

ATHENS' NEW SPIRIT

ATHENS, DUBBED "EUROPE'S CAPITAL OF CREATIVITY" BY CONDÉ NAST TRAVELER, HAS CEMENTED ITS STATUS AS AN UP-AND-COMING LIVING DESTINATION, THANKS TO AFFORDABLE SPACES IN CHARMING AREAS AND AN URBAN YET LAID-BACK LIFESTYLE. TO SUM IT UP, THE CAPITAL IS WORTH A VISIT.



It might very well be the ultimate cradle of civilization, but for many travelers Athens is a blur from a taxi – and a few snapshots of the Parthenon – on the way from the airport to the port, where a ferry to the islands awaits. Add the distressing images of the economic crisis that has plagued Greece for the past few years, and you can see why Athens has been largely absent from the Top Ten of Glam Destinations lately. That is, until April last year, when documenta 14 chose the city as the parallel location for the renowned international art fair. When hordes of artists, curators and art lovers descended on the Greek capital at the time, they were pleasantly surprised to discover a capital buzzing with creative energy, despite, or maybe thanks to the crisis. A creative wave, spurred by an indomitable spirit of resilience, is still palpable today in private art institutions, exhibition spaces, art galleries, design hotels, foodie restaurants and quirky boutiques embodying the new Athens spirit: fierce, independent, original.



Stavros Niarchos Foundation



National Museum of Contemporary Art (EMST)



Gallery Kalfayan

ART & ARCHITECTURE

If the mighty Acropolis remains a must-see (don't miss the **Acropolis Museum** by French/Swiss deconstructivist Bernard Tschumi and Greek architect Michael Fotiadis), you can experience today's architectural renaissance in structures such as the **Stavros Niarchos Foundation**, a striking glass building by Italian architect Renzo Piano. Surrounded by a park and a lake, it houses the National Opera, the National Library, an auditorium and a theatre. Formerly a brewery and a metro station, the **National Museum of Contemporary Art (EMST)**, revamped by 3SK Stylianiadis Architects, boasts a permanent collection of Greek and foreign artists, a library, labs, project rooms, an auditorium and a restaurant. To measure the creative fever gripping the capital, head to the **Benaki Museum Pireos Street Annexe**, an outpost of contemporary art designed by Maria Kokkinou & Andreas Kourkoulas: it hosts exhibitions, musical events and performances. And visit the galleries that are redefining the city's art scene: in Metaxourgeio, a former no-go area peppered by graffiti, **The Breeder** (an ex-ice-cream factory) represents Greek artists based in Athens and introduces international names to the Greek public. The area is also home to the **Rebecca Camhi Gallery**, one of the pioneers: the space features works of well-known local and international artists, while a gift shop sells ceramics, textiles and jewelry by local designers. Also worth a visit is **Atopos**, a cultural center where you can admire a unique collection of paper dresses from the Sixties, some designed by names like Issey Miyake and Martin Margiela. Find political and social art and workshops at **State of Concept**, an artist-run space in the EMST neighborhood, which is en route to gentrification thanks to the Museum. On the other hand, works by up-and-coming and established Greek artists, and South American and Asian maestros are at the core of the program of the **Kalfayan Gallery**, located in the chic district of Kolonaki.



Funky Gourmet



NOLAN

EAT

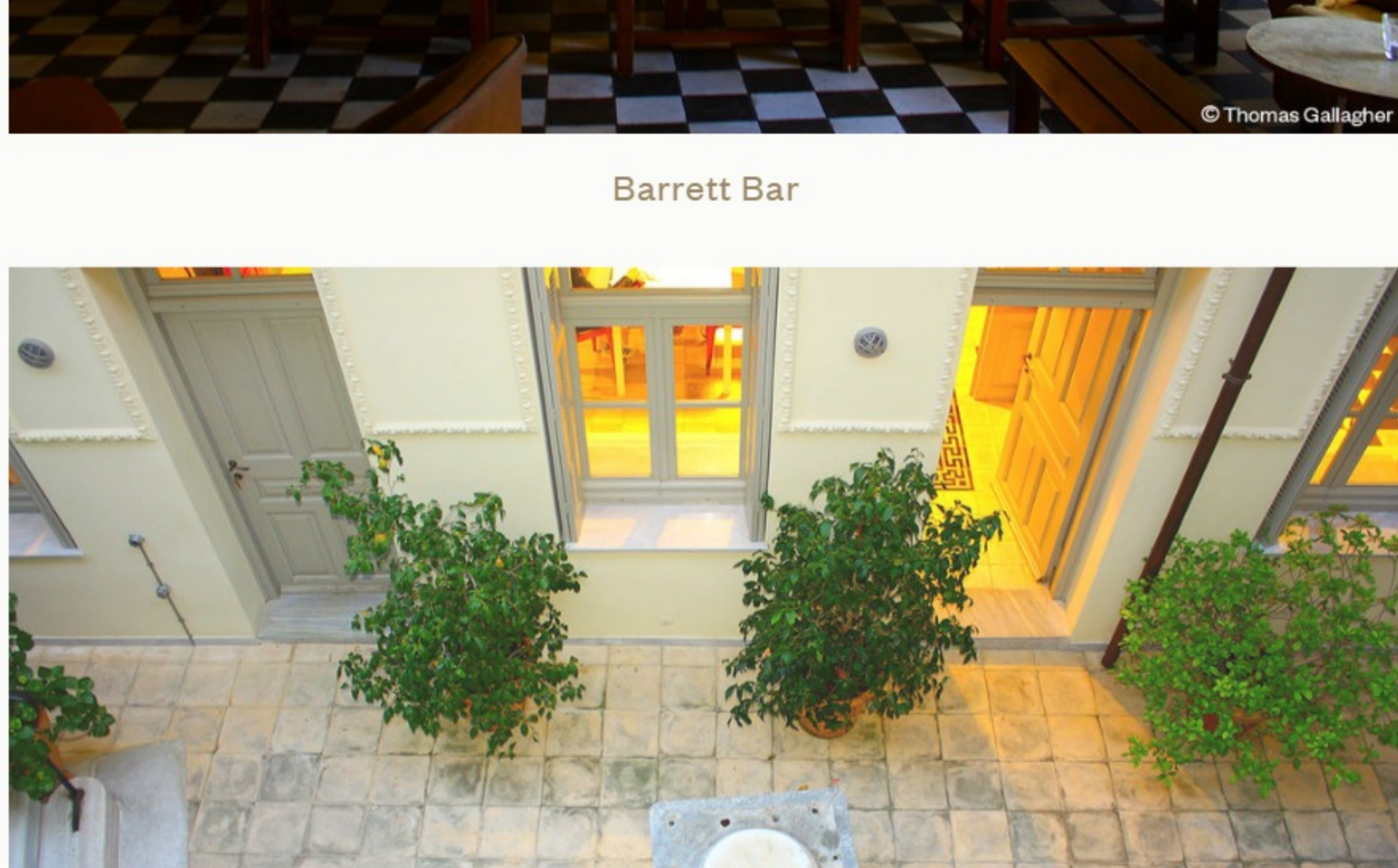
Beyond tzatziki or souviaki, cuisine "made in Athens" has reinvented itself by capturing the latest moods of this evolving city. Blending Greek fare with Asian influences to create unexpected dishes, **Nolan**, a small venue of the area of Plaka, is the toast of the town today. Molecular cuisine meets unleashed creativity at **Funky Gourmet**, taking up an entire house in Metaxourgeio. The 14-course menu boasts playful dishes and compositions that are works of art. For farm-to-table fare and traditional Greek recipes visit **Vezene**, the innovative bistro by New York-born chef Ari Vezene: local seafood and sustainable meats are cooked in a wood-fired kitchen. Gripped by nostalgia for a "real" experience? Head to the Central Market, where a nameless door will lead you to **Diporto**, the art community's favorite lunch spot. Wooden tables, a sparse menu, flavor-packed dishes and "retsina" wine poured straight from the barrel make for an unforgettable experience. The fava bean purée and chickpea soup are simply glorious. Try traditional cuisine and recipes passed from generation to generation at the family-owned **Filippou**. Dating back to 1923, this Athens classic is loved by intellectuals, politicians and artists. The neighborhood also boasts **Papadakis**, where star chef Argiro Barbarigou delivers creative seafood dishes of revisited Greek cuisine. Sit outside under the orange trees nibbling at grilled octopus with truffle purée: life doesn't get any better.



Filippou



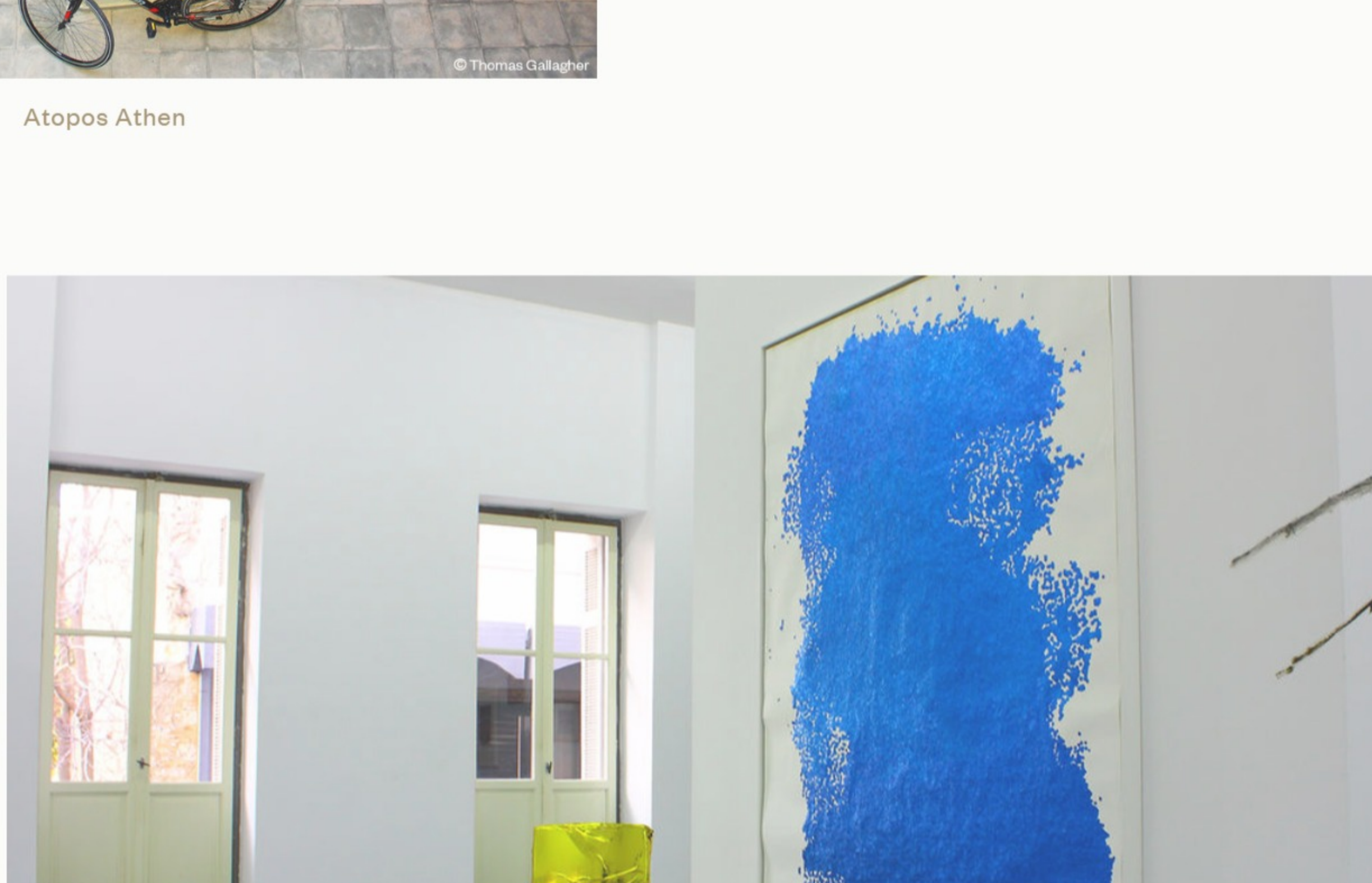
Barrett Bar



Atopos Athen

DRINK

Bar-hopping is a popular sport here, and watering holes come in all shapes and sizes. See **Bios** in the Kerameikos area, decorated with airline memorabilia, it serves frozen cocktails on a stick, hosts theatre performances and offers magnificent views of the Acropolis (from its terrace). At the other end of the spectrum is the **Galaxy Bar** in the Kolonaki area: a sliver of a bar that is an Athens icon (not to be confused with the bar at the Hilton Hotel) where illustrious patrons such as Tennessee Williams and Frank Sinatra have sampled quality whiskeys. It is also as an art gallery. At **Barrett Bar** in the lively district of Monastiraki, you can watch the hipster crowd sip excellent Mai Tais while admiring works by up-and-coming local talent on the walls.



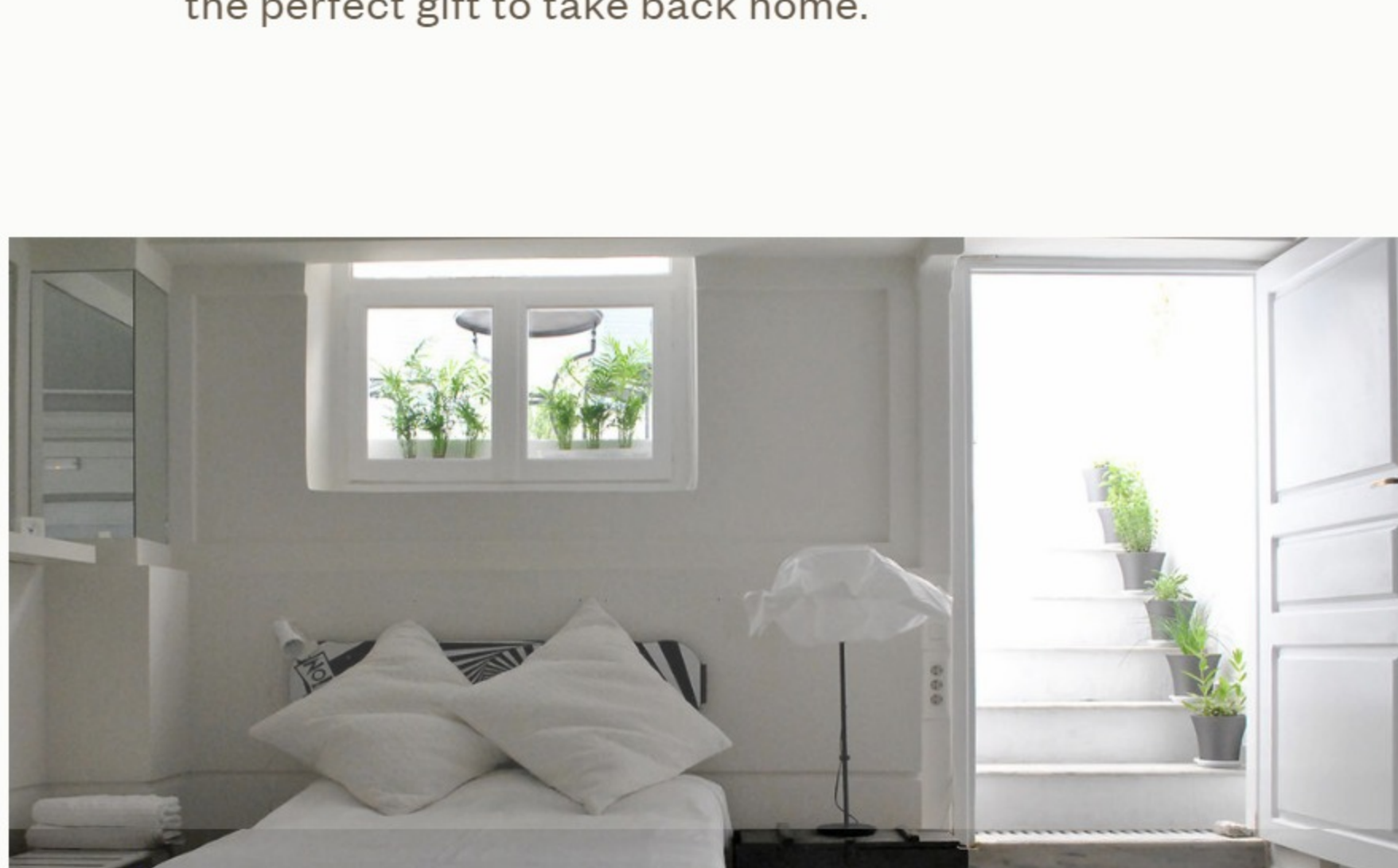
Camhi Gallery

SHOP

It might not be Paris or Milan, but Athens is fostering a new generation of local fashion talents. Discover them at **Neon Raum** in the Plaka area, a 1st floor loft-like space that serves as a showroom for up-and-coming Greek designers. Or in the boutiques of upscale Kolonaki such as that of designer **Yiorgos Eleftheriades**, whose sartorial pieces unite unique shapes with local delicacies. The vicinity also lets you stock up on quality delicatessens: **Yoleni's Gourmet** is a treasure trove of produce from small farmers from all over Greece. There is also an olive oil bar, and cooking classes are available. For souvenirs and original objects by Greek artists, head instead to **Forget Me Not**, a charming boutique in the Plaka area: scented candles, cosmetics made with local olive oil, handmade jewelry and cute stationary and T-shirts make it a one-stop-shop for the perfect gift to take back home.



Yiorgos Eleftheriades



Alice Inn



Hotel Grande Bretagne

STAY

Feel the urban vibe in the uber-cool **New Hotel** designed by the Campana Brothers in the central area of Plaka: the Brazilian designers display their signature style and furniture constructed from found materials in their Athens outpost. The undisputed Grande Dame of the city, the **Hotel Grande Bretagne** embodies old style elegance: strategically located on the famous Syntagma Square, it is the ideal base for lovers of vintage openness. The view of the Acropolis from the terrace is breath-taking. For a "local" experience, choose the cozy **Alice Inn**, owned by Irish-Greek architect John Ansolas. Every room of this quirky Bed & Breakfast enconced in a quiet street of Plaka is uniquely decorated with objects unearthed in local flea markets. Original and creative: very Athens.

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