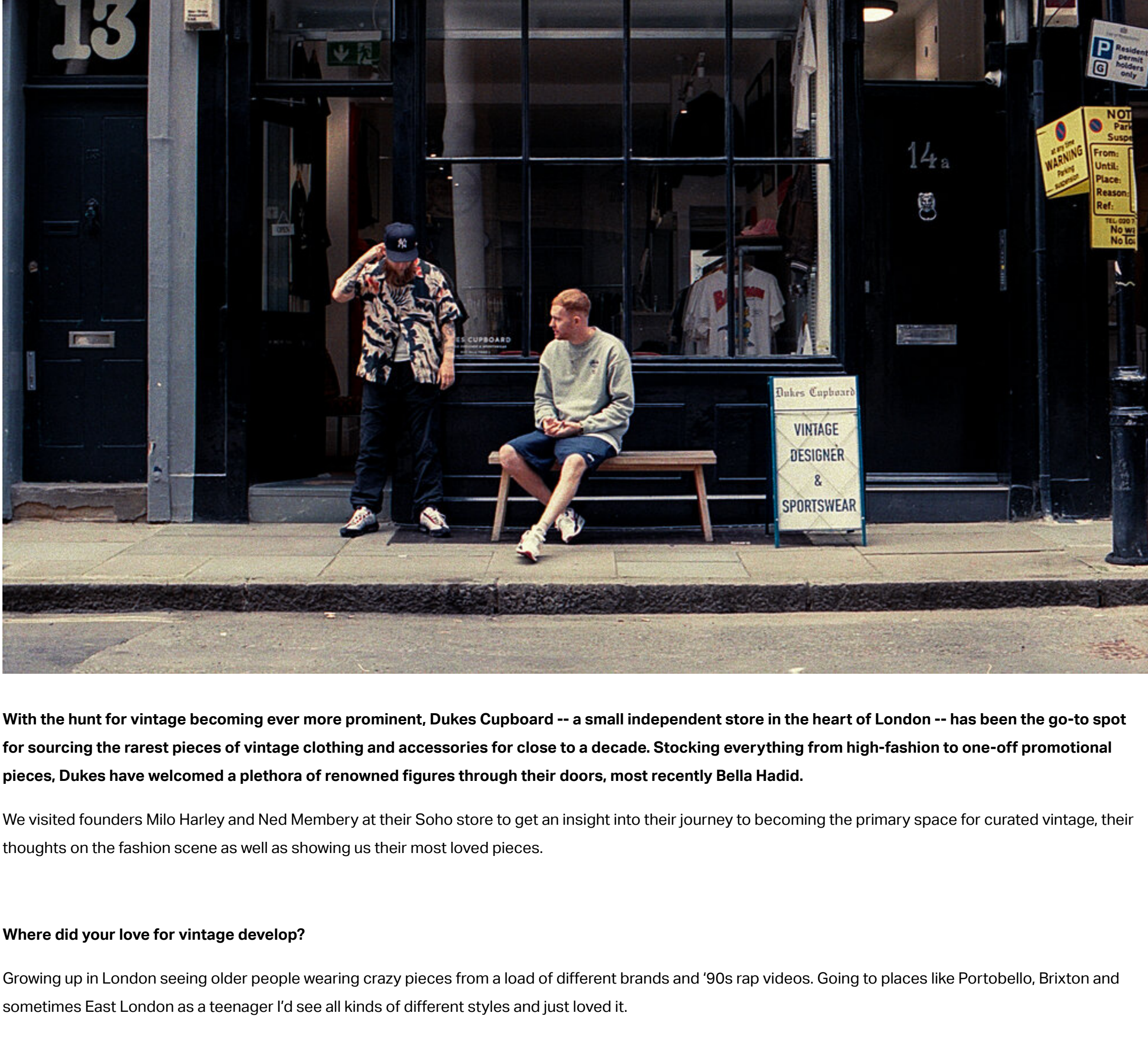


In conversation with Dukes Cupboard

Written By Ali Mohammed-Ali



With the hunt for vintage becoming ever more prominent, Dukes Cupboard – a small independent store in the heart of London – has been the go-to spot for sourcing the rarest pieces of clothing and accessories for close to a decade. Stocking everything from high-fashion to one-off promotional pieces, Dukes have welcomed a plethora of renowned figures through their doors, most recently Bella Hadid.

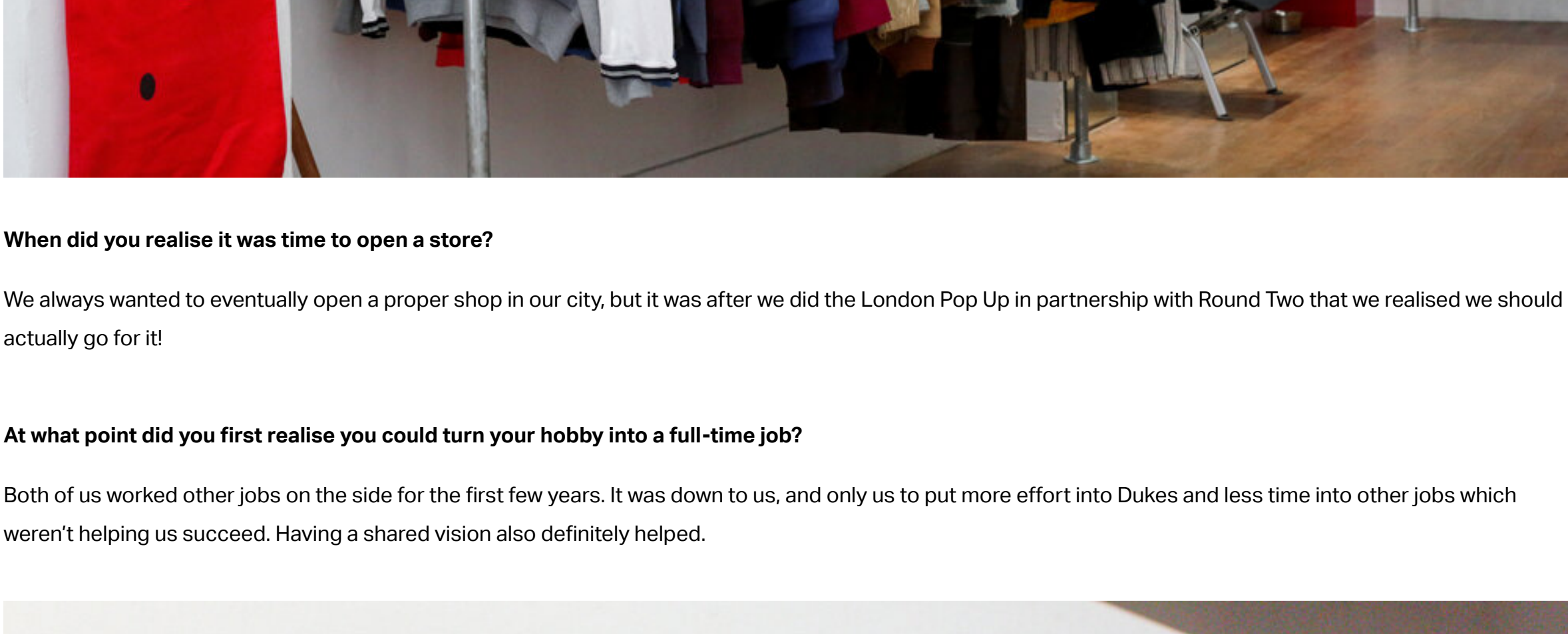
We visited founders Milo Harley and Ned Membery at their Soho store to get an insight into their journey to becoming the primary space for curated vintage, their thoughts on the fashion scene as well as showing us their most loved pieces.

Where did your love for vintage develop?

Growing up in London seeing older people wearing crazy pieces from a load of different brands and '90s rap videos. Going to places like Portobello, Brixton and sometimes East London as a teenager I'd see all kinds of different styles and just loved it.

How did Dukes Cupboard come to be?

We actually first met to swap a vintage Polo Jacket for a Berghaus jacket in Soho, as we were both already selling vintage. Milo had the stall on Berwick Street and I had one on Portobello Market, so we decided to merge both the stalls together and it all started to make sense.

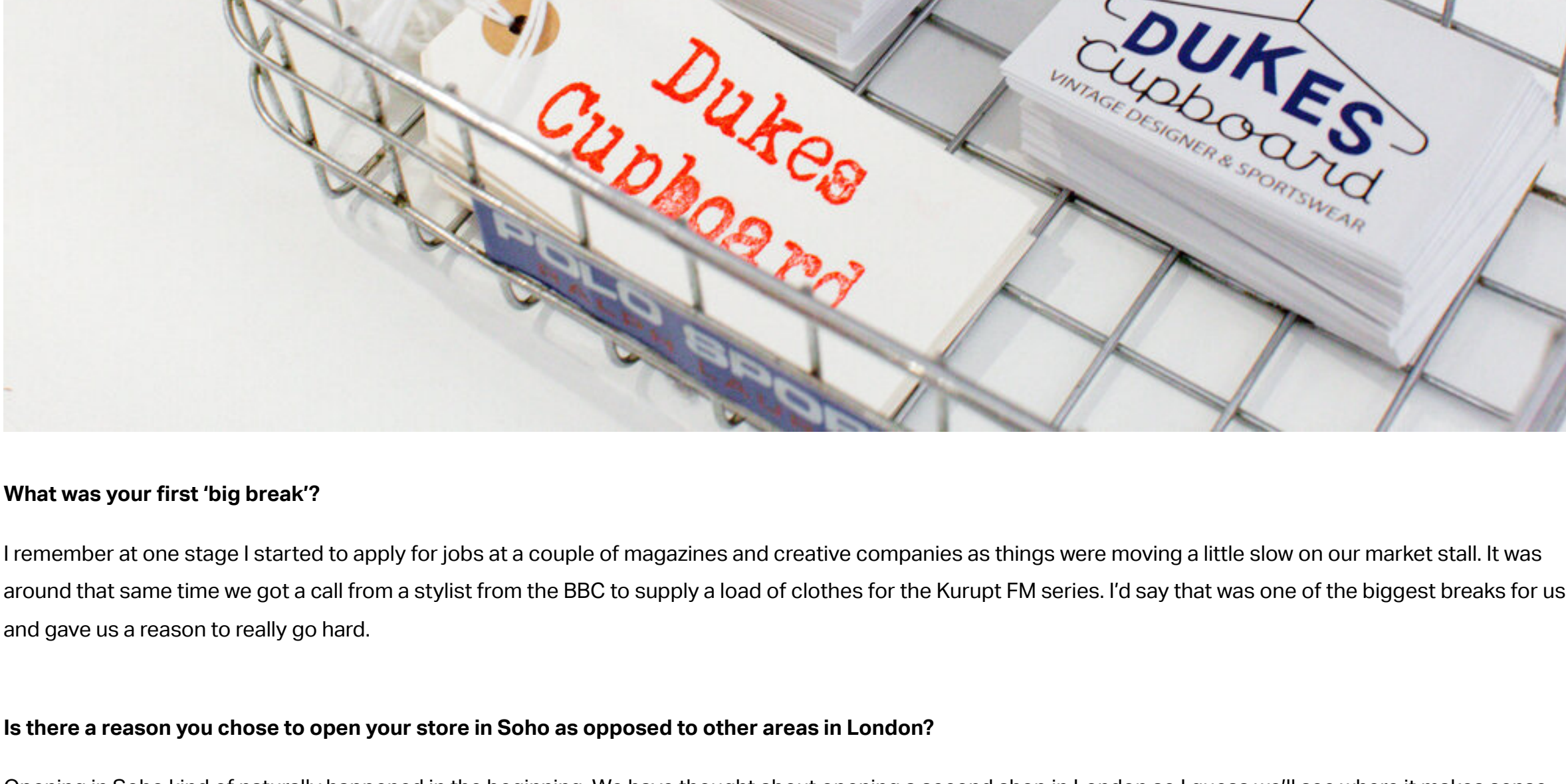


When did you realise it was time to open a store?

We always wanted to eventually open a proper shop in our city, but it was after we did the London Pop Up in partnership with Round Two that we realised we should actually go for it!

At what point did you first realise you could turn your hobby into a full-time job?

Both of us worked other jobs on the side for the first few years. It was down to us, and only us to put more effort into Dukes and less time into other jobs which weren't helping us succeed. Having a shared vision also definitely helped.



What was your first 'big break'?

I remember at one stage I started to apply for jobs at a couple of magazines and creative companies as things were moving a little slow on our market stall. It was around that same time we got a call from a stylist from the BBC to supply a load of clothes for the Kurupt FM series. I'd say that was one of the biggest breaks for us and gave us a reason to really go hard.

Is there a reason you chose to open your store in Soho as opposed to other areas in London?

Opening in Soho kind of naturally happened in the beginning. We have thought about opening a second shop in London so I guess we'll see where it makes sense for us in the future.

Is there anything you miss from your time on the stalls?

Yeah man, so much! Running a market stall in Soho for 5 years gives you a pretty mad insight to the city. You literally can't miss a thing, you're exposed to some explicit and very real situations.



What major changes have you noticed in the vintage scene?

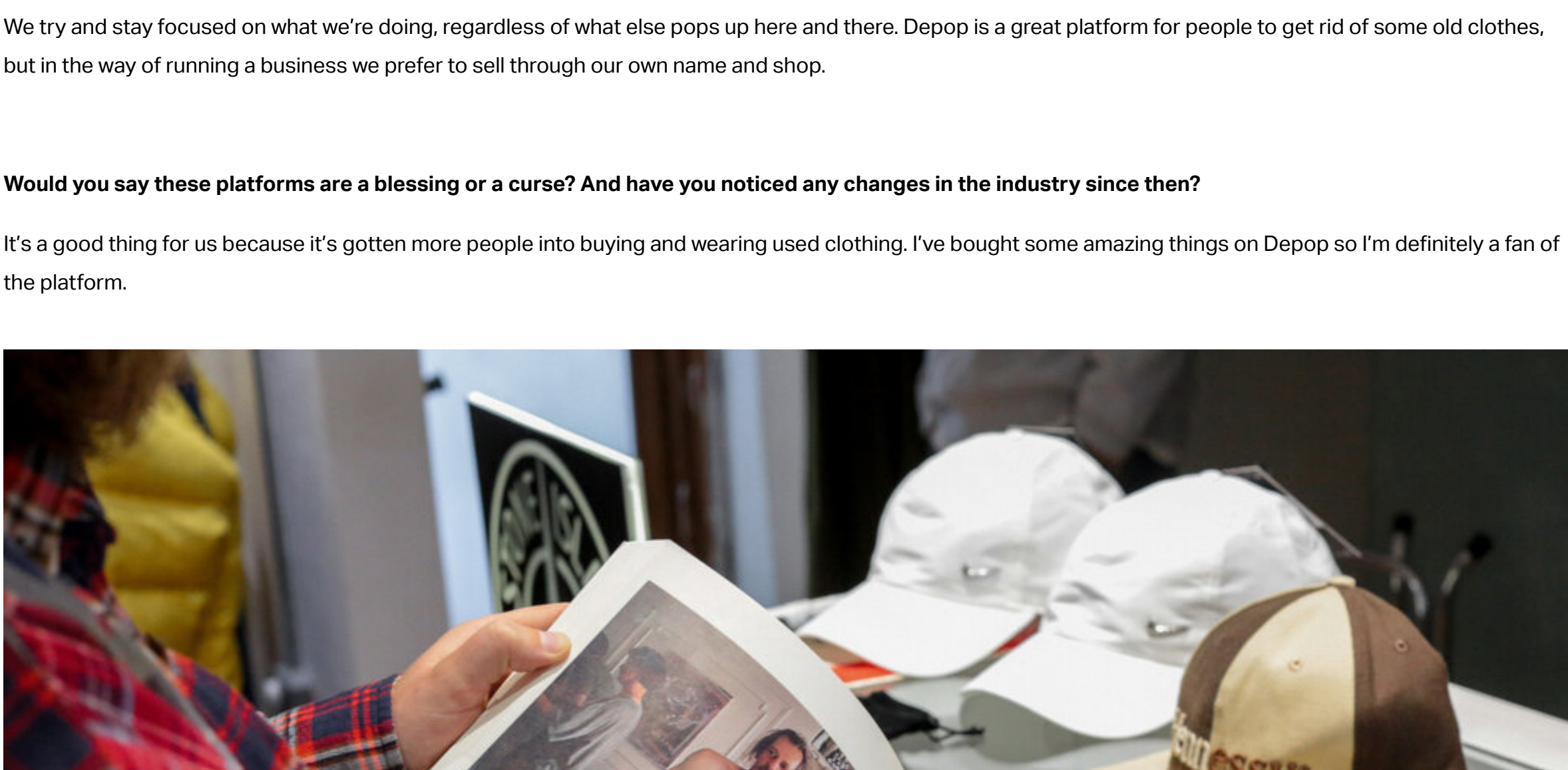
I guess when we started, we were part of a new wave of the 'vintage scene' which from 2012 till now has absolutely blown up! I mean pretty much everyone is having a go at it. It's cool that the world is moving in that direction but equally as important for the big brands to take notice of how big vintage is now.

With increasing competition from selling platforms like Depop, what have been the biggest challenges you've faced?

We try and stay focused on what we're doing, regardless of what else pops up here and there. Depop is a great platform for people to get rid of some old clothes, but in the way of running a business we prefer to sell through our own name and shop.

Would you say these platforms are a blessing or a curse? And have you noticed any changes in the industry since then?

It's a good thing for us because it's gotten more people into buying and wearing used clothing. I've bought some amazing things on Depop so I'm definitely a fan of the platform.

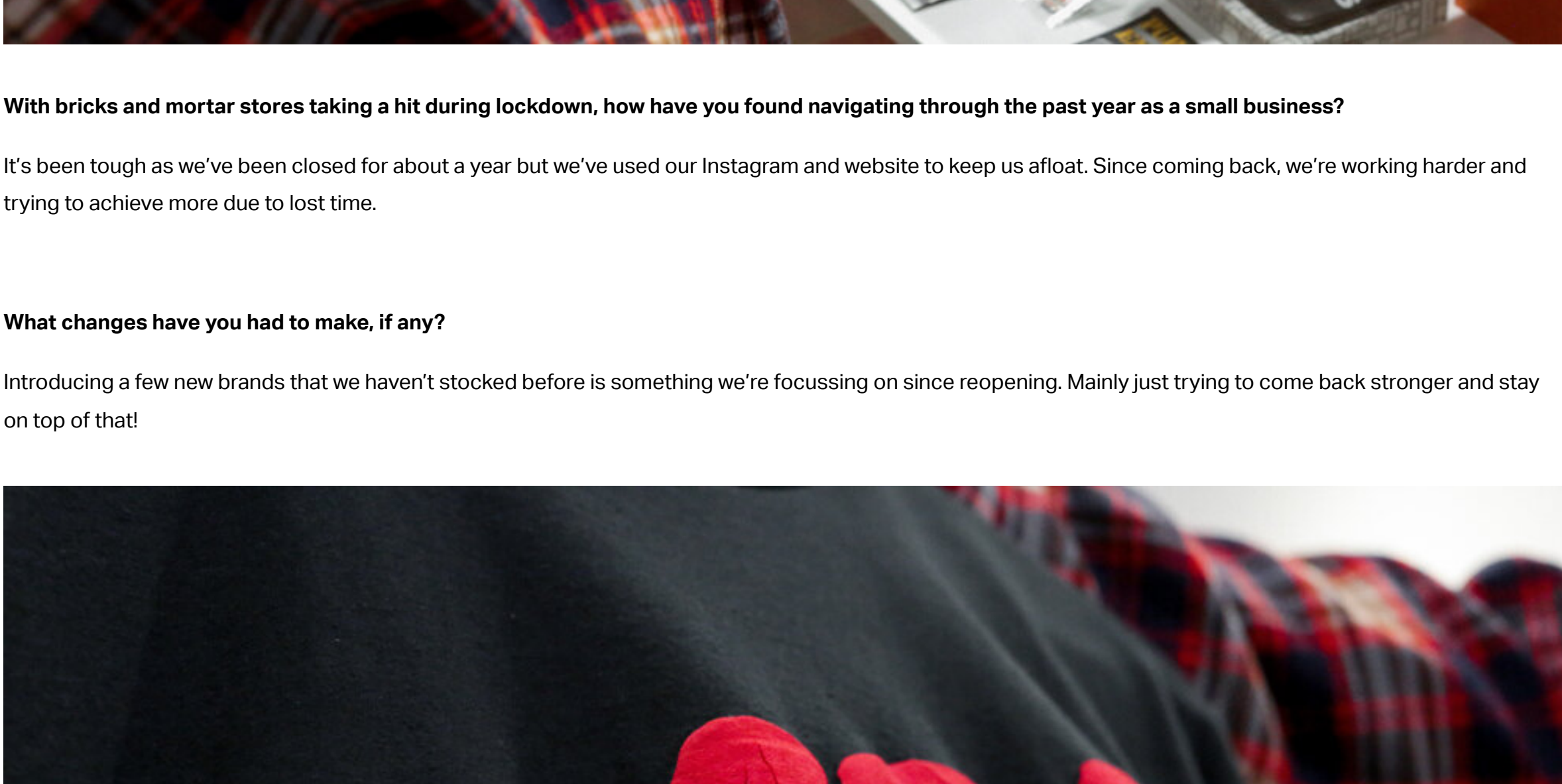


With bricks and mortar stores taking a hit during lockdown, how have you found navigating through the past year as a small business?

It's been tough as we've been closed for about a year but we've used our Instagram and website to keep us afloat. Since coming back, we're working harder and trying to achieve more due to lost time.

What changes have you had to make, if any?

Introducing a few new brands that we haven't stocked before is something we're focussing on since reopening. Mainly just trying to come back stronger and stay on top of that!



What makes your customer experience different?

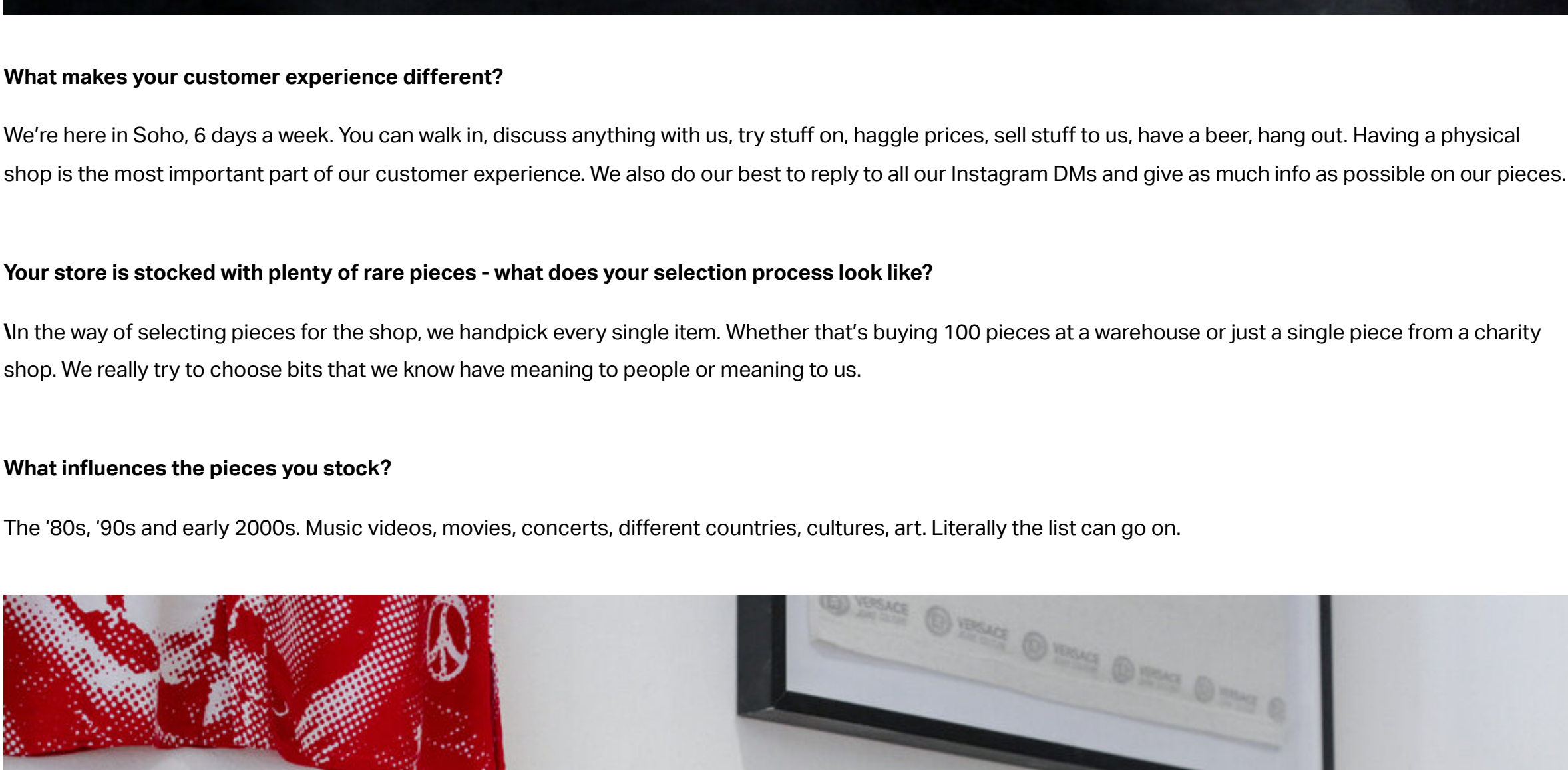
We're here in Soho, 6 days a week. You can walk in, discuss anything with us, try stuff on, haggle prices, sell stuff to us, have a beer, hang out. Having a physical shop is the most important part of our customer experience. We also do our best to reply to all our Instagram DMs and give as much info as possible on our pieces.

Your store is stocked with plenty of rare pieces - what does your selection process look like?

In the way of selecting pieces for the shop, we handpick every single item. Whether that's buying 100 pieces at a warehouse or just a single piece from a charity shop. We really try to choose bits that we know have meaning to people or meaning to us.

What influences the pieces you stock?

The '80s, '90s and early 2000s. Music videos, movies, concerts, different countries, cultures, art. Literally the list can go on.



Are there any pieces you would never consider selling?

Yeah definitely. A good few pieces I'd never been up for selling. We both have some pieces in our collections that would be impossible to let go of. We used to keep a lot more than we do now, but there's definitely some bits we will hold on to forever.

What are your favourite pieces that have passed through the store?

For me, it's those pieces that I had when I was a kid in the early/mid 2000s that mean the most to me sentimentally. Apart from that I'd say the variety of different vintage T-shirt's from music to art and so on.

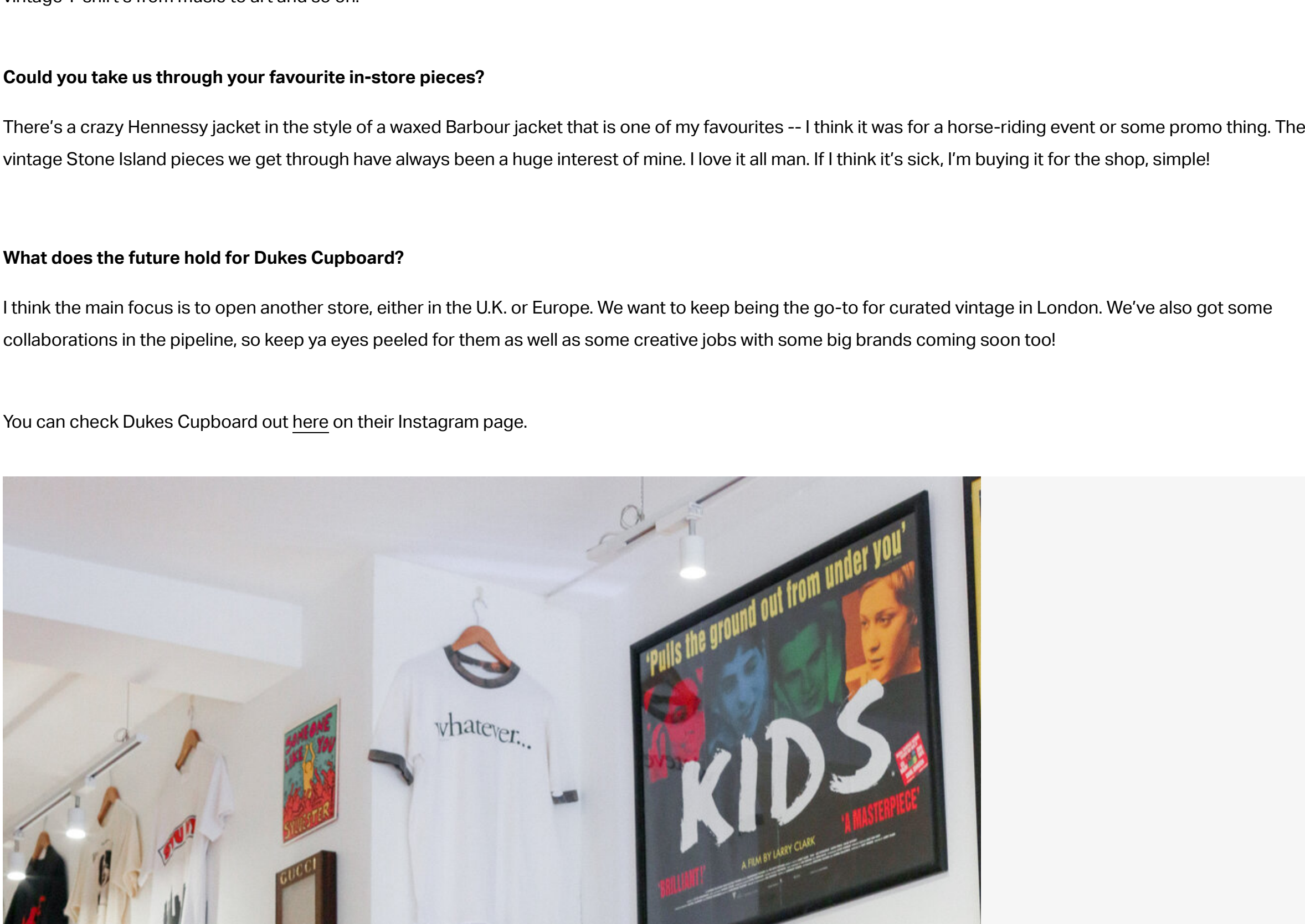
Could you take us through your favourite in-store pieces?

There's a crazy Hennessy jacket in the style of a waxed Barbour jacket that is one of my favourites -- I think it was for a horse-riding event or some promo thing. The vintage Stone Island pieces we get through have always been a huge interest of mine. I love it all man. If I think it's sick, I'm buying it for the shop, simple!

What does the future hold for Dukes Cupboard?

I think the main focus is to open other stores, either in the U.K. or Europe. We want to keep being the go-to for curated vintage in London. We've also got some collaborations in the pipeline, so keep ya eyes peeled for them as well as some creative jobs with some big brands coming soon too!

You can check Dukes Cupboard out [here](#) on their Instagram page.



In conversation with Benjamin Edgar

