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Move over, Queen West

Leslieville, a stretch of Queen East between Leslie St. and Empire Ave., is the new cool kid on the shopping block

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[DAPHNE GORDON](#)

Queen East is the new Queen West.

The coolest new place to shop in Toronto these days is Leslieville, a neighbourhood that spans a stretch of Queen St. between Empire Ave. and Leslie St.

Perhaps responding to a new crop of condo developments and many young families buying houses in the area, a wave of new restaurants and shops have opened on Queen East in recent months. There's a real feeling of discovery for adventurous shoppers who like to explore new territory.

Aside from the anticipated opening of a new Starbucks at the corner of Queen and Logan Sts., most of the places in Leslieville are independently owned and operated. It's kind of an anti-mall shopping experience.

Leslieville dates to about 1850, when it was a working-class village named after businessman George Leslie. It's seen some hard economic times over the years, but now it's attracting creative shop owners who prefer not to pay the high rents of Queen St. W.

The vibe is decidedly indie and eco-conscious. Themes include vintage furniture, specifically mid-century modern, organic foods and retailers that offer do-it-yourself classes.

For example, the Leslieville Cheese Market has tasty night classes in cheese appreciation. At Sushi Marché, chef John Lee will teach you everything you ever wanted to know about Japanese food, then send you home with enough sushi to feed an army — or at least your hungry family. And at Nathalie-Roze & Co., you can learn how to make your own soaps, accessories, books and more.

But the area is definitely in transition. For every newly-renovated storefront, there's a neglected address that's seen better days.

And the neighbourhood is not without a criminal element, though shopkeepers and local residents are working together to create homegrown solutions that respect the community's history and variety.



VINCE TALOTTA/TORONTO STAR

Retailer and interior designer Stephen Howard opened his shop Filk and Company in 2004, and it's become known for its nouveau country aesthetic and distinctive colour palette.

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