

**THIS PAGE** Harking back to another era at Trouvé Village Merchants and Interiors.

**OPPOSITE** Grand Hotel owner, Zeke Kerbel, at the entrance to his shop, one of the oldest businesses on Antique Street.

TRAVEL | **Antique Street**

## TREASURE STREET

RYAN ENSLIN GOES EXPLORING IN HIS HOMETOWN OF JOHANNESBURG AND FINDS A GEM WHERE HOPE LIVES AND CURIOSITIES ABOUND





**FAR LEFT** Suitcases that have travelled the length and breadth of Africa at The Grand Hotel.

**LEFT** The friendly service is matched only by a great cup of coffee at Modern Antiques.

**RIGHT** The Grand Hotel has no rooms to rent but it once housed a snake in a bottle.



I recently found myself in Long Road in Grey-mont, a somewhat forgotten section of Joburg. It transported me back to my varsity days 20 years ago when I frequently travelled this route to visit my dad. Faded but familiar, yet at the same time strangely comforting.

Perhaps this familiarity flowed from the isolation I, like so many others, have experienced at the hands of Covid-19 restrictions, forging in me a desire to travel, explore and discover – if only around my hometown of Johannesburg at first.

A mere five-minute drive from the plush neighbourhood of Northcliff in northern Joburg lies a unique space. An intersection of three residential areas, Grey-mont, Albertville and Albertskroon have collectively given rise to a new hub in Johannesburg, which goes by the name of Antique Street. It may be more than 20 years old but the attraction of Antique Street is on the rise with aesthete Joburgers.

My attention is piqued from the outset. What once served as family homes are today adapted into shops,

most overflowing with wares. And I'm struck by the busyness of the place.

My day started at one of the longest-standing establishments in the street: The Grand Hotel. Owned and run by Zeke Kerbel, it's actually a shop that has always specialised in unusual, interesting items which, back in the day, included a snake in a bottle and an elephant head skeleton, to name but a few. 'I started in Yeoville in 1984 with a shop to sell my items,' says Zeke who himself has an interesting past. Previously in the nightclub business, collecting old and unusual items was a mere hobby for him at the time. 'My house was full of the items I collected until there simply was no more space. That was when I decided to find a shop in fashionable Yeoville'.

When pressed about the name of his

shop, Zeke concedes that he was rather taken by a sign which read 'The Grand Hotel' and fancied it for his new business. Unfortunately, the owner of the sign refused to part ways but by then the shop had already been named.

Walking around the shop, I ask Zeke what his current most unusual item is. Instantly he leads me to the back and high upon a shelf sits an old Chicago Band Box. Zeke beams with pride as he points it out and divulges that the band box was the jukebox of its day. A piece harking back to another time, and for a fleeting moment I spot another era reflected in Zeke's aged eyes. Just as quickly, it's gone.

These days Zeke laments the state of affairs in the trade he so dearly loves. Being one of the first on the street, he bore witness to its growth, watching as

the clientele evolved and its offering morphed. With the current challenging economic times, Zeke says sales are down and customers browse more than buy. I feel his pain.

Bidding Zeke a fond farewell, I continued on my journey of discovery to meet Bianca Bronkhorst, owner of Bianca's Antiques and Bianca's Cottage Furniture. Thanks to a youth spent working in her parents' antique shop in Brixton, this business truly runs in her veins. 'My dad is still actively involved in my business,' Bianca shares with me, explaining that he assists in sourcing many of the items to be found in her shops. 'I look for things that people can buy and make their own,' says Bianca, as we continue our conversation.

I ask her about the many bicycles hanging from the ceiling, strangely, out of arm's reach. 'They are my passion, they remind me of my childhood,' she says, and in the next breath hastens to add that they are not for sale. After operating in the street for 12 years, Bianca is a force to be reckoned with.

#### Did you know?

Alberts Farm Park, running alongside Greymont and flanked by the Northcliff Ridge, is the second-largest green lung in Joburg (after Delta Park). Within Alberts Farm Park, rock formations have been found which are believed to relate to the Vredefort Dome at Parys, 100km south of the city. The Vredefort Dome is a vast basin formed when a meteorite hit the earth approximately two million years ago. It was declared a Unesco World Heritage Site in 2005.



## TRAVEL | Antique street



**LEFT, FROM TOP** You'll find old tins aplenty in the treasure trove that is Bianca's Antiques; Bianca Bronkhorst, whose time in antiques dates back to her youth, owns two shops along Antique Street.

**RIGHT** Trouvé Vintage Merchants and Interiors, at the top of Antique Street, offers weekend workshops in chalk-paint application.

Always focused on the future, she tells me that she is starting a third shop to cater exclusively to men. 'It will be a man cave, designed specifically for men to find things that interest them.' Sadly, soon after writing this piece, I learnt that the new shop was only open for two months – another victim of tough economic times. But I have no doubt Bianca will astound the street with new ideas later this year.

Crossing Long Road, I head over to Modern Antiques where I meet Tanya Geyer. Daughter of Hein and Marinda Geyer, I find the antique business runs in her veins, too. The family has been in the game for the past 25 years, starting with a shop in Ontdekkers Road in Roodepoort. The last 15 years have seen the shop relocate to Antique Street and employ 10 people. In addition to the standard antique fare, the business imports reproduction pieces from Malaysia and upcycles old pieces, giving them a new lease of life.

'Antique Street is a place of hope,' declares Tanya. 'It certainly was for my family'. The business boasts a proud track record of upskilling workers who then go on to start an enterprise of their own, creating further employment opportunities on the street. For me, it's interesting to see the street in a state of flux, continuing to evolve before my eyes. And Tanya makes a really great cup of coffee, much welcomed as a Highveld thunderstorm unleashes its wrath on the street outside.

At the very top of Antique Street, and with the sun once more making an appearance, I find a passionate proponent for this hub, Joe Strydom-Oosthuizen. Joe and his husband Shaun own and run Trouvé Vintage Merchants and Interiors, an eclectic assortment of vintage items and chalk-paint adorned pieces. Be sure to ask about their coffee and a selection of light meals while you peruse the merchandise on offer – just what the discerning antiquer requires following a morning of bargain hunting along Antique Street. For the budding enthusiast, Trouvé offers workshops in chalk-paint application, hosted at the shop.

Leaving Joe and Shaun, and once again walking the length of Antique Street in search of my car, I feel more intimately connected with this special place. Tanya Geyer's words echo in my head as I continue: 'Antique Street is a place of hope'.

Hope for the future of this little corner of Joburg, where three neighbourhoods meet. Hope for the future of our country, based on a renewed sense of community like I had experienced along Antique Street. And hope for you, that you too may go forth and explore your neighbourhood, and uncover the many gems that hide in plain sight. **G**

PHOTOGRAPHY RYAN ENSLIN



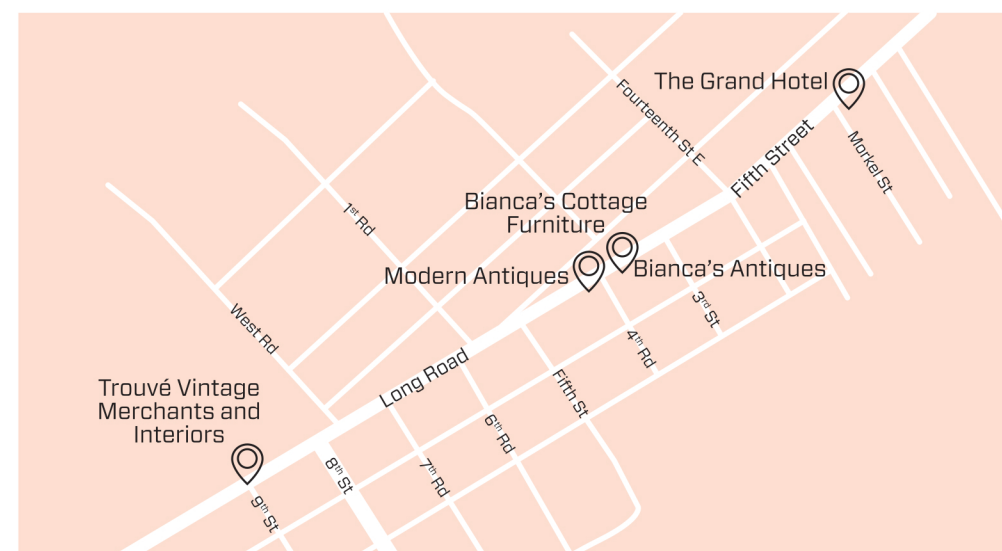
*'I loved my time spent browsing the shops. I found them on Facebook and spent a very leisurely Saturday morning exploring all the treasures on offer. Can't wait for their monthly market!'*

**SANDRA PRETORIUS,**  
SHOPPER



*'I live right on Long Road itself and have been very happy for the increased work opportunities Antique Street brings. Sadly customers are spending less, probably due to the effects of Covid on available income.'*

**GIDEON VAN DIJK,**  
RESIDENT



### Street smart Joburg

#### VILAKAZI STREET, SOWETO

This thriving heart of Soweto is where Nelson Mandela spent his first few nights, following his release from prison. His old home is now the Mandela House Museum, and across the road is The Arch's residence, where retired archbishop and social rights activist, Desmond Tutu, lives. So Vilakazi Street has the honour of two Nobel Laureates as residents. Authentic kasi flavours flow from nearby Sakhumzi Restaurant, offering its popular Soweto-style buffet.

#### QUEEN STREET, KENSINGTON

Where a sense of community flows through the streets and everyone has a story to tell. Kensington, established in 1897 by Max Langermann, once lay on one of the original farms which today constitutes Joburg – Doornfontein. Queen Street is the main thoroughfare through Kensington, offering an eclectic assortment of antique shops, a florist, restaurants and various other interesting finds.

#### KRAMER ROAD, KRAMERVILLE

What was once an industrial area on the outskirts of Sandton has been transformed into a retail, corporate, light industrial and entertainment destination, coined as South Africa's leading design district. Everything from homeware, lighting, appliances, fabrics and custom-made furniture, plus a delectable assortment of spots to eat and drink, is on offer in this success story of a space repurposed.