

FEATURES

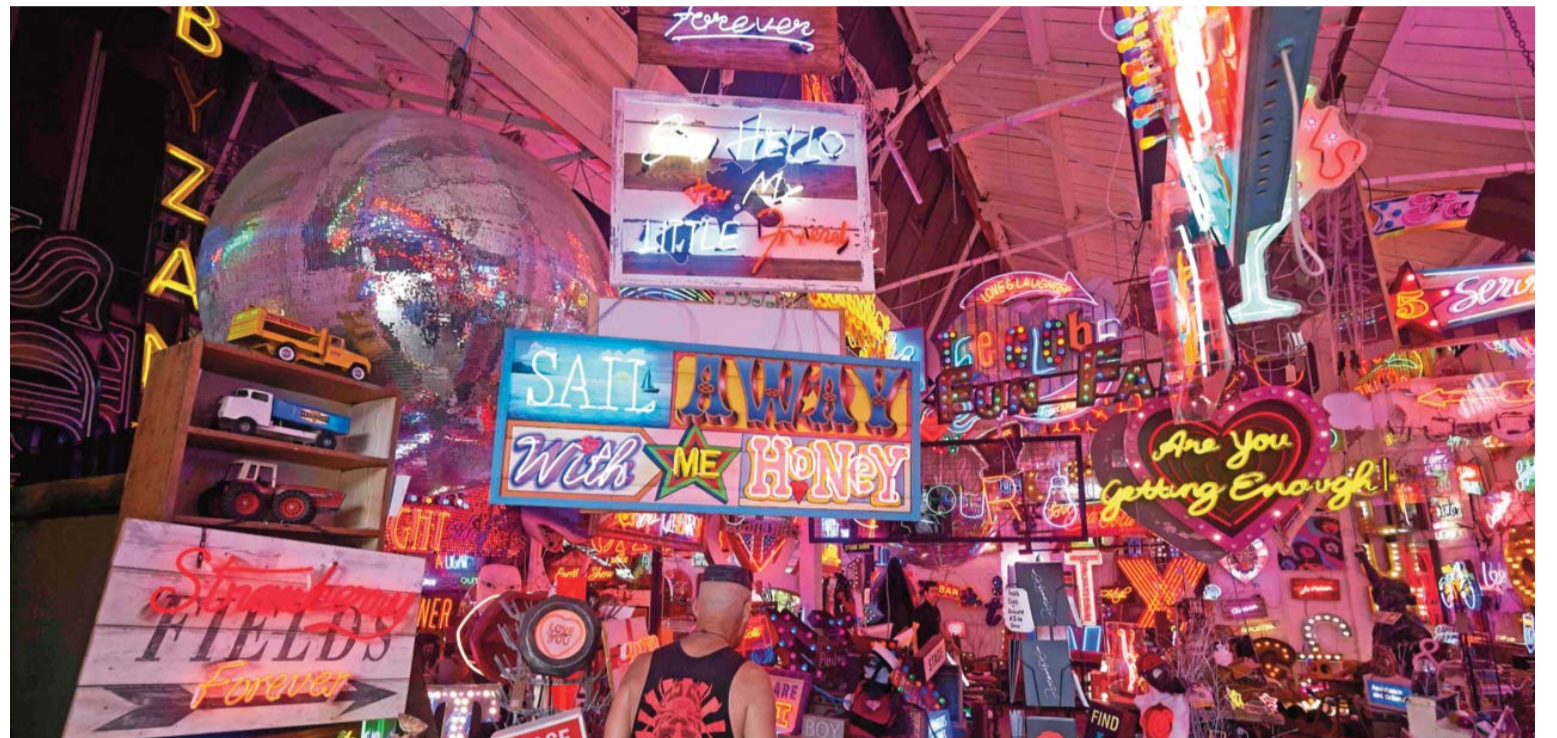


An array of neon lights and signs is displayed inside a Junkyard gallery, cafe and workshop in Walthamstow, East London. — AFP photos

Patrons relax at a Junkyard gallery, cafe and workshop in Walthamstow, East London.



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A patron relaxes amidst an array of neon lights and signs is displayed inside the Junkyard gallery, cafe and workshop.

Retro trend lights up London's labyrinth of neon

Whether in search of a glowing skull or a bright red heart, God's Own Junkyard in London is a maze of multicolored neon of all shapes and sizes which is thriving on its retro reputation. In a vast warehouse in the east of the British capital sits Europe's biggest collection of neon signs. "In here we've got 1,400 pieces," said the creative director of God's Own Junkyard, Marcus Bracey, walking through the treasure trove of brightly-illuminated tubes.

Most are for sale—a heart with the British flag emblazoned with "God Save the Queen" across it, for instance, or an enormous pair of bright red lips with a tongue reaching out to the top of an ice cream cone. "We've got a mixture of sex, contemporary art, everything," said Bracey. "From love through lust, everything's here." Some of the signs date back to the 1950s, while others can cost thousands of pounds, such as a cowboy-like Jesus Christ clutching two blue revolvers, which has been sold but never picked up by its new owner.

From seedy Soho to Hollywood

The hip, disco-like space has evolved from suitably colorful origins through several generations of Bracey's family. The collection of neon was begun by Bracey's grandfather, a former coal miner, in the 1950s. Bracey, 43, jokes that his grandfather "came up from the dark to the light" and found his passion after leaving the mines to work for a lighting company. It was the next generation that developed the business, now based in the up-and-coming east London neighborhood, Walthamstow.

Bracey's late father, Chris, became a major supplier of neon signs to the sex shops of London's Soho district. But, as the neighborhood started to shed its seedy reputation, signs such as the neon-lit shapely figure of a woman, began finding their way to God's Own Junkyard. The family has also produced signs for film shoots, such as the flashing dragon sign used in Ridley Scott's "Blade Runner" in 1982 — Bracey vows he will never sell it. A rainbow sign was also crafted for Stanley Kubrick's 1999 film "Eyes Wide Shut" starring Tom Cruise and Nicole Kidman.

Neon 'in our blood'

While the buyers have changed, the technology has hardly evolved. Neon technology was first developed in 1910 by Georges Claude, a French chemist who was looking for a cheaper way to produce oxygen for hospitals. Since his remarkable

finding that different gases produced an array of vivid colors, neon has gone on to conquer the world of advertising. From Paris to New York, it remains "one of the great symbols of the 20th century, signifying in turn the utilitarian conquest of the night" and "electric globalization", wrote philosopher Luis de Miranda in his essay "Being and Neon" on the cultural history of neon signs. But despite a boom in the bright lights, the industry has faced tough times. "In the 1980s, there was a big shrink in demand and neon workshops were all closing. We thought almost it was the end of neon," Bracey said.

"But it has come back," he said, with the help of individual buyers in search of retro designs, which make up 50 percent of his clients. And the future looks bright for God's Own Junkyard. Bracey's two children say the yard provides an exciting and colorful playground and that they are aware of its importance in their family history. "It's always been in our blood, in our DNA!" one of them said. — AFP



An array of neon lights and signs are displayed inside the Junkyard gallery.

A look at plans for new rides and more at Disney parks

Disney is calling upon the "Guardians of the Galaxy" and a cohort of blockbuster movies to help modernize its amusement parks. Walt Disney Parks and Resorts Chairman Bob Chapek unveiled the upcoming attractions at both international and domestic Disney parks during its D23 fan expo in Anaheim, California, on July 15.

Most of the upcoming projects are expected to be completed by Disney World's 50th anniversary in 2021. Here's a recap of some of the big announcements, including a legendary mascot finally getting his own ride.

Star Wars sleepers

A themed resort will join the family of "Star Wars" attractions at Disney World in Orlando, Florida, including Star Tours and the previously announced Star Wars: Galaxy's Edge land expansion. Chapek emphasized the resort's "100 percent immersive" experience, saying it is Disney's most experiential park concept to date. Guests can become citizens of the Star Wars galaxy, including the chance to dress in proper attire.

Epcot overhaul

Epcot, Disney World's second-oldest park, is receiving a much-needed update. Chapek said the makeover boosts Epcot's relevance and family appeal. A "Guardians of the Galaxy" ride in Future World will buoy the park's space travel theme, replacing the Universe of Energy attraction closing this summer. Ratatouille: The Adventure ride, which originated at Disneyland Paris, is headed to Epcot's France Pavilion. Shanghai Disneyland's TRON Lightcycle Power Run attraction is also coming stateside, making a second home in the Magic Kingdom.

Pixar Pier

Pixar Pier is replacing Paradise Pier at Disney California Adventure as an immersive hub for all Pixar characters. The announcement reinforces Disneyland as the premiere location for Pixar, also home to a land themed on "Cars" and a previously announced "Toy Story" land. The forthcoming attractions are expected to open in time for a limited-run Pixar Fest in 2018.

Mickey Mouse

Mickey Mouse is getting his own ride. Mickey and Minnie's Runaway Railway will replace The Great Movie Ride at Hollywood Studios, which closes this summer. An opening date for the new attraction was not announced.

Double the ships

Disney Cruise Line is adding a seventh ship to its roster. Two upcoming ships were announced last year with Chapek unveiling a third is in the works. All three are still early in development but are set to be completed by 2023. They're expected to be slightly larger than the current Disney Cruise Line ships.

Marvel mania

The "Guardians of the Galaxy" are making a stop in France. Disneyland Paris is reimagining its Disney's Hotel New York with a focus on Tony Stark and his legion of superhero friends. Chapek announced plans for a reimagined Disney's Hotel New York - The Art of Marvel, saying he hopes to make Stark proud. — AP



In this file photo, visitors walk near Sleeping Beauty's Castle at Disneyland Paris, in Marne la Vallée, east of Paris. — AP