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In Two Lively Districts in Lisbon, Every Night Is a Block Party

By PAVIA ROSATI



LISBON has no idea how cool it is. The city lives in the shadow of Europe's superstar capitals, unaware of its own modern charms. It is not uncommon to hear people talk about surviving dictatorship, the earthquake of 1755 and the loss of empire as though these were recent concerns, not events that happened some 30, 250 and 400 years ago.

The city's potential is most evident in Chiado and Bairro Alto, the lively adjoining neighborhoods whose narrow streets are lined with an ever-increasing array of bars, boutiques and restaurants. Things are booming; construction just might be the preferred pastime of the locals.

The areas flank Rua da Misericórdia, the thoroughfare that changes names several times (Rua do Alecrim, Rua de São Pedro de Alcântara) on the route uphill from the River Tagus. Pack comfortable shoes; the hills and the cobblestones make this a town of vigorous walking.

Chiado and Bairro Alto meet at Praça Luís de Camões, site of the new Bairro Alto Hotel, 8 Praça Luís de Camões, (351-21) 340 8288. The décor at the 55-room boutique property, scheduled to open this month, is a restrained mix of old and new: plasma TV's sit on the walls between wainscoting and paintings of the birds of Lisbon; dark wood desks double as sleek vanities. The rooms on the fourth floor have narrow balconies that overlook the square below. The roof deck has stunning river views. A ground-floor bar opens onto the bustling street outside, and a D.J. will spin in the lobby on weekends. A design hotel basic in other cities, house D.J.'s are still considered a novelty here. For better or for worse. A special summer package good from June 15 through August for \$989 includes three nights with breakfast, one dinner a person, airport transfers and a walking tour of the Bairro Alto district.

Largo do Chiado, across Rua da Misericórdia, is home to some of Lisbon's oldest and fanciest shops. Heiresses could outfit their trousseau from the china and porcelain at Vista Alegre, 20 Largo do Chiado, (351-21) 346 1401, and the bedding and linens at Paris em Lisboa, 77 Rua Garrett, (351-21) 346 8885. Should they need a restorative

coffee in between, they can stop at Café a Brasileira, 120 Rua Garrett, (351-21) 346 9541, a favorite meeting place for writers and social butterflies since the 18th century. It's crowded, overpriced, historic, charming.



A display at the Yorn emporium, and a dress hangs from a meat hook at Aleksandar Protich, a former butcher shop.

Back to shopping, which may be what Chiado does best - at least during the daylight hours. Hipsters score the jeans du moment at Gardénia, 54 Rua Garrett, (351-21) 342 1207, a narrow boutique with a high vaulted ceiling.

Lisbon's most interesting retail space, Yorn, 105-115 Rua Nova do Almada, (351-21) 092 7016, is an industrial emporium with a staircase-cum-runway that connects three floors of cafes, Internet terminals, a hair salon, a record store, Diesel and Vodafone boutiques, and men's and women's fashions by designers like Wearplay, Custo and Susana Pinheiro. Rulys, 89-101 Rua Nova do Almada, (351-21) 342 0017, a cool Portuguese chain, sells trendy, lower-priced clothing and accessories for men and women. Osklen, 9 Rua do Carmo, (351-21) 325 8844, along the pedestrian zone, carries blithe, breezy and beach-ready casual wear from Brazil.

Two shops along Calçada do Sacramento offer a glance back in time. Manuscrito Histórico, No. 50, (351-21) 346 4283, a one-room shop beneath an arched ceiling, is a trove of manuscripts, prints and beautifully bound first editions. You'll find an excellent selection of ceramics (arguably Lisbon's best import) at Viúva Lamego, No. 29, (351-21) 346 9692.

A stained-glass ceiling, rotating art exhibits and bagels are the main attractions at the recently opened Café Vertigo, 4 Travessa do Carmo, (351-21) 343 3112, a favorite spot of the young literary set. Lisbon's pretty boys find one another at Heróis, 14 Calçada do Sacramento, (351-21) 342 0077, a sleek two-floor bar and restaurant with the requisite chartreuse, white and wenge wood touches. The trendy (but unpretentious) crowd is dining on Calçada do Duque at Paladar, No. 43, (351-21) 342 3097, which serves Mediterranean specialties in a dark and seductive dining room, and at the cozy and buzzing Café Buenos Aires, at No. 31, (351-21) 342 0739.

Neighboring Bairro Alto is anything but obvious. By day, the cobblestone streets are so sleepy with hanging laundry and elderly residents meeting for coffee that the many cool boutiques almost seem out of place. But this is what the quiet side of trendy looks like.

Aleksandar Protich, 112 Rua da Rosa, (351-93) 633 7795, is a converted butcher shop where dresses and sweaters hang from meat hooks. Sneakers Delight, 30-32 Rua do Norte, (351-21) 347 9976, has gallerylike displays of hard-to-score limited-edition Nikes,

Pumas, Adidas and other cult kicks. No Kidding, 40-42 Rua do Norte, (351-21) 342 1801, a cute and colorful children's shop, has a play area filled with large blocks for arranging and climbing. Vintage gets a proper treatment at A Outra Face da Lua, 86 Rua do Norte, (351-21) 343 1631, which has a zany mural made of old ties, as well as a relaxing cafe at the entrance.

By night, Bairro Alto is an altogether different scene. Diners have to knock for entry at Olivier, 35 Rua do Teixeira, (351-21) 342 1024, a low-ceiling restaurant with dark-wood paneling that serves impossibly creamy scrambled eggs and caviar, succulent sausage wrapped in cabbage, and chocolate cake with a molten center that alone could justify another Portuguese vacation. Lisboa à Noite, 69 Rua das Gáveas, (351-21) 346 8557, serves traditional cuisine in a modern space lined with large-scale photographs of the city at night. The menu includes seafood and meat dishes as well as porco preto, a succulent black pork found only on the Iberian peninsula.



Amo-te at Yorn, where shops and cafes share space on three floors.

Other current favorites include the elegant Pap' Açorda, 57 Rua da Atalaia, (351-21) 346 4811, and Sul, 13 Rua do Norte, (351-21) 346 2449, a cozy steakhouse. Those tempted by all the fado restaurants lining the streets might not be surprised to learn that locals leave these places to the tourists.

For one of the best meals in Lisbon, take a quick cab ride to Mezzaluna, 16 Rua Artilharia Um, (351-21) 387 9944, in Rato, a neighborhood just north of Bairro Alto. Michael Guerrieri, a vibrant Neopolitan chef who grew up on Long Island, prepares Italian food that's at once innovative and unpretentious. He serves cod with warm strips of radicchio and a purée of carrot and ginger, and makes an excellent goat-cheese appetizer with eggplant on a bed of chopped tomatoes. Everything is impossibly fresh, and dishes are as much a treat for the eyes as the stomach. A favorite spot for local politicians and social butterflies alike, Mezzaluna just completed a huge renovation and redecoration this spring. Make this one of your first stops, because you'll want to come back.

Around midnight, Bairro Alto becomes a giant block party. Bars serve drinks in plastic cups, the better to encourage patrons to spill onto the streets outside. Every corner is its own scene, though the crowd is consistently lively and flirty no matter where you stop. The energy is sky-high, and the Lisbon night is just beginning. There may be no better place on the planet to be young and bold - if only in spirit.