



Glasgow

"I'm embarrassed by Glasgow," says the car hire man in Edinburgh. When pressed for a reason, he just shrugs and mutters, "You'll see."



But I know already. Edinburgh people have always looked down on Glasgow. To them it's rough and common, filled with the worst Scottish stereotypes, from fat drunkards spoiling for a fight to its best-known culinary creation, the cardiologist's nightmare that is the deep-fried Mars bar. It goes on: the local council recently announced with pride that the latest addition to its list of famous Glaswegians is miserly Scrooge McDuck, thus buying into the biggest national cliché of them all.

First impressions reinforce this notion. If Edinburgh could be likened to a Remuera matron, stately, refined and well-groomed, Glasgow initially appears more like a K-Road slapper: blousy, down to earth and good for a laugh. I see abundant evidence of lively times along the once-mighty Clyde, its banks littered with empty beer and whisky bottles, even a bar stool tipped over the railings opposite the pub bearing the river's Gaelic name: The Clutha. An elderly man totters out of the doorway and tacks around the corner into the Saltmarket, conducting an emphatic conversation with himself before disappearing into another pub, the smokers gathered outside parting to let him through.

Further along the road, clumps of people wander away from the Barras, the weekend market, clutching bulging blue plastic bags. The stalls sell everything from sporrans to cell phones, Beano annuals to an actual kitchen sink, 3kg bags of liquorice allsorts to pale and doughy-looking 'Home-made Cloutie Dumplings'. Litter and graffiti are everywhere, but it is also bustling and noisy, with music, laughter and cheerful banter between stall-holders and customers.

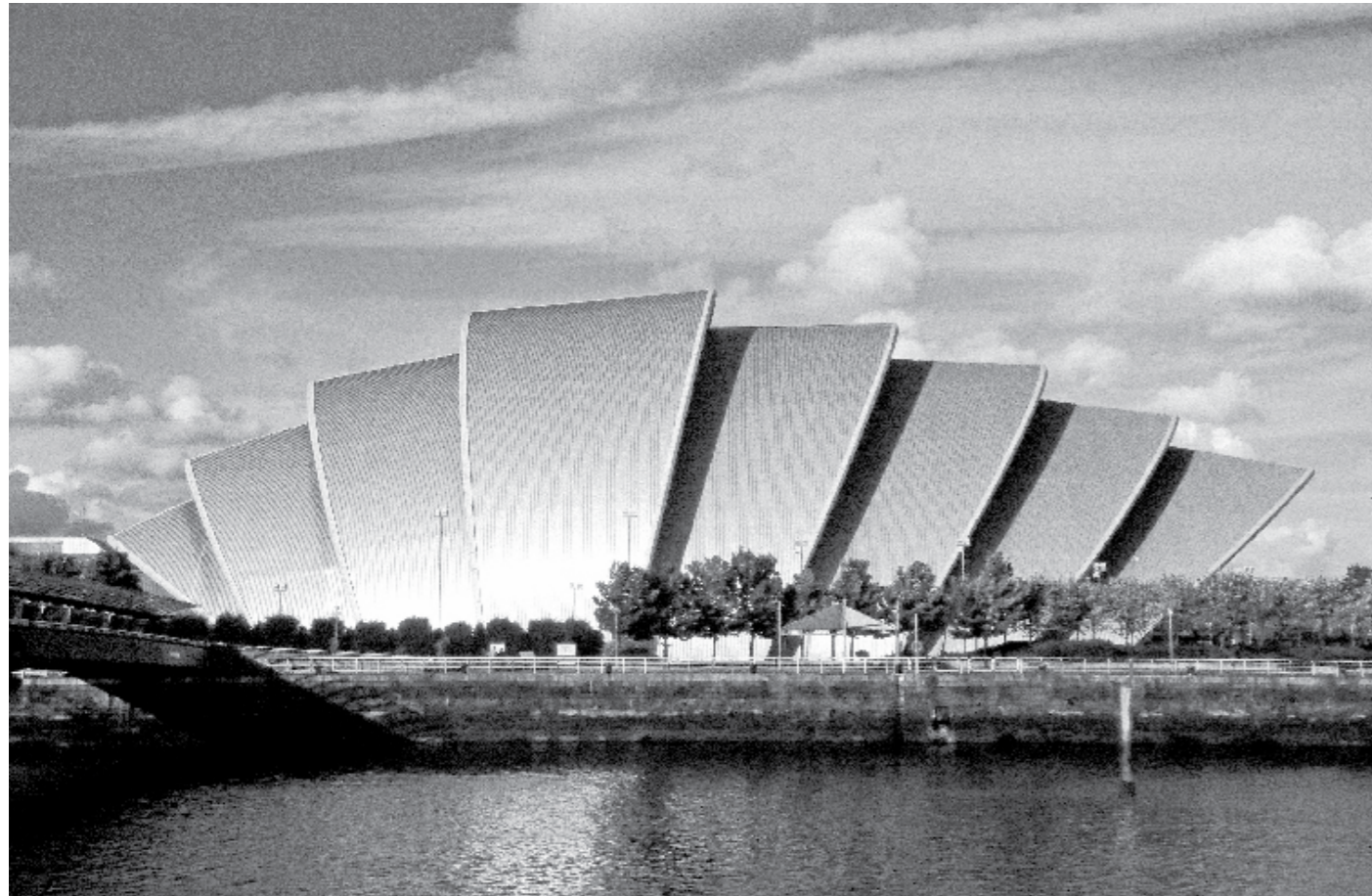
Up the hill it is tidy and quiet, the cobbled square dominated by the huge Gothic bulk of the 600-year-old cathedral, built over the tomb of St Mungo. Amongst its treasures are the faded and bullet-holed colours of the Scottish Regiment of Foot Guards from the Egypt Campaign of 1801 that, according to the label, found their way to the cathedral thanks to Mrs Hankins of Palmerston North.

Across the cobbles is the entrance to the Necropolis, which sounds like a city in a sci-fi novel, but is actually the dead centre of town, a green hilltop spiky with tombs and memorials, the grandest belonging to John Knox, 'who banished popery from the kingdom'. Drifting up from the city below comes *Scotland the Brave* on bagpipes and 'nee nah' on police klaxon, while on the viaduct leading to the tombstones a plump bride poses for photographs with her kilted groom.

Back down in George Square there is a Gothic border around the lawns: inky black against the vivid green, teenagers defy convention by all dressing in skin-tight jeans and T-shirts, shocking pink streaks in their hair, hard metal buzzing through their earphones. Three Indie boys in cardigans with careful, shiny hair stop to flirt with some Goth girls as a fat man in kilt, sunnies and beanie cruises slowly past on his mobility scooter, a thermos in his handlebar basket. A punk with a spiked Mohican leans against the brass foot and yard standard measures on the wall of the grand City Chambers watching a big girl pull jeans up under her short skirt and a sweatshirt over her boob tube before going home to Mam.

Buchanan Street and Sauchiehall Street are busy with shoppers working their way from the six-storey Art Nouveau splendour of Princes Square to the sleek modernity of Buchanan Galleries, only briefly diverted by the buskers: a bongo drummer, razor blade swallower, balloon twister, some old guys cranking out Beach Boys hits, a man with a ring of fascinated small boys demonstrating a magic whistle, a guitarist singing the Crowded House hit, *Weather With You*, three men in kilts with bagpipes, snare drum and bass drum. A big crowd gathers by Donald Dewar's statue ('Scotland's First-Ever First Minister') as a man in jeans and donkey jacket sings *Nessun Dorma*.

Downstairs in Waxy O'Connor's Irish pub, the punters are quiet as Scotland faces the All Blacks in the World Cup at Murrayfield over in Edinburgh. Pale in the light from the big screen, they drink steadily as the score mounts, but at the end



Photos : Elizabeth Light

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just shake their heads and tut. "That's all they could win by, the best team in the world? Against our B team? Well, if it makes you happy..."

Outside in the dark, packs of women in hot pants and high heels defy the chill and the cobbles, prowling from pub to club, shrieking and hooting and picking off lone men as they smoke on the footpaths. Age and size are irrelevant to both dress and behaviour: all that counts is having a laugh and a drink, some fun to end the week. The mood is good-humoured and friendly, the intention to make the night memorable – or, equally acceptable, a complete blank.

By morning they are gone, the streets empty except for a scattering

of empty bottles and the remains of fish suppers thrown both down and up. With the players offstage, the set draws attention: ornate Victorian Gothic built to impress with cupolas, columns and carvings, amongst which local boy Charles Rennie Macintosh's dainty Art Nouveau whimsies look like ballerinas in a line-out. I sit on a straight chair in one of them, the Willow Tea Rooms, served by a waitress in black dress and frilled white apron: leaf tea and a slice of the cloutie dumpling, which is hot, sweet and stodgy, in a puddle of custard.

Miss Agnes Toward would have come here. I visit her tenement house in Buccleugh Street. An Edinburgh spinster who never threw anything away in

the fifty years she lived there, her four-room flat has been preserved as a living museum just as she left it in 1965. It's a time capsule from early last century, with beds in cupboards, a coal bunker in the kitchen, a mangle over the sink and gas lamps keeping it warm. It's snug and neat and nothing like a slum: just as Glasgow is much more than drunks and battered Mars bars, which, despite trying, I never find - until, back home, I stop in Orewa.

By Pamela Wade

