurmer, and Steve
Garratt
Photograph by Derek Ridgers
14. Two Blitz attendees
Photograph by Robyn Beeche
15. Stephen Linard and Eve Ferret
Photograph by Ted Polhemus
16. In the bathrooms at the Blitz
Photograph by Robyn Beeche

17. Lee Sheldrick
Photograph by Andy Rosen
18. Dencil Williams and Marilyn
Photograph by Graham Smith
19. Theresa Thurmer a.k.a Pinkietessa
Photograph by Robyn Beeche

Camera ready

A great look was pointless if nobody looked at it, and most Blitz Kids were keen to appear on camera. Their outrageous style and disregard for convention attracted serious media coverage. Much of this was patronising in tone, from older, establishment journalists who found the club scene incomprehensible and decadent. But all publicity was good publicity, and the media attention amplified their energy and creativity to a broader audience.

1. Nationwide, 25 March 1980
Duration: 2 minutes 37 seconds
2. Newsnight, 23 January 1981
Duration: 1 minute 17 seconds

Courtesy of the BBC

Posing and partying, 1979-1980

1. Lee Sheldrick, Melissa Caplan, Kim Bowen and Robert Elms
Photograph by Ted Polhemus
2. Michele Clapton and other Blitz attendees
Photograph by Homer Sykes
3. Blitz attendees, Stephen Linard, and Steve Strange
Photograph by Homer Sykes
4. Steve Strange and Boy George
Photograph by Homer Sykes
5. Steve Strange
Photograph by Homer Sykes
6. Iain R. Webb, Gregory Davis and Fiona Dealey
Photograph by Robyn Beeche

Blurring boundaries

Many Blitz attendees pushed the boundaries of gender identity and sexual expression through clothing, rejecting traditional norms and experimenting with fetishwear. Though not specifically a 'gay club', the Blitz was a safe place in which to experiment without attracting homophobic abuse.

This biker cap was bought from a Soho sex shop by St Martin's fashion student Fiona Dealey and redesigned by fellow student Stephen Jones – after which Steve Strange incorporated it into a full leather look. Dealey also designed the white leather corset worn by Iain R. Webb to a 'Come as Your Favourite Blonde' party at the Blitz.

1. Contact sheet of Gregory Davis portraits, 1983
Photographs by Sally Boon
Courtesy of Gregory Davis

2. Biker cap, late 1970s
Stephen Jones
Leather, metal
Courtesy of Karen O'Connor

3. Biker trousers, late 1970s
La Rocka
Leather
Courtesy of Karen O'Connor

4. White woven corset and skirt, 1980
Fiona Dealey
Leather, cotton muslin
Courtesy of Fiona Dealey

5. Iain R. Webb wearing corset designed by
Fiona Dealey, about 1980
Photograph by Graham Smith

Thrifted finds

Unique second-hand finds ensured variety and originality. Charity shops, military surplus shops and jumble sales were rich sources for the Blitz Kids, offering glamour at an affordable price, like this beaded cocktail dress worn by singer Karen O'Connor.

Old things prompted new ideas. Fiona Dealey found this ermine fur collar in Cornucopia, a London second-hand shop. She would reference it repeatedly in her work. The silk opera coat belonged to art student Sophie Parkin, who repaired holes in this vintage find by patching it with contemporary fabric designed by Zandra Rhodes.

1. Cocktail dress, about 1950–60
Designer unknown
Silk, glass beads
Courtesy of Karen O'Connor

2. Karen O'Connor wearing beaded cocktail dress, about 1980
Photographer unknown
Courtesy of Karen O'Connor

3. Collar and gown, date unknown
Designer unknown
Fur, polyester
Courtesy of Fiona Dealey

4. Fiona Dealey wearing an ermine collar and gown, with Stephen Jones, about 1980
Photograph by Terry Smith
Courtesy of Fiona Dealey

5. Opera coat, about 1910–20
Designer unknown
Silk with cotton patch
Courtesy of Sophie Parkin

Friends in fashion

The Blitz Kids were mutually dependent, creating garments and styling looks for one another. One key figure was hairdresser Ollie O'Donnell, who styled many of his fellow club-goers for performances and photo shoots.

Fashion students found their first clients at the Blitz. Makeup artist Lesley Chilkes wore this robe and chemise designed by her friend David Holah, then a student at Middlesex Polytechnic. Holah would go on to found the label BodyMap with Stevie Stewart.

Many women who attended the Blitz wore voluminous, full-coverage garments. It was a style statement, but also a strategy to deflect unwanted sexual harassment.

1. Ollie O'Donnell styling Tony Hadley's hair, 1981
Photograph by Neil Mackenzie Matthews

2. 'Hairstyles Chop and Change...'
Camouflage magazine, January 1980
Courtesy of Ollie O'Donnell

3. Spiral earrings, date unknown
Designer unknown
Metal
Courtesy of Lesley Chilkes

4. Patterned robe and chemise dress, about
1979
David Holah
Viscose and polyester
Courtesy of Lesley Chilkes

5. Lesley Chilkes dressed in David Holah
ensemble, about 1979
Photograph by Derek Ridgers

Section 4 panel

The Club

For most of the week, the Blitz was a Second World War- themed wine bar in Covent Garden, with occasional cabaret performances from acts like Biddie and Eve.

But on Tuesday nights it transformed into something entirely different. Steve Strange and Rusty Egan were able to run their club because they guaranteed to fill the room on an otherwise quiet night. The curious and the fabulous came to see and be seen by the bar, to hear Egan's pioneering playlist and to dance. A favourite move was the stately, precise performance dubbed the 'Elizabethan jive'.

Attendees included the dance troupes Tik and Tok, Shock and Hot Gossip, as well as the dancer and choreographer Michael Clark. The Blitz proved that 'electro-disco' was more than an experimental novelty – it was the dance sound of the future.

Dancing at the Blitz

1. Blitz attendees on the dancefloor, about 1980

Photograph by Homer Sykes

2. Iain R. Webb performing an 'Elizabethan Jive', about 1980

Photographs by Volker Stox

Courtesy of Iain R. Webb

It's Tuesday Night!

Queue here for your chance to walk into the Blitz and relive the legendary club night. Step onto the dancefloor to the sound of DJ Rusty Egan's pioneering playlist and pose alongside a crowd of fabulous, flamboyant Blitz Kids.

Stick around for a performance by Spandau Ballet, the only band to ever perform live at the Blitz. Archival footage captured at the Scala Cinema in 1980, now fully remastered, brings to life the look, feel and sound of 1980's most exciting scene.

The show starts every 15 minutes.

Please be aware that this immersive space contains loud music and flashing lights. If you prefer, you can continue your visit via the curtain to your left.

→ **Continue through doorway
into the next section**

Section 5 panel

The Scene

From the Blitz club scene came an explosion of creativity that would shape popular culture in 1980s Britain and beyond. Dedicated club nights were a reason to push the boundaries of fashion, music and the visual arts. The scene acted as a ready-made professional network, encouraging collaboration and mutual support.

Though they often worked as a collective, many of the Blitz Kids were ruthless in their pursuit of individual fame and success. Emerging at the dawn of Thatcherite Britain, they represented an uneasy truce between the past and the future, shaped by history even as they created something new. Championing personal style over established notions of taste, the Blitz Kids were truly postmodern.

→ **After exiting the club, continue along right wall**

Sub-section panel

The Postmodern Decade

Postmodern design embraced an eclectic mixing of codes and styles, often paired with an ironic playfulness. It represented a radical break from the purity and simplicity of Modernism. By 1980, the style and sensibility of Postmodernism had moved from a fringe movement to a mainstream design approach.

The Blitz Kids reflected this shift in their haircuts, clothes, music and dance moves. Their approach mirrored a broader cultural trend across design and architecture. Designers and artists were also embracing bricolage, combining historical references with found objects, and tackling the complexities of a changing urban environment.

The Postmodern city

The Postmodern approach to architecture redefined the cityscape, rejecting Modernist austerity in favour of a more contextual and expressive architectural language.

Architect Terry Farrell designed Comyn Ching Triangle in Covent Garden, which exemplified an emerging philosophy of regeneration, combining the restoration of existing buildings with new, bold designs. Competitions gave architects like Eva Jiříčná opportunities to imagine new futures for the urban landscape, expressed through collaged drawings. Meanwhile, Nigel Coates infused narrative-driven, playful elements into urban spaces, reflecting the eclecticism of the era.

1. Winning entry for the H.H. Robertson 'Ideas for Architecture' competition, 2025 reproduction of 1979 original
Eva Jiříčná
Courtesy of Eva Jiříčná

2. Design for Asprey's jewellers, 2025
reproduction of 1980 original
Eva Jiříčná
Courtesy of Eva Jiříčná

3. Sketches for ArkAlbion, 1984
Nigel Coates
Courtesy of Nigel Coates

Isometric plan/drawing of the Comyn Ching
Triangle, late 1970s
Terry Farrell and Partners
Courtesy of Farrell (Sir Terry) Archive, GB
186 TF-06257, Newcastle University Special
Collections & Archives, kindly loaned by The
Terry Farrell Foundation.

Creative Salvage

The Creative Salvage movement emerged in the 1980s as a radical approach to design. It incorporated industrial materials and salvaged scrap to create expressive, unique furniture. Designers Ron Arad, Jasper Morrison and Tom Dixon embraced this ethos in their early work.

Creative Salvage challenged traditional design hierarchies, embracing imperfection and spontaneity. It mirrored the Blitz Kids' approach to style, which also relied on found objects and discarded materials. The movement existed in the same creative sphere as the Blitz. Both Morrison and Dixon were active in the London club scene at the time, while Arad opened his first studio, One Off, in nearby Neal Street.

1. Rover chair, 1981

Ron Arad

Salvaged leather and foam Rover P5 car seat, steel legs

Design Museum Collection

2. Handlebar table, 1983
Jasper Morrison
Aluminium handlebars, beech stand,
chromium-plated connectors, plate-glass
top and rubber stoppers
Design Museum Collection

3. Victorian chair, 1986
Tom Dixon
Welded iron railings
Courtesy of Themes and Variations

NATØ

In 1983, a group of staff and students at the Architectural Association established the collective NATØ (Narrative Architecture Today). Led by tutor – and Blitz attendee – Nigel Coates, alongside Mark Prizeman, they championed the modes of subcultural expression emerging in 1980s London: zines, club culture and street style.

NATØ produced a series of speculative projects that explored the complex layers of city life and challenged the market-led approach to redevelopment that was shaping London's urban fabric. Though never realised, these were published together in three issues of NATØ magazine – part manifesto, part fanzine.

1. NATØ magazine, issues 1 to 3, 1983–85
NATØ

2. NATØ magazine, issue 3 paste-up boards,
1985
NATØ

Courtesy of Mark Prizeman

Poetry

In 1980, artist Christine Binnie set up the Coffee Spoon, a salon and impromptu café based in a Bloomsbury squat. The word-of-mouth gathering became host to cabaret, film screenings and poetry nights. Among its attendees were aspiring filmmaker John Maybury and artist Cerith Wyn Evans, as well as an extended group of Blitz Kids including Boy George, all ready to perform.

Some took the production of poetry more seriously than others and used the opportunity to produce conceptual work. Others were content with writing lewd limericks and mocking their peers.

1. 'A poem for tonight', about 1980
Cerith Wyn Evans
2. 'the following are the official names of christine', about 1980
John Maybury

3. 'Dear sensible, ...' exchange of letters,
about 1980
Robert and Myra

4. 'George came from Shooters Hill...', about
1980
Marilyn

Courtesy of Christine Binnie

Performance

The early 1980s saw an explosion in subversive, DIY moving image production. A new generation of artists developed conceptual film projects, shot on cheap Super8 film. They were directed by and starred a cast of Blitz Kids who welcomed the opportunity to perform for the camera.

While artists' film screenings occupied galleries, performance art was taking over the clubs. The Neo-Naturists – founded by sisters Christine and Jennifer Binnie, and Wilma Johnson – brought their artistic practice of nude body painting to various parties and clubs including Blitz, Heaven and the Fridge.

1. A Certain Sensibility poster, 1981
John Maybury and Cerith Wyn Evans
Institute for Contemporary Art
2. Cultural Impotence of Stupid Boys (AKA Tortures that Laugh) poster, 1983
John Maybury
B2 Gallery

3. Circus Logic poster, 1984
John Maybury
Institute for Contemporary Art

4. John Maybury films and video poster, 1981
John Maybury
London Film-Makers' Co-op

Courtesy of British Artists' Film and Video Study
Collection – University of the Arts, London

5. Installation shots - The Mirror's Venus, 1980
Holly Warburton
Giclée print
Courtesy of Holly Warburton

The Mirror's Venus, 1980

Directed by Holly Warburton

Featuring Cerith Wyn Evans and Christine Binnie

Courtesy of Holly Warburton

Duration: 2 minutes 20 seconds

Neo-Naturists at Blitz, 1980

Directed by John Maybury
Courtesy of John Maybury

Duration: 2 minutes

Wannock Weekend, 1980

Directed by and featuring Cerith Wyn Evans, Christine Binnie, Grayson Perry, Jennifer Binnie, Michelle Sinnott and Wilma Johnson

Courtesy of Christine Binnie

Duration: 2 minutes

Please be aware these videos contain nudity.

Neo-Naturists at Blitz and Wannock Weekend videos contain no sound.

Style

Many of the Blitz Kids were fashion and design students, and all of them were interested in clothes. Unsurprisingly, small independent labels and design collectives sprang up, with nightclubs serving as important venues for fashion shows. A thriving network of independent boutiques and street markets provided retail opportunities.

Despite the media portrayal of the Blitz Kids as 'New Romantics' in frilled shirts, no single defined trend would emerge from the scene. Instead, new magazines championed the idea of style as something personal and idiosyncratic, rather than trend-led and dictated by the fashion establishment.

Sue Clowes

In 1981, textile designer Sue Clowes launched a collection in collaboration with Culture Club, the band fronted by Boy George. It was sold in Soho boutique The Foundry, where Boy George worked as a merchandiser.

Clowes' clothes featured bold, colourful prints laden with religious and national symbolism. They were a perfect match for Culture Club, which drew its name from its members' diverse identities. The Destruction of Purity vest layers the silhouette of warplanes over a St George's cross and red roses, symbolic of England, while the Hebrew vest's design translates loosely to 'culture club'.

1. Hebrew vest, 1981
Sue Clowes
Cotton
Courtesy of Mikey Bean

2. Destruction of Purity vest, 1981
Sue Clowes
Cotton
Courtesy of Mikey Bean

3. 'The Foundry'
New Sounds New Styles, May 1982

4. Sue Clowes, 1980
Photograph by Iain McKell

BodyMap

David Holah and Stevie Stewart began the BodyMap label as a stall on Camden Market, before their graduate collection was purchased by the influential boutique Browns. Collaborating with the textile designer Hilde Smith, their work was characterised by bold, graphic prints, genderfluid layering and pioneering use of lycra.

BodyMap catwalk shows were anarchic spectacles featuring latex, dancing and celebrity models, and the label was a prominent force in British fashion during the 1980s. Today, Holah and Stewart remain active as designers and educators, working with a range of performers from Michael Clark to Kylie Minogue.

1. Yellow printed tunic, S/S 1986
BodyMap, print by Hilde Smith
Cotton
Courtesy of Westminster Menswear
Archive, University of Westminster

2. Stevie Stewart and David Holah, about 1980
Photograph by Graham Smith

Darla-Jane Gilroy

Darla-Jane Gilroy was a founding member of the design collective Notre Dame X. Her early work leaned heavily on medieval imagery, with long robes and skullcaps recalling monastic dress, and heavy, studded yokes in the manner of armour.

Gilroy teamed a voluminous black coat with an austere white collar, akin to a nun's habit, which she wore to the Blitz on a night that David Bowie was in attendance. This striking look prompted Bowie to cast her in the video for his single 'Ashes to Ashes'.

1. Ensemble from the Crushed Velvet collection, 1984 Darla-Jane Gilroy
Wool viscose mix suit, silk georgette blouse
2. Design illustrations, final year collection, 1980
Darla-Jane Gilroy

3. Final year collection feature in Vogue Italia, 1981
4. 'All Dressed Up with Somewhere to Go' Over 21 magazine, 1980
5. 'Ashes to Ashes' ensemble, 1980
Darla-Jane Gilroy
Cotton velvet dress, rayon collar, viscose coat, nylon gloves
6. 'The Flock Who are Taking the Cloth' NOW! magazine, 1981

Courtesy of Darla-Jane Gilroy

Fiona Dealey

Like several of her St Martin's peers, Fiona Dealey rooted her designs in a sense of toughness, encasing the body in leather and corsetry. But unlike her peers, Dealey turned away from voluminous garments in favour of something more figure-hugging and overtly feminine.

She paired woven corsets with soft muslin skirts for her graduate collection, while her 1981 Leather Queens collection included black leather dresses with skin-baring cutouts. Singer-songwriter Sade wore one of these dresses to perform at Ronnie Scott's jazz club.

1. Drawings for the Leather Queens collection, 1981
Fiona Dealey
2. Fiona Dealey wearing dress from Leather Queens collection, 1981
Photograph by Emma Andersen

3. Fiona Dealey wearing dress from Leather Queens collection, with Iain R. Webb, 1981
Photographer unknown
4. Backless dress with detachable stitched collar and gauntlets, 1981
Fiona Dealey
Leather
5. Sketch of black leather dress designed by Fiona Dealey, 1980
Lee Sheldrick

Courtesy of Fiona Dealey

6. Flyer for Sade at Ronnie Scotts, 1982
Designed by Graham Smith
Courtesy of Gregory Davis
7. Flyer for Sade at Ronnie Scotts, 1983
Designed by Graham Smith
Courtesy of Neil Mackenzie Matthews

Willy Brown

Willy Brown ran his Modern Classics label from a shop in Rivington Street, Shoreditch, at a time when the area was far from gentrified. Each Modern Classics piece was a one off, with Brown's collections drawing on different aspects of transport and technology. Their austere elegance appealed to those Blitz Kids who were inspired by the industrial aesthetics of Futurism and Russian Constructivism.

Brown staged a fashion show at the Blitz in 1980. He bridged the Blitz scene and David Bowie's inner circle, creating clothes for both. Later, he established the cult clothing label Old Town, together with Marie Willey.

1. Dress with red yoke, about 1980
Modern Classics
Satin
Courtesy of Langley Fisher

2. Blue and white dress, about 1980
Modern Classics
Cotton drill
Courtesy of Langley Fisher
3. Model wearing Modern Classics at Blitz
fashion show, 1980
Photograph by Andy Rosen
4. Checked dress, about 1980
Modern Classics
Wool
Courtesy of Salvador Macasil
5. Two-piece suit with belt, about 1980
Modern Classics
Wool, leather
Courtesy of Robert Jones
6. Ensemble with kilt, about 1980
Modern Classics
Wool, cotton, leather
Courtesy of Steve Norman
7. Modern Classics flyer, about 1978–80

Courtesy of Iain R. Webb

8. Willy Brown, 1980
Photograph by Iain McKell

Stephen Linard

With his 1981 graduate collection, *Reluctant Emigrés*, Stephen Linard synthesised many of the key trends that emerged from the Blitz. Edwardian-style tailoring juxtaposed with organza panels was topped off with voluminous black overcoats. It caused a sensation in the fashion press, heralding a new direction in menswear for the 1980s – a tender and romantic masculinity.

Linard was a founding member of the Notre Dame X design collective. He spent several years designing for Japanese retailer JUN, followed by a long career in Savile Row tailoring.

1. Buttoned vest, 1981
Stephen Linard
Wool
Courtesy of John Keeble

2. Trousers, 1981
Stephen Linard
Wool
Courtesy of Mick Hurd
3. Design sketch for Reluctant Emigrés, 2023
reproduction of 1981 original
Stephen Linard
Courtesy of Michele Clapton
4. Design sketch for Reluctant Emigrés, 2023
reproduction of a 1981 original
Stephen Linard
Courtesy of Mick Hurd
5. Stephen Linard, 1980
Photograph by Iain McKell

Stephen Jones

Hats were a key part of many Blitz looks, and nobody knew hats better than Stephen Jones. Graduating from St Martin's in 1979, he soon set up a showroom in the basement of PX Boutique in Covent Garden. As well as creating pieces for Blitz regulars, including his muse Kim Bowen, by 1982 Jones was designing hats for Diana, Princess of Wales.

Jones' style has always been whimsical, referencing an array of historical motifs. He is acknowledged as one of fashion's foremost milliners, collaborating with many couture houses, particularly Dior.

1. Chilkina, 1979
Stephen Jones Millinery
Cotton
Courtesy of Lesley Chilkes
2. Archbishop, 1979
Stephen Jones Millinery
Cotton and silk

3. Britannia, 1981
Stephen Jones Millinery
Polyester, cotton and ostrich feather
4. Copies of hat sketches, 1980
Lee Sheldrick for Stephen Jones Millinery
5. Stephen Jones feature
Ritz Newspaper, no. 48, 1980
6. 'Jones the Hat'
Daily Express, 1982

Courtesy of Stephen Jones Millinery

7. 'A Short Sharp Shock'
Tatler, 1983
Courtesy of Central St Martin's Museum
and Study Collection, University of the Arts
London
8. Stephen Jones, around 1980
Photograph by Robyn Beeche

9. Kim Bowen wearing Archbishop, around 1980
Photograph by Peter Ashworth
Courtesy of Iain R. Webb

10. Lesley Chilkes wearing Chilkina, 1980
Photograph by Terry Smith
Courtesy of Lesley Chilkes

11. Boy George wearing Britannia, 1980
Photograph by Andy Rosen

Dinny Hall

Dinny Hall created many pieces for fellow Blitz Kids. Her large, sculptural earrings and brooches co-opted a variety of references, from Rococo ribbons to Gothic architecture, which complemented the dramatic, historically-inspired styles worn to the club.

Luxury department store Liberty purchased Hall's graduate collection in 1984, and she has subsequently collaborated with fashion designers such as Rifat Ozbek and Isaac Mizrahi. Her independent jewellery brand celebrated its 40th anniversary in 2025.

1. Spiral earrings, 1980s
Dinny Hall
Silver
2. Earrings, 1984
Dinny Hall
Silver gilt and snakeskin

Courtesy of Fiona Dealey

3. Brooch, early 1980s
Dinny Hall
Silver
4. Earrings, early 1980s
Dinny Hall
Silver gilt
5. Earrings and press cutting, early 1980s
Dinny Hall
Silver
6. Earrings, early 1980s
Dinny Hall
Silver gilt

Courtesy of Dinny Hall

7. Design sketchbook, 1984
Dinny Hall
Courtesy of Mrs Susan Strettell

Melissa Caplan

Pallium Products, the label founded by Melissa Caplan, took inspiration from ancient Roman garments. Her designs incorporated elaborate, structured layers and heavy leather panels, held together with rows of metal poppers. Caplan studied at Middlesex Polytechnic and worked in the garment district around Petticoat Lane in east London.

Caplan's clothing was worn by many of the music acts that emerged from the Blitz scene, including Visage and Spandau Ballet. She also dressed the musician and actor Toyah Willcox.

1. Jacket and skirt set, about 1980

Pallium Products

Leather, cotton, metal

Courtesy of Margaret Fiddes

2. Men's coat, about 1980

Pallium Products

Leather, hand-painted cotton, metal

Courtesy of Melissa Caplan

3. Melissa Caplan photoshoot at the Warren Street squat, around 1980
Photographer unknown
Courtesy of Daryl Humphreys

4. 'Melissa Caplan'
New Sounds New Styles, April 1982
Courtesy of Neil Mackenzie Matthews

5. Melissa Caplan, 1980
Photograph by Iain McKell

Newsnight, 23 January 1981

Courtesy of the BBC

Duration: 1 minute 49 seconds

→ **Turn around towards the
red wall case**

Boutiques

A network of boutiques and design collectives provided essential support for young designers. Helen Robinson's Covent Garden shop PX set the tone, with garments inspired by military uniforms and historical dress.

The Axiom collective was organised by Jon Baker, who was also involved with the Soho boutique Demob and would later found the hip hop label Gee Street Records. Axiom held several fashion shows in London and New York, the latter of which accompanied the first US performance by Spandau Ballet. The collective included young designers such as Melissa Caplan, Fiona Dealey, Chris Sullivan and – before embarking on her musical career – Sade Adu.

1. Trousers, about 1982
Helen Robinson for PX
Cotton and polyester
Courtesy of Margaret Fiddes

1. Contact sheet from PX photoshoot, 1979
Photographs by Holly Warburton
Courtesy of Iain R. Webb
2. PX Boutique flyer, about 1980
Courtesy of Iain R. Webb
3. Inside PX, 1978
Photograph by Nicola Tyson
4. 'Axiom & Friends', 1981
Publication unknown
5. Axiom boutique flyer, early 1980s

6. Axiom fashion show programme, 1981
7. Axiom fashion show at Club for Heroes, 1981

Courtesy of Neil Mackenzie Matthews

8. Wrap-front trousers, about 1981
Lubel Adu
Wool
Courtesy of Gregory Davis
9. Jon Baker and model wearing Lubel Adu in New York, 1981
10. Sarah Lubel and Sade Adu wearing Lubel Adu in New York, 1981

Photographs by Neil Mackenzie Matthews

11. 'Axiom'
Ritz Newspaper, 1981
Courtesy of Fiona Dealey

Newsnight, 23 January 1981

Duration: 1 minute 49 seconds

Courtesy of the BBC

Located on plinth, opposite

13. Blouse and culottes, early 1980s

Demob

Printed cotton

Courtesy of Margaret Fiddes

14. Carrier bag, 1984

Designed by Neville Brody for Demob

Design Museum Collection

15. Demob opening party flyer, 1981

Courtesy of Neil Mackenzie Matthews

→ **Move across the room to the
far left of the dark blue wall**

Sub-section panel

New Wave, New Media

Around 1980, a wave of new publications emerged in and around London, capturing the spirit of a rapidly shifting cultural landscape. Magazines like *The Face* and *i-D* reflected a growing appetite for new expressions of style, subculture and visual storytelling. The Blitz scene worked in symbiosis with this new media – the scene provided content, while the magazines provided coverage.

Though its origins remain unclear, journalists soon adopted the term ‘New Romantic’ as a convenient way to categorise the diverse fashion and musical sensibilities emerging from the Blitz scene.

i-D, 1980–present

i-D magazine was founded by Terry and Tricia Jones, Alex McDowell and Blitz Kid Perry Haines. Beginning as a punk fanzine, the magazine pioneered the use of street photography as a form of fashion documentation. i-D captured the styles of the time in a section titled 'Straight-up' – a reference to both the head-to-toe ensembles it documented and the slang for 'honest'.

The first several issues consisted of A4 landscape pages, photocopied and hand-stapled together. Only 50 copies of the first issue were printed. Following its immediate success, the magazine evolved into the glossy magazine which continues to be published today.

1. i-D, no. 1, 1980
2. i-D, no. 2, 1980
3. i-D, no. 4, 1981

4. i-D, no. 5, 1981

5. i-D, no. 6, 1981

The Face, 1980–present

The Face launched in May 1980, founded by former NME editor Nick Logan. Neville Brody, the magazine's art director from 1981 to 1986, pushed The Face to the forefront of innovative graphic design, setting the tone for the decade with unconventional approaches to text and layout.

Robert Elms, an aspiring journalist and Blitz Kid, introduced Logan to the Blitz scene and convinced him of its cultural relevance. As a result, The Face provided continuous press coverage for the scene and its emergent creatives.

1. The Face, vol. 1, no. 1, May 1980
2. The Face, vol. 1, no. 4, August 1980
3. The Face, vol. 1, no. 6, October 1980
4. The Face, vol. 1, no. 7, November 1980

5. The Face, vol. 1, no. 11, March 1981
6. The Face, vol. 1, no. 20, December 1981
7. The Face, vol. 1, no. 23, March 1982
8. The Face, vol. 1, no. 31, November 1982

ZG, 1980–86

When editor Rosetta Brooks launched ZG in 1980, she wanted to remove the barriers between ‘diverse areas of cultural activity’. Garrard Martin designed the magazine in a style which echoes the red, black and white colour scheme of revolutionary leftist media of the time.

Brooks believed the art world was becoming increasingly isolated and wanted the publication to provide a platform for discussions of ‘hybrid styles’ and emerging subcultural, artistic activities. The first issue of ZG fittingly dedicated a double spread to ‘Blitz Culture’.

1. ZG, no. 1, 1980
Courtesy of Fiona Dealey
2. ZG, no. 2, 1981
Courtesy of Steven Ball
3. ZG, no. 6, 1981
Courtesy of Steven Ball

VIZ, 1978–81

VIZ magazine covered all things visual – from art and fashion to architecture, advertising and the image-led side of the music business. The publication focused on the individuals behind the images, through profiles of contemporary designers.

In contrast to its vibrant cover art, VIZ's inner pages were black and white. Each spread combined an eclectic arrangement of overlaid text and image. Printed in London, the magazine copied the dimensions of a 12-inch record sleeve, reflecting the influence the evolving music industry had on its creators, Ferry Zayadi and Robyn Bowman.

1. VIZ, no. 8, 1979
2. VIZ, no. 11, 1980
3. VIZ, no. 12, 1980

BLITZ, 1980–91

Carey Labovitch and Simon Tesler produced the first six issues of BLITZ while studying at the University of Oxford. Covering music, fashion and pop culture, the magazine aimed to platform young aspiring writers and photographers.

The style emerging out of the Blitz club – an unaffiliated namesake – was widely covered in the early issues of the magazine. Two Blitz Kids went on to become fashion editors at BLITZ: Iain R. Webb (1982–87) and Kim Bowen (1987–89).

1. BLITZ, no. 1, 1980
2. BLITZ, no. 5, 1982
3. BLITZ, no. 9, 1983

Courtesy of Carey and Simon Tesler

High fashion to high street

The creativity of the club scene was quickly commodified by mainstream media, notably through coverage of Steve Strange, Boy George and other high-profile Blitz Kids. Their colourful and outrageous looks contributed to an increasing acceptance of genderfluid fashion and individual style.

While the Blitz Kids moved on to new things, their clothing, hair and makeup continued to influence high street retailers. Major brands designed both their products and their advertising to capitalise on the pop culture sensation created by the scene. The fashion establishment also took notice, absorbing many Blitz designers into the earliest iterations of London Fashion Week.

1. Boy George Fashion & Make-up Book, 1984
Wayne and Gerardine Winder, and Christina Saunders
Courtesy of Michael Bean

2. 'Looks Even Better on a Girl', 17 Cosmetics advertising campaign
Smash Hits magazine, 1985
Designer unknown
Courtesy of Boots Archives
3. 'Record Blitz' carrier bag, 1981
Woolworths
Courtesy of Jules Wileman
4. '12-Page Do-It-Yourself Designer Fashion' featuring Willy Brown skirt and trouser patterns
19 magazine, 1983
Courtesy of Rebekah Cameron
5. London Fashion Week programme, 1982
Courtesy of Neil Mackenzie Matthews
6. Margaret Thatcher visiting fashion week, early 1980s
The Telegraph
Courtesy of Darla-Jane Gilroy

Going global

International magazines and broadcasters celebrated the Blitz Kids as the embodiment of cutting-edge British creativity. Singers like Steve Strange and Boy George became household names, influencing style far beyond the UK. Across the Atlantic, Axiom designers showcased their work and Spandau Ballet performed at the Underground Club in New York City.

French, American, Italian and Japanese publications all documented the Blitz scene through editorials featuring the likes of Gregory Davis and Princess Julia. The Blitz Kids and the associated 'New Romantic' scene had gone global.

1. Boy George on the cover of Donna magazine, December 1980
Courtesy of Gregory Davis
2. 'London's Blitz Look',
Los Angeles Times, May 1980
Courtesy of The Modern Institute

3. Gregory Davis and Princess Julia wearing
BodyMap
Brutus magazine, 1984
Courtesy of Gregory Davis

4. 'Ballet on Broadway'
New Sounds New Styles, July 1981
Courtesy of Ollie O'Donnell

→ **Continue through doorway
into the next room**

Section 6 panel

Sounds of the Future

The musicians who emerged from the Blitz embraced innovative technology. Experimenting with synthesisers and drum machines, their pioneering sounds reshaped the music industry. From a niche club scene, many of them would go on to global fame, as part of the 'Second British Invasion' of bands that took the USA by storm in the early 1980s.

This new approach to the music industry went beyond sound. Acts like Spandau Ballet, Visage and Culture Club recognised the changing media landscape, carefully crafting their public image as arbiters of style through fashion, graphic design and the emerging art form of the music video. They were the ultimate expression of club culture, drawing on the talents of their fellow Blitz Kids to create their public personas.

Sub-section panel

Synthesising sounds

The late 1970s saw a surge in musical innovation, characterised by a blend of technological advances and do-it-yourself creativity. Reel-to-reel tape machines like the Revox A77 enabled pre-digital sampling by allowing musicians to loop and layer audio manually. The development of more affordable synthesisers and drum machines, like the Roland CR-78 and the Minimoog, expanded musical possibilities for a new decade.

International acts such as Kraftwerk, Yellow Magic Orchestra and Telex had paved the way with their distinctive electronic sounds. Now, the musicians emerging from the Blitz scene offered a uniquely British take on synth-pop, labelled by the media as the 'New Romantic' sound.

Simmons SDS-V Electronic Drum Kit and Synthesiser, 1981

The Simmons SDS-V was the first fully electronic drum kit. Unlike acoustic drums, the SDS-V produces sharp, punchy and heavily processed tones. It is instantly recognisable for its hexagonal pads and became synonymous with the futuristic, synthesised sound of the early 1980s.

Richard James Burgess, who designed the set along with Dave Simmons, first used the prototype while working with his band Landscape on their second album. The SDS-V received wider recognition after its commercial release, when it was first played by John Keeble to record Spandau Ballet's 1981 single 'Chant No.1 (I Don't Need This Pressure On)'.

Designed by Richard James Burgess and Dave Simmons
Produced by Simmons
Courtesy of Wolfgang Stölzle

CS-10 Synthesiser, late 1970s

Yamaha

Courtesy of Marbelow Ltd / Spandau Ballet

→ **Return to wall. Follow the room all the way round**

Rusty Egan at the Blitz, 1979

As a DJ, Rusty Egan was a key influence on the soundtrack of early 1980s London nightlife. Described by producer Richard James Burgess as ‘the sonic architect of the Blitz’, his club playlist drew on a multitude of genres, blending ‘the electronic and the dandyish’ – everything from Roxy Music to Gina X Performance, and Siouxsie Sioux to Talking Heads. At the same time, as a member of the band Visage, Egan was instrumental in the evolution of British synth-pop.

Photograph by Andy Rosen

The rise of electronica

Rusty Egan's Blitz playlist helped push British music away from punk, popularising the more futuristic, synthesised sounds pioneered by Kraftwerk.

After their 1974 album *Autobahn* met with a muted response in the UK, Kraftwerk's popularity surged in the early 1980s thanks in large part to Egan's influence. The success of the 1981 album *Computer Love* spurred a new interest in the band's earlier work, with the 1978 single 'The Model' returning to the top of the charts in 1982. By the end of the 1980s, electronica was firmly embedded within British pop music.

1. Kraftwerk UK tour t-shirt and flyers, 1981

Courtesy of Westminster Menswear Archive,
University of Westminster

‘A Chronology of Nightclubbing’ in The Face, issue 100, 1988

In 1988, The Face published a colour-coded timeline representing the key venues and figures that shaped 1980s club culture, with Mayhem Studios, Billy’s and the Blitz placed prominently at the beginning.

Rusty Egan and Steve Strange appear repeatedly, as do other Blitz Kids like Graham Ball, Ollie O’Donnell, Chris Sullivan and Jeremy Healy. The Blitz Kids weren’t just enthusiastic about partying. They had the entrepreneurial drive to shape the future of London’s nightlife.

Club culture

The Blitz created a template for the nightclub as a place of unfettered creativity and self-expression. Steve Strange and Rusty Egan went on to run nights at Hell, Club for Heroes and, from 1982, the 1000-plus capacity Camden Palace. Other entrepreneurial Blitz Kids set up their own nights including Le Kilt, Le Beat Route, the Mud Club, St Moritz and the Wag club.

Later club nights, including Leigh Bowery's Taboo, Kinky Gerlinky and Nag Nag Nag, carried the legacy of Blitz from the 1980s into the new millennium.

1. Billy's membership card, around 1978
Courtesy of Daryl Humphreys
2. Blitz membership card, around 1980
Courtesy of Graham Smith
3. Blitz matchbook, around 1980
Courtesy of Langley Fisher

4. Le Beat Route membership card, 1980
Courtesy of Neil Mackenzie Matthews
5. Le Beat Route Christmas card, 1980
Courtesy of Neil Mackenzie Matthews
6. People's Palace Valentines Day Ball, 1981
Courtesy of Neil Mackenzie Matthews
7. St. Moritz night club posters
Designed by Graham Smith
Courtesy of Graham Smith
8. Le Kilt membership card, 1980
Courtesy of Neil Mackenzie Matthews
9. Le Kilt flyer, 1980
Courtesy of Neil Mackenzie Matthews
10. Le Kilt Christmas card, 1980
Courtesy of Gregory Davis

11. Ticket for Spandau Ballet's Heaven performance, 1981
Designed by Graham Smith
Courtesy of Graham Smith
12. Wag club agenda, 1984
Courtesy of Neil Mackenzie Matthews
13. Club for Heroes letterhead, 1981
Courtesy of Sophie Parkin
14. Mud Club cards, early 1980s
Courtesy of Neil Mackenzie Matthews, Daryl Humphreys
15. Dirtbox flyer, early 1980s
Courtesy of Neil Mackenzie Matthews
16. Camden Palace flyers and invitations, 1982
Courtesy of Neil Mackenzie Matthews

Sub-section panel

The MTV Generation

The music video was the ultimate expression of Blitz culture. Pioneered by rock acts such as Queen, it was still a novelty. Live performance remained the medium of choice for music programmes like Top of the Pops. That would change in August 1981, with the launch of MTV: music television. Aptly enough, the first video aired on the channel was The Buggles' 'Video Killed the Radio Star'.

With their sophisticated understanding of aesthetics and total commitment to image, the acts that emerged from the Blitz scene were perfectly placed to dominate this transatlantic trend as the new voices of the new MTV Generation.

Spandau Ballet

‘The Freeze’, 1981

Spandau Ballet’s early output was a novel blend of funk, disco and electronic beats. The singles from their first album *Journeys to Glory* were accompanied by music videos with a Postmodern art direction that matched the band’s ambition to define the sound of the future.

This video for ‘The Freeze’ draws on the band’s Blitz roots. The set and props are based on Graham Smith’s Neoclassical album artwork, and the narrative concept borrows from the work of New Romantic filmmakers such as Holly Warburton and John Maybury.

Directed by Brian Grant
Courtesy of Warner Music
Duration: 3 minutes 48 seconds

Ultravox

'Vienna', 1981

Filmed partly on location in the city of Vienna, Austria, the music video for the song of the same name is heavily influenced by the 1949 film noir *The Third Man*. Shot on 16mm film to evoke an authentic cinematic feeling, the narrative suggests a doomed love affair.

Lead vocalist Midge Ure wore a Burberry trench coat over a suit he bought from a charity shop. The crowd of extras owes much to the eclectic mix of vintage styles seen at the Blitz, dressed in monochrome gowns, bold makeup, furs, monocles and other accessories suggestive of the 1930s and 1940s.

Directed by Russell Mulcahy

Courtesy of Blue Raincoat Music

Duration: 4 minutes 57 seconds

Visage

'Fade to Grey', 1980

Visage had always been conceived of as a studio project by founding members Midge Ure and Rusty Egan, with Steve Strange as the flamboyant frontman. Appropriately, much of the video for 'Fade to Grey' is focused on Strange's face, intercut with shots of Princess Julia lip-syncing to French lyrics by Brigitte Arendt.

Strange undergoes a series of transformations thanks to makeup by Richard Sharrah and an early example of digital visual effects. Throughout the video, he wears a series of outfits by Blitz Kid designers, including hats by Stephen Jones.

Directed by Kevin Godley and Lol Creme
Courtesy of Universal Music
Duration: 3 minutes 43 seconds

David Bowie

‘Ashes to Ashes’, 1980

Upon its release in November 1980, the ‘Ashes to Ashes’ music video was the most expensive ever produced. Bowie’s artistic vision encompassed themes of death, rebirth, addiction and introspection, with an appropriately grandiose video that reflected on his career up to that point.

Bowie chose to cast four Blitz Kids as extras: Steve Strange, Judith Frankland, Darla-Jane Gilroy and Elise Brazier. This marked the completion of a cycle in pop culture, as those teenagers who had idolised Bowie in the 1970s would now influence his look and sound for the 1980s.

Directed by David Bowie and David Mallet
Courtesy of Warner Music/The David Bowie Estate

Duration: 3 minutes 35 seconds

‘Nice Video, Shame About the Song’, 1982

The visual language of New Romantic music videos reflected the Blitz Kids’ distinctive aesthetic, notably drawing on Gothic romance, retrofuturism and authoritarian propaganda. Comedy sketch show Not the Nine O’Clock News satirised the genre, with a parody music video featuring historic costumes, goosestepping Nazis and dramatically-lit night scenes. The fact that these visuals were widely understood – and ridiculed – confirmed the music video’s emergence as a major force in popular culture.

Not the Nine O’Clock News, BBC 2

Directed by Geoff Posner

Composition and lyrics by Howard Goodall

Featuring Rowan Atkinson, Griff Rhys-Jones, Mel Smith and Pamela Stephenson

Courtesy of the BBC

Duration: 1 minute

Blitzed: The 80s Blitz Kids Story, 2025

Promo edit. Directed by Bruce Ashley and
Michael Donald

Produced by Andy Woodford, Ian Penman and
Celia Moore

Music by Rusty Egan

'When We Were Young', 'R.E.R.B', 'Catwalk'

Edited by Bruce Ashley

Duration: 4 minutes 45 seconds

Sub-section panel

From Club to Chart

Several chart-topping musical acts emerged from the Blitz scene, including Spandau Ballet, Visage, Culture Club and Ultravox. Although they drew on different musical styles, including electronica, funk and reggae, they shared a theatricality and an avant-garde approach rooted in their background as club kids.

The international success of acts like Spandau Ballet led to a frenzy among record labels desperately trying to sign the 'next big thing'. Certain acts established independently of the Blitz, like Depeche Mode and Duran Duran, also benefited from this new-found momentum. The success of other acts established in the frenzy was less enduring.

→ **Move to the wall to the right of the doorway**

Journeys to glory

Spandau Ballet went through several names and lineups before playing their first gig at the Blitz in December 1979. The name 'Spandau Ballet' – which replaced 'Gentry' – was suggested by Robert Elms, based on graffiti he spotted in a Berlin bathroom.

Brothers Gary and Martin Kemp, and their schoolfriends Tony Hadley, Steve Norman and John Keeble all hailed from north London council estates, as did their manager Steve Dagger. Gary Kemp's first synthesiser had to be paid for in instalments, with John Keeble being the only band member old enough to sign the credit agreement.

1. Gentry rehearsal invitation, 1979
2. Untitled poem introducing Spandau Ballet, 1979
Robert Elms

3. Blitz setlist with stage lighting notes, 1979

4. Spandau Ballet invitation, 1981

↕ Located in case, opposite

CS-10 Synthesiser, late 1970s

Yamaha

Located in case, opposite

Courtesy of Marbelow Ltd / Spandau Ballet

5. Typewritten lyrics, 1979

Gary Kemp

Courtesy of Reformation Ltd / Gary Kemp

6. Ticket to Spandau Ballet's Wembley Stadium concert, 1984

7. Ticket to Spandau Ballet's live performance on BBC Radio 1, 1983

Courtesy of Neil Mackenzie Matthews

Graphic identities

Graham Smith created all the early graphic design for Spandau Ballet, including album art and promotional posters. Smith, a Blitz regular and a student at Camberwell College of Art, created a coherent visual identity which complemented the band's avowed ambition to define the future, while also embracing the romance and elegance of times past.

Smith's work drew heavily on Neoclassical sculpture and other imagery of ancient Greece and Rome, as well as early 20th-century political propaganda – the result of his extensive research into an eclectic range of sources.

1. Scala cinema gig posters, 1980
2. Blitz gig flyer, 1980
3. HMS Belfast gig flyer, 1980
4. Ticket to see Spandau Ballet perform in Birmingham, 1981

5. Journeys to Glory album flyposter, 1981
6. Muscle Bound shop poster, 1981

Designed by Graham Smith
Courtesy of Graham Smith

A new visual language

The emergence of the flamboyant and synth-driven 'New Romantic' sound benefited from industry momentum. Record labels invested heavily in marketing their new acts, using music videos, photoshoots and style media to promote their distinctive, yet recognisably 'New Romantic' visuals.

There was a visible shift away from simple record sleeves with a photo of the artist on the cover. A stream of designers, photographers and stylists from the Blitz scene contributed to the image-led identities of these musical acts, from clothes by Willy Brown and Melissa Caplan for Visage, to unique paintings by Chris Sullivan for Blue Rondo à la Turk.

1. Dare, 1981
The Human League
Designed by Philip and Adrian

2. Night People, 1981
Classix Nouveau
Designer unknown
3. Prince Charming, 1981
Adam and the Ants
Designed by Julian Balme, photography by
Allan Ballard
4. Upstairs at Eric's, 1982
Yazoo
Photograph by Joe Lyons
5. 'Enola Gay', 1980
Orchestral Manoeuvres in the Dark
Designed by Peter Saville
6. 'Young Guns (Go for It)', 1983
Wham!
Designer unknown
7. 'Tainted Love', 1981
Soft Cell
Designed by Hothouse, illustration by Kris
Neat

8. 'What's Funk', 1981
Perry Haines
Designer unknown

9. 'Promised You a Miracle', 1982
Simple Minds
Designed by Malcolm Garrett, Assorted
iMaGes

10. 'Dreaming of Me', 1981
Depeche Mode
Designed by Simone Grant

11. Battle Hymns for Children Singing, 1981
Haysi Fantayzee
Designed by Graham Smith

12. Duran Duran, 1981
Duran Duran
Designed by Malcolm Garrett

13. The Anvil, 1982
Visage
Designed by Peter Saville, photograph by
Helmut Newton

14. Deep Sea Skiving, 1983
Bananarama
Designed by Peter Barrett

15. Journeys to Glory, 1981
Spandau Ballet
Designed by Graham Smith

16. Shangri-La, 1985
Animal Nightlife
Photograph by Mike Prior

17. Rage in Eden, 1981
Ultravox
Designed by Peter Saville

18. Visage, 1980
Visage
Photograph by Peter Ashworth

19. 'Shiny Shiny', 1983
Haysi Fantayzee
Designed by Graham Smith

20. 'Vienna', 1980
Ultravox
Designed by Peter Saville
21. 'Mind of a Toy', 1981
Visage
Photograph by Peter Ashworth

22. 'Klacto Vee Sedstein', 1982
Blue Rondo à la Turk
Artwork by Chris Sullivan

23. 'The Freeze', 1981
Spandau Ballet
Designed by Graham Smith

24. 'Do You Really Want to Hurt Me?', 1982
Culture Club
Artwork by Sue Clowes, design by Jik
Graham, photograph by Mark Lebon

25. From the Tea-Rooms of Mars to the Hell-Holes of Uranus, 1981
Landscape
Artwork by Carol McNicoll, designed by John Waricker-Le Breton

26. Diamond Life, 1984
Sade
Designed by Graham Smith

27. Chewing the Fat, 1982
Blue Rondo à la Turk
Artwork by Chris Sullivan

28. Kissing to be Clever, 1982
Culture Club
Artwork by Sue Clowes, designed by Jik Graham

Stadium success and music activism

In July 1985, the benefit concert Live Aid took place at Wembley Stadium in London and JFK Stadium in Philadelphia. Organised by Bob Geldof and Ultravox's Midge Ure, it was one of the largest ever TV broadcasts, with an estimated audience of 1.9 billion. The event raised over £150 million for famine relief in Ethiopia.

Live Aid marked a shift towards political activism in pop, with former Blitz Kids in a prominent position. Many participants, including Ure, Sade and Gary Kemp, were members of Red Wedge, a collective of musicians supporting the UK Labour Party. They were also part of the movement against apartheid in South Africa, as were Tony Hadley and Boy George.

1. Live Aid Wembley press advertisement, 1985

2. Red Wedge flyer, 1985
Logo designed by Neville Brody
Courtesy of Neil Mackenzie Matthews

→ **Proceed through doorway and towards exit on your right. A step free exit is available via the curtains along the blue wall.**