



11 cool apartments scattered around vibrant Thiseio and Psirri, and Dimosthenis Misentzis and Nondas Skorpideas quit corporate careers to set up hip hostel **CITY CIRCUS** (www.citycircus.gr; beds from about £15), which recently added nine rooms and a bar/restaurant. More smart

new hotels are set to open next year: **EMPORIKON**, a neoclassical landmark on Agia Irini Square; and **ATHENSWAS**, a Design Hotel by the Acropolis Museum, with Parthenon views from the top three floors.

Even the sclerotic Greek state is breathing new life into public spaces. Fourteen years in the making, the **NATIONAL MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY ART** finally welcomes the public this summer on the site of the former Fix brewery. And Aristotle's **LYCEUM** has just reopened near the beautifully restored Byzantine Museum, although the city's modern-day philosophers congregate at **FREE THINKING ZONE**, a lively bookshop, events space and think tank rolled into one.

There are even grander projects on the horizon. The **STAVROS NIARCHOS FOUNDATION CULTURAL CENTER**, designed by Renzo Piano, will house the National Library and Greek National Opera when it opens in 2016. Until then, the Visitors' Center hosts concerts and workshops, with guided tours of the site every Sunday. Nearby, the vast old **HELLINIKON AIRPORT** is being transformed into a waterfront park, marina and residences, with Norman Foster tipped for the job. Like the mythological phoenix, Athens is reborn. **RACHEL HOWARD**

Clockwise from opposite, top left: City Circus' mural and bar; Free Thinking Zone; a balcony at City Circus; Forget Me Not gift shop; Mohnblümchen; art outside and inside Romantso; B38 boutique

