

EveningStandard.



EVENTS AND THINGS TO DO

Secret London: Why you should go and explore Two Temple Place this weekend

Grand interiors: Two Temple Place houses one of London's finest staircases *Two Temple Place/Peter Dazeley*

LUKE ABRAHAMS

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In an attempt to take you all out of your comfort zones, our [Secret London series](#) uncovers little-known locations in the city and beyond.

This week, we explore [Two Temple Place](#), a mini palace of mahogany interior dreams located just off the pretty streets that weedle off into the Strand.

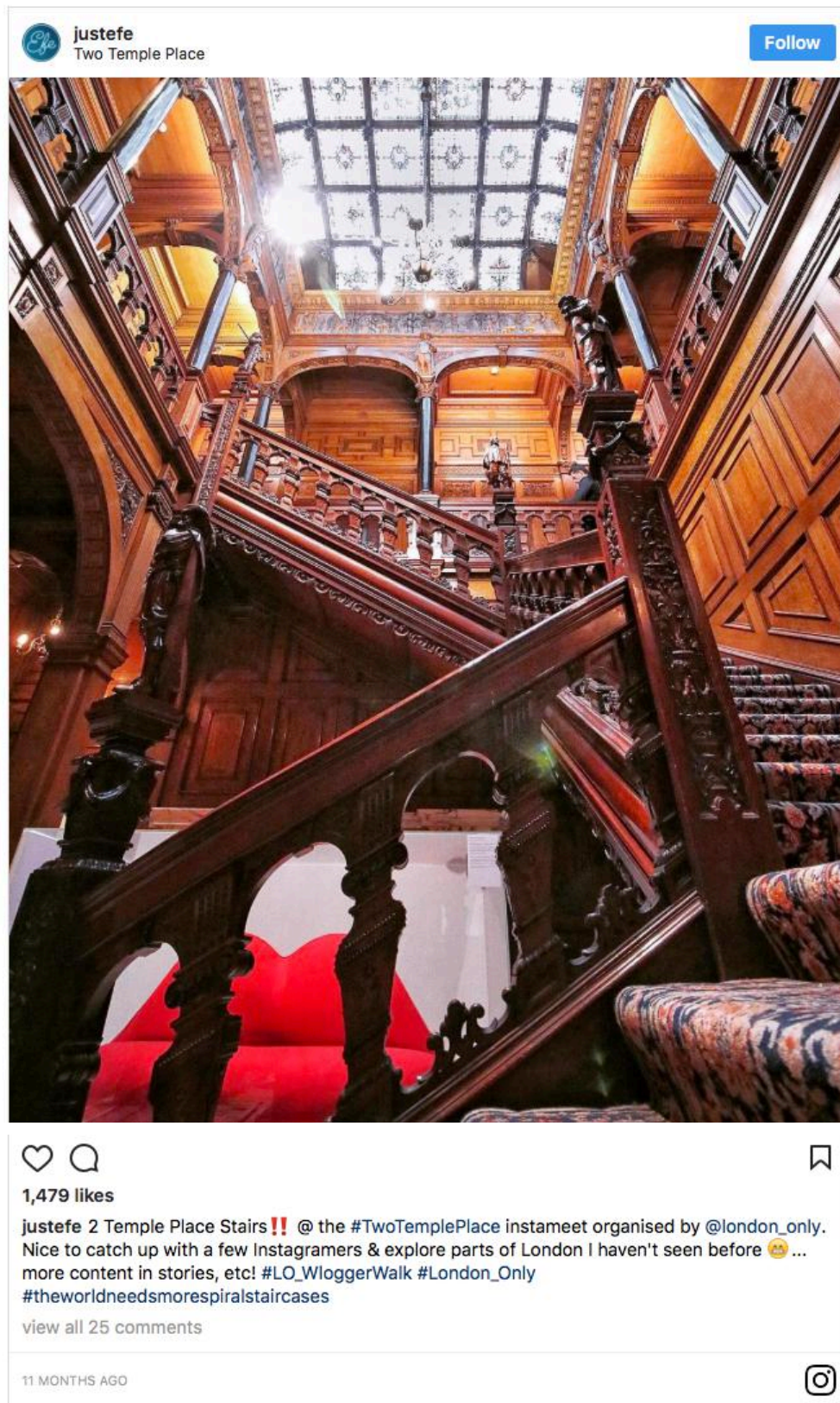
A temple in London?

It's not really a Temple at all. It was originally called Astor House, a fancy gothic-style 19th Century mansion once owned by the famously wealthy William Waldorf, The Viscount Astor. Tucked away and out of sight, very few people actually know the stonkingly beautiful place exists. Overlooking the Thames, one of its most notable claims to fame is that it was one of the first houses in London to be fitted with a working telephone. Now owned by [arts](#) charity [The Bulldog Trust](#), it survives thanks to it being one of London's most exclusive (and ludicrously opulent) party venues.

Open to the public only during [Open House](#) and the trust's annual exhibition, it's one of those rare places in the city that will make you genuinely gasp holy moly.

OK. Tell us more...

In short, London's answer to [Downton Abbey](#) is nothing short of a jewel in London's already glistening [crown](#): it's mysteriously magnificent as well as extremely culturally, artistically and architecturally valuable. It's very pretty, and oh so dandy.



Astor partially built and renovated the crenellated Tudor Thames-side stronghold with three things in mind. First it had to be a place that was far from his homeland of the [United States](#), a place where he thought his children would be safe and protected from kidnapping and a place that would make for an adequate office. In addition, [the mini palace](#) also had to have enough space to house his extensive collection of art, [literature](#) and musical instruments.

After a few minutes of standing inside, you'll instantly realise that this place is all about the interiors. Imagine high Victoriana-meets-[Disney](#) via a splash of modern gothic grandeur. It's as Donald Strachan described, 'a tad bizzare'. The bloke behind the incredible design was architect John Loughborough, often referred to as the godfather of modern neo gothic. Inside, the imposing rooms house many statues of recognisable literary figures, many drawn from the works of Shakespeare (Othello, Macbeth and Anthony & Cleopatra) one dedicated to Rip Van Winkle and several other heroes from great canonical American prose.

You'll find some of the grandest works flanking the mahogany-ridden Great Hall. Dominated by chandeliers and immense tapestries, a great patchwork of historical figures from the likes of Mary, Queen of Scots, to a headless Anne Boleyn and Pocahontas crown every nook, crevice and cranny in sight. Aside from those, indulge in a game of eye spy and seek out your favourite of the nine Arthurian heroines. Such fun.



Then there's the staircase, easily one of the finest in the land. From the marble, jasper, porphyry and onyx floor rises an absolutely [Instagrammable](#) and romanticised oak structure riddled with statues of the Three Musketeers, a favourite of Astor et al.

Look up however, and you'll see something even grander: a glistening stained-glass ceiling decorated with ships, regal flags and every floral you can imagine. Combine it with the staircase, and it looks like the entire room has been plucked out of a scene of Titanic. We'll be your Jack, if you'll be our Rose.

Sold. But why should I go now?

They've got a special exhibition on at the moment dedicated to celebrating [100 years of jazz in the UK](#). Teaming up with [The Arts Society](#), the small, but fascinating display brings together all sorts of bits and bobs, films and artworks from the history of the [musical](#) genre throughout the country. Expect [paintings](#) by acclaimed British artist Edward Burra, ceramics inspired by jazz [royalty](#) Carlton Ware and Royal Winton, as well as a thoughtful insight into how African American and black culture profoundly influenced British culture as we see it and experience it today.

Best part is that it's totally free to see, too. Our advice: get in quick before it closes, otherwise you'll have to wait until the next Open House or worse, next year.

Two Temple Place is at 2 Temple Place London WC2R 3BD. Nearest tube: Temple. Entry to Rhythm & Reaction: The Age of Jazz in Britain is free. For more information, visit the venue's [website](#)