



OVER THE MOON

The historic Half Moon pub in Herne Hill has opened its doors once again

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When the legendary Half Moon pub (first opened in 1894) was flooded in August 2013, the community of Herne Hill – backed by local celebrities such as Jo Brand and La Roux – was inspired to set up the Save the Half Moon Campaign. It was a bid to retain the status of the building as a public house and music venue, rather than see it converted into flats.

Eventually, Fuller's took over the lease from the Dulwich Estate, and faced

the task of winning over the local community. They have sought to sympathetically refurbish it in a way that recognises and respects its heritage, but without preserving the performance space, which has seen the likes of Eric Clapton, Frank Sinatra, U2 and Paloma Faith take to the stage. Instead, it has replaced it with a light and airy restaurant-style space and an open kitchen. It's a move that has faced opposition from some campaigners, who are continuing to push to restore the pub

to its former glory days – but it's not all bad, as we discovered on a tour of the vast and cleverly remodelled space.

Upstairs, 12 individually designed boutique bedrooms have been added, named after the 12 men who have walked on the moon. For General Manager Matt Dutson, formerly of The Mason's Arms in Battersea, they each boast 'a Victorian feel, with antique furniture, wooden beams and vintage-style wallpaper, but also modern twists such as en-suite bathrooms'.

As one of just 270 pubs on the Campaign for Real Ale's National Inventory of Historic Pub Interiors, and as a Grade II* listed building, many of the original features are still in evidence. One of Dutson's favourite spots in the pub is the intimate snug area, which still retains six back-painted mirrors





depicting birds and signed by the renowned W. Gibbs & Sons glass decorators of Blackfriars.

‘It’s multipurpose,’ he says. ‘It accommodates standing functions for fifteen to twenty people or intimate sit down meals for ten to twelve. If it’s not booked out, then regulars can always have a quiet drink in there too. There’s no plugs or anything, so it’s just like going back in time.’

Meanwhile, the abundance of seating at the front of the pub and the courtyard at the rear is set to be a family-friendly sun-trap come summer, with the addition of a tasteful children’s play area, a barbecue and grill. There’s also a rustic, white-washed function room in which some acoustic and jazz nights are set to take place. On 14 May, it will be the venue for a celebration of International Dylan Thomas Day (the renowned Welsh poet and Tulse Hill resident could often be found drinking at the Half Moon back in the day).

Dutson hopes to get creative with the space and maximise the scope for events, and is collaborating with the Herne Hill Film Festival to put on a number of

screenings. He’s keen to involve local brewers Bullfinch and the Canopy Beer Co, which are available on tap alongside pints from the Brixton Brewery and the Gipsy Hill Brewery as well as Fuller’s own. Come winter, he’d like to create a Christmas market feel in the outdoor space. ‘It’s the pub that just keeps on giving,’ he enthuses. ‘It’s really exploded since we opened and it’s three times busier than we expected. The passion in the

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community and the Herne Hill solidarity is just amazing. I want to turn the so-called negativity around the Save the Half Moon campaign into a positive.’

Will Dutson be reinstating the pub’s legendary list of barred characters, which famously went viral on Twitter (I have to ask)? ‘I’ve still got a copy,’ he laughs. ‘A lot of those characters are still around – I thought it was an 80s thing – but I’ve drawn a line under it and no-one is barred as yet, so it’s a clean slate!’ The re-opening, it seems, is set to put Herne Hill on the map as a go-to destination for a day out. Cheers to that!

Visit halfmoonhernehill.co.uk for more information or to make a reservation

The 12 new boutique bedrooms are all individually decorated



Head Chef Mike Blizzard will serve up a delicious menu of modern British pub grub to hungry diners