



**P**hysical Graffiti is the brainchild of tattoo artists Chris Hatton and Chris Jones. Born of frustration and a need for change – at a time when tattooing itself was starting to experience its own growing pains – the shop came about as a reaction to the circumstances in which both artists found themselves. Both wanted to create something they felt was the future of tattooing: a more open and collaborative space that would encourage communication and the sharing of ideas.

A lot has happened in the seven years since the shop opened, but Physical Graffiti's core values and ambitions have remained the same. So when the flat above their ground-floor premises came up for grabs, Chris H and Chris J seized the opportunity to create a vibrant, multi-level, open-plan workspace to house the ever-expanding family of talented young Welsh artists who've chosen to call the shop their home.

Chris Hatton (left) & Chris Jones

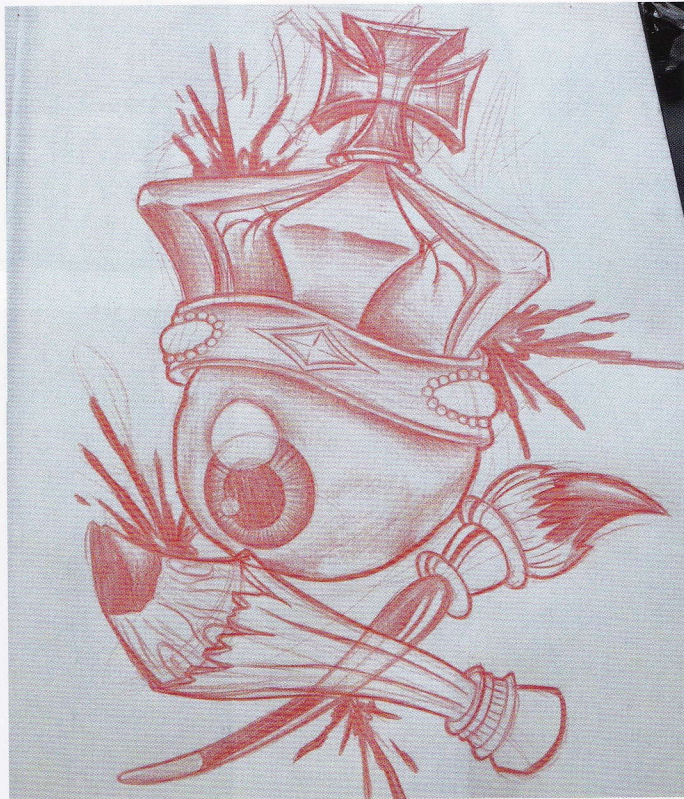


A visit to check out the new premises was long overdue, and a chance to sit down with two old friends and reflect on all that they have gone through to get to this point was something I was really looking forward to. I was also interested in finding out how the artists who work at Physical Graffiti feel about being part of this iconic studio. It's a place that has always seemed to have something special about it.

So how did it all begin? Chris J tells the story: "Back in 2005 I was the kid doing all the new school stuff in Wales. Then Chris Hatton popped his head up, and he was really good at it. He'd done a set of flash that was awesome; I just thought, 'I've got to get to know this fucker!'



Chris Jones



Chris Hatton



Ash Davies



Chris Hatton



David Swambo



Sam Fisher



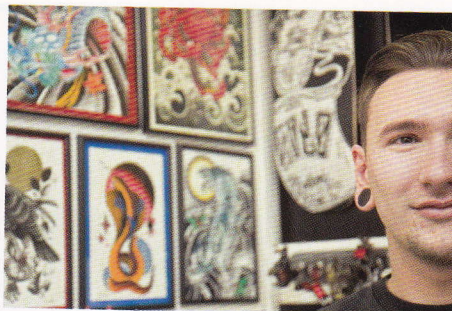
Tasha Pollendine



Chris Hatton



Tash Pollendine



Gavin Rose

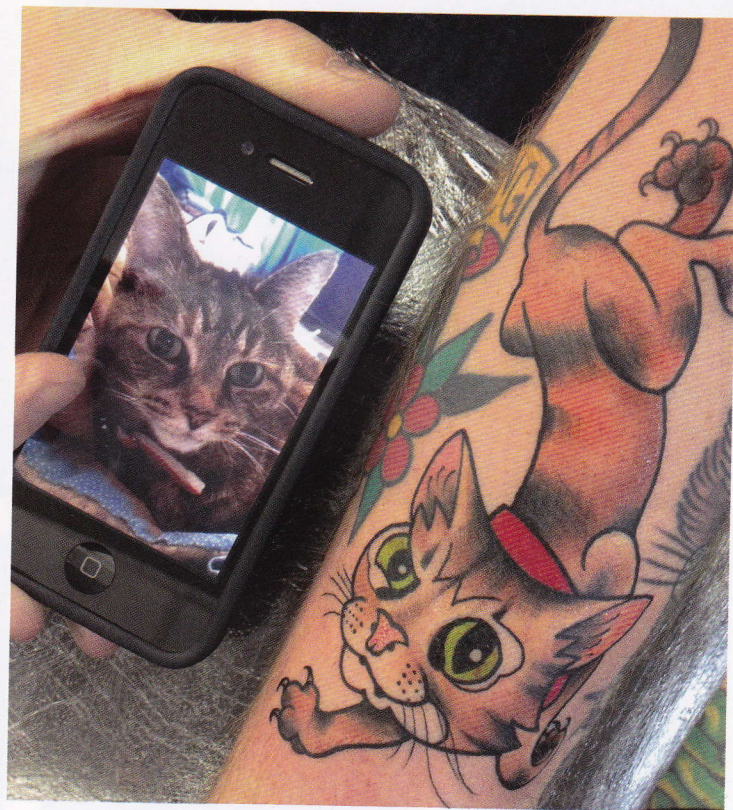
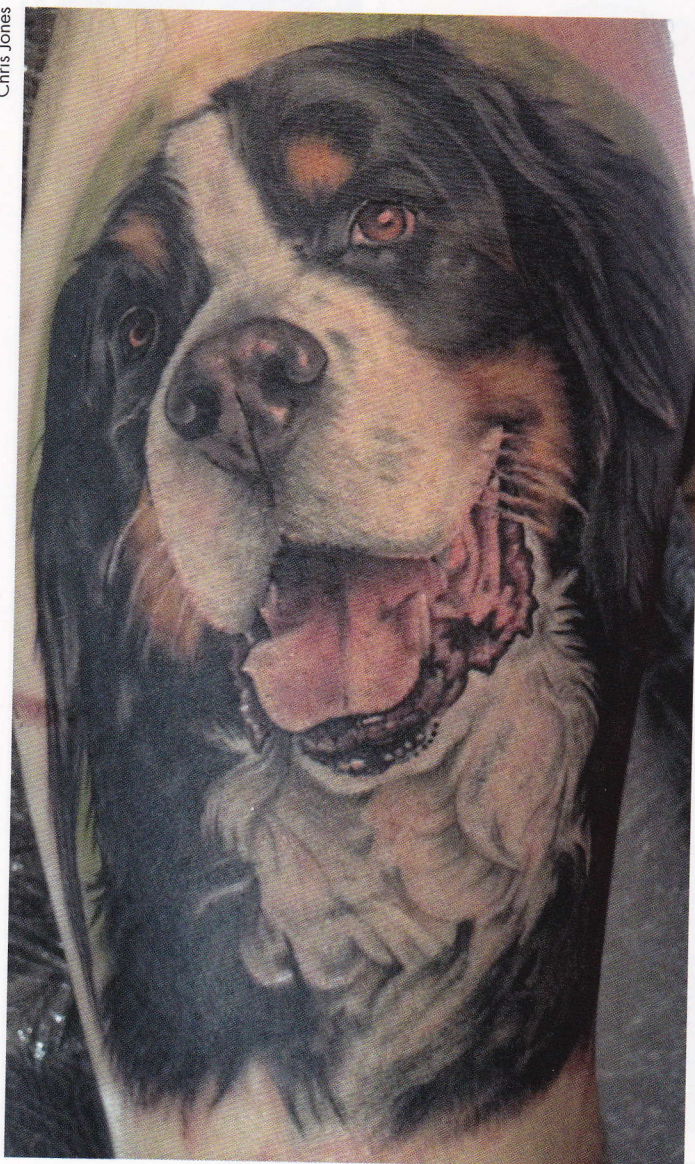
I realised that if I didn't leave the shop I was working in, I was going to get left behind." It was a similar story for Chris. He was working part-time in a studio that wasn't interested in the changing face of tattooing, and this was becoming increasingly frustrating for him. "I was starting to get tattooed by more and more different people and I was taking that new knowledge back to the shop, but the owner showed no interest in it at all."



Gavin Rose

Both artists wanted more. They talked about a fresh, open-plan, friendly environment in which to work, getting away from the intimidating tattoo shops they had both experienced. And so Physical Graffiti was born. At first, Chris H worked there with Fil (who went on to open Broad Street Tattoo in Bath), but it wasn't long before Chris J came on board. With both boys being regulars on the convention circuit – winning awards left, right and centre (some things never change!) – the shop's reputation rapidly grew. Like all new projects, the place took a little time to find its own rhythm, but things soon settled into the natural, laid-back pace of its two owners.

Chris Jones







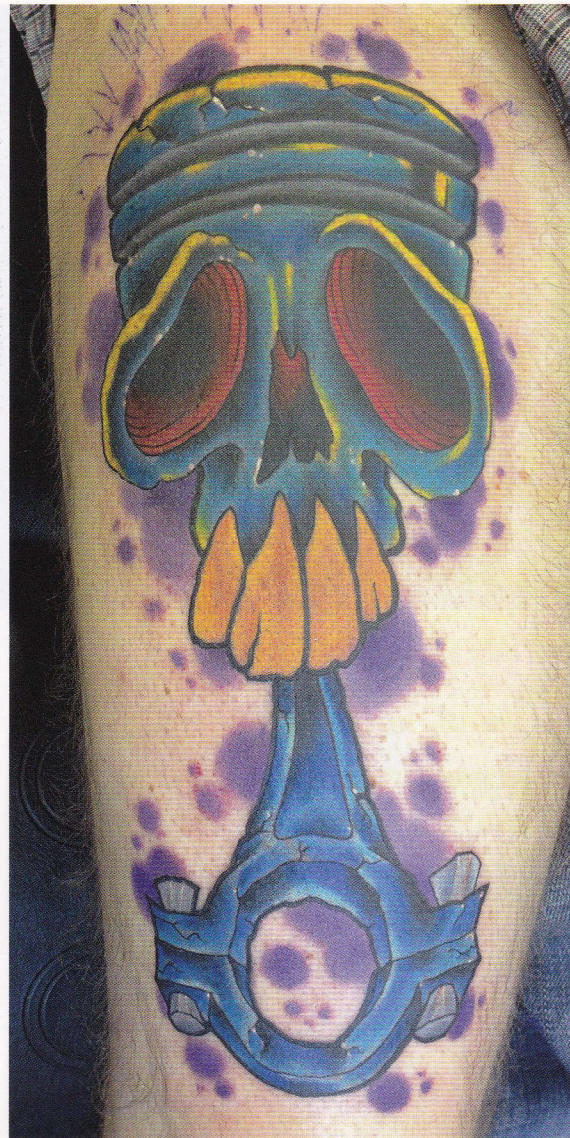
Gavin Rose



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Chris Hutton



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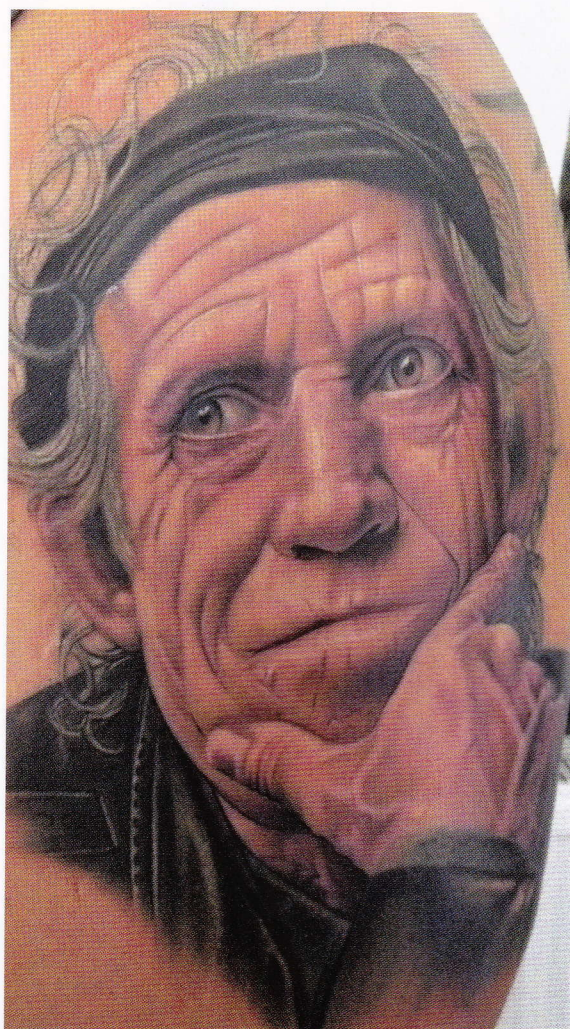




Sam Fisher



Chris Jones

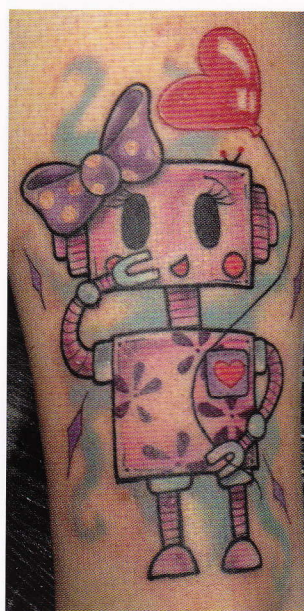


Ash Davies



David Swambo

Tasha Pollendine



Chris Hatton



Chris H and Chris J are very different personalities, but they have always worked well as a team. When one of them has a dip in focus, the other has always been able to lift his own work to compensate, which has kept the shop progressing. Both have had their ups and downs, but they've come through, rediscovering their passion for tattooing in the process. Perhaps most importantly, they've always kept the lines of communication open between them.

Chris J's reinvention from new school dropout to master of the realistic portrait – seemingly overnight – has certainly injected massive energy into the shop and has been one of the catalysts for the recent growth. I had to ask him, "What triggered such a dramatic change?" "I cleaned up my act for starters. I had always done black and grey portraits, but I ended up doing my first colour one completely by chance. Some kid came in wanting a portrait of Christian Bale in American Psycho, and he brought in a picture of a really badly done tattoo to show me the sort of thing he wanted. I thought to myself, 'At the very least, I can do a better job than that'. So I booked him in on a Sunday when nobody else was around, and I really enjoyed it. It just took off from there. For me, tattooing has got exciting again and a bit scary. A portrait not only has to look like the person; you have to give it life."

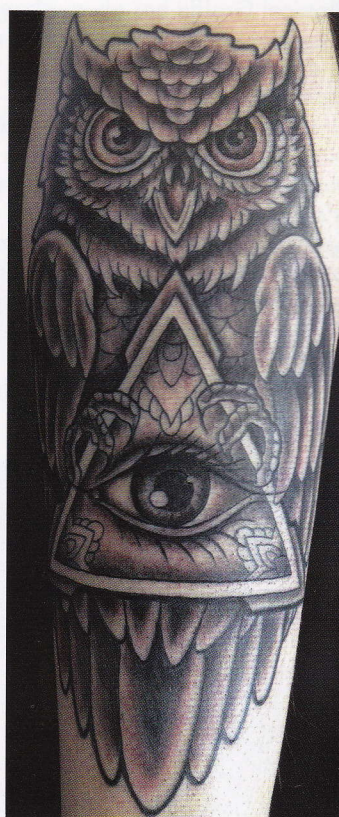
The shop's expansion was also necessitated by the growth of the Physical Graffiti family. Talented younger artists are being drawn to the studio. One thing that really came across when I talked to them is that *this* is the place they want to be, and in some cases they've harboured that desire for quite a while. Gavin Rose, for example, closed his own shop, Nocturnal



David Swambo



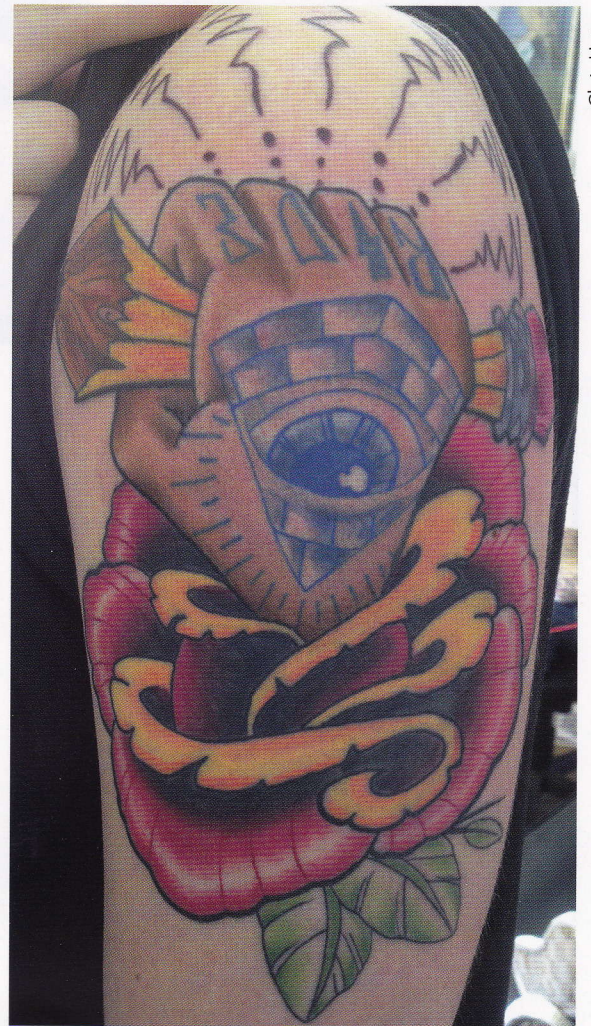
Ash Davies



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Chris Hatton



Chris Hatton



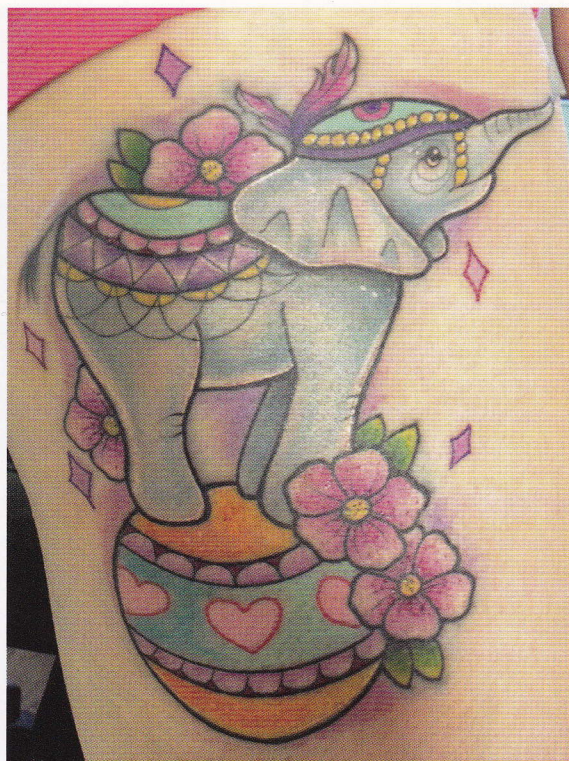
Chris Jones



Ash Davies



Sam Fisher



Tasha Pollendine

Gavin Rose



Tattoo, to move to Physical Graffiti. He told me it was always his main goal to work here: "I asked Chris for an apprenticeship when he first opened the shop but at that point he just didn't have the time. Working here has always been in the back of my mind, so when he offered me a permanent position I felt like if I didn't jump ship that week I would always regret it – and I've never looked back. Now, for me, it's the driving force to better things." It's a similar story for Ash Davies. Physical Graffiti has always been a special shop for him. "I grew up in Cardiff and knew of Chris Hatton's work before I even started to tattoo. I've always had in mind that when I did come to work in the city, it would be here. It's such a relaxed, nurturing environment to be in. I never feel pressured. I want to hear what the other artists think about what I'm doing, and vice versa, and much of that informal collaborative attitude is down to how open the two Chrisses are."



David Swambo



Chris Jones



Tash Pollendine

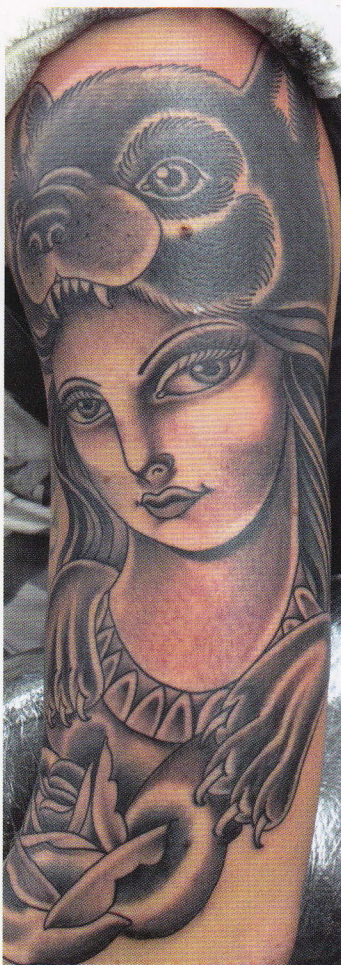
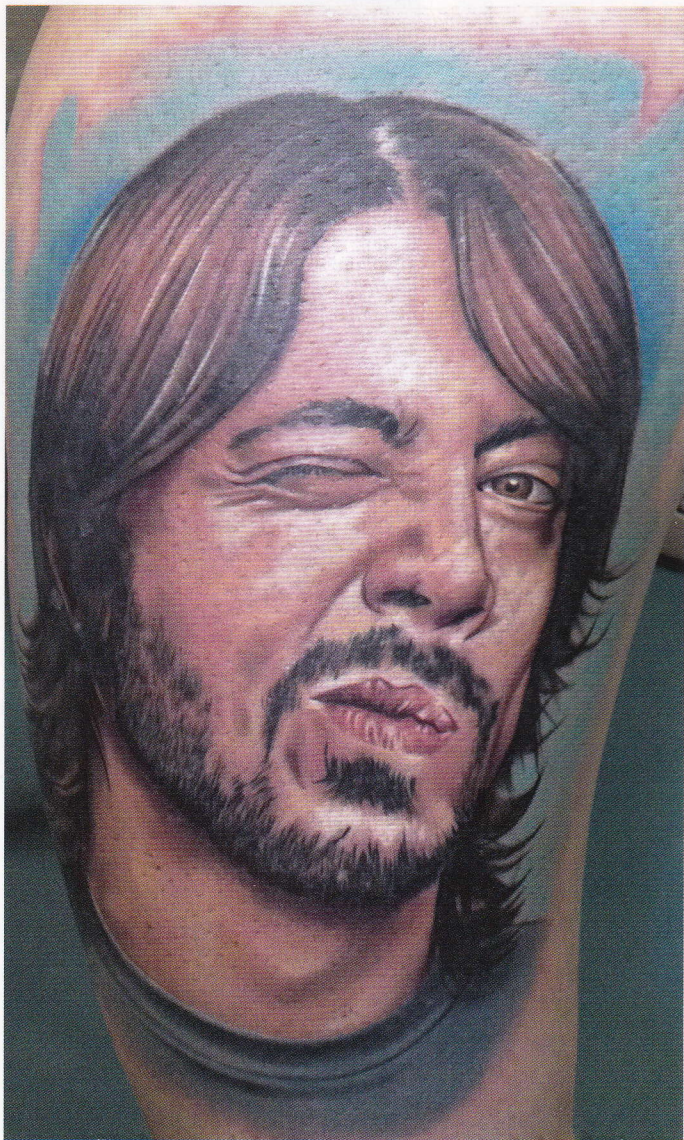


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Gavin Rose



Chris Jones





That loyalty and affection is a thread that runs through the entire Physical Graffiti family and binds them together, regardless of how long they've each been at the shop. Tasha Pollendine started out on the desk, answering phones and booking appointments. After two years doing that and developing her own drawing skills, Chris J offered her an apprenticeship. "Being Chris's apprentice during the period that he really started to push himself actually pushed me. I never wanted people to think, 'Why has he given her a chance?' I did feel some pressure, but I've always felt privileged to be in this situation. I love the shop; it means so much to me." The same sentiment is echoed by fellow tattooists Sam Fisher and David Swambo, and piercer Dan Walters. Phrases like "second home", "amazing thing to be part of" and "why would I want to work anywhere else?" seem to crop up again and again.

Chris H and Chris J claim that they have never really planned anything, other than the colour scheme and the name of the shop. Even the opportunity to expand their premises seemed to just fall into their laps. So, OK, the fact that they've now got space for more guests to come and spend time with them might be described as a "happy accident". But surely a great team of talented artists like this doesn't just come together by chance? Chris H and Chris J eventually have to admit that they've always been quite fussy about who comes to work at Physical Graffiti; over the years, they've turned more than a few away. Perhaps it's that combination of patience and hard work that's been the key to their success; they've never tried to force things, and between the two of them they've never lost the original spirit of what they wanted Physical Graffiti to be.

[www.physicalgraffiti.co.uk](http://www.physicalgraffiti.co.uk)

