



LONDON SHOOTFIGHTERS  
LONDON, U.K.



## London Brawling

**Without MapQuest,** a GPS, and a local cabbie to point you in the right direction, your chances of navigating past a fleet of dirty cars, around a shipping container and underneath a bridge to discover the London Shootfighters gym is about the same as finding WMD in Iraq. The gym radiates an aura much like the mysterious island on “Lost”: you’ll find it only if it wants to be found.

Open to the public since 2004, many students flock to the gritty hole in the wall yet never return because of the demanding curriculum that has become the gym’s trademark. Its austere atmosphere exemplifies the British attitude of perseverance through defiance. Anyone who can stick it out, however, is rewarded with the best MMA training in the city, and arguably the whole UK.

### THE LONDON UNDERGROUND

Located north of the Thames, London Shootfighters is on the city’s double-decker bus route and a five-minute walk from the Underground’s Latimer Road station. Sporting an imposing matte-black veneer, it’s hard to distinguish it from any of the matching portals underneath the train, save for the small hand-painted logo and the unmistakable sound of bodies hitting grappling mats that echoes down the street.

The property was originally designed to be a simple storage space until life-long friends Alexis Demetriades and Paul Ivens transformed it into an MMA training facility. The pair has studied combat arts all their lives. Wrestlers in middle school, they struck out in their teens to learn Aikido in Japan, until they

caught a glimpse of UFC 1 and quickly embarked for southern California to shack up at the Gracie Academy in Torrance. They eventually earned their BJJ black belts from Pride veteran Jean Silva, and learned the value of developing an individual’s style instead of molding fighters into someone else’s vision.

“All the coaches in here really know what they’re doing and they’re really good at explaining what to do,” Demetriades says of his instructors. “They don’t coach their style; they try to get the style that suits you. There are things that you can do that I can’t. I’ve got to recognize that and adapt your style to that. I think that’s one of the most underrated things as far as coaching goes.”

### SMELLS LIKE HARD WORK

Demetriades has earned the right to coach. Besides the Gracie Academy in Torrance, Calif., he and Ivens have trained in several other prestigious MMA schools, including Enson Inoue’s Purebred Academy in Osaka, Japan, the Frank Shamrock Martial Arts Academy in San Jose, Calif., and the Abu Dhabi Combat Club in the United Arab Emirates. Demetriades was also on the 2004 British Olympic wrestling team, and his boxing coach, Andy Zajac, is a five-time Muay Thai national champion. The credentials of London Shootfighters are pure and impeccable, even if the oxygen inside is not.

Wherever athletes congregate to push their bodies to



Left: London Shootfighters co-founder and instructor Alexis Demetriades offers his students a world-class wrestling pedigree, a BJJ black belt and a long history of MMA training.



A Phil Baroni shirt in London? Now we’re even for that Spice Girls reunion tour.

“I DON’T WANT A GUY WHO COMES DOWN, HURTS HIS ARM AND SUES ME. I WANT A GUY WHO COMES DOWN AND WANTS TO TRAIN AND WORK HARD.”

their physical limits, there’s bound to be an odor, especially in an enclosed space. But London Shootfighters goes beyond the mere aroma of a sweat-soaked gym. Constructed from the same red bricks as pizza ovens and designed to store dry goods, it was never meant for prolonged human use, and has no means of circulating air. Demetriades combats this by opening the fire escape door when the stench or the summertime heat gets too intense. The stagnant atmosphere provides a sense of comfort for the regulars, and acts as a first line of defense against novices who might not have the intestinal fortitude to embrace it.

“It smells like hard work,” says Cage Rage Heavyweight Champion Mustapha al-Turk simply. “We haven’t got a TV in the corner, but we’ve got everything we need. We’ve got a cage and a ring. We’ve got excellent guys to work with, so I don’t feel that we lack anything. It’s stuffy, but that’s the point. It’s reminiscent of fight night.”

### BANGERS AND MASH

London Shootfighters is two separate addresses that are adjoining but not connected. The space inside 56 Bard Street houses the striking gear, such as the bags and the ring, while 57 Bard Street is all grappling mats.

IN THE BRITISH TRADITION, LONDON SHOOTFIGHTERS PROUDLY DISPLAYS A STIFF UPPER LIP.

Written and photographed by Kelly Crigger



# gym class

## LONDON SHOOTFIGHTERS

**OWNERS:** Alexis Demetriades and Paul Ivens

**YEAR OPENED:** 2004

**SQUARE FOOTAGE:** 3000 sq ft

**MAT SPACE:** 1400 sq ft

**HEAVY BAGS:** 3

**BOXING RING:** Yes, but not regulation size

**CAGE:** Yes, but with nylon instead of steel mesh

**TRAINERS:** Alexis Demetriades, Paul Ivens, Andy Zajac

**OPEN TO PUBLIC:** Yes

**CLASSES OFFERED:** Freestyle wrestling, Greco-Roman wrestling, Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu, MMA, Muay Thai

**LOCKER ROOM:** No, but small changing room and toilet

**CONTACT:** 56-57 Bard Street, London, UK;

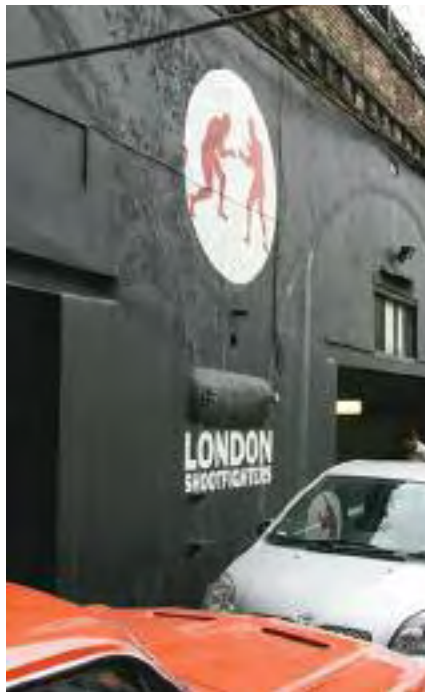
[www.londonshootfighters.com](http://www.londonshootfighters.com) (under construction)



With a finite amount of space to work with underneath the bridge, Demetriades couldn't simply break down a wall and expand; instead, he recently purchased an old shipping container and dropped it outside the front door. It's in the parking lot just a few feet from the front door of space 56, and contains cardio equipment and a smattering of free weights. Don't expect any colorful balloons or "grand reopening" banners adorning it.

"We've never publicized the gym once," Demetriades says. "Anyone who comes here does his research. I don't want a guy who comes down here, hurts his arm and sues me. I want a guy who comes down and wants to train and work hard."

It's that attitude that sets his training facility apart. While London Shootfighters is open to the public, the training is tailored more to MMA fighters intent on competing than the average bloke who wants a good cardio burn after his nine-to-five. For those aspiring to make MMA a career, it's the best in the city—as long as they bring resolve and a stiff upper lip. Demetriades' roster of almost exclusively homegrown British talent has earned a great deal of success that's been matched only by their



Top: Demetriades puts his wrestling class through their drills. Left: The two small hand-painted signs are the only hints that the premiere MMA gym in the U.K. is hiding behind this wall.

reputation for breaking limbs and crushing wills.

"We've had all sorts of broken bones in here, but it's not a crazy gym," says Demetriades. "There have been a lot of articles in the English press saying we spar too rough and there's too many injuries, [but] we've got to know if it works before we get in front of 10,000 people or eight million people on CBS."

It sounds primitive, but it seems to work. Before James Thompson fought Kimbo Slice in EliteXC's inaugural foray into prime-time network television last May, Thompson trained under the bridge.

The glass jaw that had plagued him his whole career was nowhere to be seen when he threw down with the power-punching Slice.

Demetriades and Ivens believe making mistakes in the gym is better than making them during a fight. Sparring, in the tradition of British military leader Field Marshal Bernard Montgomery, embodies the British trait of overpreparation. "I just want you to do the best you can," says Demetriades. "That's why we spar hard here."

On an ironic note of compassion, London Shootfighters attempts to reduce injuries by using a cage with mesh sides instead of metal fencing. All they need now is a tea and crumpet break...and a bigger sign. 🙄

