



THE VIEW OVER THE THAMES with a rendering of the Verta hotel

## Transpontine transformation

With its taut, angular Thames-side architecture, louche gastro-pubs and 80-hectare park, Battersea is becoming one of London's hottest "villages" in which to work, live and party, says **Peter Swain**

**A GENERATION AGO**, the London borough of Battersea was nothing more than an urban backwater, anchored by the distinguished but decaying edifice of Sir Giles Gilbert Scott's 1930s Power Station and noted throughout the capital for its seedy criminal element. The genteel Victorian mansion flats around the leafy, 80-hectare namesake park aside, it was an enclave to drive past rather than reside in, very different from well-upholstered Chelsea just across the river. Today, the architectural, commercial and residential revolution that started in London's Docklands is rippling upstream to SW11 – punctuated by the high-tech ziggurat of Richard Rogers' **Montevetro** building and the huge Camembert-on-stilts of Norman Foster's **Albion Riverside**, both fashionably high-ticket Thames-side apartment blocks that kick started Battersea's renaissance when they were completed a few years ago.

Unsurprisingly, the river hereabouts, which has been a liquid magnet for über-chic high-rise housing on the count of its

"village-like" feel, according to Foster, whose internationally acclaimed practice is headquartered next door to Albion, is now also drawing in intrepid hoteliers, keen to be in the hospitality vanguard of a burgeoning neighbourhood within sight of Big Ben. Hotels like the 65-room **Rafayel**, which combines five-star extravagance with an impressively low carbon footprint, located midway between Wandsworth and Battersea Bridges; its jazz bar and cigar terrace betoken wicked late night revelry. Then there is the lavish modernity of nearby **Verta**, a departure



THE WAVE-LIKE FAÇADE of Norman Foster's Albion Riverside apartment block looks out over the Thames, above



PHOTO ANDREAS ACHMANN

from the Von Essen hotel group's usual country house grandeur, complete with a residential component, adjacent to the **London Heliport**. With the addition of the **Pestana Chelsea Bridge Wharf**, a solid four-star aimed at weekday businessmen and Euro weekenders, just a ten-minute walk from Sloane Square, the locale's allure is undeniable.

But then, Battersea, with its leafy waterside location and proximity to the gilded byways of SW3, doesn't suffer from a shortage of ancillary amenities that constrains many similar quarters in their embryonic stages. To wit, there is fine dining (**Chez Bruce**, **Ransomes Dock** or **The Butcher and Grill**, which also doubles as a neighborhood deli, are standouts) and fine design, in the many studios that constitute the **Imperial Laundry** on Warriner Gardens, where Art Deco furniture, Murano glassware and vintage black and white masterpieces from the likes of the Queen's cousin, Lord Lichfield, are on offer at **Restall Brown** and **Clennell**, **Mediterraneo**, and **Artemis**, respectively.

Some are dubbing Battersea the new "Left Bank" – a tad fanciful maybe, but if students, a thriving arts scene and café, or at least gastro-pub, society are the hallmarks of Paris's Latin quarter, then the moniker isn't entirely misplaced. Indeed, a scholastic vibe courtesy of, among other institutions, the Royal Academies of Dance and Sculpture, permeates the eclectic ambience of Battersea Square where **Mazar** offers Lebanese cuisine, the **Barrio** cocktail bar specializes in Mexican food and **Riviera** draws an Italian crowd – to say nothing of the bustle apparent in pubs like the newly-relaunched **Prince of Wales**, **Prince Albert** and the popular gypsy jazz joint on Battersea High Street, **Le Quecum**, all of which are all hopping.



**BATTERSEA'S NEW FACE**  
Montevetro's high-concept interior; the spotlighted exterior of Hotel Rafael; a rendering of the Pestana Chelsea Bridge Wharf hotel



The area is clearly on a roll but its stock is set to rise even higher now that the US Embassy has announced its decision to move from Grosvenor Square to Nine Elms – a move that is set to inspire a new mixed-use international business district, complete with promenades and the like. And then there is four-chimneyed monolith itself, **Battersea Power Station**, whose owners have unveiled a £4 billion master plan which calls for hundreds of homes, shops, hotels and offices – an entirely new urban quarter. Neither of these green-centric projects will progress overnight but with all there is and all that's to come, there's no denying that Battersea's star is now fully in the ascendant.

## ADDRESS BOOK

### ■ HOTELS

**RAFAYEL**, [hotelrafayel.com](http://hotelrafayel.com); **VERTA**, [hotel-verta.co.uk](http://hotel-verta.co.uk); **PESTANA CHELSEA BRIDGE WHARF**, [pestana-chelseabridge.co.uk](http://pestana-chelseabridge.co.uk)

### ■ RESTAURANTS

**CHEZ BRUCE**, [chezbruce.co.uk](http://chezbruce.co.uk); **RANSOMES DOCK**, [ransomesdock.co.uk](http://ransomesdock.co.uk); **THE BUTCHER AND GRILL**, [thebutcherandgrill.com](http://thebutcherandgrill.com); **MAZAR**, 11-12 Battersea Square; **TOM ILYC**, [tomilic.com](http://tomilic.com); **THE PANTRY**, [thepantrylondon.com](http://thepantrylondon.com)

### ■ PUBS AND BARS

**BARRIO**, [barrio-bar.com](http://barrio-bar.com); **THE PRINCE OF WALES**, [theprinceofwalesbattersea.co.uk](http://theprinceofwalesbattersea.co.uk); **THE PRINCE ALBERT**, [theprincealbertbattersea.co.uk](http://theprincealbertbattersea.co.uk); **LE QUECUM**, [quecumbar.co.uk](http://quecumbar.co.uk)

**THE BATTERSEA POWER STATION** as seen from across the Thames



PHOTO ANDREAS ACHMANN