

Blitz: the short-lived nightclub where the 1980s were born gets major Design Museum exhibition

Blitz: the club that shaped the 80s

20 September 2025 – 29 March 2026

the Design Museum

Generously supported by the Blavatnik Family Foundation

- Exhibition will celebrate the nightclub that began the careers of ‘Blitz Kids’ Spandau Ballet, Visage, and Boy George
- Highlights of the 250 objects going on display were revealed in a press launch this morning
- Show brings together personal items that have been hidden from public view since 1980

Tuesday 20 May 2025, London | This autumn, the Design Museum invites visitors to a major new exhibition to discover — or rediscover — the London nightclub where the culture of the 1980s began.

In a press launch this morning, details of the rare and hugely personal items that will go on display in **Blitz: the club that shaped the 80s** were revealed. Many of the objects in the exhibition have been hidden from public view since 1980.

This will be the first ever major exhibition on the legendary and impactful Blitz club night. Despite its short lifespan — running for just 18 months from 1979-1980 in London’s Covent Garden — it generated a creative scene that had an enormous global impact on popular culture in the decade that followed — from fashion and music, to film, art and design.

The scene launched the careers of many stars, including chart-topping performers Spandau Ballet, Visage, Boy George and Marilyn as well as a long list of designers, artists, filmmakers and writers —

from couture milliner Stephen Jones and *Game of Thrones* costume designer Michele Clapton, to DJ and fashion writer Princess Julia and BBC broadcaster Robert Elms.

Today's Blitz exhibition press launch took place at the Groucho Club in Soho, just a short distance from the former site of the Blitz on Great Queen Street. Full details were unveiled by the exhibition's curator Danielle Thom from the Design Museum, alongside Rusty Egan, the co-founder and resident DJ of the Blitz, and Robert Elms.

Developed in close collaboration with some of the leading 'Blitz Kids' who were there, the exhibition — which opens on 20 September 2025 — will feature over 250 items, ranging from clothing and accessories, design sketches, musical instruments, flyers, magazines, furniture, artworks, photography, vinyl records and rare film footage. All are drawn from the Blitz club scene and the creative individuals who populated it.

The vast majority of the objects that visitors will experience are coming to the Design Museum from the personal collections of former Blitz Kids. Many have been in the homes of these influential figures ever since they starred in the Blitz nights. This means most items have not been seen in well over 40 years. Many have even been rediscovered, long thought lost, during the research for this exhibition.

Highlights include the 1970s synthesiser that Spandau Ballet recorded their first album with, and striking full ensembles worn by club goers to the Blitz.

Visitors to the exhibition will take a sensory journey which mirrors that of the archetypal Blitz Kid, emerging from 'monochrome' 1970s London to absorb the key cultural influences of the end of that decade, through the experience of the club itself, and on to influential careers in the arts and design.

What was the Blitz club?

In London in 1979 — at the tail end of Punk and at the start of Thatcher's decade in power — a small but influential group of young creatives came together every Tuesday at the Blitz wine bar in Covent Garden.

Co-hosted by Steve Strange and Rusty Egan, this weekly club night drew a daring, restless new generation. They rejected both the conformity of mainstream culture and the rigidity of existing subcultures, and instead pushed the boundaries of taste with their outrageous fashions and futuristic music.

Coming down the stairs from London's dour streets into the tiny club that could only hold 50 people were young creatives that would go on to invent a new wave of glamour. The house band was Spandau Ballet, the cloakroom attendant was Boy George and singer Marilyn was a regular. Founders Steve Strange and Rusty Egan formed Visage with fellow club goer Midge Ure. DJ Princess Julia, designer Philip Sallon, and Siobhan Fahey from Bananarama were all on the dancefloor. Broadcaster Robert Elms, Perry Haines who co-founded i-D magazine and Chris Sullivan of Blue Rondo à la Turk were spotted in the crowds, as were artists Cerith Wyn Evans and Christine Binnie, and filmmaker John Maybury.

They were quickly dubbed by the media as the 'Blitz Kids' or 'New Romantics.' Some of these Blitz Kids became global chart-topping celebrities, while many others would establish themselves as leading designers, writers, artists and filmmakers.

Their sources of inspiration were many: David Bowie, punk culture, the soul scene, Weimar-era Germany, film noir and European art-house cinema, as well as London's art schools and much more. These club-goers were the brightest young talents of their generation, and they came together to revolutionise fashion, music

and design in a way that would shape the following decade in Britain and beyond.

Blitz exhibition highlights

Spandau Ballet played their first ever public performance at the Blitz in December 1979 and would go on to become the 'house band'. They were the only artists ever to play the legendary Tuesday night at the Blitz. On display will be the 1970s Yamaha synthesiser used by Spandau Ballet to write and record their first album, *Journeys to Glory*, along with Gary Kemp's original handwritten lyrics to Spandau's first hit single *To Cut A Long Story Short*.

Also on show will be striking, one-of-a-kind ensembles worn by Blitz kids to the club night, most of which have not been seen in public since they were worn to the club. Highlights include a blue tartan suit designed and worn by Chris Sullivan (later modelled by him on the front cover of *The Face*), leather garments owned by Steve Strange, and an early ensemble designed for Lesley Chilkes by David Holah, the co-founder of Bodymap.

Alongside these will be early pieces by London's most exciting new designers who emerged from the Blitz scene and from its legacy, including some of the very first hats created by celebrated milliner Stephen Jones, one-off pieces by jeweller Dinny Hall, and rare, avant-garde pieces by unsung designers such as exaggerated tailoring from Stephen Linard and the Roman-inspired garments of Melissa Caplan, as well as work by a young fashion design graduate who would go on to find fame in a completely different medium — the singer Sade.

The exhibition will also highlight the global fame achieved by many of the Blitz Kids, which was fueled by extensive media coverage in the UK and internationally. On display will be the original first issues of *The Face* and *i-D* magazines, which were born out of the Blitz club and which laid down a template for the new genre of style publication that would dominate the media landscape of the 1980s and beyond.

The Blitz Kids' fame grew alongside that of their inspiration and hero, David Bowie. On show will be Darla-Jane Gilroy's striking monochrome clerical robes and collar, worn by her on the set of *Ashes to Ashes*. Gilroy was one of four Blitz Kids cast by Bowie to feature in the 1980 music video for that song.

The reach and extent of the Blitz Kids will also be demonstrated through objects which highlight the relationship between the club scene and wider shifts in postmodern design and architecture throughout the 1980s. This will include furniture by Ron Arad, Jasper Morrison and Tom Dixon whose work with found objects and 'Creative Salvage' mirrored the Blitz Kids' approach to style; and material from the radical architecture collective NATØ, which, like the Blitz Kids, regarded street culture as the ultimate source of cultural authority.

As well as physical objects, the exhibition will be filled with photography, audio and film, including brand new audio interviews with Blitz Kids reflecting on their lived experiences of 1980s London. These can be heard in the exhibition alongside archival news coverage of the club scene courtesy of the BBC, and key music videos for *Fade to Grey* by Visage, *Vienna* by Ultravox and several others which heralded the arrival of the Blitz Kids as a major cultural force.

Danielle Thom, curator of Blitz: the club that shaped the 80s at the Design Museum, said: "It's remarkable that so much of 1980s pop culture can be traced back to the Blitz scene. That the club night only ran for little over a year but shaped a whole decade is really astonishing, and so forty-five years on feels like the right time to explore the club's enduring legacy in a major exhibition, as well as its continued impact today. After spending two years working with the Blitz Kids, hearing their stories and rediscovering their treasures from this radical period, it has reaffirmed to me that this wasn't just a club night. It was the scene from which a decade was born."

Tim Marlow, Director and CEO of the Design Museum, said: “The Blitz kids were among the brightest young talents of their generation and their impact on fashion, music and design is one of the underexplored stories of Eighties culture in Britain. How a niche club night launched numerous glittering careers and helped to revolutionize not just cultural but social attitudes in London and beyond is at the heart of this exhibition — the first of its kind which will not only be a sensory extravaganza of pop music, flamboyant fashions, and pioneering art, film and design, but it will feature items from that formative and indeed radical era which have never been displayed before.”

Rusty Egan, co-founder of the Blitz, said: “In every town I visited as a drummer on tour with the Rich Kids band, I found out where to go and who was doing something that I liked. If there was someone using synths had some style and liked clubs, I found them. But then, Steve Strange FOUND ME and we knew that we had to do something. Just as Malcolm and Vivienne had said with Punk Rock, do it yourself, start a band, start a fanzine, do something you love and they will follow. With that and an attitude (and my record collection) we had some parties and that was the start...the rest, as they say, was history.”

To accompany the exhibition, the 2012 book *We Can Be Heroes: Punks, Poseurs, Peacocks and People of a Particular Persuasion* will be reprinted. It's available to pre-order now through designmuseumshop.com

Blitz: the club that shaped the 80s opens at the Design Museum in London on 20 September 2025. Tickets have gone on sale today and can be pre-ordered at designmuseum.org.

-Ends-

Notes to Editors

W: <https://designmuseum.org/exhibitions/blitz-the-club-that-shaped-the-80s>

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About the Design Museum:

The Design Museum is a multifaceted museum, an ever-changing space for the public, industry and education to come together and explore new ideas. A registered charity, the museum's innovative exhibitions, partnerships, research and learning programmes evidence how design can enable this planet and its inhabitants to thrive. Our landmark building in Kensington is the centre of our national network and a global hub for the transformative potential of design.



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