CITY A.M.

No. 70 — THE MAGAZINE — JUN 18

TRAVEL

The ancient Mexican ritual that takes you to another dimension

LIVING

How Instagram has changed the game for young designers

FOOD & BOOZE

Restaurateur extraordinaire Mark Hix on why he never gets invited to dinner parties

THE BIG INTERVIEW: IRVINE WELSH

The Trainspotting author talks technology, books and how pilates changed his life

ISSN 2516-5445

DEATH OF THE BEARD

Is it finally time up for facial hair? We take a deep dive into the trend that lasted a decade

Senator Chronograph

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	Watches of Switzerland, Oxford Street
	Harrods, Heathrow Airport, Terminal 2
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EDITOR'S LETTER

We have been making magazines at *City A.M.* for more than six years – this is my 70th issue as editor. But this one is special. Not only have we overhauled the design and introduced a host of new regular features, we will also, for the first time, distribute a significant number of magazines independently of the newspaper.

We had, in short, outgrown the old system, limited not by ideas but by physics; being inserted into the paper meant we were restricted in the number of pages we could print.

Free of this constraint, we'll be able to bring you even more of the award-winning culture, design, architecture, luxury shopping, travel and motoring features, with a renewed focus on food and drink. The City has changed almost beyond recognition in the eight years I've been here, transforming from a place people worked to somewhere they actually *want* to spend time. Eating here has become about quality rather than convenience with every new development coming with an array of restaurants to discover; we'll tell you which ones are worth your time. New regular features will include Chef's Table, in which restaurateurs interview their interesting friends – in this issue Jason Atherton chats to model extraordinaire David Gandy.

Elsewhere, we will look at the issues that *matter*, like how gin took over the world, or if it's finally time to lose the beard (after reading our feature, I shaved mine off just in case). We will send people on journeys to strange places, like the reporter who visited Mexico to take psychedelic tea with a suspiciously young shaman (spoiler alert: he regretted it). And we'll interview people who actually have something to say, like outspoken Trainspotting author Irvine Welsh.

It's all the good stuff you're used to, but *more* – I think you're going to love it.

– **STEVE DINNEEN**

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

Above: How houseplants took millennials by storm (P90); **Below from left:** Driving a McLaren across a frozen lake (P62); The best places in the City for a business lunch (P18); Cover illustration by **Jesse Brown**

FEATURES

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JONATHAN YEO is one of the most highly regarded portrait painters in Britain today, with sitters including Cara Delevingne and Tony Blair. In his column for us – found on the very last page – he writes about his fascination with surgical operations.

MARK HIX is *City A.M. Magazine*'s regular food columnist. His restaurants include HIX Oyster & Chop House, HIX Mayfair, HIX Soho, Tramshed, Hixter Bankside and Pharmacy 2. Read why he never gets invited to dinner parties on P39

SCARLET WINTERBERG is *City A.M. Magazine*'s luxury travel columnist. Each issue, she shares insider tips and frequent flyer information to help you get the best from your work trips. This month she debates when it's worth investing in business class, on P74

MARK BONNAR is a star of stage and screen, appearing in shows including Doctor Who, Psychoville, Apple Tree Yard and Catastrophe. He tells us what he'd eat for his last supper on P25, including a phallic kebab from a Glasgow chip shop and his gran's trifle.

VALENTINA ZAMPINI is head wine buyer at Carluccio's. She spends her time exploring the vineyards of Italy looking for special bottles to bring back home. In her column on P40, she offers some simple tips to avoid wine pairing disasters

JASON ATHERTON is the owner of one of the world's top restaurant empires, with London venues including Pollen Street Social, City Social and Berners Tavern. This issue, he interviews his friend David Gandy over a three course dinner; see P20

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FRESHEN UP YOUR DRINK?

Japan just discovered alcopops, and now Coca-Cola wants in. Words: **STEVE HOGARTY**

Sold in cans from convenience stores up and down the country, chu-hi is a flavoured alcoholic drink taking Japan by storm. It's made from a mix of shochu – which is an inexpensive, vodka-like spirit distilled from pretty much anything you've got in your cupboard – and one or more of hundreds of different fruit flavours and juices, from orange, mango and grapefruit, to lychee, plum and cream soda.

The word chu-hi itself is a portmanteau of the second syllable of "shochu" and the first of "highball", as in the cocktail. With an ABV of typically between two and eight per cent, chu-hi appeals to both men and women, as well as to those who prefer a less boozy tipple. The market grows by between five and 25 per cent each year according to Japan's largest drinks company Suntory. Ben Stiller advertises chu-hi in a series of semi-ironic television commercials. In effect, Japan has just discovered alcopops.

"Japan has the old rice wine market, the medium to high end whiskey market, and beer," says Ron Cregan, industry expert and founder of Endangered Species, a movement to protect creative culture. "But for late teenagers and the early 20s, low ABV products were a huge gap in the market. They're filling it, and they have the branding power to do it."

If you don't think the chu-hi trend is worth paying attention to, you need only look at how the big players are reacting to it.

In 1978, Coca-Cola bought up two vineyards in California in an attempt to tap the resurging wine market in the US. It was the company's first foray into alcoholic beverages, and its efforts were met with reasonable success. (One side-effect was the invention of canned wine to be sold on United Airlines flights, an innovation for which oenophiles may never truly forgive the company). But after just four years, Coca-Cola, unimpressed by relatively meagre profit margins in grapes, withdrew from the alcohol trade entirely.

Thirty-six years later, the surge in popularity of chu-hi in Japan has inspired Coca-Cola to get back in the booze game, at least in a small way. The biggest drinks company in the world is launching its own experimental chu-hi in 2018, exclusive to the Japanese market, in an attempt to capitalise on the rising trend for hard soft drinks. The context here is that soda consumption has fallen to a 30 year low in the US, and the recent sugar tax in the UK spells a bleaker future for those with a corporate interest in rotting our teeth.

In a global market that's falling out of love with carbonated sugar-water in a huge way, Coca-Cola's hedging efforts already include bottled water brand Dasani and a variety of iced coffees and teas. Tapping the chu-hi market would be the most recent of these ongoing efforts to nudge the company's direction, but it also exemplifies just what a sensation the shochu-infused beverages have become.

Britain already had its love affair with alcopops in the 90s, and their reputation was left somewhere in a gutter outside a Manchester nightclub, but could chu-hi spell their grand resurrection? Cregan thinks not. "The UK is more innovative than Japan when it comes to alcohol. We're leaders rather than followers, so I think it's Japan following a trend that didn't exist in their market."

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WHAT HAPPENED TO THE 3D PRINTING REVOLUTION?

Left: The 3Doodler is among the cheapest 3D printers on the market, available for just $79; just don't expect any miracles

Five years ago, the tech world hailed 3D printing as the future, with one destined for every home. So what happened? Words by **STEVE DINNEEN**

Had you attended the Consumer Electronics Show in Las Vegas five years ago, you would have found, nestled among the tablet computers and gigantic TVs, dozens of big, glass cubes. These retro-futuristic boxes, often accented in bright, primary colours, contained little robotic arms that swung around in three dimensions, extruding threads of molten resin. This, we were confidently told, was the beginning of the 3D printing revolution.

While the process had been around for decades in the commercial world, the technology had reached a level where it could be miniaturised and manufactured cheaply enough to reach our homes, allowing us to "print" everything from the children's' Christmas presents to busts of our own heads. Dozens of companies were backing the nascent market, including MakerBot, XYZprinting, Ultimaker and Formlabs. There was something irresistible about the idea of manufacturing objects from the comfort of our own homes, plucking a trope straight from science fiction and making it a bold new reality, akin to seeing a mobile phone in action for the first time.

> Right now, the whole market revolves around a dedicated group of hobbyists, akin to top cyclists who customise their own bikes

Except the revolution never happened, with the consumer 3D printer market remaining virtually non-existent. Prohibitive pricing – often upwards of £1,000 for a half decent one – dubious quality, unwieldy size, and a steep learning curve has put off... well, just about everyone. The Kickstarter-backed 3Doodler claims to be the world's best-selling 3D printer (having shifted just 1.4m units), doing away with all but a handheld pen that oozes strings of plastic; even its makers couldn't produce anything more impressive than a slightly mangled origami crane (*pictured*). It's hardly the Starship Enterprise's replicator.

"Some of the early predictions in 2012-2013 were more than a little optimistic," says Scott Dunham, senior analyst at SmarTech Markets Publishing. "The consumer market is chugging along but it's certainly not achieved what many thought it would when it hit the limelight a few years ago. It's not anywhere close to 'one in every house' like a PC, and it probably never will be. Despite it being a digital tool, there's no way to eliminate the level of hard work and creative design it takes to make something, despite advancements in 3D scanning."

The real innovations in 3D printing are taking place commercially, where aeronautical and aerospace industries are inevitably leading the way, using the technology to create parts that would be virtually impossible to make through traditional methods. The healthcare and bio-medicine sectors also see benefits, with custom designed implants and patient-specific, 3D printed drugs currently in development. Adidas has also had some success using it to make trainers. Even so, the global 3D printing industry is worth a relatively paltry $6.7bn, although it's expected to rise to $53bn by 2027.

So should we kiss goodbye to the idea of synthesising our shopping at the press of a button?

"It might not be revolutionising the way people buy and consume things today, but I wouldn't write it off forever," says Dunham. "It's just the time-scale for disruption is going to be a lot longer than we'd previously thought. Right now, it really takes an enthusiast-level consumer to invest the time and money, so the whole market will revolve around a dedicated group of hobbyists, akin to top cyclists who are willing to customise their bikes."

If, however, you're in the market for a wonky origami crane, you can always head to the3doodler.com.

THE NOT SO SMARTPHONE

Can a dumbphone change the way you live your life? Words by **STEVE HOGARTY**

Every year in the woods outside of San Francisco, in what just might be the most San Franciscan thing ever, a group of people gather to reconnect with nature, themselves and one another. They leave behind everything electronic – cameras, phones and tablets are all safely locked away by the event's organisers – with the mission of freeing themselves from not just a few hundred dollars, but all of those digital distractions, that unceasing barrage of Facebook comments, Instagram likes and Bebo retweets.

So-called digital detoxes are gaining popularity around the world, as people begin to reappraise the increasingly controlling relationship they have with their devices. But while confining yourself to a wi-fi free gulag in the forest is an extreme example of the trend, many are turning to less radical solutions, and using *dumbphones* as a means of cutting down on a screen time.

Dumbphones (also called feature phones) are a category of phone with a limited set of features. Typically capable of just phone calls and texting, with no touchscreen or apps, and costing tens of pounds rather than hundreds, the growth of these devices outpaced the rest of the smartphone market for the first time in 2017. That's thanks in part to their affordability and reliability in developing markets such as India. Nokia has even revived two of its classic phones, the 3310 and the 8110, much to the delight of nostalgic millennials, though the inclusion of Google Maps and Facebook precludes these from being considered true dumbphones.

As the niche widens, designers are now creating feature-light phones that aren't just low-tech, retro, or for emerging markets, but that look good and perform as well as any high-end device. Chief among these is the Light Phone, a crowdfunded, minimalist, e-ink phone that strips away the extraneous features of a smartphone – there's no camera, no internet, no app store and no email – to leave just a few select features behind.

It's a phone that, according to its creators, doesn't want to be used. "We wanted to create an object that encourages people to take a break from their phone and come back to reality, even if just for a couple of hours," says Kaiwei Tang, Light Phone's co-creator.

"Just the presence of a smartphone on the table changes conversation," says Tang. "We expect someone to pick it up, we expect to be interrupted, so the conversation doesn't go deep. Just the presence of that shape changes us. It's so deeply rooted into our behaviour. When we started out, I realised we're fighting against the tide."

The second iteration of the Light Phone has raised almost $1.5m in crowdfunding, with the first devices shipping to backers in 2019. Demand is rising for a phone that makes no demands of us, and perhaps one that would be permitted in the woods outside of San Francisco.

"People say, why not turn off your phone? Why not have some self-control? But we're so far beyond self-control. When every app is designed to draw your attention, the phone is no longer a neutral object."

BUSINESS LUNCH

The best places to eat in and around the City of London, from hip new openings to long-established staples

HAWKSMOOR SPITALFIELDS

WHAT IS IT? – The original Hawksmoor on Commercial Street has just reopened after a major refurbishment. Will Beckett and Huw Gott's venue made its City debut 12 years ago, but there are now seven in the capital and one in Manchester.

WHO WILL IT IMPRESS? – Carnivores. Though there are fish and vegetarian options – and fine ones at that – this place is all about hefty cuts of cow scorching on hot coals.

WHAT ABOUT THE FOOD? – The menu is split into "steak" and "everything else", with a disclaimer that the steaks are big. Sides are six varieties of potato but we recommend the chunky triple cooked chips. An array of starters range from the trendy – bone broth, burrata – to the paleolithic, with potted beef and Yorkshires competing with pork belly ribs to spoil your appetite. For something in-between, go for a generous mound of crab piled atop a crisped crumpet. Desserts are twists on British comfort puds. The banana bread and

butter pudding is fresh and surprisingly light, served with banana ice cream, and the rhubarb pavlova is a tart masterpiece.

SET MENU? – The Express Menu is two courses for £25 and three courses for £28, but it's only available off-peak Monday to Saturday. You don't have to pay extra for steak (unless you want a fillet) and that rhubarb pavlova is on it.

PHONE: 020 7426 4850
WHERE: 57A Commercial St
WEB: thehawksmoor.com

SUSHI SAMBA

WHAT IS IT? – At 38 storeys above Bishopsgate, Sushisamba is the most altitudinous restaurant on these pages and boasts Britain's highest outdoor dining terrace. It's an American import – the original NYC outpost is infamous for its repeated appearances in Sex and the City – that fuses Japanese, Peruvian and Brazilian dishes against panoramic views of London.

WHO WILL IT IMPRESS? – Willy Wonka fans will get a kick out of the superfast glass elevator ride up Heron Tower. Everyone else will enjoy what's waiting at the top, a sushi joint suspended in the sky, haunted by the Instagram-famous and steeped in Manhattan cool.

WHAT ABOUT THE FOOD? – South American and Japanese cuisine are familiar bedfellows, but Sushisamba still manages to impress and surprise. The vegan menu has a nigiri and maki platter that tops each blob of rice with soy-sticky mushrooms or thin slices of marinaded red pepper. The cancha seviche (with an "s") bowl is a highlight, coming with three big corn chips with which to scoop up the lightly acidic mix of white cusco corn, red onion and tostadas. Both very tasty and unavoidably social.

SET MENU? – The all day omakase menu ("omakase" is a set menu, and translates to "I'll leave it up to you") is basically Sushisamba's highlight reel and costs £82 per person. The lunchtime version is £58.

PHONE: 020 3640 7330
WHERE: Heron Tower, 110 Bishopsgate
WEB: sushisamba.com

CITY SOCIAL

WHAT IS IT? – Jason Atherton's ever expanding empire includes Japanese restaurant Socharu in Farringdon, New York-Italian deli Hai Cenato in Victoria and, of course, the Michelin-starred Pollen Street Social in Mayfair (you can read about the man himself on P20). City Social opened in Tower 42 in 2014. It's an art deco palace in the sky, serving his signature modern European fare.

WHO WILL IT IMPRESS? –It's on the 24th floor, with panoramic views over London and beyond, so everyone, really; the most highly prized tables overlook the Gherkin. It's a great place to take clients from out of town, but even the most jaded City worker would be lying if they said they weren't impressed.

WHAT ABOUT THE FOOD? – It serves Atherton's signature modern European cuisine. Prawn and scallop tortellini (*pictured*) is a highlight. If you're pushing the boat out, the caviar and beef tartare is a work of art, although at £36 you would expect nothing less. The rabbit saddle wrapped in Parma ham is also a perennial favourite. As far as fine dining in the City goes, it doesn't get better than this.

SET MENU? – Yes, but only when you book through bookatable.com. It offers three courses for £38, with a choice of three starters, mains and desserts. If you're after a quick in-out job, however, this probably isn't the place; City Social is best enjoyed at leisure.

PHONE: 020 7877 7703
WHERE: Tower 42, 25 Old Broad Street
WEB: citysociallondon.com

DUDDELL'S LONDON

WHAT IS IT? – Duddell's in Hong Kong is one of the best Cantonese restaurants in the world, a two Michelin-starred temple to dim sum. Duddell's London is the second iteration of the restaurant, this time in a former church near London Bridge.

WHO WILL IT IMPRESS? – The name Duddell's is well-known enough in foodie circles to get people who are serious about their lunch hot under the collar. The venue is also impressive in its own right, with chefs working at an open counter on the ground floor, and tables propped against glass barriers along the mezzanine offering great views across the restaurant and through the huge, arched windows.

WHAT ABOUT THE FOOD? – The Peking duck (£38/half) is exceptional, carved at the table and served in two stages, the first with the crispy skin and easy-to-get-at meat, the second served later in a choice of sauces. The dim sum symphony is unmissable, with six huge morsels filled with prawn, lobster and pork. The lobster ones are lovingly shaped into little carp with caviar eyes. Main courses include buttery black cod (similar to Nobu's version) and a gigantic bowl of lobster noodles, which is more than enough for two (and will set you back £49).

SET MENU? – There's an express lunch menu with three courses for an incredibly reasonable £30, and it includes a selection of dim sum.

PHONE: 020 3957 9932
WHERE: 9a St Thomas St, SE1
WEB: duddells.co/london

CHEF'S TABLE

This month, superstar chef **JASON ATHERTON** cooks lunch at his Michelin-starred restaurant Pollen Street Social for the world's top male model **DAVID GANDY**

STARTER

Colchester crab on "toast", with lemon gel, coriander and basil, with a crabmeat foam

Jason Atherton: You know what, this is actually the first time I've eaten in Pollen Street Social. I can't enjoy it. If the waiter pours red wine over the lady wearing the Prada dress, I can't just sit there and watch.
David Gandy: Well, I'm glad I have the honour! I was trying to remember how we met...
JA: It was at the opening of City Social, right?
DG: That's it – we had the same personal shopper, Joe. Proper man's man, not how you'd expect a personal shopper to be. He used to be a centre half, he's about six foot six and immaculately dressed. I always wanted to look like him. I've known you for a few years, anyway, but I still have no idea where you grew up.
JA: I was born in Sheffield, but raised in Skegness.
DG: Were your mum and dad successful?
JA: My dad was successful, he built a successful engineering company, lost it and then rebuilt it again. He and my brother run it now. My mum left my dad when I was about five or six so I was taken to Skegness where me and my sister were raised in a caravan. My dad remarried, then my mum remarried, then my mum and step-dad, who I call dad, got a little guest house in Skegness and they worked hard on that. I'm from a hard-working family.
DG: Same, I saw my mum and dad work from 7am until midnight. If you grow up with your mum and dad giving you that example, not giving you everything, you strive for it and you're scared to lose it.
JA: Oh, petrified. Achievement is incredible but you can never ever take it for granted. My wife Ihra comes from a very, very poor background.
DG: The less you know about people the more intriguing they are. We've been mates for a while and I didn't know anything about where you grew up. I find it strange when people have got so much money and they want to put their whole life on social media. It's created a generation where people want to be famous without putting the work in. You get bloggers and 'influencers' who are given everything: free cars, free clothes, free holidays. I see people at fashion shows and I think, 'what experience have you had?' People just want to be seen, they want it all for nothing, even if they haven't achieved anything. But I think people are becoming a lot wiser, with food, with fashion, with everything. It's not about just churning stuff out, it's about quality, and that means hard work.
JA: Yeah, I'll go to the gym at 5am, get to work at 8am and won't get home till midnight. Saturday and Sunday I'll be travelling abroad to the restaurants or spending it with the children. That's literally it. That's why I stopped doing television, it just took too much time. You have to decide who you want to be. Do you want to be a successful chef or a TV star? It took me 20 years to get noticed as a chef, which is a long time to be stuck in the kitchen. Then all of a sudden you become known, get some Michelin stars and everyone's trying to suck you out of what made you famous in the first place. It's only because I was older when it happened that I was able to say, 'Okay, if I spent that much time out of my kitchen, it's going to mess the whole thing up.'
DG: Are chefs still as tough as people think?
JA: Gordon [Ramsay[was fucking ruthless. Like, mafia ruthless. He wasn't so bad with me because I was like: 'I'm following your arse right to the top,' but guys who didn't cut the crop, they were taken down big style. I can be ruthless if I don't get what I want, but I'm diplomatic about it. I say: 'This is where I'm going, if you're not coming with me then get off the wagon. You either work with me or there's another 20 passengers wanting to get on the wagon. It's not personal, it's just somewhere I have to be."
DG: It's the same with everything, you have to work hard. Look at Victoria's Secret models, they're at the top of their game, freakishly beautiful, with bodies like athletes. But that's about diet, training, lifestyle...
JA: I train like a demon four or five days a week, I run most mornings, between half an hour and 40 minutes. I was in such good shape before Christmas, I was at 14 per cent body fat and fit in a pair of 30-inch waist trousers. But I have to try all these new menus all the time, and now I can't fit in them – what a waste of money. How do you stay in shape?
DG: I never eat breakfast. I've always been an evening gym guy, never been a morning gym guy. So sometimes dinner could be at 10pm, but from then until lunch the next day I'll have completely fasted. I eat small meals during the day, but I never hold back from bread and butter or anything. It's about moderation. Nutritionists say a really high percentage of people who maintain their weight skip breakfast. An average guy burns 2,500 calories doing nothing: if you take the dog for a walk for 6km you'll need 3,000, if you go to the gym you're up to 3,500, if you're constantly moving, you're on maybe 4,000 calories a day, so my problem is consuming enough protein, enough good calories. But the older I get the harder it gets. I used to be able to train for two weeks and see a difference, now that makes no difference whatsoever. The older I get the harder it is to get into shape. Do you think there's still a cliché that Britain's not good for food?
JA: Britain, yes, London, no. Which is ▶

Clockwise from above: David Gandy admires the glassware; Jason Atherton's sea bass; Atherton mid-conversation; the crab; Pictures by Greg Sigston

▶ odd because it's produce from the rest of the UK that sustains us. It's the creative people that make London what it is. But there are some great places elsewhere: Restaurant Sat Bains, Nathan Outlaw, all those guys. Post Second World War we became obsessed by the American way of life, with supermarkets and microwaves, and we lost our culinary identity. Now, thank goodness, it's back.

DG: It happened with a lot of things. The car industry – look at Bentley, Rolls Royce, Mini, Jaguar, all those great brands that we no longer own. In fashion you have Gieves, Hardy Amies. We're losing our identity, aren't we? It's because we're very British and we self-destruct. America is very good at investing in itself, in start-ups. I think we're slowly getting there but we need to start believing in ourselves, shouting about the things we do well. Brands I work with – Aspinal, Jaguar, M&S – are proud to be British. We're the fifth biggest economy in the world, which people forget. London is one of the number one cities in the world and that's the way we've got to keep it.

JA: Absolutely. My biggest worry is that 85 per cent of my workforce is from the continent. If we don't get a good Brexit deal, a lot of restaurants in London will really hurt, because we've become really reliant on these guys for good service. If we don't get freedom of movement, we'll struggle. We're so lucky in London, I just hope Brexit doesn't decimate the creativity. Our fashion, food, restaurants, bars and music are all incredible. I feel super proud to be a Londoner.

MAIN

Roasted cornish sea bass with cockles, whelks and clams, served with seaweed butter and jersey royal potatoes

JA: What's your favourite place abroad?

DG: My dad thinks he's David Attenborough the Second, so he has always educated me and my sister through travel. My classmates would go travelling in Europe and we'd be in the middle of the Amazon rainforest or watching the brown bears grabbing salmon as they migrate through the Alaskan falls. We still try and all go away together. About four years ago we went gorilla trekking in Uganda, just me, my mum and dad, and that was an incredible experience. We drove for two days across these terrible roads and had a car smash into us, which the local mayor helped us out with. But we had an hour with the gorillas. You're absolutely among them, and the young ones will come running past and grab your shoulder and stuff, but you're always aware the mum is watching.

> Manny Pacquiao's sister is a big fan of mine. When I was in the Philippines we ended up at Manny's house eating pizza. He likes to be called 'Senator'

DESSERT

Eton Mess with brillat-savarin mousse

JA: I'm a massive boxing fan. I was out in Manila House in the Philippines having dinner and got talking to the guy next to me. Turns out he was Manny Pacquiao's manager. He said 'do you want to meet him?' So he text him and apparently his sister is a huge fan of mine, so we ended up at Manny's house eating pizza. He was a super nice guy. Likes to be called 'Senator'.

DG: Is there anything you still really want to achieve in your career?

JA: At some point I really to do our own hotel. Just 15, 20 bedrooms.

DG: Investors always say 'Don't go into restaurants, don't go into hotels', but I guess if anyone's going to make it work it'll be you...

JA: I live and breathe it, that's the difference. I know the pitfalls. Even in the middle of Brexit, landlords are still trying to charge crazy rents, but I can do my sums and know straight away if something's going to work. If your restaurant is half-full and you can't pay the rent, don't do it. People plan for things to be amazing, but that's not smart. It was a blessing in disguise for me to get success later in life, I learned to be smart.

DG: The key is to keep pushing through when things are going well. My M&S range is up 90 per cent this year but you can't just rest on your laurels. My first thought is 'how are we going to keep that going?' Male shoppers tend to be very loyal once they know they're onto something good, so I'm always listening to customers about what works and what we need to improve. People say to me, 'You're not really involved, are you? Everyone else does the work and you just sign your name on it.' I'm like, 'No, no, no', I'm involved every step of the way: concept, design, marketing, creative, styling. Because you're responsible if sales aren't good.

JA: That's why you have to choose your projects carefully. It's not just about the money, you have to do what feels right. If you think about how you'll be judged at the end of your life it's not about how much cash you made, that's for your kids, but what kind of person you were, what kind of friend, what kind of husband. Money is the last thing on my mind. Unfortunately everything in this industry costs money. ■

Pollen Street Social by Jason Atherton, published by Absolute Press, is out 15 November, priced £50

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THE LAST SUPPER

Catastrophe star **MARK BONNAR** tells us what he'd eat for his last meal, including the 1,000 calorie 'stonner', dubbed the most dangerous dish in Scotland

I've chosen dishes from all over the place. If this is my last supper, I want to make the most of it, and if that means bending the rules then so be it. First I'd be travelling to L'Atelier near Covent Garden. It's a Joel Robuchon restaurant I ate in around 2010. Before my wife and I had the kids, we used to go to a Michelin-starred restaurant to celebrate our birthdays each year. This was one of my favourites – I loved being there and the food was out of this world. We had a five-course tasting menu and everything was exceptional, but for the purposes of this supper, I'm going to go with the beetroot tartare with wholegrain mustard sorbet and fresh herbs, which I can thoroughly recommend.

I've chosen two main courses, because I'm greedy. The first is a dish my wife Lucy Gaskell made back in 2013. She's an ambassador for Women's Aid and she came up with an idea called Donate Your Plate, where she invited friends round for dinner, and they donated money based on what they thought it was worth. She invited her pals from the TV series Cutting It, so we had Amanda Holden, Sarah Parish, Angela Griffin, Lisa Falkner and Nichola Stevenson, and Lucy cooked one of the most remarkable meals I've ever eaten. It was pan-fried halibut with a saffron sauce that was to die for, served with black rice, which I've never had before, but has now become very popular. I'd have happily paid 70 or 80 quid for it in a restaurant.

My second main course isn't so glamorous by a long shot. It's a thing called a "stonner kebab" from Ruby's Cafe in Glasgow, which has been dubbed the most dangerous supper in Scotland. I have to admit that I've never tried it, so this will be a surprise for me. "Stonner" is a Glaswegian word for erection, and this thing is a pork sausage wrapped in donner meat and coated in not one but two layers of batter, served on a bed of chips. Weighing in at a kilo and a half, it's 1,000 calories, with 46g of fat. And it only costs £3! It's a mythical beast, this thing, and people keep mentioning it to me, so I figure I may as well go out with a bang. Being Scottish, I love deep fried stuff, so I can't die without trying it.

For dessert I'm going homespun again: my granny's trifle, which was the taste of my childhood. I could go with either my mum's mum's or my dad's mum's version – they both made a mean trifle. They were quite different, one was boozier, proper big bits of sponge soaked in sherry. The other was a lot smoother, with home made custard and not much booze. They kind of reflected the grannies themselves, come to think of it. Both were special in their own way.

And I want to top it off with a Creme Egg, because it's about the sweetest thing my teeth can take. It sets them tingling but I love it. I know this sounds like a lot of food, but I'll keep eating until they drag me away.

Mark is now starring in Instructions for Correct Assembly running at the Royal Court Theatre until 19 May. For tickets go to royalcourttheatre.com; Humans returns to Channel 4 in May

All images: Gin-making equipment and botanicals at the City of London Distillery

HOW GIN TOOK OVER THE WORLD

It's selling in record numbers with little sign of slowing down, but with so many competing distillers, could the gin bubble be about to burst? asks **STEVE DINNEEN**

From Dalston dives to The Rivoli at the Ritz, people are drinking juniper-flavoured ethanol in record numbers. Last year more than 50m bottles of gin were sold in the UK for the first time, with £1.2bn in sales, up from £600m in 2011. That's more than a billion gin and tonics. And while the best-selling brands are owned by the big four drinks companies – Diageo (Tanqueray and Gordon's), Pernod Ricard (Beefeater and US top-seller Seagram's), Beam Suntory (Sipsmith and Spanish giant Larios), and Bacardi (Bombay Sapphire) – the real growth has come from the bottom up, with the number of independent distilleries almost trebling in the last five years, hitting an all-time high of 315 last month.

To underscore its ubiquity, gin was added to last year's basket of goods used by the Office for National Statistics to measure inflation, sitting alongside chilled pizza and a pint of milk. The last time it featured was back in 2004, at which point gin sales had slumped amid a relatively short-lived love-affair with vodka, a strange time when it was acceptable to order a butterscotch-flavoured voddy and listen to trance music.

But today gin reigns supreme. There's just one problem: "The bubble is about to burst."

• • •

This bombshell was dropped by an unlikely source: Joel Lawrence, the general manager of boutique gin-maker City of London Distillery. Lawrence was teaching me to make gin, explaining the taste profiles of botanicals filling dozens of glass jars in front of me, ranging from the commonplace (cinnamon, grapefruit, rose hip) to the obscure (baobab, orris root, yarrow herb).

"The only things you *need* for a London dry gin are ethanol, juniper berries, coriander seed and angelica root," he says. "But you can add almost anything."

The ethanol is generally bought as a byproduct from the petroleum industry; juniper gives gin its distinctive ginny flavour; coriander seed helps mask the taste of alcohol (navy strength gin, typically containing 57 per cent alcohol, tends to use a lot of coriander); and angelica root binds the botanicals together – the more botanicals, the more angelica root you need.

Working within suggested parameters, I measured out heaps of botanicals using a small, drug dealer-style weighing scale. I went heavy on juniper (I like the ▶

A-Z OF BOTANICALS

Angelica One of the most prevalent botanicals in gin, the root is most commonly used, but the seeds are sometimes used, too. Producers cite its properties as a binding agent, as well as its earthy flavour.

Bergamot Best known for giving Earl Grey tea its distinctive flavour, Bergamot is derived from the bitter zest of the Bergamot orange. Half Hitch Gin uses Calabrian Bergamot from Southern Italy.

Coriander Coriander seeds are found in almost all gins, and are sometimes roasted or crushed to alter the flavour profile. Coriander seeds provide the 'high citrus' notes towards the end of the taste.

Dandelion Dandelion leaves are unusually used in Caorunn Gin, one of 5 'Celtic' botanicals, that add sharpness to this Scottish Gin.

Elderflower Elderflowers can be found in abundance in the British countryside. Warner Edwards steeps its Harrington Dry Gin at 89% abv, for a week with elderflower petals, adding sugar & water to create their Elderflower Gin, bottled at 40% abv.

Frankincense A resin tapped from the bark of the Boswellia Sacra tree, found in Arabia and North Africa, and used as an incense. Sacred Gin uses it to provid a gentle warmth.

Green cardamom Sweet and fiery, this cardamom pod is native to South India. The easily identifiable flavour is put to good use in Opihr Gin, paired with black pepper and cubeb.

Honeysuckle Native to the Northern hemisphere, there are 160 varieties of

Honeysuckle. Bloom Gin uses Chinese honeysuckle to provide a delicate floral sweetness.

Iris root Or Orris Root, is also used in perfumery, where it is dried for five years before use. Orris root is used as a base note to bind other flavours, with woody, oily properties.

Juniper The thing that makes gin gin. Juniper berries are sweet with pine notes and grow across huge swathes of the world. In Britain it's particularly common in the Scottish Highlands. Legally, gin must be predominantly flavoured with juniper.

Kaffir lime leaves Native to tropical Asia, the kaffir lime leaves are high in citronella oil, which is also found in lemonbalm and lemongrass. Berkeley Square Gin balances this beautifully with basil.

Liquorice A traditional sweetener in gin, liquorice root was prevalent when sugar was too expensive during the 1700s.

Mint Often used as a garnish, mint is occasionally used in the distillation process, too. Beckett's Gin uses Kingston-Upon-Thames mint to provide a cool aftertaste.

Olive Famously paired with gin in martinis, Gin Mare uses arbequina olives with thyme, rosemary and basil to create a savory, Mediterranean gin.

Pomelo Native to South Asia, this citrus fruit resembles a large grapefruit, but tastes sweeter and less bitter. Monkey 47 uses it as part of its mix of a whopping 47 botanicals.

Quince Golden yellow and related to the apple, quince brings acidic balance to Ferdinand's Saar Dry Gin.

Rose Rose petals provide a delicate floral note and perfume. Hendrick's Gin infuses its gin with Bulgarian "Rosa Damascen".

Above: The magical juniper berry; A-Z of Botanicals compiled by **Katherine O'Neil**, AKA **The Gin Whore** – for more ginsights, go to her website theginwhore.com

► taste of gin), relatively easy on coriander (I like the taste of alcohol), with my blockbuster botanicals being ginger, pepper, orange peel, rowan berries and grapefruit. The botanicals and ethanol are added to a small copper still, heated, cooled again, and the liquid collected in a jar (the distillery's own gin is made in three vast stills, two of which are called Clarissa and Jennifer after the Two Fat Ladies). The flavour of each botanical is released at different points of the distillation process, so dip your finger in the super-strength gin (it's later diluted with water) as it trickles from the still and you'll taste intense citrus one minute, hot ginger the next, and spicy pepper after that.

After distilling the gin, personalising the label and sealing the bottle with wax, you develop a certain emotional attachment to the finished product. But even accounting for that, *City A.M. Magazine* Gin is *wonderful*: classy and complex, smooth and rounded, refreshingly – but not *overpoweringly* – citrusy, with the pepper and ginger giving it a mild spiciness. While the Gin Experience, which includes several large and delicious G&Ts, lasts a whole afternoon, the gin-making itself takes about half an hour. *This* is the real driving force behind the exponential growth in boutique distilleries. Unlike whisky, for which you will wait a decade or more before recouping a single penny of your investment, you can make gin in the morning and sell it in the afternoon, with only a minimal investment in equipment.

"There are so many gin-makers on the market right now," says Lawrence. "It's saturated. The gin bubble will burst in three or four years."

Is he worried? "Selling gin is only half of our business. We have experiences, events, a bar. We're well positioned. But there are others out there who are more exposed, and if people move on to something else, some of them will be in trouble."

• • •

The history of gin is infamous. It was invented by the Dutch in the 17th century, but it was the Brits who really took it to heart. The period between 1695 and 1735 is known as the Gin Craze, which some blame for the stabilisation of London's previously growing popu- ►

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Silver birch Sap from Silver Birch is the newest health fad, but Blackdown Sussex Dry Gin uses it to deliver a smooth sweet gin. Tapped once a year in early spring each tree can give up to five litres of sap.

Turmeric Native to Southern India, this bright orange spice is related to both ginger and cardamom. Blue Gin uses it to add earthiness to its delicious gin.

Urtica dioica Better known as stinging nettles, this is traditionally used in beer where the sting is removed by cooking. D1 London Gin uses it to add a green kick and peppery zing.

Vanilla Native to mexico, vanilla pods come from a flowering vine, which takes three to five years to bloom. Indonesia and Madagascar are the biggest growers. Sloane's Gin uses it to deliver a smooth creamy gin.

Wormwood More famous for being used in Absinthe, you'll also find wormwood in bitters, vermouth and in Bath Gin. Toxic in large quantities, it's often used to relieve indigestion.

Xocolatl Our word for chocolate comes from the spanish Xocolatl. Belgium's X-Gin uses it to give it a bitter-sweet kick.

Yuzu From East Asia, this citrus fruit has hints of mandarin and grapefruit. Used in Jinzu Gin, alongside sake, to create a British Japanese fusion.

Zest Almost all gin uses citrus zest, either dry or fresh, to balance the sweetness of juniper. It's often lemon but sometimes orange, East Asian fruit yuzu or grapefruit, the latter being used in Tanqueray 10.

Jake Burger, curator of the Ginstitute at Portobello Road Gin

> People see gin-making as a way of escaping the rat race, but it's never been easy to make money selling alcohol. The pessimistic view is the multi-nationals buy up the most successful brands and the rest disappear.

lation, thanks to lots of people drinking themselves to death. There are reports – probably apocryphal – that gin was cheaper than water, and it was certainly a lot more fun. People made their own at home, turning a liquid that's already poisonous (alcohol) into something acutely lethal; when people stopped showing up for work, the government brought in strict gin laws that still inform licensing regulations today. Even worse, the gin tasted terrible.

• • •

It's only recently that a significant number of people started to differentiate between gins. Pre-2010, if you ordered a G&T in a bar, you'd have been served Gordon's, with Bombay Sapphire, Tanqueray or Beefeater probably available if you were somewhere a bit fancy. Few, including most of those behind the bar, could explain the difference between them, aside from a vague notion that "the more expensive ones are better" (there's a parallel with the vodka industry, which spent millions boasting its products were "10-times distilled" and tasted of virtually nothing). Then, in 2010, Hendrick's, Martin Miller's and Tanqueray No. Ten – all a decade old by this point – caught the public imagination, trading on the backward-looking nostalgia of burgeoning hipsterism. Hendrick's in particular changed the way people thought about the spirit with its medicinal bottles and million dollar innovation: the slice of cucumber.

You can't talk about the resurgence of gin without a special mention for Fever-Tree. The 2008 upstart start-up seemed destined to be, at best, a niche alternative to Schweppes – six years later a stock market floatation valued it at £154m. Since then its share price has risen 1,500 per cent, overtaking Britvic in terms of market cap and outselling Schweppes in off-sales. Last year its revenues rose 96 per cent, with co-founder Charles Rolls cashing out £155m since 2017, which he presumably toasted with a gin and (premium) tonic. So, is Fever-Tree worried about the gin bubble bursting?

"Gone are the days when you only had three bottles of gin behind a bar," says brand ambassador Craig Harper. "We've moved past that. But we're not sitting on our laurels. I spend most of my time working with dark spirits, which is another [area] we see [growth]. A lot of gin distilleries are sitting on aged spirits they're hoping to bring out in the future, so we're looking for the same kind of partnerships we had with the flavoured tonics."

Rival spirits are already trying to muscle in on gin's territory. Mezcal is receiving rave reviews within the drinks industry; indie vodka labels are riding on the coat-tails of the gin-makers; and there are whispers that rum is preparing for a moment in the sun. Portobello Road Gin's Jake Burger, however, remains unfazed. "If you look at it from a perspective of centuries rather than decades, gin's popularity is just a return to the norm. We're a nation of gin drinkers. The market probably *is* saturated and we'll see fewer new brands, and some of the smaller brands fading away.

"People see gin-making as a way of escaping the rat race, but it's never been easy to make money selling alcohol. The pessimistic view is the same happens to gin that happened to vodka 15 or 20 years ago, with the multi-nationals buying up the most successful brands and the rest disappearing forever. The more optimistic view is to look to somewhere like France where you have lots of small, rural producers of things like armagnac who are successful within a small geographical area rather than taking on global brands."

This is how I see *City A.M. Magazine* Gin – it may never take on Diageo, but as long as the recipe exists, the gin revolution will continue apace, at least in my house. ■

To book a gin-making experience with City of London Distillery, go to cityoflondondistillery.com

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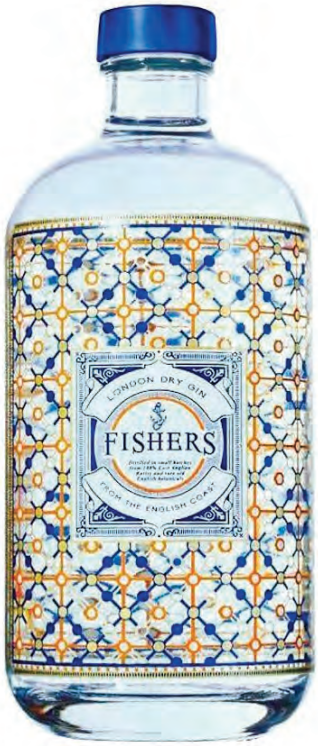

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While many gins boast about the locality of their botanicals, One Gin has a different message. Collecting nine core botanicals from around the world, it aims to raise awareness – and money – for people unable to access clean water. One Gin is a spin-off of The One Foundation, which uses proceeds from bottled water for the same cause, and has already raised £16.5m; it hopes gin sales can push that number over the £20m mark by 2020. The "hero" botanical in the gin is sage, giving it an interesting, aromatic flavour, offset by orange and lemon zest, and sweetened by Mediterranean liquorice root. The suggested garnish is apple and sage leaf. So not only is One Gin for a good cause; it's also a great gin in its own right.

REVIEW

Simon Rogan makes a triumphant return to London with the incredible Aulis, says **STEVE DINNEEN**

Even in London, one of the most varied dining cities in the world, Simon Rogan's latest venture has an aura of mystery and intrigue. The single sitting, catering to a maximum of eight guests, begins at 7:30pm sharp. The address isn't revealed on the website but provided after you make a reservation; if you're using Google Maps, the trail will go cold down an alleyway outside a tanning salon. But look closely above a whited-out window and you'll spot a little sign reading "Aulis". Here, for a mere £250 a head, you have the undivided attention of two of Rogan's top chefs, who will beguile you with one of the most adventurous tasting menus in the land.

Rogan, chef-proprietor of L'Enclume in Cartmel, which has won almost as many awards as it's served hot dinners, said he wanted his latest venture to feel "proper underground". And somehow, for an outpost of a multi-million pound empire, it does.

This is the third iteration of his experimental "development kitchen" – named after chef de partie Aulis Lehtimäki, a long-term colleague who passed away – with the original up in Cartmel and another that acted as the chef's table at Fera in Claridges, until Rogan walked away from the venture under a cloud last year (there were... *disputes* about how many hours he was required to be in the kitchen there).

The long, thin space, dominated by a central island, is strikingly similar to the Cartmel version. It even has the same textured grey wall, which apparently took some poor craftsman several attempts before he captured Rogan's singular vision. I was there last year, when a solitary chef was perfecting some kind of squid-ink cracker before serving them in the restaurant-proper.

Back in 2011 when Rogan ran the Roganic pop-up in Marylebone, he used to pack a suitcase full of ingredients and take them on the train from Cartmel. Now Roganic has a permanent restaurant, also in Marylebone, and L'Enclume is a four-times Good Food Guide restaurant of the year, I imagine the operation has become a little more professional.

"Yeah, of course", says Aulis London head chef Rafael Cagali. "Now it's two suitcases."

The night I ate, there were only four guests: my partner and I, and a couple of New Yorkers who had a better grasp of the London restaurant scene than any natives I've met. The action all takes place on the central island, which has a central hotplate, with the set-up feeling less like a meal out than a dinner party, albeit with total strangers and better food.

When I was in L'Enclume, the 20-course tasting menu took five and a half hours to complete. This one took a mere three and a half, with 14 "dishes" ranging from tiny cones of crème fraiche topped with cubes of jellied damson, to a neat block of vivid pink lamb whose colour and texture was implausibly consistent throughout (the fat had been trimmed off, crisped, cut into squares and served with the underside still molten).

Aulis adheres to Rogan's veg-first philosophy, with protein kept to a minimum. The stand out dish, in fact, was butternut squash with onion and thyme, only the squash was... congealed. No, that's not quite right. I asked Cagali how *he'd* describe it.

"I'd call it a gnocchi emulsion, but Simon wouldn't like that. He'd probably say it was a dumpling." Apparently the process includes pureeing, juicing, adding some kind of starch, and then whispering a curse into a seashell during a full moon.

Every dish is a tiny work of art, often the kind of art that your nan wouldn't get. Crispy balls of deeply fishy cod's head, topped with a bright green blob of burnt chive, is served on a pile of bones. Cep brioche is fashioned into dainty little mushrooms sitting on a bed of moss. The attention to detail is incredible: a fat mussel, pocked with dill and caviar wasn't *perfectly* aligned, so Cagali leaned over to shift it two millimetres to the left. Occasionally he'd offer advice on how things were supposed to be eaten, such as: "This one in three bites".

Aulis is great. Brilliant. *Heavenly*. Is it worth £500 a couple? Sure, if you've got it. Even with prices this high, the margins must be tight, given you get two dedicated chefs and a Soho location. But I don't think Aulis is designed to make money. It exists to generate buzz for the Rogan empire, to let the people of London – and, evidently, New York – know that he's back in the capital, and this time he's doing things *his* way.

To book, go to aulis.london

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HOW TO MIX: BLUEBIRD FEATHER

Bluebird Bar's Fabio Merlotti on how to concoct a cocktail that's naturally blue
Words: **MELISSA YORK**

Blue may be the warmest colour, if the French film of the same name is to be believed, but it's also widely considered to be the most unappetising. Red and yellow, now those are tasty colours, which is why so many fast food outlets, famously McDonald's, choose it for their logos. Blue, on the other hand, is thought to be an appetite suppressant, which is why catering kitchens insist their staff wear blue plasters over cuts and burns – it's easy to spot if it falls off because there just aren't that many blue foods for it to fall into.

But Bluebird cares not for colour customs. The famous King's Road brasserie has ventured northwards to the former home of the BBC in White City, Television Centre, to take up space among Kricket and Soho House. And it's invented Bluebird Feather, a newly blue cocktail to kick things off.

"Blue is also a vital, quirky colour," says Fabio Merlotti, bar supervisor at Bluebird White City. "It reminds me of the Bluebird bar and it's a predominant colour in the décor of both Bluebirds. The foam and our pink feather garnish are matching really well with the colours of our bar. I think it is going to be a really good scenic effect for the guests."

Merlotti was working as a barista in his native Italy, before moving to London to learn bartending from the best. He started off at German Gymnasium in King's Cross and worked his way up to Bar Supervisor before taking up the post at the new Bluebird.

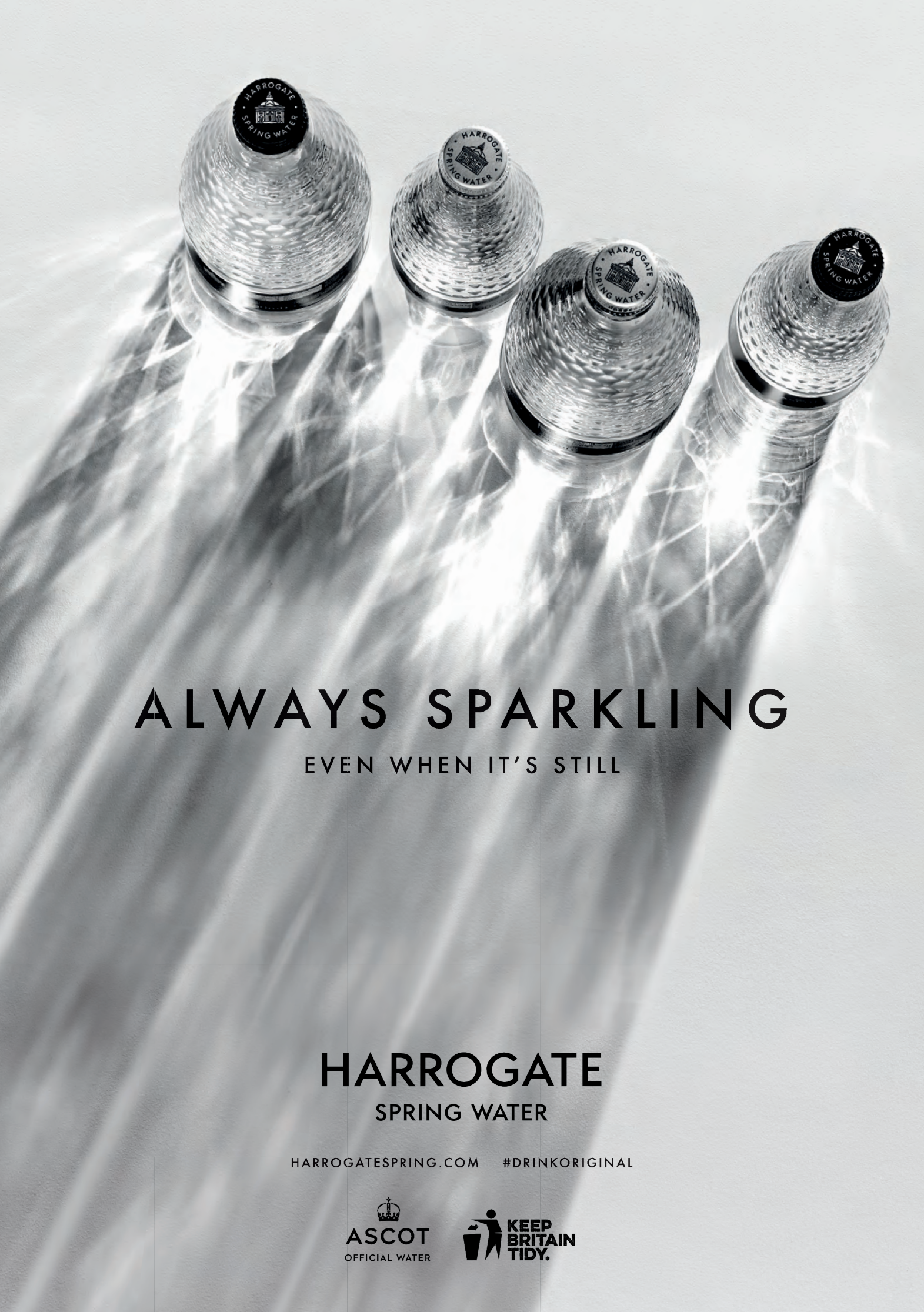
He's brought with him a love of natural ingredients, which is why this margarita with a twist comes with a banana foam that's blue, yes, but made using fresh FairTrade bananas with sugar and lemon. An easy-whip powder, a cellulose and a gum mixture is added to foam things up, so it's suitable for vegan drinkers. The blue colour is even natural, as it comes from a Blue Curacao liqueur that adds citrus notes to balance out the Olmeca Plata tequila and lime juice.

Regulars needn't feel blue, though, as all of the King's Road signature cocktails will still be available to order on the Legends section of the bar menu. But for a tipple that'll tickle your tastebuds, only the Feather will do.

Ingredients:
- 45ml Olmeca Plata tequila
- 20ml fresh lime juice
- 10ml gym syrup
- blue banana foam

Glassware:
- Vintage Nick and Nora

Garnish
- Pink feather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MY LIFE IN
RESTAURANTS
MARK HIX

WHY I NEVER GET INVITED TO DINNER

Our resident food columnist on why his diary is empty, and how to pull out the stops when cooking for a group

People never invite me round for dinner. They assume I'd be critical of what they serve. I wouldn't be, of course. Not vocally. Not to their faces. I mean, I'd be judging them inside my head, just like you'd be judging me if I came into your bank and started mashing your Bloomberg Terminal with my fists and demanding shares in Dixons. But however terrible the food was, I'd keep it to myself, maybe share it with a few close friends, but I certainly wouldn't go around shouting about it. I wouldn't write a column describing it.

On the rare occasions I *have* been invited to dinner, the host inevitably gets me around an hour or two before the other guests so I feel like I have to get involved in the food preparation. Just as inevitable is that the kitchen will look like an Exocet missile has gone through it, with gunky fingerprints covering the Nigella cookbook they're trying to decipher, like a labrador gazing into a television set. It made me realise who buys those cook book stands with perspex covers. I imagine iPads don't fare much better, either.

So let me tell you how to entertain at home, so I don't have to roll my sleeves up. Start off at a fresh market, somewhere like Borough, and find out what's in season. Speak to the traders and they'll tell you all about their produce. You'll be safe in the knowledge it hasn't sat on a temperature-controlled shelf for three weeks, or been vacuum-wrapped in ten layers of plastic to eke some extra life out of it. Stock up on quality meat, fish and veg, and this will give you an idea of what to serve. It also means there's a good chance you'll be handing over your money to the people who actually grew or reared the stuff, rather than lining the pockets of Tesco PLC. Next, look up recipes that use your core ingredients, filling in the missing ingredients with a quick trip to Whole Foods, a decent grocer or your local deli.

These days most people think of themselves as foodies, so buying from a fresh market means you can impress your guests by telling them the provenance of what they're eating. I also find it's much more impressive when you prepare a simple, ingredient-led dinner rather than try to replicate a well known chef's recipe, which you're probably going to mess up anyway. Simplicity is key, especially when you're cooking for more than three or four people.

A simple plate of asparagus with some good British charcuterie to share and some crusty sourdough always wins as a starter. Likewise wild mushrooms on toast or soft polenta. Timing is crucial at dinner parties so I suggest getting as much done as possible the day before, which makes entertaining far less stressful. That way, you can have a few drinks with your guests in a tidy, organised kitchen pre-dinner. Try to get all the chopping, blanching, dessert making and even laying the table out of the way well in advance.

One last tip: I've started serving magnums of wine at dinner parties as my guests will demolish a single bottle in no time, and you find yourself up and down like a yo-yo opening fresh bottles every ten minutes.

So there you have it: you don't need a professional to help you throw a great dinner party. Now maybe someone will invite me to one.

THE
WINE CONNOISSEUR
VALENTINA ZAMPINI

HOW TO AVOID WINE PAIRING DISASTERS

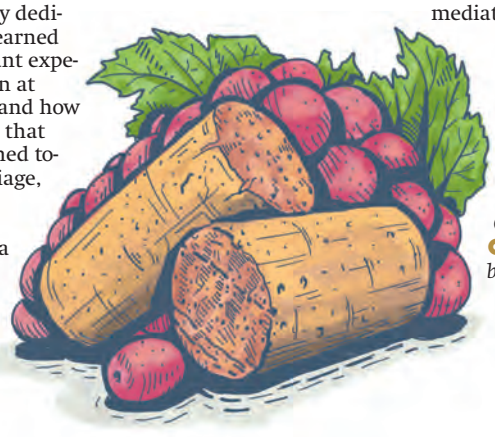
I learned the hard way – here's a simple guide to making sure you don't waste your expensive booze

I have been surrounded by wine my entire life, from my mum's collection of rarities to my uncle's home-brewed sparkling. Growing up in Italy, there was wine in nearly every recipe and a bottle on every table. But that doesn't mean pairing wine with food comes naturally – it's a process of trial and error that's been a work in progress for at least 2,000 years. I have a vivid memory of the first time I was handed a glass of champagne – New Year's Eve, 1995. It was a non-vintage Mumm and I can still recall the signature red band on the label; I felt like I was taking my first steps into adulthood. This extraordinary drink was paired with, I'm ashamed to admit, a black forest gateau (don't judge, German patisserie was fashionable in the 90s). I had a bite of the cake and downed most of the champagne. It was dreadful, sour with an overwhelming tartness. I remember screwing my face up and wondering what on earth makes people treasure such a horrible wine.

It was only when I eventually dedicated my life to grapes that I learned why this was such an unpleasant experience. The first thing you learn at wine school is flavour profiles and how to combine them; never forget that wine and food are best consumed together. But like a perfect marriage, they must be well suited, one complementing the other. Champagne and gateau is not a desirable combination – the sweetness in the chocolate cake meant all I could taste in the wine was crisp acidity, making the usually complex flavours of champagne taste like an Amalfi lemon. If you must opt for cake, pair it with something sweeter like a moscato or a prosecco, which can revive a sugar-tainted palate.

I've learned the hard way, through much practice, how to get the best from champagne, and it might not be what you think. It's the perfect pairing for fish and chips, for instance, with the acidity complementing the stodgy richness of the food, with the bubbles helping to break down the starch, making it seem like a lighter lunch than it really is.

There are some simple rules that should guide you into the world of pairing: sweet wine with sweet food, as mentioned above; acidic wines with acidic food, such as Alabarino with a vinaigrette salad; sweet wines with salty food, such as port with cheese; bitter wine with fatty food, such as Barolo with steak; bitter with bitter is definite no-no, so chocolate and red wine should immediately set alarm bells ringing.



There are, of course, exceptions to every rule, and nothing will improve your grasp of pairing like making all the mistakes I've made for yourself.

But if you're hosting a big dinner party, sticking to the above should help to avoid any Champagne-gateau type disasters.

Valentina Zampini is head wine buyer and drinks expert at Carluccio's

epsomderby.co.uk

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SHAVING FACE

Are we living through the demise of the beard, or have reports of its death been greatly exaggerated? Words: **STEVE HOGARTY**

The age of the neo-dandy has drawn to a close. Tweed is out. The moustache has twirled its last. The beard is dead, and we are but mourners at its wake. At least, that is what the streets of London would seem to suggest. So many naked chins thrust into the wind like the jutting prows of gleaming icebreakers, forging their smooth passage along busy footpaths. But have we crested the hairy hill once and for all, is it plain-shaving from here on out?

As tides and seasons change, so too does the business of facial hair. The most recent resurgence in the popularity of the beard can trace its origins to the organic coffee shops and art studios of Manhattan in the mid-to-late 2000s, where a newly emerging and style-conscious counterculture – soon to be labelled 'hipsters', though the term predates them by decades – was busily reappropriating anything and everything that popular opinion had discarded as outdated or unfashionable. In ransacking the history books of style, bald-lipped young men had happened upon the ornate pre-war beards of late-Victorian expeditionists and adopted them as their own.

The freewheeling, anything-goes spirit of previous decades had been allowed to run amok with facial hair, distorting the once proud reputation of the moustache until it morphed, irretrievably, into the brushy emblem of the porn star and the toppled despot, a fate from which it still has not completely recovered. But by 2010, the beard had been safely reclaimed.

In more recent years the nouveau-hirsute have factionalised into a number of beardy sub-groups, and the most enduring of these tribes is the (unfortunately labelled) *lumbersexual*. Whereas the overly affected bow-ties, penny farthings and smoking pipes of the ancestral hipster trend burned fast and bright, they betrayed only a rudimentary (and mercilessly ridiculed) interest in style. The more socially agreeable appearance of the lumbersexual, on the other hand, slips neatly into mainstream avenues of fashion, taking up residence alongside the longstanding and trend-immune beards of bikers, bears (not the animal, but the gay tribe) and the generally unkempt. Uniformed in wool-lined denim coats, the ankle-supporting Timberlands needed to traverse the untamed wilderness (though thousands of miles from it) and downy-soft flannel shirts, the rugged style speaks to a subconscious desire to return to the more honest and uncomplicated physical toil of our imagined forefathers.

Here, the beard evokes the raw masculine romance of a life of axe-sharpening, bear-wrestling (not the gay tribe, but the animal) and wood-chopping. It is a clear rejection, however superficial, of the comforts and trappings of urban living, an attempt to look like you hail from someplace where there are no commuter trains, mobile phones and Macbooks Air, but roaring waterfalls, campfires and mountain lions. To appear misplaced is to appear distinguished, but this is a carefully managed aura. And here lies the contradiction at the heart of the beard: at first glance it may look wild, but it is usually meticulously curated, given lustre and strength by a careful grooming regimen

“A beard is a clear rejection, however superficial, of the comforts and trappings of urban living, an attempt to look like you hail from someplace where there are no commuter trains, mobile phones and Macbooks Air, but roaring waterfalls, campfires and mountain lions

BEARDS THROUGH THE AGES

1.8M YEARS AGO
The first humans would have been beardy. Both men and women.

427 BC: PLATO TO THE PARTY
Greek philosopher Plato sports a rugged beard made of marble.

30 AD: CHRIST IS BRISTLIN'
Jesus Christ is rocking his signature messiah style.

270 AD: HOLIDAYS ARE COMIN'
St. Nicholas is born. Gifts begin appearing under trees.

1680: SLICING AND DICING
The cut-throat razor is invented in Sheffield.

1685: ARRR
Facial hair takes to the high seas with the arrival of Blackbeard.

1772: HAIRY ARMS
Wilkinson Sword is formed, but they only sell guns for now.

of oils, balms, lotions and creams. Like pigeons, these beards appear suddenly, fully grown, and as if from nowhere.

"The trend of beard-wearing comes and goes," says Graham Fish, founder of men's grooming brand men-ü. He claims that the beard's waning popularity goes hand in hand with an increased attention to proper skincare. "It was around the end of the 1700s when surgical blades became available and people became fascinated by smooth skin. You then had a brief phase in the Victorian period when polar and tropical explorers wore heavy beards as an outward display of their masculinity.

"Now we're living through a resurgence in the beard's popularity, but it's tapering off quickly. If you look at it over the course of the last half a century, it's generally been on the decline. Beards are a fad, as any fashion historian will tell you."

If the beard is dead, then this is far from its first funeral. The beard died a death in the trenches of World War One. For reasons of uniformity, discipline and hygiene (and apocryphally, to ensure gas masks would form a tight seal against the face) soldiers were required to be clean shaven at all times, with one notable exception.

Until it was repealed in 1916, British Army uniform regulations stated that "the hair of the head will be kept short. The chin and the under lip will be shaved, but not the upper lip." Shaving off a moustache was a disciplinary offence.

At the same time King Camp Gillette was providing American troops with his new invention, the safety razor, which rapidly accelerated the beard's demise by eradicating the need for sharpening and maintaining a blade, allowing men to "be their own barbers". Returning soldiers brought with them a newfound shaving habit, and were easily differentiated from those who hadn't served. The beard became synonymous with the feckless layabout, the hobo, the hippy and the draft dodger. It was suddenly unclean. The beard was tainted.

We entered the era of the shorn statesman, a time in which we still find ourselves today despite the beard's apparent resurrection. To wear a beard in public office is to appear outmoded, or worse, untrustworthy, and to this day (with a most notable exception in the leadership of the Labour Party) there are vanishingly few hairy cheeks in British politics.

The studies bear this out: people perceive men with beards to be more dominant and aggressive and, while a beard is associated with power and authority, it is friendliness and approachability that win elections. Dig into the piles of academic beard studies and you'll find a set of increasingly strange observations. If you have a beard, says one study, you're 63 per cent more likely to win a staring contest against a beardless man. You're also perceived as less cheerful, but more generous, confident and sincere. Whether you like it or not your beard is ▶

BEARDS BY NUMBERS

- **50 per cent** of bearded British men between the ages of 18-24 say that the main reason they have facial hair is out of laziness, while **34 per cent** in the same group grow theirs to look more attractive. **41 per cent** of men over the age of 55 say they have a beard simply because they've always had a beard.

- Trendy London hipsters are not the dominant beard group. Beard popularity is spread fairly evenly across Britain, with the least facial hair found in the Midlands (**43 per cent** of men), and the most found in the North (**54 per cent**). In London, **52 per cent** of men have some type of facial hair.

- Despite the premise of this article, beards are actually becoming more popular. In 2011, **12 per cent** of men had a beard. That figure rose to **20 per cent** in 2016 and **27 per cent** in 2018.

- Sorry to go all Derren Brown on you, but if you are a man under 35, you most likely have facial hair. **59 per cent** of British men between 18 and 34 have either stubble or a full, luscious, beautiful beard.

Data from YouGov for City A.M.
Beard illustrations all by Janelle Huber, AKA Huber Ink; to buy prints go to huberink.tictail.com

1809: ASCENT OF MAN
Charles Darwin is born on the same day as history's *second* most famous beardy man...

1809: FOUR SCORE
Abraham Lincoln is born and promptly becomes a US president.

1818: MEANS OF PRODUCTION
Did Karl Marx draw socialist power from his beard? Let's not rule it out.

1901: BETTER SAFE THAN SORRY
Gillette invents the safety razor and begins a disposable arms race.

1958: SATURDAY NIGHT FEVER
The Bee Gees form, gifting us the greatest beards in music history.

Truefitt & Hill's Gino Russo, who has been trimming beards in the world's oldest barber shop for eight years; Picture by Greg Sigston

► talking about you, not behind your back but right in front of your chin.

"Recent research suggests that men with beards are seen as older, more aggressive, and more dominant, but not more attractive" says Dr Rob Burriss, a psychologist at Basel University whose research focuses on human attraction. "This suggests that straight men grow beards to intimidate their same-sex rivals, and not because they think facial hair will impress the ladies."

This isn't to say that bearded men are less successful with women. "Other research has shown that stronger and more dominant men enjoy what biologists call 'enhanced reproductive success', that is, they have more sex partners. This could be because dominant men scare other men away, leaving women a limited pool to choose from."

The relatively recent field of beard psychology is riddled with obscure and pseudo-scientific explanations as to its origins. Depending on who you ask, the beard could be a signal of male competitive ability, a self-inflicted handicap in combat because it can easily be grabbed on to, and so a signifier of a confidence in one's own strength despite a disadvantage. This "one hand behind my back" theory of beards sounds pleasing at first, but has tenuous basis in evolutionary history. So, do beards give men an evolutionary advantage?

"Maybe," says Dr. Burriss. "But we could also flip the question around and ask whether a *lack* of facial hair gives women an advantage. Beards grow under the influence of testosterone. During the evolution of our species, men may have preferred feminine women with relatively sparse facial hair, until at last women lost their beards completely."

Fashion plays a role too, of course, and hairstyles follow roughly predictable peaks and troughs. If the beard is dead, it won't be for long. "Beard historians have found that facial hair fashions are cyclical," says Burriss. "They reach a peak before fading out. There might be an advantage to standing out from the crowd. The females of many species, even fish and birds, prefer males who look distinctive rather than dull."

Hold on, *beard historians*? "They exist," says Burriss.

> The beard could be a signal of male competitive ability or a self-inflicted handicap in combat because it can be easily grabbed on to

The oldest barbershop in the world, Truefitt & Hill was established in 1805 and is barber and wigmaker (historically, of course) to the royals. Within snipping distance of Buckingham Palace, the oak-panelled shop keeps good company at its quietly regal St James's Street address, bordered as it is by a boutique tobacconist, assorted gentlemen's clubs and a superyacht sales room.

Gino Russo has been shaving faces here for eight years. His appearance is pleasingly ironic for a man who cuts hair, his own head shaved smooth and only a light stubble adorning his face. Trustworthiness, as it happens, is also an important quality in those who hold cut-throat razors to your neck.

The small shop has two rooms and just ►

1968: STINKING PAWS
To the confusion of some monkeys, Charlton Heston shaves his face in Planet of the Apes.

1969: SHARP DRESSED MAN
ZZ Top form, and become an unwelcome point of comparison for bearded men everywhere,

1969: HOUSTON, WE HAVE STUBBLE
Aboard Apollo 10, John Young enjoys the first shave in space.

1977: BARBU
French rugby star Sebastien Chabal is born, presumably fully bearded.

1980: RICK ROALD
Roald Dahl's scathing critique of the beard, 'The Twits' is released.


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▶ a handful of chairs. When I arrive they are occupied by various pinstripe-suited, silver-haired men receiving trims, or tilted way back in their seat, their faces swaddled in hot, lime-scented towels. Around them the barbers work quickly and efficiently, like skilled machinists, heating up blades, discreetly snipping rogue ear hairs, and gliding razors up, down and around the contours and grains of their client's faces. "We've had generations of men coming here," Russo tells me. "One of our clients has been coming to Truefitt & Hill for almost 70 years, since he was a boy."

This convergence point of the past and present of London's hair is the ideal vantage point to observe the beard's changing popularity, and it appears Russo is not convinced the beard is going anywhere soon. "Beards are as popular as they have ever been," says Russo as he sets to work. "Most of our clients at Truefitt & Hill are clean shaven, especially the older men. The younger men are more inclined to grow beards, and that isn't changing."

And why do you think that is? I ask, somehow optimistic that Russo holds the key to truly understanding beards, that he alone could divine some underlying truth of man's on-again, off-again relationship with facial hair. He pauses, then turns to look at me in the mirror as if about to say something deeply profound. "Fashion?" He shrugs. "Who can say?"

> The reasons for beards are myriad, a messy patchwork of explanations that draw from every corner of the psyche. We wear them to stand out, to intimidate, because we're too lazy to shave, or because we're afraid of looking like children

Perhaps it's wishful thinking to expect to discover a grand unifying theory of beards in this place. The reasons for beards are myriad, a messy patchwork of explanations that draw from every corner of the psyche, and defy summary. We wear beards to stand out, to intimidate, because we're too lazy to shave every day, or because we're afraid of looking like children.

In a YouGov survey of bearded men for *City A.M. Magazine*, 36 per cent say that laziness is the main reason they have a beard. A quarter say it's simply habit. And 17 per cent claim it's to appear more attractive.

But the number of men with facial hair is, in fact, higher than ever. Only 51 per cent of men in the UK are now clean shaven, down from 55 per cent last year. And five o'clock shadows aren't inflating the figures – of those with facial hair, half sport a full beard and moustache.

"Certainly some men want to look older," Russo says, thoughtfully. "I had three boys come in, aged 14, 15 and 16, asking for a wet shave so that their beards would grow in more quickly. They were applying to colleges and wanted to be taken seriously."

The barber gestures to the glinting cut-throat razor laid on the table, and offers me a shave. I rub my stubble and, for the first time, consider the reason for my own facial hair, which is for no more complex a reason than that I look like a stubbed toe without one. I decide to keep it. ■

2005: SINKING FEELING
Bill Murray grows an iconic bush for The Life Aquatic.

2008: I'M A LUMBERJACK AND I'M OKAY
The word "lumbersexual" is coined for the first time on Urban Dictionary.

2013: ALL THE RAGE
Celebrities like Clooney and Beckham spark the new wave.

2014: DANCING QUEEN
Conchita Wurst wins the Eurovision song contest with Rise Like a Phoenix.

2015: BEARDY LABOUR LEADER
Does Jeremy Corbyn draw socialist powers from his beard? Let's not rule it out.

WRONG SIDE OF THE TRACKS

Trainspotting author Irvine Welsh on religious experiences, the state of literature and why he's still doing drugs at 59

Words: **STEVE DINNEEN**

The image of a former enfant terrible growing up, moving to a big house in coastal America and living a life of manicured leisure is hardly novel. Even so, Irvine Welsh – former heroin addict, guitarist with punk band The Pubic Lice, and author of Trainspotting – talking about his Miami pilates regime is a record-scratch moment. The idea of this pasty bloke from Leith limbering up with a bunch of lithe, tanned Floridians is difficult to process.

"I've decided to do everything counter-intuitively," he chuckles, adding, perhaps a touch defensively, "I also do boxing..."

We meet in Leadenhall Market, the last leg of his book-signing tour for Dead Men's Trousers, the sixth novel following the characters from Trainspotting. There's something familiar, almost archetypal about him. I used to work in Glasgow pubs, and while the accent is from the wrong coast, he reminds me of a certain type of regular who'd prop up the bar: smart, working class, politically engaged, a touch misanthropic, someone to keep an eye on come closing time. Not that he's a big drinker – "I had a crazy one in Glasgow and then a mad one in Edinburgh, but in America people don't really drink like that, so I'm not used to it" – it's something about his demeanour, exacerbated by the fact he's six-foot-two with a perfectly shaved head. It's frightening to think he'll be 60 this year; he doesn't look it.

When Trainspotting was released in 1993, he was hailed as the new messiah of British literature, part of a surge of working class creators reshaping the country. He entered the public consciousness just as Brit-Pop was taking off, when Damien Hirst was on his way to being the world's richest artist and Noel Gallagher got invitations to 10 Downing Street. Today, he says, Trainspotting wouldn't even get published.

"It's not an escapist, Booker Prize-type novel about people falling out of love in Tuscany or going on holiday to India – The food! The sights! The smells! – so no mainstream publisher would take a chance on it. It's never going to sell as many books as Dan Brown or Dean Koontz or whoever."

It's safe to say Welsh isn't enamoured with the state of modern literature. He loves Jane Austen and George Eliot but says most novels today are tame. It's a systemic problem, he says: "You get people – at least the ones who can afford MFA programmes – being taught to write a certain kind of book, in many cases a genre novel because it's easier to sell."

The problem, he says, is that in times of social upheaval, people want to be comforted rather than challenged, to be "thrilled" but ultimately know "the bad people aren't going to come crashing through the door".

Trainspotting isn't like that. The bad people *definitely* crash through the door. They kick it to smithereens. The series of overlapping short stories about a group of young heroin addicts revelled in squalor, addiction, violence, disease and death. But there was also energy and hope. These characters were figuring out whether or not to 'choose life', and what exactly that meant. ▶

> In 10 or 20 years, are we going to be running around in fields shagging each other, writing poems and playing football, or are we going to be in an Oliver Twist-style workhouse?

▶ It implied there was a future. In Dead Men's Trousers, the characters are older and generally better off – Renton manages DJs; Begbie is a hotshot artist; Sickboy owns an escort agency – but there's a suffocating hopelessness behind it, a sense that the cards have already been played and things can only get worse. Renton, especially, is stuck on the treadmill of life, his ostensibly glamorous job little more than glorified babysitting, his life a fug of airport lounges, jet-lag and hangovers. It sounds suspiciously autobiographical...

"Yeah, I guess it is a bit. It's been a hectic year. I'm looking forward to getting back to Miami and just sitting in the garden."

• • •

We walk up Bishopsgate as the freak April snowstorm starts to fall, eventually arriving at M Restaurant on Threadneedle Street. Welsh orders steak and a glass of pinot noir – very nice, apparently – telling me about the places he eats in Miami.

I ask if he fancies sharing some octopus.

"No, I saw that David Attenborough programme on it. They're super-smart and compassionate and social and all that. It's like eating dog, basically."

He's soon back into his groove, railing against the system. He says we've been approaching an economic and cultural turning-point since long before the Trump and Brexit votes; these things just made us take notice.

"If we look at what's happened in the last 30 years, and what's going to happen in the *next* 30 years, it's a long, drawn-out transition from an industrial society with paid work into something else, into authoritarianism maybe, and that's a big adjustment. We're part of a dying world, and that leads to rage and insecurity."

This, he says, is what he was trying to capture in Trainspotting, and what concerns authors like Bret Easton Ellis and Chuck Palahniuk, both of whom he admires. "The characters in Trainspotting were the first generation to be made not just redundant, but *existentially* redundant, no longer fitting in the world. Now that process is starting to happen to middle class people, to *their* jobs. In 10 or 20 years, are we are going to be running around in fields shagging each other, writing poems and playing football, or are we going to be in an Oliver Twist-style workhouse?"

He clearly enjoys prodding at the architecture of modern society, from Tinder – "If it had been around when I was a teenager, I'd never have been off the bastard", to the health industry – "The best way to take someone's assets is to keep them alive longer". ▶


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Above: The reunited cast of Trainspotting on the set of T2 last year; **Below:** Welsh's cameo in the 1996 film version of Trainspotting

▶ He comes across as part visionary Cassandra, part old-man-shaking-a-stick-at-the-clouds. I tell him he should write a sci-fi novel.

"Maybe, maybe," he says. "I loved the new Blade Runner. It was so emotional. I was crying."

Not that he needs to look far into the future for inspiration. Welsh has long been fascinated with toxic masculinity, from the casual psychopathy of Francis Begbie, to the cruel misogyny of Sickboy, to the brutal racism of Bruce Robertson. Welsh is currently working on a new novel about spree killings in the US, starting out with the real-life Las Vegas massacre and ending with a fictional shooting two years later. I wonder if he worries about glamourising the people involved, or if he fears a backlash.

"Yeah, there's a worry that they become poster boys for young guys. I try to show the consequences of that behaviour, on the character themselves and on the people around them. You can't pretend it doesn't exist."

As well as the new book, Welsh is working on a handful of TV shows, including one about modern dating. Both are a long way from his early novels, which drew heavily from his experiences around Edinburgh housing estates, a time when he was briefly addicted to heroin and often in trouble with the law. But then Welsh is a long way from the man he was 25 years ago. Since then, he's released 20 books, married twice (he's currently going through a second divorce), lived in Amsterdam, Barcelona, Chicago, San Francisco and Miami, turned his hand to screenwriting (earning more money, he says, for things that haven't been made than for things that have), and revived his interest in DJing, with a string of club nights in the pipeline. His biggest regret, he deadpans, is that he "wasn't a millionaire at 20 rather than 30".

It feels strange to ask a man in the twilight of his 50s whether he still takes loads of drugs, but I do it anyway. He does. He has *loads* of drug stories. There's the one about getting high on a boat with some San Francisco tech-bros, the one where he took crystal meth with a bunch of red-necks while he was researching a TV show ("I thought I was going to get murdered in a hill-billy toilet"), the one about his lawyer friend who micro-doses LSD all week ("I can see a future like Mad Men, but instead of pouring a whisky, it's a micro-dose of acid"). But his favourite drug right now, one that plays a central part in Dead Men's Trousers, is DMT.

Derived from tree bark and associated with shamanistic rituals, it's a hallucinogen that used to be known as the "businessman's trip" owing to its short, intense effects. The characters in Dead Men's Trousers all have revelations after huffing it, and their experience is very much based on Welsh's own. Like his characters, he describes taking three giant lungfuls of smoke...

"One minute you're sitting on a couch, the next little gnomes are escorting you around and you're flying up the side of a mountain. You leave and go to a different place entirely. You go back in time to before you were born or forward to after you've died, and you get the feeling like you knew all this stuff before but had forgotten it."

Did he have a religious experience?

"I was a confirmed atheist until I took it but now I kind of feel there may be something more..."

It's an upbeat note on which to end a lunch that had largely revolved largely around the collapse of Western civilisation. There's something appropriate, perhaps even inevitable, that Welsh's meandering path through life should culminate with drug-induced spirituality.

Outside, the snow is already churning to black slush. He pulls out a woolly hat, folds himself forward and sets out into the blizzard. Tomorrow he'll be back in the Miami sun, tinkering with the new novel, working on the TV show, waiting for the world to burn. ■

Dead Men's Trousers, published by Jonathan Cape, is out now priced £16.99

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WATCHES

Breitling may have dropped the wings from its logo, but that doesn't mean it's neglecting its aerial heritage Words: **ALEX DOAK**

The professional pilot's favourite watchmaker is undergoing a sky-to-ground shake-up right now, at the experienced hands of ex-IWC CEO, Georges Kern. For a start, he's shifting the venerable chronograph brand's main focus away from the air, controversially dropping the wings logo from all dials and ranking 'land' and 'sea' sectors equally. That's not to say Breitling's most iconic pilot collection, Navitimer, is being neglected. Named after and inspired by the marque's 'Huit' cockpit chronograph department, set up in 1938, this year's hero collection, Navitimer 8 boasts a smoothed-out and cleaned-up aesthetic, with a wicked touch of retro typography. The one to get is the B01 Chronograph, driven by Breitling's in-house automatic mechanics. *£5,900, breitling.com*

WHAT'S TICKING?

News from the bleeding edge of haute horologie

CIAO, PANERAI

The ribbon has been snipped and the doors are now open to Officine Panerai's slick new London boutique on Bond Street – the watchmaker's second largest in Europe after its flagship in Florence, where the brand was founded in 1860. Back then, before it counted the likes of IWC and Cartier as its siblings at Richemont Group, Giovanni Panerai's tiny 'orologeria' atelier-cum-boutique on Ponte alle Grazie supplied all manner of equipment for the Royal Italian Navy, its instruments illuminated by a radium-based luminescent material pioneered by Panerai in 1916 called 'Radiomir'. Come the Thirties, a collaboration with Rolex led to its first diving watches issued to military frogmen, all cased in a cushion-shaped steel housing. It's this famed design that gleams from every display case at 30 New Bond Street. We urge you to visit, if only for the history.

THE BANE OF BREMONT

British watchmaking doesn't come much cooler than Bremont – so cool, in fact, that the rock-hard military chronometer brand so beloved of fighter squadrons the world over now eschews the annual Baselworld trade fair in favour of its own, infinitely more civilised 'London Townhouse' affair. It's an affair that Bremont devotee and fellow cool Brit Tom Hardy couldn't resist. Bringing selfie opportunities, not to mention PR points galore, the Dark Knight Rises and Inception star popped by and lit up proceedings with his boyish-yet-grizzled charm, later Instagramming to his 1.5m followers an endorsement that doesn't get more ringing: "British engineering at its finest". On his wrist? Nothing less than Bremont's 'Wright Flyer' limited edition, containing a piece of the Wright Brothers' pioneering heavier-than-air flying machine.

SPEAKS PERFECT ENGLISH

After over 15 years of unhurried development, whispered about within only the most nerdy of watch-nerd circles, Charles Frodsham & Co of Bury Street in St James's is finally marketing its wristwatch, the Double Impulse Chronometer. Hand-crafted entirely in-house, within striking distance of the M25, it's an exquisite means of investing in England's last vestige of chronometry – a nationwide industry that rose and dwindled along with the naval infrastructure it served. Design-wise, it's based on a Frodsham pocket watch from the early 1900s, but it's the movement inside where the true interest lies, regulated by a dual-escape-wheel assembly that acts on a single, shared 'detent' lever, the upshot being that no lubrication is required. Though invented by Breguet in the 1800s, it was two 20th-century Brits, George Daniels and Derek Pratt who made the system viable – and now Frodsham has made it wearable. At long last. Expect to pay £60,000 in steel, £64,000 in 18k rose or white gold, £65,500 in hardened 22k yellow gold. Visit frodsham.com to find out more.

From top: The new Panerai boutique on Bond Street; Tom Hardy with Bremont co-founder Nick English; The long-anticipated Frodsham & Co Double Impulse Chronometer, from £60,000, frodsham.com; The acid yellow Valkyrie AMR Pro housing the new Aston-Tag collaboration, £TBC

TAG, ASTON'S IT

Officially announced at March's Geneva motor show, TAG Heuer is now on board as Aston Martin's new watch partner – an upshot of shared technological values, motorsport DNA (Heuer singlehandedly coined the tropes of the driver's watch back in the 60s) and a common F1 partner in the shape of Red Bull Racing. In fact, all eyes at Geneva's Palexpo convention centre were on the monster acid-yellow TAG-branded Valkyrie AMR Pro, a mid-engined V12 hybrid whose jaw-dropping Red Bull Racing-penned aerodynamics will create enough downforce for anyone brave enough to drive along the ceiling of a tunnel.

It makes a lot of sense to petrolhead watch fans, who will be immediately sated by the 'Aston Martin' Carrera Calibre Heuer 01 (£5,250) complete with front-grille mesh dial, plus the 'Aston Martin Racing' Formula 1 Chronograph (£1,250) in racy green accents – and this is just the start of an ongoing series with serious innovation in the pipeline. Much like Warwickshire's finest carmaker in fact, whose recent profit upswing and product diversification knows no bounds.

BASEL, NOT FAULTY

The knives were out for the watch world's biggest fixture this year, but nothing could detract from the scintillating creativity on show

Words: **ALEX DOAK**

The rickety tram ride from Basel's Old Town to Messeplatz, or 'Exhibition Square', is a curious tableau. Medieval quaintness and winding streets quickly yield to the mighty Rhine, with the chimneys of Big Pharma spiking its banks in the distance. Over the river, the urbanity picks up again, but with city-limits mundanity and red-light seediness. Then suddenly, one sharp corner later, you're plunged into it: Baselworld.

The biggest date in the watch and jewellery calendar has always been a spectacular affair, but thanks to a recent CHF430m investment, a gleaming new extension looms over the aforementioned platz, designed by starchitects Herzog & de Meuron, a parked-up Star Destroyer, whose jagged metallic cladding brings widescreen science fiction to Switzerland's meekest city.

And then you venture inside to be swept up in the throng of Euro glitterati, Middle Eastern royalty and lowly journalists. It's two Place Vendômes, a few Bond Streets, one Fifth Avenue and a Dubai Mall, all bolted

together beneath one roof for seven days of wheeling and dealing, to the tune of billions of dollars of wholesale luxury trade.

Rolex leads the charge, unsurprisingly – its 31x40m footprint containing a vast three-storey stand that takes 150 trucks to transport and a month to build. Meanwhile, that other bastion of the horological firmament, Patek Philippe, LVMH (Bulgari, TAG Heuer, Zenith and Hublot), and Chopard all serve as Baselworld's gateguards, they themselves guarded by frosty fembots and impassive security guards. The upshot? A jamboree of ticking bling that accounts for 80 per cent of Swiss watch exports.

By all rights, the pervading mood should have been more confident than ever this March, following a bumpy few years of gifting-culture clamp-down in China, not to mention the Swiss National Bank's abrupt uncapping of the franc against the euro in 2015. Even in 2009, at the height of the financial slump, the atmosphere at Baselworld was infectiously optimistic. Yet this year there was an unusually cautious atmosphere clinging to the velvet walls. Perhaps it was the unseasonably bleak weather, when Basel in March should be the harbinger ▶

▶ of a long-overdue springtime, or the continuing exodus of brands to January's rival Salon International de la Haute Horologerie in Geneva, with higher-profile exits rumoured to come, or simply the lack of sustenance beyond a lean-to veal-sausage stall next to the tram stop.

To be fair, the future viability of any vast global event like this, in our digital age of see-now-buy-now lightning connectivity and locally 'curated' retail initiatives, is being questioned across all manner of sectors. But bad juju aside, 2018 saw one of the best, and most consistent spreads of horological launches in years. It certainly helped that watchmakers seemed disinclined to compete for the dubious accolade of Most Over-Ambitious Product. Just look at Rolex and Patek Philippe, whose respective fortes – the GMT sports watch and annual calendar complication – each received respectful nurture in the form of the re-released red-and-blue 'Pepsi' cult classic, and a handsome new midnight-blue dial.

Surprisingly, however, it was the most classical of the two who couldn't resist rocking the boat a smidge more, with a new variant of Patek's own sports watch, the Aquanaut (where, we should clarify, 'sports' implies one's capacity as a debenture-holding spectator; or, if pushed, a volunteer for a relaxed set of mixed doubles). Picked out in fabulous orange, the reference 5968A is the first time a chronograph has featured in the collection, and about time too, given the stopwatch function's pure sporting pedigree. But for the most part, this was a welcome, sunny antidote to the gloom outside.

> Tudor scored massive points with its headliner, a second-time-zone 'GMT' evolution of its cult Black Bay, coloured in not-so-subtle allusion to the 'Pepsi' Rolex

WATCH EDITOR **ALEX DOAK**

Following so many years of safe, rose-tinted retro revivals (Omega's swoonsome new 70th-anniversary Seamaster reissues notwithstanding) it was equally heartening to step onto Nomos Glashütte's bright and breezy pavilion and discover yet another surprising and contemporary venture. The German purveyor of Bauhaus purism, where form and function remain in perpetual balance, are famous for toying with layouts, typography and colour – oh, the colours! – but everything has always been in strict service to the task at hand: telling the time. So what's the deal with the new Autobahn's luminescent semi-circular motif? Nothing much more than decoration, as well as allusion to nightime driving... But, boy, does it work. Especially in concert with a dial contoured like a flea-circus skatepark.

So much for outward optimism in glorious technicolour, but what of the stuff that justifies those astronomical pricetags; the hand-assembled mechanics that form the beating heart and soul of every luxury timepiece? Innovation will always come at a cost here, given the microscopic tolerances, drawn-out R&D and laborious hand craftsmanship, so you're invariably in for one of two things: variation on a theme, or no-holds-barred outré showmanship.

The former is usually the preference of the purist, and sure enough Rolex's increasingly

From left: Tudor Heritage Black Bay GMT, £2,790, tudorwatch.com; Patek Philippe Aquanaut Chronograph 5968A, £33,510, patek.com; Omega Seamaster 1948 Limited Edition, £4,550, omegawatches.com; **Below:** Chanel Boy.Friend Skeleton, £32,500, chanel.com; **Opposite:** The Patek stand at Baselworld 2018, where companies compete for the biggest, most opulent surrounds from which to show off their wares

self-sufficient sibling, Tudor scored massive points with its headliner – a second-time-zone 'GMT' evolution of its cult Black Bay, coloured in not-so-subtle allusion to the above-mentioned 'Pepsi' Rolex. Devastating looks aside however, the kicker is the brand-new, in-house 'integrated' movement. This means the mechanics required to adjust your 'home time' hand separately from the 'local time' are part and parcel of the whole engine, rather than bolted on top – not only a far more reliable, let alone prestigious state of affairs, but a bargainous one too at just £2,570.

You'll have to believe the spec sheet there though, as all that clever engineering is firmly sequestered behind a solid-steel caseback. If your audience down the local requires firmer, visual proof of your canny investment, then perhaps it's worth thinking about two other brands who had everyone talking with some proper highfalutin mechanical fireworks: Chanel and Bulgari.

One, a titan of Parisian fashion. The other, Rome's very own jewellery diva. Hardly the sorts to be taken seriously when it comes to cutting-edge haute horlogerie, right? Well, they are, actually – mostly thanks to some clever acquisitions from the Swiss Jura's Watch Valley, plus some collaborations with the area's finest tweezer-wielders. Cottage-industry skunkworks, if you like. The refreshing difference being that, with watchmaking nous established beyond reasonable doubt, extra kudos is guaranteed thanks to (sorry, Switzerland) both brands'

total mastery of chic, elegance and élan (things generally lost on mountain-dwelling watch sorts).

To whit, Chanel's unisex Calibre 3, framed within the voluptuous Boy.Friend case, is a deceptively pared-back movement, whose smooth, spokeless wheels had to be galvanically grown from the particulate metal to ensure they would have enough weight to function properly. This attention to detail has become Chanel's calling card in its burgeoning business of in-house mechanical alchemy. If the term 'haute couture' could apply to watchmaking, this would be it.

And then there's Bulgari. Not only is its Octo collection's defining, Tetris-worthy geometry of sculpted facets the finest example of contemporary watch design today, but it is showcasing an endless parade of record-breaking horological gymnastics. This year, without anyone asking, let alone expecting, the Octo Finissimo Tourbillon Automatic breaks three world records in one fell swoop: it's the world's thinnest self-winding watch, it's the world's thinnest self-winding tourbillon (the tourbillon being that tiny carrousel whirring away at 6 o'clock), and it's the world's thinnest tourbillon, period.

Not only all that, its constellation of wafer-thin mechanics looks phenomenal. Otherworldly, almost. Perfectly at home aboard the crashlanded Star Destroyer that is Baselworld, just over the Rhine, up the road from the red-light district. ■

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WOMEN'S HOUR

LAURA MCCREDDIE-DOAK

DON'T CUT CORNERS

Now is the time to be loud and proud about being a square, with a new wave of boxy, gender fluid watches

Given its position as one of the grande dames (or hommes depending on how you gender your brands) of the luxury watch world, you don't necessarily equate Cartier with being on trend. Desirable, yes. Classic, of course. But a trend leader, not so much. However, its revamp of its Santos collection unveiled at SIHH was the first inkling that square and rectangular, rather than round and oval, were going to be the case shapes of 2018.

Obviously the iconic case of the Santos is nothing new; it's a design invented at the turn of the century when pilot Alberto Santos Dumont mentioned to his friend Louis Cartier that he found it difficult to check his pocket watch while flying. Cartier responded by creating the first-ever pilot watch – the Santos-Dumont wristwatch. With its bevelled-edged square case it became an instant style icon, representative of the modernist period that was influencing design at the time.

Skip forward a mere 114 years and it is now available in a very female-friendly 35mm version and in various iterations, including a very fabulous all pink-gold option with Cartier's new SmartLink adjustment, which means you can change the strap size at home.

Hermès, meanwhile, has relaunched its Carré H, with the 2010 original given a make-over by designer and furniture maker Marc Berthier. With its deceptive simplicity, square case and minimalist aesthetic, it has a mid-century modern vibe that still feels relevant.

The trend continued at this year's Baselworld. Nomos put its Tetra back in the spotlight with a series of deliciously candy-coloured dials called the Petit Four series; the best of which being the Tetra Azure with its powder-blue dial and contrasting emerald hands. Meanwhile Rado went 1960s and rectangular with a reissue of its Manhattan, now called the Tradition 1965. Its boxy indices and brown colour palette, were inspired by Manhattan's 1960s skyline and it's the kind of thing you could imagine Mad Men's Peggy Olsen wearing to prove she's not like other women. It's a bold slice of retro style that's perfect for today's gender-fluid times.

However, if you want the watch that most encompasses gender fluidity and the trend for angular cases, then it has to be Chanel's Boy.Friend Skeleton that houses the Maison's newest in-house movement. By exposing the mechanics, the Place Vendôme-inspired case takes on a more masculine aesthetic, while the flashes of gold and the option of diamonds draws it back to the feminine.

It is a perfect distillation of the appeal of this new breed of angular cases – a flirtation between male and female design codes that feels both bravely modern but also eminently classic.

ICE COLD

From huskies to supercars, the wilderness of Finland is transformed into a billionaires' playground by McLaren. Words: **ADAM HAY-NICHOLLS**

I've been promised 567 horsepower, but first I get to experience the propulsion of seven huskies. I'm scrambling through the forests of northern Finland, hanging onto a rickety two-man sled, zipped up against the Arctic cold. I eventually arrive at McLaren's kota, a traditional wooden hut 2,000 miles as the crow flies but more realistically a million miles from the automotive group's space-age Technology Centre in Woking. Inside, around an open fire, a lunch of wild salmon is grilled, and I wrap myself in reindeer skins for warmth while the supercar is prepped in the snow-capped hanger.

These are not the standard optics for a drivers' briefing, but then this is no ordinary drive. McLaren's Arctic Experience is designed for its most committed customers and those hungry to improve their four-wheel helmsmanship skills in an environment of adventure and exclusivity. Over four days, with two spent at a sprawling ice driving facility, McLaren will treat you and a guest to gourmet food and wine, sumptuous lodgings fit for a president (literally), and loan you a professional racing coach in addition to a 204mph McLaren 570S, in order to get the best out of yourself as well as this state-of-the-art kit. The price: £15,000, all in. That's not a sum to be sniffed at, but everything about this trip is unforgettable and should qualify for even the most spoilt billionaire's bucket list.

I'm 200 miles deep into the Arctic Circle. As well as spruce, larch and fir trees, barbed wire fences and high security surround the Test World proving ground, 500 hectares of frozen lakes and alpine flats that entice many of the world's premium car and tyre manufacturers to take their products and prototypes to the edge by sliding around specially constructed snow and ice tracks.

McLaren has 14 separate courses at its disposal, all individually designed to discover the power and agility of

> You learn to be telepathic with your reactions and saw at the steering when you have to. It becomes like a furious dance; a 600 newton metre ballet of torque and bluster.

its machinery. Over the two days, I spent around 20-30 minutes driving around every one of them. My instructor is 30-year-old Brit and champion racer James Littlejohn. For each track, he gives me a demo and then hands over the reins. Ducking under the dihedral door and clipping in, every outing comes with a wave of adrenaline that's as addictive as the motoring itself. I've done a fair amount of ice driving before, including in Ferraris and Porsches, but this is the first time I've taken out a mid-engined RWD supercar with Nordic spikes. The result is tricky but all the more rewarding.

Such is the sublime balance of the 1,440kg 570S Coupe and 1,486kg Spider, as well as the tractability of its twin-turbo V8 and crisp gearbox, one quickly builds confidence as you learn to turn with the throttle and power through switchback corners in effortless pendular drifts. You know you're getting it when you barely have to turn the wheel, although you learn to be telepathic with your reactions and saw at the steering when you have to. It becomes like a furious dance; a 600 newton metre ballet of torque and bluster.

You learn to see through corners far ahead and use the car's weight transfer to rotate it towards each apex, patiently waiting for the nose of the car to bite without leaning too hard on the loud pedal. For corners where a more aggressive turn-in is required, I'm taught to execute a 'Scandinavian flick', where you jolt the steering one way in order to loosen the rear, then quickly rotate the other way so as to neatly and tightly negotiate a hairpin.

We begin on the smaller circuits; some ovals and circles, others resembling a dog's bone, before moving on to the handling and 'dynamic' circuits, which are longer and more physical. The low-lying sun is about to bid adieu but fortunately, unlike most other ice driving programmes, I have a second day in the hot seat and a night to consider all that I've learnt. For hours afterwards, rather like the swaying feeling you get after disembarking a ship, I sense the floor shuffling under me, this way and that.

Accommodation is the Jávri Lodge in nearby Saariselkä. I'd flown into Ivalo, via Helsinki, and made the half-hour drive south in a fleet of blacked-out Mercedes MPVs. The presidential-style motorcade seems apt, given Jávri Lodge was once the holiday home of Urho Kekkonen, Finland's longest serving premier. Once a place of reflection and negotiation during the most politically turbulent times between East and West (Finland borders Russia and Kekkonen was president throughout the majority of the Cold War), it's now a 13-bedroom boutique hotel designed to restore skied out and overdriven limbs. It feels like a private ▶

THE DREAM COLLECTION

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home, all the more so given McLaren rents its guests the whole thing (individual room rates usually run to £2,610 for three nights).

Though built 50 years ago, the cabin's interior is at once boldly contemporary and at one with its surroundings. In the living room is a grand piano, a roaring fire, and a well-stocked bar to which you're welcome to help yourself. There are also two saunas and, depending on how adventurous you are, there's an indoor pool or soft snow outside to cool off afterwards.

The food is spectacular; between four and six courses of stunningly creative farm-to-table cooking each night, and for the third a trip to Laanilan Kievari; a traditional-style restaurant run by a mother and son team, who laid on one of the finest food and wine pairings I've ever enjoyed. Highlights included reindeer carpaccio with a sparkling rosé, roasted king crab with lemon butter and a glass of Riesling, and peppery elk tenderloin with pinot noir.

Another major draw to the area are the Northern Lights, which can be seen on a clear night; gaseous particles in the Earth's atmosphere colliding with charged particles released from the sun create ghostly green, yellow, red and purple flares in the sky. It's Mother Nature's answer to Pink Floyd's concert lightshows.

In such cinematic surroundings, I started to think about automotive brands in the context of modern film directors. Ridley Scott would make Ferrari. Michael Bay would be responsible for Lamborghini. McLaren would be a Christopher Nolan movie; narratively complex, technically innovative, brooding and atmospheric, reliant on technical skill rather than CGI. This is exactly what I want from a supercar. It suits the icy location, but there's fire in the way it goes about its business.

MOTORING EDITOR
ADAM HAY-NICHOLLS

> If automotive brands were film directors, Ridley Scott would be Ferrari, Michael Bay would be Lamborghini, and McLaren would be pure Christopher Nolan

For more information on McLaren Automotive's track driving programmes and to register for the 2019 Arctic Experience, visit cars.mclaren.com

I return to our kota the following morning ready to push things forward in the driving stakes. After a few more sessions on the handling circuits, Littlejohn and I head to the 'GP Stage', a giant 2.5 mile race track cut into the forest. With a particularly long straight, the speeds one is capable of here are potentially perilous. I'd already managed to dislodge two front bumpers against the ice walls of the smaller courses (the front end of a 570S quickly becomes a snowplough if you take a corner too tightly), and I had one high-speed spin that resulted in me needing to be towed out of a snowbank. But this is normal, and the instructors and mechanics were very patient every time I required new bodywork.

So, to the GP Stage. By this time, visibility was poor. The dimming light made it difficult to differentiate the track from the snowbanks. Every so often, I would rubberneck at another McLaren beached with its wheels in the air. But on I pressed, Littlejohn giving me instructions like a rally co-pilot – "left hairpin brake, fast right more throttle, give it a 'Scandi-flick' here, watch the trees" – and the McLaren and I emerged from our 20 lap marathon unscathed, me with a tremendous sense of achievement. Sideways at 60mph through the snow had become as relaxing as a pootle to the shops.

Monty Python wrote a song about Finland. Michael Palin, himself no stranger to adventure, sang of the country's lofty mountains, tall trees and pleasurable pursuits; pony trekking, camping, or "just watching TV". Finland, he concluded "has it all". For petrolheads and anyone who fancies driving a McLaren, it most certainly does. ■


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TRAVEL

HOTEL FOCUS: BISHA, TORONTO

Nicknamed the 'King of Clubs', Charles Khabouth is CEO of Toronto's Ink Entertainment empire, which spans more than a dozen local restaurants – including Batch, Byblos, Macho and Patria – night clubs, pool bars, and even music festivals. He also has enterprises in Miami, Montreal and Niagara Falls. Now the hedonistic entrepreneur has expanded his reach with a glitzy new hotel, the Bisha.

Located in the Entertainment District, in the shadow of the CN Tower, the 44-storey building has 355 private residences and 96 hotel rooms, the latter of which are decorated with Andy Warhol prints that line the corridors. "We want Bisha to redefine the next generation of luxury and lifestyle boutique hotel brands and have future international locations already in the works," he says confidently.

A floor designed by Lenny Kravitz was unveiled earlier this year, with 13 rooms including the duplex Bisha suite. It's the first time the pop singer-slash-interior designer has been involved in a project of this size, and the result is a distinctly rock 'n' roll dark minimalism. It's reminiscent of certain W hotels around the world, but a little less gimmicky (there are no mirror balls, for a start).

The rest of the hotel design was handed over to Studio Munge, which continued sultry décor, from the black and white lobby (where a magenta balloon animal by Jeff Koons sits in a glass case), to the Mr C bar (decorated with framed Alexander McQueen/Damien Hirst scarves). In the rooms, guests will find cocktail trolleys, lacquered custom armoires and gallery prints curated by Grace Zeppilli.

While it's not exactly a party hotel (it's well suited to business travellers), guests will likely see the odd recognisable face slipping into a Hummer outside, and music pumps into the ears of the great and good at weekends. Drinking and dining is all operated by Khabouth's Iconink F&B brand, and ranges from Akira Back, a Japanese-Peruvian restaurant accessed by a golden staircase, to modern beach house-style Kost on the top floor.

Visit Bisha Hotel and Residences at bisha.com; For more information, go to Tourism Toronto seetorontonow.com

THE CUBAN CONNECTION

Miami's Cuban culture is well known, but Tampa, on Florida's Gulf Coast, has a Cuban community that predates Miami's by a century. **ASHWIN BHARDWAJ** visits both in search of Florida's Latin history.

"Miami is the capital of Latin America," says Ricardo, the hotel concierge who moved here from Cuba in 1997. This is confusing because, the last time I checked, Miami was in the United States.

"By geography, yes," says Ricardo, "But 70 per cent of Miami's population speaks Spanish, and it's the city that all Latinos look to for inspiration. So a lot of companies have their Latin American headquarters here, making it the financial capital, too."

Miami's Latin importance was largely accidental. In 1959, following Fidel Castro's Communist revolution, Cuban businesses owners and industrialists fled to America. Almost all settled in Miami, creating a new community rich in entrepreneurs and ambition. Most expected to only stay for a few years, but when Castro's regime proved durable, the exiles put down roots in an area that became known as Little Havana.

In the 1960s, counter-revolutionary thinking was the neighbourhood's lifeblood. Its cafes and bars became meeting places for those planning Castro's downfall, and those who just wanted to reminisce about home. Today, the main street, Calle Ocho, oozes Cuban culture from every doorway, with cigar shops and art galleries adding to the Caribbean mix.

Miami Culinary Tours run guided walks of Little Havana, taking in the food hotspots. At El Pub, one of the oldest restaurants on Calle Ocho, a beef, onion and olive-filled pastry called picadillo empanadas, are the house speciality. You can sit at the bar amongst builders on their lunch break, or order from the hole-in-the-wall service windows known as "ventanitas."

Coffee has always been a part of Cuban culture, served sweet and milky. For those looking for something a little stronger, the Ball And Chain serves excellent daiquiris. It also has a great pedigree in live music, with Count Basie and Billie Holiday having played here in the 1950s. Even in the early afternoon of my visit, a band was playing Cuban fusion with saxophones, trumpets and drums, and there is salsa most nights. Over the road, at Maximo Gomez Park, more sedate entertainment is on display. Locals come here to play pick-up games of dominoes, although you have to be at least 60 years old to get a seat at the table. Many of those playing were part of the first wave of Cuban immigrants.

For their children and grandchildren, Miami is their home, creating a distinct culture, rooted in the music, food and language of Cuba, but with the brashness and opportunity – or at least the illusion thereof – of the US.

Half a century on, many successful Cubans have left Little Havana for areas like Coral Gables. Miami's ▶

This page: Colourful rooster statues populate the streets of Little Havana; **Opposite:** A familiar mural hints at Miami's cultural roots

Clockwise from top: An entire roast pig is the centrepiece of one stall at the Calle Ocho festival in Miami; dancers in Little Havana; and lunch is served at La Carreta restaurant

- For more information on **Florida** go to *visitflorida.com*
- You can **hire a car** from Miami airport and drop it off at Tampa airport. Seven days from £156. Visit *hertz.co.uk*
- **La Segunda Bakery**, 2512 N 15th St, Tampa, Florida. *lasegundabakery.com*
- **Son Cubano**, 2530 Ponce De Leon Boulevard. Coral Gables, Florida. *soncubanomiami.com*
- For **Miami Culinary Tours** call +1 (786)-942-8856. or visit *miamiculinarytours.com*
- **The Florida Oceanographic Coastal Centre**, 890 N.E. Ocean Boulevard, Stuart, Florida. *floridaocean.org*
- **Ohana Surf Shop**, 652 NE Ocean Blvd, Stuart, Florida. *ohanasurfshop.com*

▶ wealthiest neighbourhood is home to politicians like Marco Rubio and new forms of Cuban integration, such as Son Cubano. This restaurant combines Asian flavours such as wasabi and Thai basil with Cuban ingredients including fried tortillas and stewed pork to create tasty fusion dishes.

But while Miami is the heartland of modern Cuban America, it wasn't the first Cuban outpost in Florida. To find that I headed north, aiming for the city of Tampa.

I drove the scenic route along the Atlantic Coast, and stopped at Jensen Beach, Martin County, for an insight into old-school Florida. I was expecting retirement villages and golf carts. Instead, I found start-up businesses and young families who had moved there for good weather, pristine beaches and North America's most ecologically diverse estuary, the Indian River Lagoon.

From Jensen Beach I took the I60 across Florida to the Gulf Coast. Until 1885, Tampa was just a minor town at the edge of swamplands. But once it became the southern terminus of the national railroad system, a group of cigar manufacturers, led by Don Vicente Martinez-Ybor, bought land next to the port, drained the swamps and founded Ybor City.

By 1890, Ybor was booming. Tobacco came in by boat, was rolled into cigars by hand, and then sent across the US by rail. Cuban cigar-rollers poured into the city, drawn by good wages and the chance to buy houses subsidised by the cigar companies. The Cubans were followed by Germans, Italians and Jews, who set up farms and shops to serve the growing community, and Ybor was eventually absorbed as a neighbourhood of Tampa.

Don Vicente set up banks, a port authority, and a real estate company, and by 1920 Ybor was producing half a billion cigars a year. Its main street, 7th Avenue, is still lined with old social clubs, such as the Cuban Club or Italian Society, in magnificent brick buildings with iron-wrought balconies that wouldn't look out of place in New Orleans.

> Ybor was booming. Tobacco came in by boat, was rolled into cigars by hand, and then sent across the United States by rail.

Like Miami, it became a hotbed of political activism. In 1893, Jose Marti, the Cuban nationalist, came here to raise money for Cuba's War of Independence from Spain. Ybor became such a symbol of support that it was chosen as the departure port of Theodore Roosevelt's Rough Riders, an American Cavalry unit who fought alongside the Cubans.

An enduring legacy of this era is La Segunda Bakery. Copeland More is the fourth generation of his family to run the bakery, which was founded by his great grandfather, Juan More, in 1915. Juan learned to make bread in Cuba following the War of Independence and moved to Ybor City to feed the thriving Cuban community. La Segunda now produces 15,000 loaves a day, sending its Cuban bread as far afield as Alaska.

"It's the process that makes Cuban bread different," explains Copeland, "The dough is left to ferment for eight to 10 hours in three stages, and we place a palmetto leaf on top. That helps to keep it moist during baking, and the bread rises around it, creating a split along the top."

The bakery shop is full of sweet treats, snacks and sandwiches. By lunchtime there is a queue of customers out of the door, and most of them are here for one thing: the Cuban sandwich.

"Every Cuban community will tell you their Cuban sandwich is the best," explains Copeland. "But, of course, ours is! They were invented for factory workers who didn't want a heavy lunch, and it's the culinary embodiment of the community here: Swiss cheese, German mustard and pickles, Italian salami, Spanish ham and Cuban pork, all wrapped up in Cuban bread."

The cigar industry declined during the Great Depression, and Ybor declined with it. Veterans returning from World War II used their military bonuses to move to other parts of Tampa, and the empty wooden houses from Don Vicente's time were cleared without being rebuilt.

In the 1980s, artists set up studios in the abandoned factories, and the brick buildings that once housed mutual aid societies became bars and nightclubs. It kick-started a renaissance that now sees tech companies moving into the neighbourhood, and new housing developments going up.

Cubans are part of Tampa's original fabric. Ybor might have boutique cafes, upscale bars and art galleries, but they are built on a Cuban heritage that's very different to Miami's. A journey between the two cities proves that Cuban America is more than just a monoculture, and that Florida's modern success is built on Cuban innovation. ■

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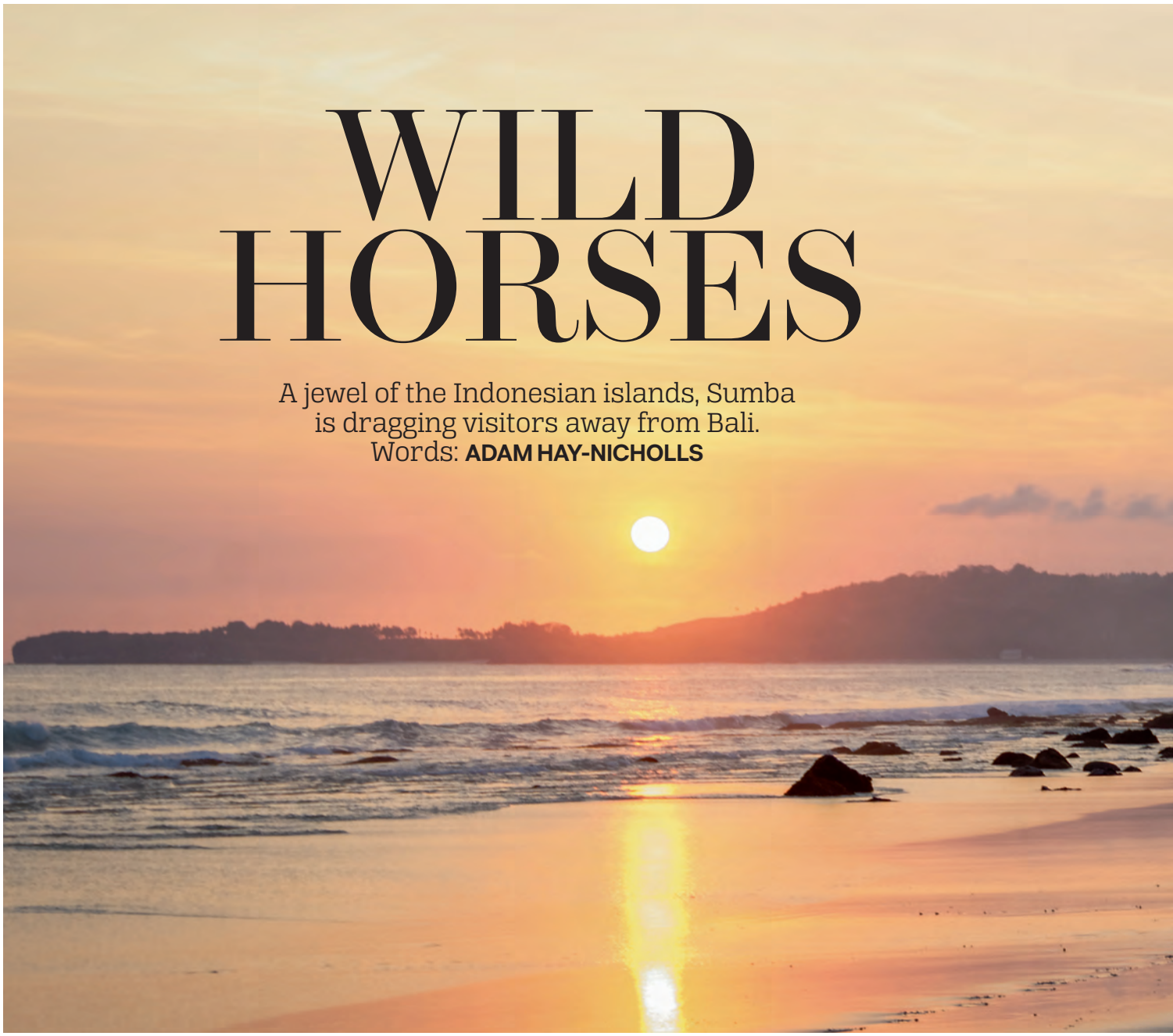


WILD HORSES

A jewel of the Indonesian islands, Sumba is dragging visitors away from Bali.
Words: **ADAM HAY-NICHOLLS**

My wild Indonesian beach horse had a split personality. We headed to the tip of the three-mile-long Nihiwatu beach, me giving the animal polite but firm kicks to the ribs, yet it refused to so much as trot or go near the water. Then – and I knew this was going to happen – once we turned around and it saw home it transformed, in two-wheeled terms, from being a Boris bike to a Ducati 1299 Superleggera. It went faster than anything I've seen Frankie Dettori ride. It rode through the surge of the Indian Ocean, which was fun for the first mile. But as I pulled on the reins and the nag refused to heel, the cartilage in my back went on strike and it felt like nails were being hammered into my spine.

So, there I am, flat-out aboard one tonne of pot roast, and I see a couple on a romantic sunset stroll. Rather than scream for help I decided to grit my teeth and try to look cavalier as I galloped past, leaning backwards ever further, knowing that at the end of the beach was a huge infinity pool and no way around it. Finally, as the frontier of sunbathers appeared, it slammed on its anchors, pulled a 90-degree left into its stable and, shaking and sweating, I prised myself off its saddle and gingerly slipped off.

That might be enough to put one off Nihi Sumba Island (previously known as Nihiwatu), which has been ranked as the best hotel in the world two years in a row, but I consider it a testament to its motto 'The Edge of Wildness'. This is a place of such adventure that few £1,000-a-night resorts can attest. And before I get stuck into telling you about sustainable luxury and eco charm, let me just say that this is a hotel that lives up to its billing; if you're well-heeled and independently-minded, with a subscription to National Geographic and the director's cut of Point Break, you will love the place.

One of 17,000 islands in the Indonesian archipelago, and an hour's flight from Bali, Sumba is the same size as Jamaica yet there's only one proper hotel; this one.

Getting here from the UK is a mission, but that's what weeds out the uncommitted. I fly 14 hours via Singapore and then on to Bali, where I check into The Legian hotel. This has been my Indonesian outpost in the past, thanks to spending much of my twenties terrorising Paris with their executive chef, Australian Luke McLeod, who learned his way around a kitchen from Alain Senderens and Pierre Gagnaire. The Legian offers

acclimatisation, a massage for jetlagged limbs, sea bass ceviche and seared red snapper for the gullet, and a very deep sleep.

The following morning it's off to Sumba Island, which is the antithesis of bright-lights-Bali. The passage is eased by Nihi having a team at Denpasar airport to sort luggage, queue-free check-in and a VIP lounge before boarding the hour-long Garuda flight to Sumba. There, I'm loaded into a canvas-topped Land Rover and begin the hour and a half drive south to Nihiwatu beach. I notice that all the men have machetes tied to their hip.

Within minutes of steering away from arrivals I'm slightly disconcerted by the stream of blood we drive through. Sumba is tribal, and I make a note to look up when they stopped eating visitors here (headhunting, I learn, fizzled out in the 1960s), but in this instance my anxiety is unwarranted. I'm witnessing a Marapu religious ceremony, where a crowd is sacrificing two large buffalo right in the middle of a main road.

As we descend the hill into Nihi Sumba the most idyllic vista opens; traditional Sumbanese thatched rooftops poking out of the dense vegetation of banana, coconut and papaya trees. The hotel is largely camouflaged. Rice paddies and jungle make up most of the 560-acre property, of which just 65 acres is developed, and spills onto a long, champagne-coloured beach. Beyond the sand is an isolated cluster of three large rocks with plenty of ancient folklore. These are the "Nihiwatu" – mortar stones – and they're battered by one of the planet's best surf breaks.

Only ten surfers each day are allowed to take on "Nihiwatu Left", aka "Occy's Left". Such is its prestige, it attracts world champions as well as budding Keanus like me. Nihi is also a mecca for yoga practitioners, with an expert instructor always in residence. A covered yoga platform sits on the hill above the property giving unobstructed views across the Indian Ocean and the unblemished south west tip of the island. Classes are held at sunrise and sunset and are included in the room rate.

Claude and Petra Graves discovered this spot in 1988 and settled here, camping out on the beach, drinking water from a creek and spearfishing for food. He'd grown up in New Jersey but had spent most of his working life in East Africa. Having established Kenya's hottest nightclub, the Graves sold up and shipped out in search of the world's greatest wave. Motivated by a desire not only to surf and be at one with nature, but to help protect Sumba's unique cultures and empower the communities, Claude now dedicates his time to the Sumba ►

Audley Travel offers tailor-made trips to Indonesia. An eight night Hidden Beaches trip costs from £5,442 per person (based on two sharing) and includes one night at **The Legian, Bali** on a bed and breakfast basis and seven nights at **Nihi Sumba Island** on a full board basis. Price also includes international and domestic flights as well as transfers. For more information or to book visit *audleytravel.com/indonesia* or call *01993 838250*

▶ Foundation. Funded by profits from the hotel and individual benefactors, the charity provides malaria clinics, wells and schools. Its work is something Nihi encourages every guest to see. And I know one always reads how friendly the locals are, but the kids here are utterly joyful.

The Graves still live in "the big house" but are less involved in the running of the hotel since selling five years ago to American fashion and real estate billionaire Chris Burch and South African hotelier James McBride, formerly of Park Lane's Grosvenor House and New York's Carlyle. They've ramped up the luxury quota while preserving the rugged charm, turning it into a resort not only for salty-haired surfers but those who view sustainability and philanthropy as an integral part of wellness. This is luxury with a conscience, and the management want to attract the kind of travellers who might engage with local issues.

Above: A Sumbanese tribe perform a traditional dance
This image: The super-luxe Nihi Sumba resort, one of the world's top hotels

A lot of guests come not for a week but *month*-long retreats. The least expensive room in low-season is £600-a-night, while a five bedroom 'estate' in high-season bills at the daily rate of £12,000. Guests, therefore, are mostly millionaires-and-then-some, yet this is one of the least flashy places I've stayed in a long time. No Melissa Odabash resort wear or Chopard sunnies here; the guests are wide-ranging in age and nationality but united in boho style, anthropological curiosity and environmental sensitivity.

The boat house, surf shack and beach bar are convivial and shabby-chic, where guests and staff all mingle at sundown to boast of the day's adventures. The main restaurant sits in sand and gazes across to the moonlit rocks. Each night baby turtles are released onto the beach, before everyone heads back to their cocktails or, in my case, a plentiful seafood platter topped with a lobster and a glass regularly refreshed by the Nihi's Burgundian sommelier.

While the management is western, the hotel is 90 per cent staffed by Sumbanese. The 33 suites are all individual in style but many ape the pointed alang-alang roofs of traditional Sumba houses, where grain is stored in the attic. Underneath, you'll find discrete luxury with tropical bathrooms round the back and private pools snaking around the terrace. The mini-bar is complimentary and includes homemade gin, vodka and whiskey. There is also a chocolate factory on site so you can make your own confections. Think Robinson Crusoe meets Willy Wonka.

A highlight of Nihi Sumba Island is the Spa Safari, where you go on a 90-minute trek across the lush jungle, paddies and waterfalls, passing through hamlets with bale houses, their high peaks designed to connect with the spirits, and megalithic Marapu stone tombs where generations of villagers are buried. Once you've worked up a sweat you arrive at the most incredible natural setting for a spa you can possibly conceive.

The treatment rooms are open-fronted stilted huts built upon a cliff overlooking the sand and rock strewn peninsula. The colours below are every shade of blue. A short distance away is a pool and dining area. Having all this separate from the main property makes you feel even more at one with nature, and an angled mirror on the floor means you still see the waves while you're face down.

In many ways, Sumba Island is a forgotten world but Nihi is a resort that's impossible to forget. ■

FREQUENT FLYER

SCARLET WINTERBERG

CLASS WAR

Savvy flyers should know when to insist on business class and when premium economy will suffice

In March, Australian airline Qantas launched a new ultra-long-haul flight between London and Perth covering almost 15,000km and with a journey time of 17 hours. If there was ever a time to fly business class, this is it; the thought of being trapped in an economy class seat for that long is close to my idea of hell. But with business tickets typically costing around £4,500, the price will be prohibitive to most leisure travellers.

Those on expense accounts shouldn't have a problem justifying it, however, especially if you need to be on something approaching top form when you finally land, or don't want to waste an entire working day when you could be typing away on your laptop in business. Generally speaking, companies are more amenable to upgrades on longer flights, and they don't get longer than this. It's worth checking your company's policy on when you're allowed to fly at the front of the plane – this could be based on journeys of more than four, five, six or seven hours, for example, or how senior the person is.

There are fewer benefits to flying business short-haul. The seats are generally the same as in economy, with a only few inches more legroom, a middle seat that's kept free and some wine and food. Sure, you get lounge access at the airport, fast-track boarding and priority luggage, but most business travellers on European hops turn up at the last minute and travel with hand-baggage only. With British Airways from London to Zurich, you could be talking about £300 in economy versus £600 in business (or just £100 with Easyjet). That's a much harder sell to your HR department.

Where does first class come into all this? These days, long-haul business class tends to be so good there's little point upgrading further unless you have air miles to burn. At the lower strata, premium economy doesn't come close to the comfort you get in business class – but it generally costs far less, so could be a good compromise. In the case of Virgin Atlantic, which is regularly voted as having the best premium economy product, you get a dedicated check-in area, priority boarding, a welcome drink, sizeable armchair seats and a better meal than in economy.

In business (upper class on Virgin), however, you get a chauffeur drive service from your home, access to the Clubhouse lounge with an a la carte restaurant and spa, your own private onboard booth with a flat bed made up with sheets and pillows, free champagne, multi-course dining and a bar. Better still, Qatar Airways's QSuite now gives the option of double beds in business, as well as pods for four-way communal dining and socialising. Singapore Airlines has a "Book the Cook" service where you can order gourmet meals such as lobster thermidor and Cantonese roast duck, to enjoy alongside wine chosen by a panel of expert sommeliers.

All of which is super, but it still pays to do your homework. Not all planes carry the most up-to-date seating, which can be a disappointment and some airlines still have outdated angled lie-flat beds, poor food and entertainment systems. Beware of "codeshare" routes too – you might be booking through Qantas, for example, but you will find the plane is actually one from Emirates' fleet.

The rule I live by is that if you're flying during the day, you can get away with premium economy but night flights should always be business, assuming the funds are available. And never, ever bank on getting a "free upgrade", which happens so infrequently, you'd be as well buying a fist-full of lottery tickets the week before you fly. Instead, use air miles to pay for upgrades, or bid for them in eBay-style auctions (Air New Zealand, Cathay Pacific, Etihad, Swiss and Virgin Atlantic are just a handful of airlines that offer this service). Another good bet is to keep an eye out for business class seat sales. Or just take a couple of Xanax.

WHERE IS MY MIND?

How an ancient psychedelic ritual in the Oaxaca region of Mexico turned into the trip from hell

Words: **ALEX DYMOKE**

It's a beautiful day in San Jose Del Pacifico, a small village high in the mountains south of Oaxaca City, southern Mexico, where I'm sitting in front of the world's most frightening cup of tea. Opposite me is Paolo, a 19-year-old "mushroom guide" in whom I have placed an inordinate amount of trust.

Are you having any? I ask.

"No," he says, and smiles. "It's all for you."

I lift murky liquid to my lips and sip. It's sweet, earthy, not unpleasant. This isn't so bad, I think, and slosh the brew down. Shortly after, the nightmare begins.

• • •

San Jose del Pacifico marks the half-way point on the stunning 200-mile mountain road leading from Oaxaca City to Mexico's Pacific south coast. A steady trickle of tourists keeps a handful of hostels and restaurants in business throughout the year. Some of these raggedy travellers come for the spectacular scenery. Others seek reprieve from the scorching heat of the coast. The majority, however, have one thing on their mind: mushrooms.

The mountains of southern Mexico occupy a special place in the history of psychedelic exploration. It was here that, in 1955, R Gordon Wasson, a vice-president of JP Morgan and amateur ethnomycologist, consumed psilocybin mushrooms in a ceremony presided over by the healer Maria Sabina. The article Wasson subsequently wrote up for Life magazine – "Seeking the Magic Mushroom" – transformed Sabina into a reluctant icon and caught the attention of scientists including Harvard psychologist Timothy Leary. After making his own pilgrimage to the region, Leary said: "I learned more about psychology in the five hours after taking these mushrooms than in the preceding 15 years of studying and doing research in psychology."

Though magic mushrooms are illegal in modern Mexico, police tend to turn a blind eye in recognition of their centrality to the customs and traditions of the Zapotecs, the area's dominant ethnic group. When it comes to eating mushrooms, Zapotecs start young. Jucinda, owner of the village's longest running hostel, recalls feeding them to her children. "My first child first had mushrooms when he was five. My second when he was six. It made them happy, very happy. They sang and danced and laughed a lot. For us, it is not a drug, it is medicine," she says. "It's a cleansing of the body. If you have any sickness, physical or psychological, the mushroom give you the information that will allow you to heal."

• • •

After drinking three quarters of my mushroom tea, I start giggling uncontrollably. Paolo says, "It's acting quickly on you," and goes to fetch some water for our hike. His plan is to guide me on a walk to a special spot on the mountain where we will watch the sunset. Despite being of Mexican descent, Paolo grew up in San Antonio, Texas, and only moved to Oaxaca aged 18 at the behest of his "nomad" mother, with whom he now lives at the hostel. "When the mountains call, you have to answer," she tells me. Together they offer mushroom tours to tourists passing through the hostel.

While he's gone I stagger onto the balcony and test my vision on the horizon. On the other side of the valley, pastel-coloured houses are lurid in the afternoon sun. When Paolo returns, he looks in my mug and notices dregs at the bottom. "You haven't finished it," he says. I say I'm already feeling pretty weird, but okay. I down the last bit, mushroom slush and all.

As we leave the restaurant, I start to feel on edge. I ask Paolo where we're going. "Into nature," he says.

"But what kind of nature?" The idea of going into ▶

▶ the forest with Paolo was suddenly deeply unappealing. I craved expansiveness, a view, somewhere I could escape. "What do you mean, 'what kind of nature?' Nature is nature!" he says. "Relax."

Paolo keeps to the road for 100 yards, then takes a sharp left turn into the forest, and I follow. It's around now that the visuals really kick in. I scramble over branches as the trees above me flash purple, green, red, blue, orange. The soil, which is red and moist like unset clay, oozes revoltingly. Fallen pine needles on the forest floor look like cobwebs or nets. "There are cobwebs everywhere," I say. "Everything looks hairy. There's hair everywhere."

"I know," Paolo says. "Isn't it amazing?"

I start to panic. Once again I ask Paolo where we're going. "To a clearing, where we'll do some chanting," he says. There is absolutely no way I am doing anything of the sort. "I'm not enjoying this," I say, "I need to go back to the cabana."

"Ok, that's fine, whatever you want," he says, looking concerned, which makes me feel worse.

• • •

Between 1953 and 1973, the US government funded 116 studies into the effects of psychedelics. The mid-20th century was a time of revolutionary thinking about the mind. A few decades earlier, Sigmund Freud's theory of the unconscious had popularised the idea that psychological health depends on the harmonious co-existence of our outward selves and the complex knot of desires and repressions beneath. Many psychologists speculated that psychedelics, by acting as a bridge between our conscious selves and some other state, could help those suffering from difficult to treat conditions like alcoholism.

> My psychedelic guide's mother holds my hands and stares into my eyes: 'You need to listen to the mushroom, it is trying to tell you something'

From 1961-1963, Harvard's Dr Timothy Leary tested psilocybin on a group of inmates from a maximum security young offenders prison in Massachusetts. During the study, known later as the Concord prison experiment, prisoners reported having "transcendent" or "mystical" feelings, akin to religious experiences. For prisoners treated with the drug, only 24 per cent reoffended within six months, compared to the ordinary rate of 64 per cent. Though questions have since been raised about the study's methodology, it is one of many from around this time that posted encouraging results. In the 1960s, over 1,000 scientific journals recorded ways in which psychedelic drugs could aid psychotherapy.

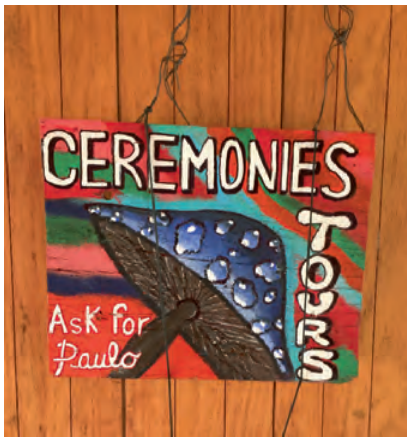
Research, however, soon ground to a halt. By the late sixties the medical potential of psychedelics was overshadowed by their association with a hippy counter-culture viewed with increasing suspicion by middle America. In 1970, President Nixon introduced the Controlled Substances Act, which banned the use of psychedelics for any purpose. For almost three decades, there wasn't a single peer-reviewed study into the medical use of psychedelics.

• • •

We scramble back to the road towards the cabana. On the way a phrase enters my mind: "Bad trip". I'm having a bad trip. Bad trip. The concept amplifies my panic. Then the sensory distortion spreads to my hearing. Paolo tries to reassure me, but his voice sounds all sped up, like a tape on fast forward.

When I get back to my room I can't work out how to get inside. My key is in my pocket, and I know something involving the key has to take place in order for me to gain entry, but somehow the concept of opening a door with a key eludes me. I start to feel paranoid that my mind is gone forever.

Paolo's mum appears. "I hear you are having a bad time," she says. She holds my hands and stares into my eyes. "You need to listen to the mushroom, it is trying to tell you something." Right. Every left-field thing she and Paolo says only heightens my sense of having entrusted my sanity to two deeply



Opposite: Clouds rolling over the hills at sunset in San Jose del Pacifico, a small village high in the mountains south of Oaxaca City; **From left:** The Mexican mother, who has been feeding her children magic mushrooms since they were five and six; The sign that led Alex into his mushroom hell; The baby-faced Paolo with his ungodly brew

untrustworthy people.

"I don't care about any of that stuff," I say, "Just tell me when this will end."

"About four hours."

I don't know whether to be comforted by the fact that it will probably end in four hours or terrified that I have four hours of this to go. Plus, my sense of time is starting to slip away. Four hours? What is four hours? I have no sense of it, can't grasp its significance.

I decide to go for a walk. I leave the hostel in search of a nice view. San Jose del Pacifico is one of the most beautiful places I've ever been, but I feel like I am in hell. The outlandish beauty of the place only contributes to its unreality and makes me feel lost, like I'm trapped in a nightmare world, universes away from friends, family, job.

I rifle through my mind for everything I've heard about hallucinogens and bad trips. I think of my friend who had a mushroom cocktail on his gap year in Thailand and was so traumatised he didn't go out for six months. Another who was laid low after foolishly taking acid in a nightclub. It occurs to me that most of the people in these horror stories are okay in the end. I'm comforted by this – for about two minutes. Then the anxiety loops back round and I begin to panic again. This is how it goes: I locate a comforting thought, hang on to it, only for reality to crumble anew.

Recent years have seen a rolling back of some of the legal and bureaucratic impediments to research, ushering in what many are calling a "new psychedelic revolution". If such a thing is underway, it is thanks in large part to one man: Roland Griffiths. A psychiatry professor at Johns Hopkins University with impeccable scientific pedigree, Griffiths was the straight-shooter required to drag psychedelics back into the mainstream. In a 2006 paper for the journal Psychopharmacology he wrote up several years worth of psychedelic research and invited academics to respond. Scientists from UCLA and NYU answered his call, winning FDA approval for studies into the effects of psilocybin on terminally ill cancer patients suffering from anxiety or depression.

In 2010, the New York Times reported on the UCLA study. One patient, a retired psychologist with stage four cancer named Clark Martin, says: "All of a sudden, everything familiar started evaporating. Imagine you fall off a boat out in the open ocean, and you turn around, and the boat is gone. And then the water's gone. And then you're gone." For Martin, the experience on psilocybin alleviated his fears of dying more than antidepressants and talking therapies. Six months later, he still counted it among the most meaningful experiences of his life. He is not the only participant to report a perspective-altering, life-affirming experience. "Under the influences of hallucinogens individuals transcend their primary identification with their bodies," said Dr Charles Gob, one of the scientists leading the study. "They experience ego-free states before the time of their actual physical demise, and return with a new perspective and profound acceptance of the life constant: change."

• • •

I walk north up the mountain. A few times I veer into the road and cars beep. I say out loud to myself "You're not safe. You need to go back." I find it comforting to speak out loud, the sound of coherent phrases a welcome counterpoint to the insanity unfolding in my mind.

When I arrive back at the cabana Paolo's mum is still there. Noticing my agitated state, she says: "If you want we can land you now."

Land me?

"All you need to do is eat a banana."

LIAR! A banana won't do anything! Your son just fed me a serious dose of hallucinogens and you're saying a banana will 'land me', I scream internally. Desperate, I trudge up the stairs, which are like treacle beneath my feet, to where the bananas are. I realise I don't know where I am, when I arrived, how I'd got there. I need to be back in London for Christmas and I'm not going to make it. I've lost my mind. I try to say "San Jose del Pacifico" out loud but can't make it to Pacifico. I feel completely insane, overcome with grief for my mind which I am convinced is irretrievably broken.

I eat the banana. Nothing.

"I had the banana and nothing happened," I say to Paolo's mum.

She said, "How many did you have?"

One, obviously. Nobody eats two bananas. On her advice I eat another. Still tripping, I decide to go back to my room and ride it out in bed. Everything looks alien. Things I remember being on the left are on the right. I try listening to music, but the sound melts in my ears.

I go for another walk and get lost. I ask for directions to the main road, which I'm already standing on. I will be in hospital forever, I think, and family members will visit and fold their arms and shake their heads and wonder what could have been.

Then, at around a few hours later, it wears off. The sun is setting and I feel euphoric. Coherent thoughts begin to stream back into my mind and the world takes a familiar shape around me. I remembered where I am: "San Jose Del Pacifico". I can even say it.

• • •

In recent studies into psilocybin, bad trips barely get a mention. Some new evangelists have even suggested they are a myth. They are not a myth. Since the experience I have read countless psilocybin testimonies, the vast majority positive. I was struck by how similar even the very best trips sounded to my own terrifying experience: the depersonalisation, the destruction of ego, the feeling of being outside of time. And though what I experienced was undoubtedly the worst six hours of my life, I see how it could have been a euphoric experience given slight changes in context.

There's a movement among psychedelic advocates to rename bad trips "difficult" or "challenging" in recognition of the fact that negative trips are often the most meaningful for those who endure them. I'm yet to work out what mine meant. I did, however, learn one very important thing: I am never taking hallucinogens again. ■

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Devotees of the Soho House members clubs have been able to buy the eclectic furniture found in its hotels and farmhouses for a while now. Its online store, Soho Home, makes its tasselled lamps and chunky ottomans available to members and non-members alike.

When The Ned opened in the old Midlands Bank building, it was the talk of the City and now you can take its Edwardian style home with you, too.

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This breakfast china, made by Stoke potter Burleigh, can be found in all the hotel rooms, but also in Millie's Lounge, the British brasserie on the ground floor.

While it's decked out in Burleigh's leafy hibiscus print, the rich green colour is exclusive to The Ned Collection, as it matches the Grade I Listed, African verdite columns in the former banking hall.

RUARK MRX
£399, RUARKAUDIO.COM
British audio manufacturer Ruark has been building premium home speakers since 1985. Its current range continues to reflect the aesthetics of the vinyl era, with rich walnut veneered cabinets and stitched fabric coverings. The MRx is the company's latest piece, a connected wireless speaker that streams online music services or from your phone. Though it's loaded with the latest tech, the MRx retains a classic, timeless style that elevates it to a piece of furniture. The perfect accompaniment to a mid century-styled room.

DOLCE & GABANA JUICER, SMEG
£400, HARRODS.COM
Save money by juicing your own oranges at home with this Dolce & Gabana citrus juicer from Smeg. The colours are inspired by the Sicilian sunshine, so it's sure to bring some warmth to your kitchen.

EMBRACE CHAIR, CARL HANSEN
£1,400-£1,600, CARLHANSEN.COM
Danish designer Carl Hansen & Son are renowned for its woodwork. Here, the studio reimagines the dining room chair in modern aesthetics using upholstery and quality craftsmanship to produce a truly stunning seat.

Visualisation of a two bedroom apartment at early evening, with 4.1m ceiling height.

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MY HOUSE: CHARLIE SIEM

The London-born violinist tells **MELISSA YORK** about dropping into his family's eccentric house moments away from the Royal Albert Hall

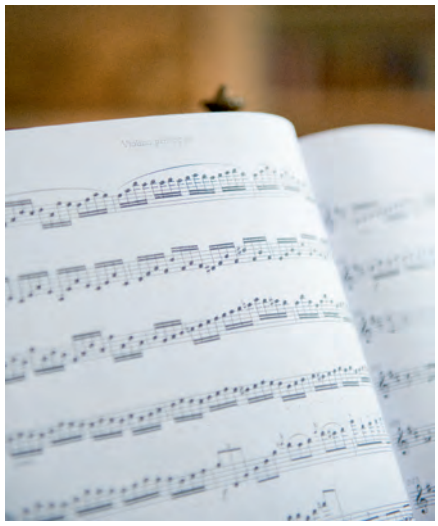
The house is on a pretty amazing street in Kensington, an historic London street, and I've lived here since I was seven. Churchill lived down the road; Baden-Powell, chief scout of the world, lived up the road; Virginia Woolf was born on this road; and Jacob Epstein, the sculptor, lived across the street. It's a lot to live up to.

It's such a wonderful area. I've played at the Royal Albert Hall many times and I can literally walk there into the performers' entrance. It's such a nice feeling to be able to do that. We've been really privileged to be here. You can walk around the corner to all the coffee places and Launceston Place, and it's got real charm.

We live in the eyesore of the road, though. I don't know if there was a bomb here or something, but it's an old London street with white townhouses and they built this red brick monstrosity in the late 70s. My family moved here in the early 90s, so it's my childhood home, but I'm 32 now. We haven't overhauled and decorated it since those days; well, there have been little bits along the way. It used to have unusual 1970s, artist-painted walls that went all along the hall and around the stairs, but we stupidly painted over that with a boring yellow/cream colour. We all regret that, but mostly, it's falling apart at the seams.

It was an eccentric person who built this thing and it's basically two houses oddly configured partly on top and side by side of each other in this huge brick structure. I'm based in Florence, but I come here when I'm in London and it's part-derelict, part-inhabited. I've got two sisters who are based here at the moment. But we pass through and there are lots of memories attached to the place.

When I was a teenager, my character was printed on my bedroom, but that's completely gone. Maybe that room was redecorated. Maybe I trashed it so much that my



Left: Charlie Siem sitting at the bottom of the swimming pool. **Above:** Charlie's sheet music and original Chinese artwork **Opposite:** Charlie with his sister Louisa; Pictures by Greg Sigston

mum had to re-carpet or re-paint, because it doesn't look like it did when I was a child. I moved to a different bedroom that's a bit bigger, but I've still got my library books and things in my old bedroom so I sometimes go in and take them with me on the road when I'm travelling. Lots of things have been thrown out over the years, so it doesn't quite have the same feeling as it did when I lived there in that old room.

We have a swimming pool that's used as a sort of storage space. It did have water in it and it was really warm at one point. We didn't ever really use it that much and when everyone moved out of here, it didn't make sense to fill it up. You have to look after a pool, you have to clean it, so it was emptied and there was a long period when we were going to sell the house. We decided to throw lots of things away so we put all those things around the swimming pool, but so far we haven't thrown them away or sold the house, so it reflects the disorganisation of the family.

There's a music room I used to use but it's been flooded, completely gutted and it's now like an urban decaying landscape, the floors all rocks and stuff..

> We have a swimming pool that's used as a sort of storage space. It did have water in it and it was really warm at one point.

The living room is probably the most civilised of the rooms, where there's still a normal, habitable space. There's a piano so I practise in there and it has a big window so you can look out onto the garden. That's why I spend most of my time in there.

For a lot of young people now, classical music wasn't necessarily part of the education system when they were growing up so it's quite unfamiliar to them. If anything there's an exoticism and excitement attached to it. The New Generation Festival is about only bringing people to perform who are under 50, many of them are out of conservatoire and looking for possibilities, and they get to come to the Palazzo Corsini in Florence, which is the most beautiful place to perform.

I'm the artistic director so I'm involved in inviting people and programming the festival as much as performing at it myself. Last year was our first year and it was a great success, but this year will be much bigger.

Being a young person, I want to share classical music with other young people. To me, music is a language and it's a form of human expression that everyone can relate to and I don't think that anyone should be turned off or not be in a position to listen to a Mahler symphony.

Maybe you need to make more of an effort in terms of sitting down and taking the time to be quiet enough to listen, but you don't need an education or anything like that to appreciate classical music. There's a stigma that's attached and it's a great shame. I'm all for making it available to everybody and especially young people, and that's what the festival is about.

The New Generation Festival runs from 29 August to 1 September in Florence; for tickets, visit newgenerationfestival.org

Below: A computer-generated image of a semi-detached nHouse from the outside.
Right: A dining area in one of the modular homes

FLAT-PACK FLATS

As Britain cries out for better quality, affordable housing, should we be looking to factory made homes? Words: **MELISSA YORK**

While we all know what disruptive tech looks like, what does disruptive *housing* look like? By almost universal consent, three problems need to be addressed in the current market – affordability, sustainability and quality – and whoever conquers all three will seriously shake up the UK market. Yet architect Richard Hywel Evans thinks he, along with his business partner Nick Fulford, has cracked it with the nHouse. The "n" stands for "new", as it aims to differentiate itself from so much of what has come before.

They're manufactured in parts off-site, then delivered to, and assembled in, a location of the buyer's choosing. So far, so prefab, but the entrepreneurs believe this is the first time modular housing has been delivered to a higher standard than the average new build, yet below the price.

"In the last few weeks, we've had some of the biggest housing developers and associations come to see us," says co-founder Fulford. "The fact that RIBA did a survey that said only one in four people in the UK would even consider buying a new build is reflective of the fact we are not enamoured with the majority of products offered by the main housebuilders in this country. So there's a desperate desire for an alternative."

The idea first came to Fulford following a holiday in the Alps, where he fell in love with the eco-house he was staying in. When he returned home, he couldn't find anything like it to buy on the open market and encountered extortionate costs when he sought the advice of custom-builders. So he contacted friend and architect Evans, director of Hoxton-based Studio RHE, to see if he could design something similar, but tailored to the UK market.

If nHouse were a dish, its secret ingredient would be CLT. Cross-laminated timber is a sustainable, engineered wood that consists of layered panels that are glued together to achieve a desired thickness. "It's the most sustainable building material we can use. It has incredibly high structural capacity and bearing, and it's endlessly available," says architect Evans. CLT is a material that's being increasingly explored within the housing sector in the UK for its low environmental impact, but also for its versatility. And it's particularly useful for modular or custom housing because it's easy to modify. "If it arrives on site and something isn't quite right, you can work with timber," Evans says. "With a concrete framework, if it doesn't work, you have to take it away and recast it, whereas with timber, you get your power tools out and you can trim a bit here and there. It's an extraordinary solution to what we need at the moment." In this post-Grenfell world, it's worth mentioning that it's also naturally fire-resistant. Hold a flame to CLT and it'll char the outside, but maintain a surprisingly robust structural integrity.

Once the material was decided, it was time to focus on design. Each room can be packed up into a minimum of four modules that take 16 days on average to be assembled in a factory. Then they're ready to be transported on the back of a lorry to the desired site and connected via a patented attachment system developed especially for nHouse called QuadClick that allows the whole property to be constructed in as little as three days.

Once the design was completed, Fulford got to work on the branding and marketing to make sure the concept was developed in time for MIPM, the annual real estate bonanza in Cannes. Their exhibit elicited approving nods from venture capitalists, but Fulford had other plans.

He sought alternative funding on the crowd-funding platform Crowdcube, where the project doubled its fundraising target, gathering more than £1m from over 700 investors donating between £10 to £200,000. Crowdcube has since valued the business at over £6m.

Initially, this put investors off, as the valuation was fixed and share prices couldn't be negotiated, but Fulford felt the traditional investor route was not for nHouse. By spurning the advances of venture capital, the founders would retain full control over the project, while reflecting its democratic ideals. "When we say we are building quality homes for people on average incomes, we want this to be a mass market house," says Fulford. "Being able to have the opportunity for anyone to invest perfectly suited the results of the campaign. They come from all backgrounds and all parts of the world and they're excited about a solution, to not just UK house prices, but broader house prices that exist globally with so many people underhoused."

This investment allowed Evans and Fulford to push ahead, going from concept to a prototype in 12 months. Now MPIM 2018 is over, the show house lives at its first production facility in Peterborough and the order book opened a month ago.

Price is another area where the nHouse thinks it can compete. Individual buyers can snap a three bedroom one up from £180,000, while a Hamptons International study from 2017 puts the average price of a one bed new build in London at £679,681.

What's more, nHouse claims its properties are 20 per cent bigger than the average new build in the UK, with more windows, higher ceilings and bundles of tech. Each one comes with a house management system, a car and house battery pack, in-built guttering that reuses rain water in the plumbing, a solar panelled roof to reduce energy bills, underfloor heating and even futuristic luxuries like a robot vacuum cleaner and a drone landing pad.

The result is a sleek space with lots of on-trend exposed timber blocks. "We kept talking about sauna fear," says Evans. "We were putting coverings over the wood because we didn't want it to be a wooden box. But then once we'd finished the show home, we thought it looked really great to expose the wood and when people have come to ▶

▶ see it, they've been inventing reasons to have one, going, 'Maybe I could have one of these in my garden?'"

The show house can also be seen up close at self-build mecca Grand Designs Live, which arrives at ExCeL London next week, not least by some of its investors. Tickets were handed out as backer privileges, along with discounts for bigger investors on the final nHouse. Now it's on the market, this isn't the end of the road for the investors. Fulford says he wants to use the 700-strong group as a cross between a board and a market research group, going back to them for inspiration and improvements. "We treat them as a privileged club and a resource," says Fulford. "Unlike when you have a single VC when you might get access to talent from their board, we have 700 advocates and supporters and this amazing pool of high quality ideas that we can tap into. They all essentially want to promote our business and their investment, but they also like the concept."

Usually, if you want to self-build, your solutions are to be found abroad with German or Scandinavian companies like Passivhaus and Huf Haus. And these are often expensive, not because they're necessarily better quality, but because they have almost unlimited options. "It's a very expensive process to create a bespoke house," says Fulford. "So we minimised the number of options, but increased the quality of what we do have and, through economies of scale and mass procurement of the same materials again and again, brought the price point down until we're offering homes at £125-130psqft."

Fulford even claims the nHouse, and other modular businesses like it, won't need the construction workers that could be in short supply once freedom of movement ends because of the simplicity of its assembly. "Two factors making the government's housebuilding targets more difficult include massive infrastructure projects like Hinkley Point C and HS2 – both will soak up a lot of labour – and we've got an increasingly ageing population of people working in the building trade. With us being able to build homes in a factory, we can be a lot more efficient and keep costs down when, across the board, you are going to see labour costs in the building sector increase over the next few years."

Above and below: The living area and kitchen of the nHouse show home, currently in Peterborough

While the nHouse might be Brexit-proof, there are two huge cultural barriers it has to tackle before it can really take off.

The first is the lack of self-builders in the UK. Yes, we all enjoy watching Kevin McCloud wander around modernist monstrosities in the Sussex Downs, but these self-builders are still seen as monied eccentrics. And this has been borne out in nHouse's order book, where the vast majority of purchases are from developers. Once a private buyer has acquired land, there are advisors on board to help with planning permission and a number of building societies (and one high street bank, Virgin Money) to provide a mortgage for it through self-build finance service BuildStore. "Only seven per cent of homebuyers are building their own homes and I think the next lowest figure in Europe is 25 per cent. So the majority of product you see coming onto the market is supplied by the 12 big housebuilders," says Fulford, "and what happens when you have a very limited number of companies supplying a marketplace? Where's the incentive to innovate in terms of product quality, design and to reduce prices?"

The second is creeping urbanisation. According to the UN, the number of people living in cities is set to increase to 66 per cent of the world's population by 2050 and, with land around big cities running out, this means building higher or expanding out towards rural areas. This means flats, and lots of them.

Currently, nHouses can be set up as a detached, terraced or semi-detached house, but plans for lateral apartments are already under-way. However, CLT is notoriously hard to build at height, having to be reinforced by another less environmentally friendly material at some stage. The tallest CLT buildings in the world are currently Dalston Works, a block of flats in Hackney, and 5 King Street, an office block in Brisbane, and both are only 10 storeys.

With city accommodation in ever-increasing demand, land values inevitably rise to extortionate levels, locking all but the big-name developers out of the house-building game. The co-founders of nHouse say they are merely manufacturers, and if developers want to build their homes on expensive land and that pushes the price up, there isn't much they can do about it. While they're trying to get the price for a single unit down to around £110,000, for now, they are focusing on the quality of the product to shake up Britain's elite club of house-builders.

"The only way we can attract them is by threatening them," says Evans, matter-of-factly. "If we are offering a better product at the same price on a site where they're in competition, then they have to react. If we can do it better, with better guarantees, and none of these horror stories you read about with new builds, because they're better built homes, then people will choose us instead. They will react once they're threatened by genuine competition." Bring it on. ■

To find out more, visit the-nhouse.com

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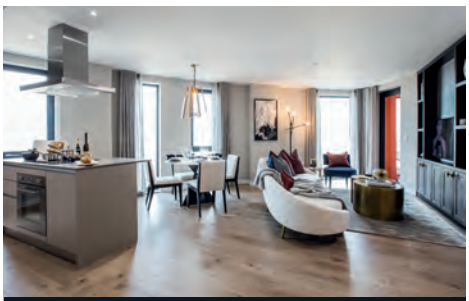

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Above: Chaz the monstera deliciosa, £65; **Inset:** Susie the sansevieria, £10-£65, both available at patch.garden

GREEN HOUSE

Houseplants are all the rage again, but are they an urban renter's cry for help? Words: **MELISSA YORK**

Millennials have been accused of killing almost every industry there is, but there may be one that 25-35 year olds are actually propping up. Houseplants are taking off like an avocado tied to a racing drone among Generation Rent, prompting investigations by such serious organs as The Washington Post and New York's Nylon magazine, in which a recent headline posed the rhetorical question of our time: "So you're a millennial obsessed with houseplants?"

Social media is filling up with terracotta pots piled onto balconies and crammed into the space between the kitchen cupboard and ceiling. A cursory search of #urbanjungle on Instagram will throw up forestry sprouting from tower blocks and the doorways of Victorian conversions.

Gardening is culturally associated with the middle-class suburb, where an immaculate lawn and a well-placed hanging basket speak volumes about the homeowner's respectability and family values. So why has this trend caught on among a generation that prides itself on being above such bourgeois notions?

Saunter through a potted history of houseplants, and it seems their popularity isn't just cyclical, it peaks during moments of great social upheaval. When the Romans invaded, they brought marble-potted houseplants with them to remind them of home. Once they left, their popularity fell and didn't really take off again until the British Empire was at its height, when wealthy households built elaborate orangeries to show off their exotic acquisitions from the colonies.

By the time the Industrial Revolution kicked off, houseplants had trickled down to the middle classes who used them to soften the psychological effect of moving to polluted urban landscapes. The introduction of Victorian housing was also the first time many of them had enough light or ventilation in their homes to accommodate such greenery. Houseplants emerged as a trend again in the 1970s, to add a bit of life after the death of two world wars, and, curiously, their time has come again.

Last month, a study by The Resolution Foundation think tank said one in three 20-

Above: A selection of household greenery; **Inset:** Phil the philodendron scandens, £14-65, all available at patch.garden

35-year olds won't own their own home by the time they're old enough to collect their pensions. With the average age of first time buyers increasing to 34 in some London boroughs, according to Halifax, people are renting for longer and moving around more. Many are also delaying having children until they're in more stable circumstances. With this in mind, houseplants are the perfect way to personalise often bland rental properties, but, more than that, they're also something to nurture into our extended adolescence. A large number of landlords don't just ban renovating, they also ban pets so houseplants are a static alternative. Blogger Jess Melia has suggested a millennial surrounded by houseplants in a rented flat is rather like the internet meme of the cartoon dog insisting that 'this is fine' while surrounded by flames.

As a result, a new breed of urban florist has sprouted up to capitalise on this shrub fetish. Patch is just one of these trendy services, a company founded by Freddie Blackett after he ran into plant trouble when moving in with his girlfriend in 2014. He traipsed to a garden centre on the outskirts of London, only to find there was little advice or support for novices. "There was loads of information available for practised suburban or rural gardeners, who measured space in acres rather than square feet, but nothing for me," he says. Patch doesn't just guide you towards the plants that best suit your dimly-lit windowledge in Hackney, it also delivers them and provides aftercare for clueless metropolitan types, including a Plant Rescue Service, where you can snap a pic of your wilting hydrangea on your phone, send it in and receive advice on how to resuscitate it.

Patch also indulges in nature as nurture, often using language that's more suited to an antenatal class than a traditional florist. New customers can be sent daily support emails, known as a "Houseplant Parenting Course", and plants are advertised with human names, like Ian, Chaz and Big Ken ("a tough lad who won't be phased by difficult growing conditions").

"As our customers care for it, it develops a personality and they form a bond with it," Freddie says. "Honouring them with a real name means you're much more likely to care for them well and keep them alive." Saying that, "we see a lot of new plant parents who are worried about neglecting their plants, and overcompensate by killing them with kindness."

Houseplants also tap into the current 'wellness' trend as they can suck up Volatile Organic Compounds – toxins and other chemical nasties – found in furnishings, paints, detergents and cosmetics. English ivy, for instance, is said to reduce airborne faecal particles, making it a hygienic addition to bathrooms, ensuites and studio flats. The Royal Horticultural Society lists a number of health benefits, too, including reduced blood pressure and breathing problems and, if you work from home, studies have shown that houseplants increase attention span and improve productivity.

DIY giant Homebase has just launched a new range of Air So Pure houseplants, claiming they reduce air pollutants by up to 80 per cent. "The trend for bringing the outside in is still really popular, as more and more people realise the health benefits of adding a touch of greenery," says Gillian Bush, the aptly-named greenlife buyer for Homebase.

As cities get more densely populated, we'll have to increasingly rely on our parks for a taste of the outdoors as gardens will become ▶

Above: A computer-generated image of the 27th floor garden square at Landmark Pinnacle. **Inset:** Rick the dracaena fragrans, £8-£80, patch.garden

▶ more of a luxury. Some developments, such as Landmark Pinnacle in the Docklands, are trying to compensate for the drawbacks of lateral living by building gardens in the sky. At 75-storeys, the skyscraper will lay claim to London's highest gym and loftiest roof terrace when it completes in 2020. There will also be a fully landscaped 'garden square' on the 27th floor. Split into a playful, child-friendly East side and a soothing, aromatic West Side with views of the Thames, the flora and fauna will take its cue from local parks, while temperature controls and floor-to-ceiling windows that span 1.5 times the average ceiling height will be fitted to maximise natural light.

Project co-ordinator Rami Atallah says the decision to fill up lucrative space in the skyscraper with plants was partly to keep up with an increasingly competitive marketplace – "one developer puts a garden in, the next one feels *they* have to put a garden in" – but also we will have to come up with innovative ways to create meeting places in these 'vertical neighbourhoods'. "Space is getting tight but people still want that quality of life," Atallah says. "Our vision is about a sense of community; a lot more than greenery, it's about creating an organic place where people can meet and actually socialise for real, not in a proscribed way."

Houseplants aren't just decoration; they're for good for your health, your wellbeing and your social life. ■

GOING ON HOLIDAY

Pre-departure checks

Always check plants thoroughly for pests and diseases in the week leading up to the holiday, and deal with them then, so they will enjoy the holiday, too. Water and feed the plants thoroughly before you leave.

Move pots

Moving plants away from windows means that they will be out of direct sunlight (which dries them out) in the summer, and safe from cold draughts in the winter. In the summer, move the plants to the coolest room, and in winter to the warmest (assuming the heating will be turned off). Fridges and freezers give off heat, and in the absence of central heating, it can be a good idea if you go away in winter to put plants on top of these appliances.

Watering systems

While dormant in winter, many house plants will tolerate a few days without water, providing they are given a thorough watering before you depart for a holiday. However, in the summer, many plants will need constant access to water, without becoming waterlogged. Plants take up water through their roots, and, in doing so, draw it through the soil.

Capillary matting is a means of extending the reach of the roots into a well of water collected in, for example, a bath, sink, large bowl or deep roasting tin. As the soil in the pot becomes dry, the water is drawn up from the well through the matting and into the pot. One option is to place the pot directly onto the matting and have it dangle over the side into the well. For instance, place a washing-up bowl full of water in the sink with the plants on the matting on the draining board above. This works best with plastic pots; for terracotta pots, push the matting up into the drainage hole to ensure a better connection. Alternatively, push a strip of the matting into the compost in the top of the pot. This will act as a wick, drawing up moisture from an individual well, and would be a good option for larger or more delicate plants that cannot be moved easily.

Raising humidity

Grouping plants together will help reduce water loss from the plants. All plants give off water through transpiration – evaporation of water through the stomata (pores) in the leaves. The drier the air, the faster the water loss. Grouping plants together means the surrounding air becomes more humid than if they were to be individually placed; hence the evaporation gradient is flatter and the water loss slowed. For short absences, tie a clear plastic bag around the whole plant and pot, using canes inserted into the pot to keep the bag from touching the leaves.

RHS Little Book of Happy Houseplants by Holly Farrell is published by Mitchell Beazley, £12.99 (octopusbooks.co.uk)

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Karl Meier
CRAIG & KARL
@craigandkarl, 62.3k followers
It's the go to place now for the visual world. If you're not on it, there's a whole visual culture you're missing out on. I follow observational accounts because that's how I felt Instagram used to be before the commercialisation of it. I've noticed in my personal world friends who were on Instagram in the beginning were thinking about imagery and funny photos and now you just see brands. I guess you just notice it in the way your feed changes. It's evolved into something else now, which is kind of inevitable.

That's why we just try to keep ours observational and it's mainly just me and my partner Craig Redman doing the work, it's our world and the things we see and do. We don't try to make it too much about one thing. People might be less inclined to go and look at our website, but if they see it on Instagram first then they might go there to find the rest of the work. I don't think we would have shown us in the process of doing the work before, because there was more focus on the finished product. But now, especially since Stories, if we do an installation we like to walk you through it. It's less precious, which is nice.

Previously to this there wasn't a way for someone who was just interested in design to get in touch with you and say 'I like this', and it's nice to get that feedback. Another thing is that everyone's references are laid bare for everyone to see on this platform, so if someone says 'this reminds me of this' then it's quite obvious if they've taken inspiration from somewhere else. Also, you get to see a show in New York they're talking about even if you're not in New York.

INSTA DESIGNERS

As Instagram launches a dedicated @design channel, London designers and crafters talk about its vast influence
Words: **MELISSA YORK**

Fernando Laposse
FERNANDO LAPOSSE
@fernandolaposse, 2,590 followers
I've never been very technologically adept so I got on to Instagram quite late. I did something for Selfridges two years after I graduated from Central Saint Martins and they were the ones who prompted me to get into it. Maybe a year ago I started to see it as a professional thing rather than a social thing.

I have my website, which I've had since before I graduated and through checking analytics I can see that 80 per cent of traffic comes from Instagram, so I get a lot of commercial use out of it. Instagram has replaced the design blog. At the end of the day, it's the same phenomenon, it's just that Instagram is so immediate and people are constantly scrolling through it that the flow of images you're exposed to is much larger. There are pros and cons, of course.

A lot of my posts are about what happens behind the scenes, before the finished product. In my latest project, I'm working with indigenous farmers in Mexico so it's a social venture as well as a design one, a research-heavy project. No one will have the patience to go through the whole thing on my website but if it's done in small doses with videos and images, I think that's really engaging. I can be constantly reminding people of the project and drawing it out instead of putting it all out there in one go.

I rarely shoot anything on my phone. I do my own photography with a DSLR camera and record high resolution video that I then edit, so I don't post every day, but it's well produced.

Grace Winteringham
PATTERNITY
@patternity, 63.1k followers
It started off as a platform to share photos of the patterns my partner Anna Murray and I were seeing every day. We'd marvel at the mundane and find beauty in the banal, sharing our own inspirations and journeys. Liv Taylor, our head of research and digital, curates the content to reflect our way of thinking and being – it's now a showcase of everything we do.

We use Instagram as a way to connect with our community and talk about our philosophy, our projects, events and research, and we post most days. A core part of our philosophy is the idea that pattern inspiration is everywhere, and noticing a simple stripe, or a blossoming cloud can lead to a more positive and creative life. We have a global following, and it's so inspiring to see how our pattern-loving community use #Patternity to share their own pattern finds and unite the world through pattern from Thailand to Toronto, Helsinki to Hawaii.

Celebrating the natural world is a key passion of Patternity and we love the @cloudappsoc for sharing the wonders of the sky above and @thebush__ for inspirational greenery and architectural plantscapes that highlight the patterns and colours that cross between the natural and manmade.

@teddyco is a brilliant pattern spotter in Tel Aviv. @parley.tv are also a favourite for their work raising awareness about our oceans and their projects that tackle the challenges through design.

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Matteo Fogale and Laetitia de Allegri
DE ALLEGRI AND FOGALE
@deallegrifogale, 2,031 followers
Matteo: For us process is very important. Everything we do, every material, has a story and there's always a reason we do something, so we like to share that. Hopefully, it means people see greater value in what we do and appreciate the craft behind it. I think that's very important, not only for our designs but for design in general. I think nowadays there's more awareness and people want to know where things come from and how they're made. A few years back people didn't care much about it and bought things that were mass-produced. Now craft is more appreciated. We're showing pieces in Milan with Living Correiere, and they contacted us on Instagram, so it's interesting how people connect there now, rather than email.
Laetitia: We always say that we get more business from Instagram these days than we do from our website. Even walking around Milan, everyone's talking about seeing your work on Instagram. Every time we've met someone and asked what they do, we go straight to their feed and start following them, so for us it's a way to see how other people work. I'd say it's pretty essential for people to be on it. And it's a way to grow the community. Visually, it's really inspiring because you can see what's going on in different places. Our feed fills up with Australian design and US design and it's really interesting. It's great because it reminds you that you're sharing your information with the whole world, too. Everything is linked together in a much more practical way.

Jono Smart
JONO SMART
@jonosmart, 84.5k followers
Instagram is part of daily life, for sure. I joined when I started my studio three years ago. I wasn't a full time potter back then, I was a garden designer and it was a hobby, and it just grew really quickly. Now it's 100 per cent how my business works. Every lead, every commission, all my direct customers come from Instagram. And they're from all over the world. I've had restaurants in New York, Argentina and Japan find me through Instagram. I wouldn't have a studio without it. It's been completely life-changing. I've had people following me the entire time that I've just got to know. I've met quite a few of them in real life and they've watched me grow from not knowing what I'm doing to now so I can't pretend to be too professional. I'm not putting on a professional face, it's more behind the scenes stuff – "This is how I am". I make for about three months, open up my shop three or four times a year and it sells in one or two days to people on Instagram.

I look at what people have liked on the app to work out what colours and shapes to make more of. I have to be careful not to let it creatively drive me, as people can only like what you put in front of them.

I travel to meet other Instagram craftsman and some of them are my best friends now. It's a big part of my personal life, too. @florianagadsby is the best potter in the UK, but I also love @woodwoven and @hopeinthewoods, who makes the most beautiful spoons. Learn to take good photographs, it's the best thing you can do to make sure your business grows. Instagram bypasses traditional routes to market. By not having wholesalers in the way, you're keeping 100 per cent of what you sell. That means potters and craftspeople can survive, so it's made a huge difference to the living a potter can make.

SNAPSHOT

Artist of the stars **JONATHAN YEO** discusses his paintings of plastic surgery operations and how they relate to our ideals of beauty in the 21st century

The first time I went to watch a cosmetic surgery operation it was a facelift. As a portraitist, it seemed like a fascinating opportunity to literally see the inner workings of something I'd spent much of my working life studying from the other side. I've always been fascinated by how much our personalities and moods are communicated non-verbally, much of it through facial expressions we aren't always conscious of making. The moment we start changing the underlying architecture of our appearance, especially when it affects the muscles

> Surgeons have to have an aesthetic sensibility, in order to visualise how someone's appearance can be changed in a way that will improve it

of our faces, there are inevitably going to be changes to the signals we transmit without meaning to. Aesthetic surgery has improved dramatically in recent years and often has profound benefits, but we have also become more used to seeing people, often in the public eye, who have made changes that distort our sense of who they are.

I've been working with plastic surgeons on a series of paintings about the ability to enhance our appearance through facelifts and other cosmetic procedures for the last 10 years. These works, which depict procedures such as facelifts, breast enhancements and gender reassignments, form the basis of Skin Deep, a new book and exhibition at the Bowes Museum.

They were initially intended to explore the realities of the operations themselves, but I gradually became aware that, in many ways, they were also telling a wider story about the contemporary psyche. The pressure we feel to look more youthful, more beautiful or more glamorous, comes from all around: other people, fashion images, social media and – perhaps most of all – ourselves. And for the first time in human history, we live in a time when we can actively change our appearance in ways that were impossible even a generation ago.

Another aspect I found intriguing was the way the surgeons have to have an aesthetic sensibility, in order to visualise how someone's appearance can be changed in a way that will improve it. In a sense, the surgeon is sculpting, albeit with a human body rather than a block of clay or marble. Some viewers have picked up a reference to this in the surgical pre-op markings in some of my paintings, which, divorced from the dramatic preview they give of the precise incisions to follow, have a decorative, almost tribal quality. They are also, quite literally, drawings which, again, is something more associated with art than medicine.

Several of the early works are diptychs showing the same patient before and after operations, mostly breast enhancements. The audience was split on the outcome, with roughly half preferring the unchanged bodies, underlining the fact that this kind of surgery deals in the realm of the subjective, as interpreted by the patient and surgeon.

The exhibition includes portraits of surprisingly young and already beautiful faces about to go under the knife. I wanted to reflect the fact that it's often the last people who appear in need of change who are most susceptible to the idea that perfection is within their grasp. In retrospect, the unifying theme is, perhaps inevitably, the pressures we face in society today, and the lengths we are prepared to go to pursue the ever-changing notion of beauty.

Jonathan Yeo's Skin Deep is on at the Bowes Museum until 17 June

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