

Peckham Palms

The UK's first centre for black hair stylists and a unique Afro-centric studio space

Maxine Brigue

Peckham Palms launched in 2019 as the UK's first dedicated hair and beauty space purposely designed for Afro hair. Six years later, it's thriving - and so are black businesses, its directors and entrepreneurs tell us.

Initially conceived by Southwark Council as a place for hair stylists who would be displaced by the redevelopment of Peckham Rye Station, executive directors - Paul Smyth and Cyndi Anafo - told us their aim was to "empower the most underserved communities" in the area.

"We know that the black hair industry generates billions, but very little of it goes to black women, so we wanted to redistribute that black pound and ensure that the existing communities would benefit from their own products," Anafo explained.

The Palms' directors pride themselves on being socially responsible landlords and offering subsidised rent, vital for stylists who previously operated in Blenheim Grove. For many of their stylists, having space in The Palms and business development support has given them their first opportunity to go from renting salon chairs to having a full salon unit of their own.

Ariyike Animashaun is a hair stylist who worked in The Palms when it first opened in 2019. After shutting shop during the pandemic, she then returned to the space three years ago.

Animashaun, who goes by the business name Boddays, described The Palms as "clean, organised, beautiful and calm," adding: "There's no noise so clients love it when they come here for the first time."

Augsta Sesay, another hair stylist who has been in the space since its opening, said The Palms helped her establish her business: "We don't have to go outside the station looking for customers. Customers walk in or do online bookings, so that's really helpful."

Since lockdown, The Palms has expanded to house a range of start-ups, including a restaurant, a fashion label, an author's studio, and a coffee shop - Jet Black, run by Sammy Mows. All are led by women of black or mixed heritage.

Its directors say their focus has always been on providing support to Black African and Caribbean entrepreneurs.

▼ Sammy Mows, from Jet Black Coffee in Peckham Palms



"Our aim is to empower the most underserved communities"

"Black and minority ethnic is a very ambiguous term that umbrellas the global majority," Anafo told us. "So it was far-fetched to use BAME women as a joining criteria when we know that the core demographic of Peckham tends to be from the black African and Caribbean communities."

Pokuua Ansere, the designer behind the fashion brand Kwaku Joseph, has been at The Palms for two years and has found the space warm and vibrant: "Peckham is ever-changing and ever-growing. Cyndi has seen that there needs to be a space carved out

for black women to have our own hubs within the community which has been super helpful".

Many of the 15 tenants, like Ansere, praise this open support for black women and prioritising this demographic's needs.

"The Palms is run by black women for black women and we really do care about one another", Ansere added.

Peckham Palms is at Peckham Palms Arcade, 1-14 Bournemouth Cl, London SE15 4PB, peckhampalms.com



▲ Hair stylist Ariyike Animashaun from Boddays Hair and Beauty

