

# Suburb Style



## Suburb Style editor, Deborah Warland talks to local residents

### SLUMMING IT featuring Mirren Gidda

**M**irren Gidda has been a Suburb resident for over 11 years and attends University College London, reading English. She moved out of the Suburb during term time and lives in a Hall of Residence in Camden. Here she keeps us up-to-date with what's going on in her world.

I am writing this article from my home on the Suburb, having braved out my first term at university. I have spent the past few months in my hall in Camden, lulled to sleep by the gentle screams of police sirens and the roars of inebriated members of the rugby team. Living conditions are, regrettably, rather dire. Basic hygiene mysteriously vanishes when you share a bathroom and kitchen with thirteen people, many of whom are male – and boys, as any girl knows, are icky. Unfortunately my halls are self-catering and so I am compelled to venture into the kitchen and cook underneath the ominous, mouldy extractor fans. Naturally, as a result of having to cook for myself, food shopping has become part of my daily existence. Alas though the heady days of buying organic, gluten free, fat free falafel from Waitrose and authentic Lebanese houmous from M & S are long gone. My diabolical budgeting has meant that my flatmate and I now spend a tenner on the weekly shop for Sainsbury's basics and exist in a permanent state of malnutrition. Things got so bad that the other day we purchased a bag of satsumas to stave off our impending scurvy.

University itself is not as I expected. Having applied to read English I was expecting to spend the next three years reading the odd book, drinking copious amounts of wine and having furious debates about the merits of Marxism with various velvet clad dandies. Unfortunately UCL actively forces us to read at least a book a week whilst simultaneously demanding that we become fluent in Old English. Not only that but they expect us to write essays every fortnight which is terribly inconvenient owing to my wild and crazy social life. Furthermore, I study with some incredibly bright people who daily damage my fragile ego with their brilliant observations whilst I sit drawing stick men all over my notes and crying into my copy of Paradise Lost.

The final horror is perhaps the devastating expense of London. Samuel Johnson's famous quote 'When a man is tired of London, he



Mirren Gidda

is tired of life' could be re-written to read 'if you're tired of London, you're probably bankrupt'. As a Londoner, I used to regularly defend my city at every opportunity. London is the greatest place on earth and I would hear nothing against it. Consequently at the start of term I sniggered as my Northern friends spent £7 on a double vodka, feeling smug at their naivety about London bars as I sipped on my tap water. Yet as the term approached the end, we all found ourselves desperately searching for pennies with which to buy the

cheapest possible pint or fund our bus fare into uni. Never before had I seen ten people simultaneously dive for 20p left abandoned at a bus shelter or ask a tramp if he had any change.

Consequently, I expected my return to the Suburb to be joyous. For the first time in a while, I would be given nutritious food in a kitchen free from mould and use a bathroom that was mine and mine alone. Not only that, but with a dentist for a mother and a linguist for a sister, I would be the best at English in the house. How glorious I thought. But, having been home for a couple of days, I'm already craving cheap wine from Costcutter and lectures from the wisecracking professors. Because, despite all my whingeing, UCL is actually amazing. The tuition is of course fantastic, but far better are the professors who are vastly more entertaining than teachers at school. For the first time, we're being treated like adults, even if that does mean that one professor saw fit to pour whiskey into the punch bowl at the English Christmas party. We're actively encouraged to pursue our own interests instead of studying a rigid syllabus and even more excitingly, no one cares if we swear! Hurray!

As for my disgusting halls? Well, they are disgusting, but they have one redeeming feature. A roof. Before the arctic conditions set in, we used to clamber onto the roof, risking a hair raising drop onto concrete and the wrath of the security guards. But the views are breath taking. Our halls let us look out over the bright lights of London and the circular illumination that is the London Eye and for that I will happily accept the family of mice in the kitchen upstairs. Oh yes, we have mice.

Best of all however, is the feeling of complete independence that university provides. It's quite liberating to come back at five in the morning and not wake my entire family and it is equally liberating to blow most of my food budget on alcohol and instant noodles. Obviously I miss the luxury of my home here and my family, but I am so happy to be in my squalid halls during term time. I honestly believe that if I didn't live away, I wouldn't really have the full university experience. Not only would I have fewer friends but I'd be much less independent. Living in Camden has forced me to fend for myself and actually sort out my own problems without running to my mum. Maybe I will continue to slink home for food and the occasional power shower but I'm equally happy to use the leaking shower in halls and eat day old Pot Noodles. And after my three week holiday on the Suburb, that's exactly what I intend to do. Happy New Year! **S**



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