



Launderette, Rainham Road

Wash you were here

There are 462 launderettes in London. *Isabelle Aron* talks to photographer Joshua Blackburn who spent a year snapping them

'REALLY? YOU WANT to photograph this?' That was the most common reaction photographer Joshua Blackburn got when he started turning up at London's launderettes to ask if he could take a picture of them for a project he was working on. 'I love launderettes, I've always been fascinated by them,' he explains. 'I had an idea that I would start taking a few pictures of launderettes just for myself. Once I started, I noticed how distinctive each place was.' Blackburn decided

he wanted to photograph every launderette within Greater London. Using Google Maps and online directories, he drew up a list of 462 places, mapped them out and spent a year working through them. The results have been published in 'Lauderama: London's Launderettes', a new

Hoxton Mini Press book full of aesthetically pleasing snaps of pastel colours, old-school machines and quirky decor. Here we ask him some burning questions and find out what he learned from it.



Laundrettes



← Maypine Laundrette, South Wimbledon

↓ Laundrette, West Drayton

Why laundrettes?

'They are unusual institutions. Many high streets are becoming more and more homogenous – the laundrette is completely individual and completely analogue as well, so it feels slightly out of time and out of place. That's one of the appealing and curious things about them. There's no other business that's quite like that.'

What was your biggest takeaway from the project?

'I thought I was just photographing laundrettes but it became a story about London, told through its laundrettes. I realised that their appeal wasn't just something that was visual or nostalgic. I quickly became more interested in telling the human story.'

Did you have a favourite?

'Visually, my favourites were the ones that had the original equipment and signage from the '60s and '70s – bright colours, beautiful enamel machines. They're like little time capsules. The one that's on the cover of the book is one of my favourites. It's called the



Launderettes

Maypine Launderette. You know you've got something when you go inside and you're like "Oooh!" I get more excited than people should do...'

What were the people you met while shooting like?

'I witnessed lots of exchanges but one of the photos that I took early on was this very deep conversation between two guys in the middle of the day (right). One was the owner, the other was the customer – they were just talking about relationships and life stuff. That was where I felt there was something really special about launderettes, the social aspect to them. These are people who see each other every week, who are chatting away while they do the washing. You realise that, for a lot of people, that social contact is really important. In a number of places I saw photos of people that had passed away and who were much missed. It's like a community hub, but in a totally organic and natural way.'

→ Launderette & Dry Cleaning, Cricklewood

↓ Niazi Dry Cleaning and Launderette, Thornton Heath

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What was the weirdest decor you came across?

'There was one place (left) where, above the display of soap powders, they had a whole lot of taxidermy animal heads – deer heads, rabbit heads, things like that. That was quite surreal. That was one of those times where I walked in and thought: bingo! Some of the launderettes are pretty bare, others have made an effort to make it look interesting – it's an opportunity for the owner to have a bit of fun and express their personality. There was another place where they'd dipped some jeans in concrete and then used it as a plant pot.'

→ 'Launderama: London's Launderettes' by Joshua Blackburn is published by Hoxton Mini Press. Thurs Oct 24. £14.95