

CITY A.M.

No. 78 — THE MAGAZINE — OCT 19

TRAVEL

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LIVING

The modular revolution: will the houses of the future be made on production lines?

FOOD&BOOZE

Top chef Mark Hix on why he gave up dry land for life in a houseboat on the banks of the Thames



THE BIG INTERVIEW: TRACY ANN OBERMAN

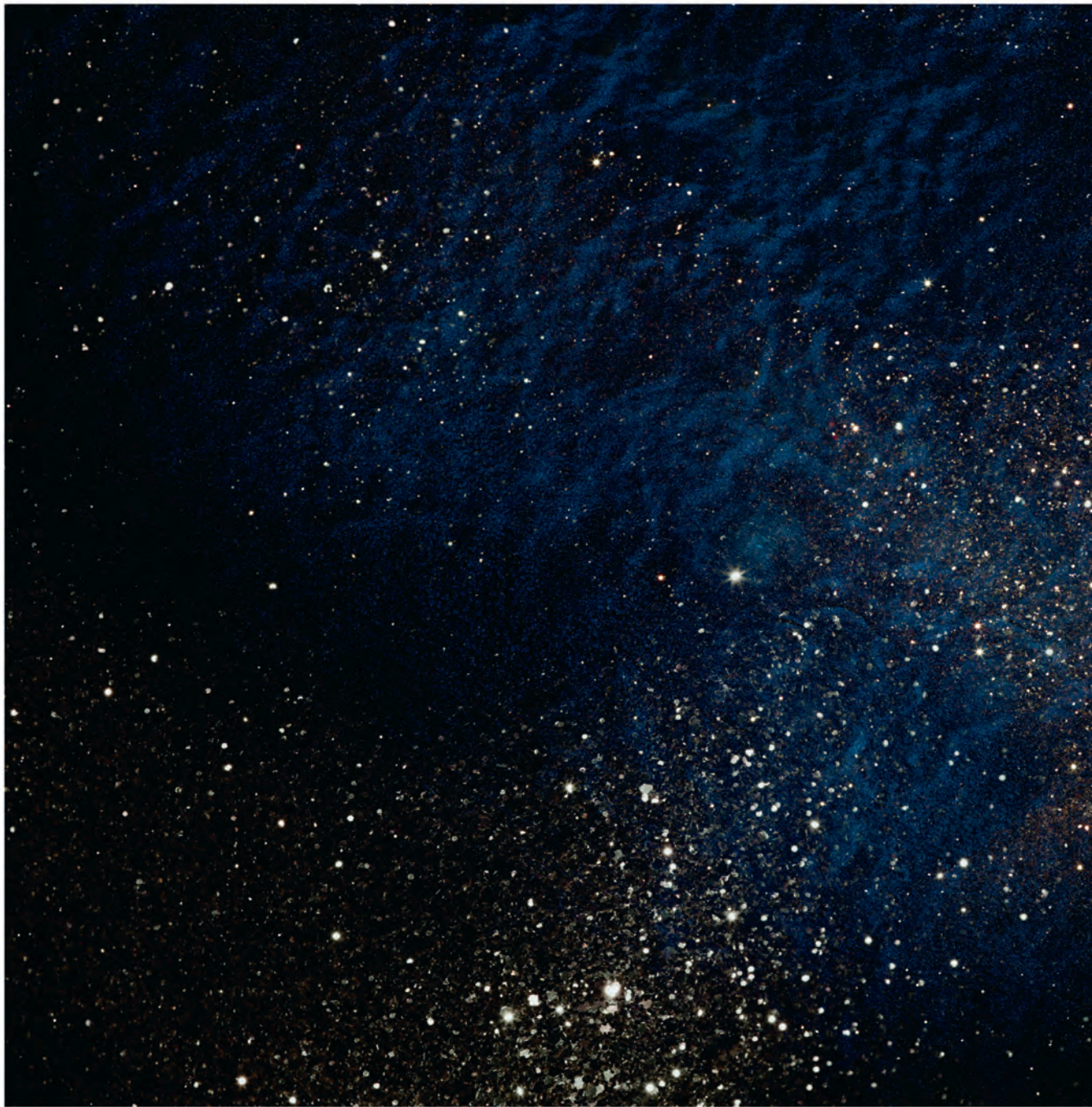
The stage actress and former Eastenders star on being a woman in showbiz



MEET THE REAL-LIFE WOLF OF WALL STREET

He made millions, lost it all, went to jail, wrote a book, inspired a movie... but who exactly is Jordan Belfort?

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PORSCHE

EDITOR'S LETTER



Speaking to Jordan Belfort for this issue's cover interview (P38) made me think about how much the world of finance has changed over the decades. Even ten years ago, when I was but a young reporter, I remember walking into a sticky-floored wine bar somewhere in the Square Mile to find a banker drinking champagne out of his shoe. It was in a bid to impress a girl, although whether or not he succeeded was a moot point; he was vomiting outside shortly afterwards.

It was like a tame version of what Belfort used to get up to with his Stratton Oakmont company, which fleeced gullible investors and spent the money on whatever hedonistic pursuit sprang to mind, whether it was necking quaaludes and trying to pilot a yacht through a storm, or chucking some dwarfs across the office.

Thankfully, times have changed. I can't imagine a City of London banker drinking champagne out of his shoe today. There are so many better ways to spend your money. Instead of being slouched in a gutter with a wet sock, you could be up the Cheesegrater in Bob Bob Cite, or luxuriating in the Ned, or at one of the dozens of great new places we have to eat and drink in the Square Mile today, some of which you can read about in these very pages.

Belfort's antics seem like a seedy reminder of time long passed. There may be a certain mythologising of those days: the 80s power-suits, the Greed is Good generation, the Barrow Boys taking over the City of London. But it was an awkward phase in its evolution, one we shouldn't spend too much time mourning. There's never been a better time to work here, or to eat here or, indeed, drink here. And you certainly don't need to involve your footwear.

— STEVE DINNEEN

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Above: Tracy Ann Oberman talks about her new play, *Mother of Him*;
Below: Sap drips from the trunk of a frankincense tree; One of the dishes at the Ned's The Dining Room

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CONTRIBUTORS



ALEX DOAK is *City A.M. The Magazine's* watch editor and one of the country's leading watch journalists. This issue he looks at the 'big five' of haute horlogerie and asks how a handful of manufacturers have managed to survive through the centuries – P44



SIMON THOMSON is *City A.M. The Magazine's* booze expert, specialising in dark spirits. He also writes film and theatre reviews for *City A.M.* newspaper – all of this when not pursuing his career in legal policy. Read his article on Talisker on P28.



SCARLET WINTERBERG is *City A.M. The Magazine's* luxury travel columnist. Each issue, she shares insider tips and frequent flyer information. This month she celebrates the age of a new stress-free dawn for the business traveller – P71



HELEN CRANE is our new Living editor, who starts her tenure with a fascinating insight into the nascent market for modular housing. Could factory-built flats really offer a solution to the housing crisis? – P86



MARK HIX is *City A.M. The Magazine's* regular food columnist. His restaurants include HIX Oyster & Chop House, HIX Soho and Tramshed. On P26 he writes about giving up land to live on the river Thames.



ADAM HAY-NICHOLLS is one of the country's top motoring journalists, cruising around the world's most glamorous cities in cars most people only see in Park Lane showrooms. This issue he drives from Paris to Provence in an Audi R8 – P54

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FIRST IMPRESSIONS

Stories from the world of arts, culture, technology, and design



Above: Rebel Book Club participants
Left: a flyer for Noname's Los Angeles meet-up

in 2015 and focuses exclusively on non-fiction. The meetings are themed around topics like 'planetary emergency,' 'career hacking' and 'transgender journeys,' each focusing on one title but with a couple of other recommended reads thrown in. "The thing I like is how everyone comes with an open mind," Keene says. It has since expanded to Bristol, Oxford, Barcelona and Berlin, and has proved so popular that its founders have just started a £150,000 crowdfunding campaign with the lofty aim of creating 'the best book club in the world'.

Attending a book club is quite a commitment: as well as the regular meet-ups, you have to find time to buy the book and read it, as well as coming up with something interesting to say. It doesn't seem

THE BOOK CLUB, BUT NOT AS YOU KNOW IT

How a new generation is shaking up the stuffy world of book meet-ups.

Words: **HELEN CRANE**

This summer, Noname, the Chicago-based female rapper, launched her own book club. The 27-year-old, better known for dropping cult mixtapes to vast critical acclaim, sounded out the idea with her 235,000 Twitter followers, and after receiving a wildly positive response, started regular meet-ups in several cities across the US.

The titles aren't kid stuff either – Noname wants to use it to "highlight progressive work from writers of colour and writers within the LGBTQ community," and one of the first titles discussed was *Pedagogy of the*

Oppressed, a 1968 tome by Brazilian author Paulo Friere that discusses colonialism and whether teaching can ever be apolitical.

It's just one example of the newfound popularity of reading groups among millennials. New online book clubs are springing up all the time, fronted by an ever-growing line-up of celebrities, from Reese Witherspoon to Emma Watson. In London alone you can now find clubs dedicated to feminist books, music books and post-apocalyptic books to name but a few. "It's the new music festival," says Ben Keene, the founder of London-based Rebel Book Club. "Everyone's got a book club."

Increasingly though, millennials aren't gathering round with copies of the latest Booker Prize winner. Instead, they've discovered a penchant for non-fiction books that take on weighty topics and question the pillars of society – perhaps unsurprising given they've grown up with all the information in the world at their fingertips.

Rebel Book Club was founded in London



Rapper Noname wants to highlight progressive work from writers of colour and those within the LGBTQ community. The first title was *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*.

like a natural fit for millennials, who, if the stereotype is to be believed, don't even want to commit to owning furniture.

But Rebel Book Club has found a solution. To make sure it's as far away from your mum's book club as it can get, meets are held in a rotation of trendy co-working spaces and bars, small talk is banned, and each month Mix & Muddle provides a one-off cocktail themed around the book. For example when the group read *Little Wins*, Paul Lindley's self-help book which argues that thinking like a toddler is the key to unlocking your creative potential, they drank the 'Orange Squash,' served in a sandwich bag.

Keene even sends WhatsApp messages to members to give them "a little nudge" about what page they should be on by a certain point in the month.

It's certainly different to discussing Salman Rushdie over wine in someone's living room – but perhaps this is the shake-up the book club needed.

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MARGATE IS TURNING HEADS

An inflatable Tina Turner is leading a cultural revolution, says **STEVE HOGARTY**

At Dreamland amusement park in Margate there's a seven metre tall inflatable Tina Turner head. Venture inside it and you'll find a private karaoke booth primed with all of her classic hits, from Proud Mary to What's Love Got To Do With It. As a piece of public art the giant head works on several levels. For one, it's camp as hell. Tina Turner is a beloved gay icon, and the installation opened on Pride weekend in Margate.

But the statue is also a punning response to the Turner Prize 2019, which comes to Margate's Turner Contemporary gallery on 28 September. Dreamland's own Tina Turner Prize will highlight the work of local artists in Margate, and playfully offers a kitsch alternative to a contest that often draws criticism and ridicule for being too esoteric.

"When it was announced that the Turner Prize was coming to Margate, we felt we needed to do something to celebrate that," says Dreamland CEO Eddie Kemsley. "So we decided to commission a giant, inflatable Tina Turner head, as you do."

The arrival of the prestigious Turner Prize in Margate comes as the seaside town is

enjoying an unexpected cultural and artistic boom. Opened in 2011 and situated on a rocky precipice overlooking the North Sea, the Turner Contemporary gallery was the catalyst for this regeneration. Dreamland itself has been the focus of several attempts to revive the 99-year-old fairground, with this latest incarnation opened in 2017, and contributing to the town's newfound status as a creative and artistic hub for locals as well as day-tripping Londoners.

"The number of artists setting up workshops and creative spaces in Margate is doubling every year," says Kemsley. "We're seeing galleries opening every month now, and that's being helped massively by the Turner Prize spotlight shining on Margate over the Autumn."

Like many other seaside towns up and down the country, Margate's economic fortunes tumbled when cheaper airfares meant British travellers increasingly chose to holiday abroad. Margate's emergence as a destination of culture comes at a time when British travel habits are already swinging back in the opposite direction.

Dreamland Margate was named in a Lords select committee report on the future of Britain's seaside towns, as an example of a

successful regeneration initiative (perhaps after a thrill-seeking baroness took a ride on the renovated wooden rollercoaster and found herself suitably impressed).

"Margate has been a leisure destination for hundreds of years," says Kemsley. "And so generations of people who've spent time here remember it fondly. I think that fondness is shining through now in the degree of support and attention the town is getting. We're punching above our weight when it comes to the kind of coverage we're getting about Margate's creative scene. Everybody wants to see it do well."

The Turner Prize is no stranger to being parodied, but perhaps not by its seaside neighbours. So has the gallery taken the giant inflatable head in good spirits?

"They are, erm, I don't know what I can say," laughs Kemsley. "What's the best way I can put it? I think they recognise the head's contribution to the art scene. And at the end of the day it's got so much coverage, and any coverage of an artistic nature around Margate is fab. It's what we're all after."

● *The Turner Prize 2019 opens at the Turner Contemporary on 28 September. The winner is revealed in December. The winner of the Tina Turner Prize will be revealed in October.*



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BUSINESS LUNCH

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

BAOZIINN, LONDON BRIDGE

WHAT IS IT? The latest in a growing empire of BaoziInn – as in *Baozi Inn* – serving fluffy steamed buns (baozi) and dumplings inspired by the cuisines of northern China. It started life in China Town, before expanding to Soho, Victoria, London Bridge and, strangely enough, the food court at Intu Lakeside. It's the brainchild of Wei Shao, one of the pioneers of London's Sichuan food scene who launched the critically acclaimed and still hugely popular Barshu 12 years ago, so it comes with some pedigree. Like all the best dumpling restaurants, it's a no-nonsense sort of place where the food does the talking.

WHO WILL IT IMPRESS? The restaurant itself is pleasant enough, with vintage posters decorating the exposed-brick dining room, and an open kitchen where you can watch the chefs preparing the food. But you don't come here for fancy accoutrements: it's really all about those baozi. A short walk from the chaos of Borough Market, it's a great place for an informal meeting with a like-minded dumpling connoisseur, or it's a good spot for a working lunch for one.

WHAT ABOUT THE FOOD? The menu runs the gamut from steamed buns to full main dishes, but we recommend going wild on the dumplings. The green jiaozi in rich puddles of broth are fantastic, the prawns having a wonderful crunch and the pork deliciously aromatic. An absolute must-order from elsewhere on the menu is the barbecue pork char sui "special set", which comes with pancakes, Sichuanese pickles and melon, not



The unbelievably good char sui pork, which is buttery soft and extremely decadent

dissimilar in presentation to peking duck. The meat is absurdly tasty: buttery and fatty and rich and almost certainly terrible for you. Brilliant stuff.

DESSERT? Get out of here: if you're still hungry after all that, you're doing it wrong.

SET MENU? Nope, just order your bodyweight in jiaozi and you'll be fine.

PHONE: 020 8037 5875

WHERE: 34-36 Southwark St, SE11TU

WEB: baoziinn.com

THE DINING ROOM, NED'S CLUB

WHAT IS IT? Everybody knows about the restaurants on the ground floor of the City's spectacular Ned. No fewer than eight venues serve food ranging from traditional British to Californian to Asian-Pacific. But members of Ned's Club will also be aware of a more hidden gem. On the same floor as The Vault – the Ned's downstairs drinking den housed in a former bank vault – is The Dining Room, a relaxed modern European restaurant that serves excellent food to a jaunty, jazz-age soundtrack.

WHO WILL IT IMPRESS? Basically everyone. The Ned is an architectural marvel and the downstairs club is no exception. Slightly away from the crowds who flock to the ground floor, there's an



The service in the Ned's The Dining Room is first class and the food is exceptional

air of relaxed glamour to The Dining Room, with its original art and liberal use of soft furnishings. The fact you must be invited by a member (or be staying in a Ned hotel 'large room' or above) gives it the added allure of exclusivity.

WHAT ABOUT THE FOOD? Genuinely top-notch. Italian chef Matteo Nardin has designed a menu filled with interesting twists on classic dishes. We started with native lobster with peas, a dish transformed into a summer garden by fresh strawberries and strawberry puree. Vivid pink beef fillet comes with three colourful variations on cauliflower, and somehow manages to taste even better than it looks. The monkfish is cooked on the bone, then deboned, before being served in a decadent curried mussel veloute, giving it a real depth of taste. Wagyu steak is every bit as good as you would expect. Special mention goes to the Marmite bread, which is as fine as any we've eaten all year.

SET MENU? Not when we visited, but generous servings of amuse-bouche and palate cleansers gives it the feel of a tasting menu, albeit one of your own making.

PHONE: 020 3828 2000
WHERE: 27 Poultry, EC2R 8AJ
WEB: thened.com

THREE UNCLES, LIVERPOOL STREET

WHAT IS IT? An impressive little Cantonese canteen just over the road from Liverpool Street station. It's the brainchild of childhood friends Cheong Yew (Uncle Lim), Put Sing Tsang (Uncle Sidney) and Mo Kwok (Uncle Mo) and was planned as the trio's second outpost after a Holloway Road flagship. Plan A was scuppered by those pesky folks at Islington council, who have been causing all kinds of headaches for bar and restaurant owners in recent years. It specialises in roasted meat, specifically Siu Yuk, Char Sui and roast duck. There are also dim sum as well as rice and noodles.

WHO WILL IT IMPRESS? It's not one for a formal meeting, but the bijou space isn't without its charms. The branding is part Hong Kong canteen, part Central St Martins graphic design graduate, with sexy fonts and a bold blue, white and red colour scheme. If you can nab one of the few tables it would be perfectly serviceable for an informal catch-up, but expect it to get busy at peak times. Your best bet is to get it delivered straight to your office. That way you can impress clients with some surprisingly authentic Cantonese cuisine, and impress your accounts department with the very reasonable bill.

WHAT ABOUT THE FOOD? The menu is reassuringly short – this is a place that offers few things, but does them well. The main event is the roast meat, which is prepared using a traditional six-step technique involving a two-day marinade.



The funky interior of Three Uncles, an authentic Cantonese canteen near Liverpool Street

The pork belly is especially good, coming with a satisfying sliver of crispy fat, and the roast duck is well worth a try.

DESSERT? The closest you'll get is a bottle of fresh juice. We can recommend the carrot and ginger.

SET MENU? Have you not been paying attention – it's really not that kind of place.

PHONE: 020 7375 3573
WHERE: 12 Devonshire Row, EC2M 4RH
WEB: threeuncles.co.uk

SANTO REMEDIO, TOOLEY STREET

WHAT IS IT? A Mexican restaurant and tequila bar, Santo Remedio started out life as a wandering pop-up and supper club, and lost none of its character when it opened its first permanent spot in Shoreditch in 2016. That residence lasted just a few months before Santo Remedio packed up their quesadillas and headed south of the river to a new location on Tooley Street, just a short walk from London Bridge station. The cuisine is classically Mexican, with a menu of enchiladas, tamales, flautas and tacos.



A taco with beef and pickled red onion, which sits alongside enchiladas, tamales and flautas

WHO WILL IT IMPRESS? Santo Remedio walks the fine line between authenticity and theme, with a bright and airy dining room swimming in bold South American tiles and tapestry. But the Mexican inspiration isn't just aesthetic. The dishes are as colourful as the walls, and key ingredients are imported from Oaxaca and the Yucatan, like the serrano peppers and the crunchy fried grasshoppers in the guacamole.

WHAT ABOUT THE FOOD? Order the soft shell crab tacos dressed in a bright and lightly spicy serrano mayo, and then get the hibiscus flower enchiladas, made with Chihuahua cheese (that is, cheese from the Mexican state of Chihuahua). The crispy flautas, or taquito, are rolled tacos, which here are packed with baby potatoes, a cool avocado salsa and pickled red onion. The guacamole is on point and served with blue and white corn tortilla chips, and if you don't mind flossing when you back to your desk, the elote (grilled corn on the cob) in cotija cheese and chipotle mayo is deeply buttery and sweet.

DESSERT? There are two desserts here that aren't churros, but seriously. You're going to have the churros.

SET MENU? Yes. There's a three course set lunch option for £19.50, or if you need to be somewhere soon you can have two courses for £15.50.

PHONE: 0207 403 30 21
WHERE: 152 Tooley St, SE1 2TU
WEB: santoremedio.co.uk



THE LAST SUPPER

Musician and radio DJ **CERYS MATTHEWS** tells us what she'd eat for her last meal on earth, from Ian Brown's cocktail recipe to chillies straight from her handbag

When I was touring I used to keep a little journal about food, full of curiosities and surprises and things that make you smile. Like the fact people from Luxembourg call turkeys "schnuddelhong", which translates as "snot hen". Once you've heard that you can't look at a turkey the same way.

I collected all these stories in a new book called *Where the Wild Cooks Go*, which is full of interesting things about cultures from South America to Japan. I've always loved food and cooking. I was quite an independent child, and I thought if I knew what was edible I'd have a better chance of surviving. It's funny, because my mum was a rubbish cook. We survived on Findus crispy pancakes.

I'm mainly vegetarian now because I have a vegan daughter and a vegetarian husband, although I let myself have fish if I really fancy it. The worst thing for vegetarians is being offered risotto and lasagne over and over again. I like recipes that are fast and delicious – I'm quite a lazy cook. I don't want to spend hours poring over intricate recipes. But touring put me off sandwiches for life, because that's all you eat for years and years. Sandwiches and pies.

As this is my last meal, I'm going to start with a cocktail – it's called Death by Chocolate. The recipe was given to me by Ian Brown of the Stone Roses when we were on tour in Japan back in 1997 or '98. You get a pint glass, add a shot of vodka, a shot of Tia Maria and fill it up with Guinness. It will help make my final few hours a lot more comfortable because it gives you that lovely winter warmer feeling.

Next I'd like something that will linger long on my tastebuds. I'm a complete chilli addict. I've carried them

with me all my life, since I was a teenager. As a touring musician I used to carry a bottle of tabasco with me but the top kept coming off so I switched to dried chillies instead, and most of the time I'll have fresh ones in my handbag. I love the texture – that crunch. Chillies give you a bit of zing and excitement. And they're good for you – what's not to love? So my next course is going to be a dahl. It's so cheap, so delicious, so good for you, and so good for the planet.

Dahl is like Welsh cawl – every family has a different twist on it, and it changes from region to region. You really can't go wrong, just choose the one that you love the most. Mine doesn't have any garlic or many aromatics in it, which is traditional for North India. You brown the butter before you start cooking, which gives it that wonderful, rich taste. I think if I was nervous about the end of my life this would sit well in my system.

I don't want to choose a huge table of stuff, which might feel like a mountain to climb, but I'd like lots of little things to pick at. So I'm going to have some pickled onions with fresh coriander, some brown jeera rice, some saag paneer, but with tofu rather than paneer, and a side of vegan haggis.

For dessert I'm going to have something I picked up in Spain: you chop a charentais melon in half, take out the seeds and fill it full of port. That's it. Simple.

And I may as well have a few drinks before the end. So I'll have a Campari spritz. Not an Aperol spritz, it has to be Campari. I love the bitterness. And I'll have a Babysham – the old recipe before they changed it. And a pina colada with proper fresh coconut milk and pineapple juice. Hopefully now I'll be a little fuzzy around the edges, and the cold-hearted finality of death will seem a bit more bearable.

● *Where the Wild Cooks Go*, published by Particular Books, is out now priced £19.49; Cerys is touring in London this month

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THE STORY OF THE WORLD'S BEST BEEF

Discovered by accident, Japan's Kobe beef industry has become the envy of the world. **CHRIS OSBURN** travels to the land of fancy cows to see what the fuss is about.

Wedged between the Rokko mountain range and Osaka Bay, Kobe is the sixth largest city in Japan with more than a million and a half people. Its namesake beef doesn't come from the city itself but from the surrounding farmland of Hyogo Prefecture where Kobe is the capital and the key port. As the story goes, it was an Englishman visiting the port of Kobe who first had the idea of eating beef from cows raised in Hyogo – or at least was the first person known to have acted on the notion. He tucked in to his legendary meal back in 1868, when Japan only just had opened up trading with the West. At that time the Japanese diet did not include meat, and cows in Japan were used mostly as draught animals. Since then, though, Kobe beef has been celebrated as what many believe to be the best in the world, and no local farmer would dare make the area's prized Tajima cows put in a day of labour to earn their keep.

THE CHAMPAGNE OF STEAKS

The breed for Kobe beef is the Tajima strain of Japanese Black cattle. Only the meat from Tajima cows that are reared in Hyogo qualify to be certified Kobe beef.

However, simply breeding the right type of cow in the right place does not in itself result in Kobe beef. The meat from these cows then must be scored on its marbling and texture, according to rules set out by the Kobe Beef Marketing and Distribution Promotion Association. Only the best of that lot can be certified.

With respect to scoring, the ideal balance of meat and fat marbled together is called *shimofuri*. In essence, the greater the *shimofuri* the higher the score. Ideally the fat should start to dissolve in the mouth, giving way to the flavour of the lean meat. In the case of Kobe, that flavour is sweet and nutty. Often when ordering a steak, there's a trade off between flavour and texture. With Kobe beef, this shouldn't be an issue, with the meat a perfect blend of both.

KOBE IN THE UK

Of the 5,577 head of Kobe beef cattle that

went to market in 2018, only 693 were exported. The European Union is the biggest overseas market for Kobe beef, with roughly 1,000kg coming to the UK. Taiwan is the second biggest market, followed by the United States. The vast majority remains in Japan for domestic consumption.

For all the recent talk of veganism and plant-based diets, beef is still big business in Britain. Indeed, eating less meat in general seems to be benefitting some high end steakhouses. M Restaurants – a premium steak restaurant group with outlets in the City, Victoria and Twickenham – has a £165 per person "Wagyu Experience Menu" featuring Kobe beef fillet among its seven courses. The M group also sells Kobe fillet a la carte for £1 per gram.

According to M's executive chef Michael Reid, his restaurants have seen "no impact whatsoever," with respect to trends in non-meat dining. Reid suggests there may be more people adhering to a flexitarian approach, but when they exercise their more carnivorous side, they do so at places such as M. "People are probably eating less beef at home, but not so much when they're dining out. It's their treat," says Reid.

KOBE IN KOBE

In Kobe beef's prefecture of origin, there's no indication of waning interest for its most famous food. Indeed it's all but impossible to stroll through the centre of Kobe without encountering restaurant signage, window displays and advertisements directing carnivores to places where they can eat Kobe beef.

Perhaps the most visible promotion is at Moriya Shoten, a butchery in the heart of Kobe specialising in selling regional beef. However, Moriya Shoten stands out not so much for the lusciously marbled meat on view in its windows or the brisk cross-counter trade conducted inside, but for the long lines of customers on the street queuing up for an affordable taste of Kobe beef.

From a tiny takeaway window on the side of the shop, Moriya Shoten sells up to 2,000 potato and Kobe beef croquettes a day to an ever-present queue of patient patrons. At a mere ¥90 (roughly 60p) each, the croquettes are worth the wait.

While queuing for croquettes, patrons ►

► pass a bronze plaque with the profile of a Tajima cow's head outside the shop. This plaque indicates proof of membership in the Kobe Beef Marketing & Distribution Promotion Association.

The more time spent in Kobe, the more these plaques become common landmarks around town. According to Tetsunori Tanimoto, the Head of Kobe Beef Association and President of Livestock Division for Hyogo Prefectural Headquarters National Federation of Agricultural Co-operative, there are plans to roll out the plaques to member businesses around the world that sell authentic Kobe beef.

Another place where it is possible to see one of these plaques is across the street from Moriya Shoten in the food halls of Daimaru Department Store. The lower floor of this upscale retail haven offers a foodie shopping experience similar to Selfridges, with vast displays of freshly made sushi and sashimi, steamed buns, and even well-stocked sections of prepared vegan dishes – and, of course, a broad selection of Kobe beef for takeaway eating or to be cooked at home.

The same plaque sits prominently on view at 110-year-old family-run Kobe beef shop, Tatsuya. Top price fillet and sirloin cuts of the highest ranked Kobe beef are king here, but a range of other products is available; the shop's owner recommends thin slices for adding to shabu shabu (hot pot). Shoppers also can pick up preserved beef products such as Kobe beef jerky and *tsukudani* (pickled beef with salt, sugar and ginger).

Of course for most diners, steak remains the preferred way to eat Kobe beef and it's arguably is the best method for savouring the fullest expression of the meat. A smart spot for having your steak done right – along with a bit of kitchen theatre – is Ishida, a quiet teppanyaki restaurant hidden away on the third floor of a seemingly nondescript commercial building (and another establishment with the aforementioned bronze plaque out front). Kobe beef served here is of the highest ranking (A5/BMS – 12, in case you're wondering).

There may not be any official bronze plaque or guarantee of high ranked meat at 'western style' restaurant Mon, but the 80-year-old family-run restaurant serves what might be the most tender cutlet sandwich in the world. With its dark wood paneling, vintage bric-a-brac behind the bar and table-side condiment trays of grated Parmesan cheese, Tabasco and soy sauce, the scene is an odd but comforting amalgamation of North American and Japanese. It's a cosy setting to indulge in the restaurant's signature cutlet sandwich.

With panko-crusted Kobe on slices of fluffy white bread, topped with a layer of tangy house-made sauce (not unlike Worcestershire sauce), it is a super soft and succulent sarnie,



From top: The distinctive marbling that gives Kobe beef its unmistakable, buttery taste, with the fat dissolving on the tongue; A chef preparing a fillet for the pan

yielding with each bite as if the meat had been pureed, tenderised or marinated before being breaded. Not so, promised Mon's owner. The beef is just that delicate.

RUGBY WORLD CUP

A great time to explore the beefier aspects of Japanese cuisine will be during Rugby World Cup 2019, which are on in Japan until early November. Kobe is one of a dozen host cities for the games, with four scheduled matches to be played at Kobe Misaki Stadium, including England v USA on 26 September.

With Kansai International Airport within easy reach of Kobe and Shinkansen bullet trains connecting the city to other destinations in Setouchi (the western "inland sea region" of Japan) as well as the rest of the country, the city makes a fabulous base for the World Cup. For travellers particularly

keen to carry on with gastronomic pursuits, consider sister Setouchi city Hiroshima. Japan's biggest producer of oysters, with *izakaya* "tapas" bars aplenty, and street treats such *okonomiyaki* (savoury pancakes) served hot and fast throughout the city, Hiroshima would be ideal to couple with Kobe for a most delicious holiday.

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- For more about Rugby World Cup 2019 check out tickets.rugbyworldcup.com

- For ideas about visiting Kobe and the Setouchi region have a look at setouchitrip.com ■

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**Ingredients:**

- 45ml Star of Bombay gin
- 20ml lemon juice
- 10ml RinQuinQuin peach aperitif
- 10ml sugar syrup
- 15ml egg white
- 1 small tarragon sprig
- 0.25g Ardbeg 10yo whisky (dip a table spoon into whisky and let it drip almost dry - the residue left over is all you need. Stir into other ingredients)

Method:

- Combine all ingredients in a shaker
- Dry shake without ice to emulsify egg white
- Add lots of ice and shake until your hands are nice and cold
- Strain through a fine tea strainer to remove any small ice chips and any bits of tarragon leaf
- Garnish with two overlapped tarragon leaves and serve

HOW TO MIX VAUDEVILLE

Travel to another place and time courtesy of this most sophisticated of cocktails at Carnaby Street's The Court

It's only fitting that the Carnaby Street bar that's played host to rock legends including Jimi Hendrix, The Rolling Stones, The Beatles and The Who should serve up a cocktail that's at once traditional and progressive. Mark Low, lead creative at Mr Lyan Studio, who designed the cocktail menu for famous members' club The Court, has combined the seemingly endless appetite for gin with a touch of Gatsby-esque class in the Vaudeville.

It's a cocktail that should be savoured by candlelight on an autumnal evening as the nights are drawing in, preferably with a jazz age soundtrack playing in the background. It's a cocktail that will transport you to another place and time, a little slice of history that channels the spirit of louche aristocrats and Venetian balls, while maintaining enough of a rock 'n' roll edge to feel relevant to the modern drinker.

"The Vaudeville's DNA boils down to that of a White Lady, a gin sour from the early 20th century, featuring gin, orange liqueur and lemon juice," explains Low. "In this instance we expanded on the original with an

elegant French influence, switching the orange liqueur for a wine based peach aperitif from Provence – the wonderfully named RinQuinQuin – and adding some fresh tarragon for subtle anise. It would be the perfect drink for a Vaudevillian party in late 18th Century Paris. Britain's love affair with gin is no secret, so we wanted to create an easy going yet complex and elegant drink reflecting The Court and it's modern day Gatsby-esque feel.

"It's really easy to make, just combine all the ingredients in a cocktail shaker and dry shake to emulsify the egg white, and then shake with ice to chill it down to serving temperature. A common mistake people make when mixing drinks at home is not using enough ice. When shaking drinks you want to fit as much ice as possible into the shaker to get good emulsification and a steady, controlled chill. With too little ice you won't get enough agitation and the ice will melt too rapidly, diluting the drink."

So head out into the warm evening and savour the flavour of this most sophisticated of beverages. It's what Mick Jagger would do.



Mixologist Mark Low shows us how it's done in the art deco surrounds of The Court, which has played host to Jimi Hendrix, The Rolling Stones, The Beatles and The Who



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Above from left: The neon logo; a yuzu and passionfruit soufflé **Right:** The main drag of the dining room, based on a Tokyo drinking den **Below:** Some of the waving lucky cats that peer down from the walls



REVIEW

LUCKY CAT
GROSVENOR SQUARE

Can Gordon Ramsay hit gold again on the site of Maze, asks **STEVE DINNEEN**

Ten years and several lifetimes ago, Jason Atherton was heading up the kitchen at Gordon Ramsay's Maze. Back then, Ramsay could do no wrong. He was decorated with more Michelin awards than he could comfortably carry up a flight of stairs, owned lauded restaurants from New York to Tokyo, and was the swearsy star of several TV shows.

But ten years and several lifetimes ago is when things started to go a bit wrong. The coming years would see personal and professional relationships explode. Key figures including Atherton would acrimoniously depart. The Ramsay empire would teeter. There were high-profile closures and higher-profile court cases and the fact he'd spent the last decade calling people ****s and ****s and ***** ****s meant nobody had much sympathy.

Ramsay retrenched, although admittedly "retrenched" in this case includes opening a two Michelin star restaurant in Bordeaux. I went over to interview him there and he was studiously pleasant, obscenely nice, speaking in the hushed tones of a man who's been told by an expensive PR agency not to lose his ***** temper.

Now he's back in the UK with his first London restaurant in five years, returning to

the Mayfair site of Maze, which feels somehow significant. Obviously he opted to play it safe, going back to his haute cuisine roots with a... Wait, what? A pan-Asian eating house?

Lucky Cat opened this summer to a chorus of sneers and accusations of cultural appropriation, in part, I'm sure, because Ramsay spent a decade calling people ****s and ****s and ***** ****s, which doesn't inspire anyone to give you the benefit of the doubt. Well, ladies and gents, I have a hot take for you. I liked it. I had a nice time. I would recommend it to a friend.

In fairness, I doubt Ramsay has been secretly hankering for a Japanese-ish restaurant to add to his portfolio; I think someone fed a bunch of numbers into a machine and Lucky Cat popped out. The elevator pitch sounds like it was generated by algorithm, with its pan-Asian menu and its sharing concept and its ostentatiously American DJ booth (thankfully unoccupied when I visited on a Sunday afternoon).

It's like someone stacked Nobu on top of Hakkasan on top of Sexy Fish and stomped on them until only one restaurant remained. Its purpose: to entice all those rich Americans staying around the corner in Claridges and the Connaught to part with large fistfuls of dollars (exhibit A, your honour: the menu uses the word "eggplant" instead of aubergine).

But, I reiterate, *I liked it*. When you're sitting in one of the expansive booths, sipping an extremely good glass of sparkling sake, chatting to a waiter who's so charming I would consider asking him speak at my wedding, it *feels* like a Gordon Ramsay restaurant. Not one of the really great ones, admittedly, but it's run by a team who know what they're doing.

The decor is easy on the eye, apparently inspired by Tokyo's 1930s drinking dens, a concept so far removed in both time and geography that it's hard to say if it bears any

actual resemblance. It's pretty, though. Along one wall are a legion of grey cats, aristocratic cousins of the gold plastic things from the Chinese takeaways of my childhood, arms held aloft but (on my visit at least) not actually waving.

The menu zigzags woozily across Asia, the biggest stop-overs being Japan and Hong Kong. And while the words "pan-Asian" fill me with a nameless dread, it's all well put together. A case in point: I never thought I'd write that Gordon Ramsay would be responsible for some of the finest prawn toast in the land, but these four perfect, springy little morsels make a strong case.

The Burmese crab masala (a recipe from the wife of one of the chefs) is deep and pungent, with half a dozen soft shell crab legs making a final bid for freedom over the side of the copper dish, the whole thing topped with thick shavings of coconut and a tangle of greenery. You'd call it street food if it didn't cost £24. It's delicious, and amusingly incongruous next to the flamboyantly-presented crudités, which are precariously draped over a tower of ice cubes.

Travelling a thousand miles east, the char sui pork chop with nashi pear (£23) is a belter, its thick layers of fat melting like butter. The crispy duck leg (£27) has a nice, greasy crunch, and comes with pillows of steamed bread so light and fragrant I'd like to be buried between two of them.

The only mis-step were the snail and watercress dumplings, which were over-engineered and didn't really taste of anything. I had soufflé for dessert, and while I enjoyed it, I can't quite pinpoint from which part of Asia it hails (I suppose it did involve yuzu and lemongrass).

In a perfect world this would be the point where I say what an absolute kitchen nightmare Lucky Cat is, but I had an infuriatingly lovely time. Chef knows how to run a ***** restaurant.

● To book visit gordonramsayrestaurants.com



MY LIFE IN
RESTAURANTS
MARK HIX

THE LIFE AQUATIC

Our resident chef leaves dry land behind in pursuit of an idyllic life aboard a barge

Chalk it up to my coastal upbringing, but for years now I've dreamed of living on a boat. There is a beguiling romanticism to leaving behind the petty concerns of dry land and heading out wherever the river takes me. But despite spending many an afternoon browsing various boats at marinas and idly fantasising about my new life on the waves, I've never been able to take the plunge, as it were.

I've been down this path once before. Back in Dorset I have this lovely old 1970s Chris-Craft, which I've spent more than a decade and unthinkable sums of money refurbishing. Far from the idealised view of sailing off into the sunset, the wrong boat can become an insatiable money sink, demanding constant maintenance and costly annual repairs just to keep it from making one last voyage to the bottom of the harbour. I'm afraid it's a lost cause, and certainly not suitable accommodation for anything bigger than the mice who've recently made it their home.

So naturally I've been cautious in my search for a boat to live aboard, trawling through online auctions and speaking to brokers who've been through the process before. Eventually I found what was to be my new home: a brand new, fully fitted, 65ft wide beam barge. It is almost perfect, more luxurious than many boats I've stayed on and surprisingly spacious. My mooring on the open Thames along the embankment is ideal too, as I'm not overlooked by high-rise buildings or crowded by too many other boats.

Adjusting to life on the river hasn't been an entirely painless

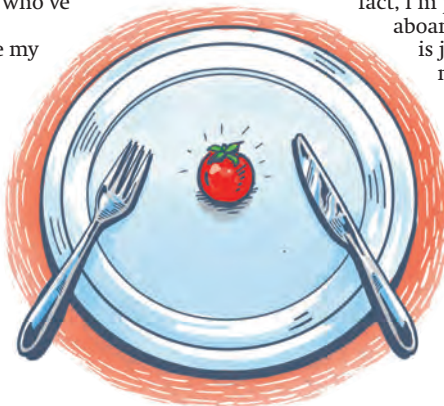
process. I will spare you too many details, but suffice it to say that one needs to be a little more hands on with the plumbing, pressing buttons and pumping bilges and ensuring everything is draining as it should.

I've always been a bit of a hoarder too, buying things I want but don't necessarily need, and so to fit my entire life into the boat I've had to give away or store many of my belongings. My wine collection has been relocated to my house in Dorset, but I've discovered that the engine room has enough space for a few choice bottles, and that they will be kept cool by the steel hull as it sits below the waterline. I've always said that downsizing is good for the soul, and recently I've found that sitting on the deck with a coffee and watching the other boats glide past is just as valuable as any well-stocked wine cellar.

Each day I'm woken by the gentle rocking of the wake of the first water taxi, which is better than any alarm, and each night that same peaceful rocking sends me to sleep. My new neighbours are a wonderful and friendly bunch, an eclectic crowd of creatives and professionals who have been an invaluable source of help and advice as I've adjusted to river living. In fact, I'm planning my first little gathering aboard Black Cow next week – the boat is jet black, so it only felt natural to name her after my favourite vodka.

Cooking will be something of a challenge – I got off to a terrible start when it took me an entire day to realise I was trying to cook without a gas bottle – but I can't wait to start hosting parties that spill off the boat and on to the pontoon.

At the very least, I'll consider this whole thing a success if the RNLI don't have to get involved.



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BLUE SKYE DRINKING

Home to one of the world's most distinctive distilleries, the Isle of Skye is a gourmand's dream. **SIMON THOMSON** visits the iconic bay to drink whisky made by the sea.

Off the northwest coast of mainland Scotland lies the Isle of Skye, the largest island of the Inner Hebrides. From its imposing central mountains, peninsulas jut into the sea like feathers extending from an open wing. Windswept and salt-sprayed, it is a scene of desolate, primeval beauty. It is the home of Talisker single malt, once praised by Robert Louis Stevenson as “the king o’ drinks”.

Skye is a remarkable place, and although it may not be entirely sensible to speak of terroir in relation to whiskies, there are both real and imagined lines to be drawn between the island and the flavours of smoke, spice and saline that characterise Talisker’s output; a whisky the marketing slogan informs us is “Made by the Sea”. The distillery’s maritime affinities are emphasised in advertising (and the brand is the title sponsor of the Talisker Whisky Atlantic Challenge, an annual, 3,000-mile rowing race, from the Canary Islands to Antigua).

Established in 1830, by brothers Hugh and Kenneth MacAskill, the Talisker Distillery is located not in Talisker Bay, but around a headland, in the village of Carbost, on the south shore of Loch Harport; close enough to the jellyfish-filled waters that waves crash against its walls in a storm. The distillery’s water, however, has always been sourced from underground

springs that rise in the nearby Hawk Hill and empty into Carbost Burn, a stream that runs past the distillery and into the sea loch.

In the almost two centuries since it was founded, the distillery has had several owners, but having been acquired by Guinness & Co in 1986, Talisker is now a prestigious part of the Diageo empire. It has traditionally produced whiskies with higher alcohol by volume (ABV) than most other distilleries. Once this was because its remote location meant that shipping costs would be reduced if it was selling comparatively fewer bottles, but at higher prices. Following the opening of a road bridge to the mainland in 1995, rather than filling barrels on site, new-make spirit is sent in tankers to the outskirts of Glasgow, where it is put into casks, some of which are returned to age on Skye. The history of high ABV production has left a mark, however; Talisker’s whiskies used to be triple distilled, and although that process was ended in the late 1920s the distillery’s current configuration of two wash stills and three spirit stills is a reminder of that heritage. Meanwhile, the level lyne arms of the wash stills encourage reflux, (where heavier elements fall back into the pot still), resulting in the creation of lighter, smoother spirits, redolent of their triple-distilled forebears.

Talisker was already producing 10- and 18-year-old bottlings, but since the early 2000s, when increasingly anorakish consumers were demanding ever more interesting single malts, the distillery has been ►

In August of this year
Talisker released the
second in the Bodega
Series; Talisker 41-
Year-Old.



PRADO settee with cushion. Design: Christian Werner.



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From top: The Talisker distillery; shucking scallops; the famous Talisker Bay

► pushing the boat out further with 20-, 25- and 30-year-old spirits. Last year it released what was then its oldest ever bottling; Talisker 40-Year-Old. Most Talisker is aged in American white oak, with small proportions in European oak ex-sherry casks. But for this, the first in their Bodega Series – in which the distillery is exploring the effects of finishing some of their finest spirits in rare sherry casks – a 1978 vintage single malt spent around three months in barrels that had previously held Delgado Zuleta’s award-winning Quo Vadis amontillado sherry. The resulting liquid had the peat, salt and pepper you would expect from a Talisker, burnished with the fruity complexity of one of Spain’s best sherries.

Encouraged by this experiment, in August of this year Talisker released the second in the Bodega Series; Talisker 41-Year-Old. Limited to just 2,000 bottles, it uses the same 1978 vintage single malt, but this time it has been rested in manzanilla sherry casks, which were once again sourced from Delgado Zuleta. Established in 1744, the eighth-generation family-controlled Delgado Zuleta is the oldest sherry producer in the so-called Sherry Triangle, of Cádiz. They provided six exceptional casks, which had been used for more than a century to age the bodega’s flagship La Goya very fine manzanilla sherry.

The 41-year-old has the same bones as the 40-year-old, only it is livelier and more



Senior site manager Diane Farrell, who was named in Management Today’s list of 35 Women Under 35, an annual recognition of Britain’s young female managerial talent. It is still rare for a distillery to have so many women in positions of authority, despite growing gender diversity.

assertive. Bright amber in colour, the signature flavours of Talisker are still present but they are intensified; the peppery notes skew towards an almost Sichuan prickle and the saltiness is the brine of oysters. A rich texture and expansive butter-caramel sweetness envelope the disparate flavours, folding them into a cohesive whole.

The experience of drinking whisky is always subjective, with different drinkers noting different elements and drawing different associations, but having a drink in great company or spectacular surroundings can greatly increase your appreciation and enjoyment. Talisker’s distillery and visitor centre attract as many as 90,000 visitors a year, and their Brand Home Manager, Fiona Macintyre, observes, “We’re the only attraction on Skye that has a roof.” The joke acknowledges that there is more to the island than exquisite single malts, with highlights including cruising around the coastline on the Seaflower, a luxury catamaran serving a surfeit of local seafoods; soaking up the warm hospitality of the old Kinloch Lodge; taking a guided wilderness hike in the foothills of the Red and Black Cuillin Mountains; and feasting on a sumptuous dinner at The Three Chimneys restaurant. Nevertheless, drinking Talisker in the environment where it was made is a positively numinous experience, in which everything else slips away. ■

IT'S AN OBERMAN'S WORLD

Stage and screen actress Tracy-Ann Oberman talks to Helen Crane about her latest role, being trolled on Twitter and why *Eastenders* is like the golden age of Hollywood. Words: **HELEN CRANE**

Stage actress, *Eastenders* mega-bitch, social media warrior. With her voluminous blonde mane, practiced side-eye and reputation for being fearlessly outspoken, Tracy-Ann Oberman cuts an intimidating figure. We meet at a bijou cafe just off Hampstead Heath, the kind that sells £400 vintage chairs and is filled with brunching mums and toddlers. She breezes in, fashionably late, wearing a long floral dress and dazzling white sneakers, her hair wavy rather than in her trademark corkscrew curls.

"I'm on a little WhatsApp group with a load of fantastic women," she tells me, sipping a glass of bright green juice. "We're talking about some of the sexiest women on British television, and they're getting their first grandma roles, even though their own children are under the age of 10. Women are having children later, their careers are longer, they're sexy longer, they're sexually active longer. But where are these women on television?"

You could make a decent case for Oberman, 53, being one of them. Her TV roles have included a stint as an anti-villain in *Doctor Who*, supporting roles in hit comedies *Friday Night Dinner* and *After Life*, and playing Chrissie Watts in *Eastenders*. She's also run the gamut on stage, from being part of the Royal Shakespeare Company to appearing alongside Celia Imrie in the recent Pinter at the Pinter season, to taking on the lead in *Fiddler on the Roof*. She's also found the time to star in more than 600 radio plays, and has now penned several of her own on the subject of golden-era Hollywood.

The term 'strong female lead' is bandied around a

lot these days but Oberman defines a good role a bit differently. "I don't mind whether a character is 'strong' or not," she says. "I just want them to be well-written and rounded and interesting, not tacked on to the story of a male protagonist."

So what roles is she itching to play? On TV, a period drama – "I've got the hair for it" – and on stage, a Chekhov. One arena that consistently offers up great female characters is soaps. Although she was only in *Eastenders* for a year and a half, Oberman had the honour of bumping off one of Albert Square's most iconic characters, 'Dirty' Den Watts, in her role as black widow Chrissie. "When you murder one of soap's hugest icons and bury him under the Queen Vic, the moniker follows you around – you're always going to be 'Eastenders actress,'" she says. "It's a badge of honour."

She makes the unlikely connection between Britain's best-loved soap and the golden age of Hollywood cinema, of which she's a huge fan (she says *Now Voyager*, *Mildred Pierce* and "anything with Bette Davis" are her favourites). "Those golden age of Hollywood films have always had fantastic female stories, and soap is kind of like that – you're darting around a set a bit like you would on the Warners lot in a little buggy," she says. This is the subject of many of the plays she writes for Radio 4, which tell the stories of icons like Davis, Joan Crawford and Doris Day.

Her latest project is new play *Mother of Him*, at the Park Theatre in London. Directed by Evan Placey, it is the real-life story of a teenage boy under house arrest after committing a terrible crime, told from the perspective of his mother. "It's about how single mothers are viewed, and their responsibility for their children," she says. "As a mother, are you meant to ►





Oberman starring in Jamie Lloyd's critically lauded Pinter season at the Harold Pinter Theatre

► love your child no matter what they do?"

One of the most striking things about Oberman is her confidence: you don't get the impression that she has ever been intimidated by anyone, or anything. Has she always been this way?

She pauses for a long time. "I think I've always been like that," she says eventually. "Bravery is very important to me, not just sitting back and going with the flow. It's about sticking your head above the parapet, and I think I've always been brave enough to do that, but age has made it easier."

A case in point is when Oberman spoke out about her past experience of working with high-profile theatre director Max Stafford-Clark, who was accused of making inappropriate sexual comments to two young actresses in 2017 – around the time the #MeToo movement was taking off in the US.

"I remember getting a message saying the narrative was going to be [that these were] silly snowflake girls who couldn't let a 70-year-old-man have a laugh," she says. "It really bothered me because this man had a reputation. I personally experienced it, I knew other people who had experienced it and I really didn't want those young women to be thrown to the wall."

This drive to stand up for what she believes runs through many of the things she's involved in outside of acting. This stems in part, she says, from her family history, which includes Jewish relatives who died in the Warsaw Ghetto. "I was always

very aware of family who didn't make it out of Poland and Germany and it's something we always discussed a lot in our family. It made me feel that I had to speak out, that nobody else was going to do it."

A project she hopes to get off the ground soon is a version of the *Merchant of Venice*, set against the Oswald Mosley fascism of the 1930s East End and the Battle of Cable Street, in which Oberman would play a female Shylock.

"We're working based on my family history, and my grandmother being an East End Jewish matriarch," she says, folding her hands and smiling pointedly to signal that that's all she wants to say on the matter.

Her grandparents were members of the Jewish Labour movement in East End, and this heritage played a part in her deciding to speak out against the Labour Party – of which she used to be a member – on Twitter, with regard to the ongoing and well-publicised allegations of anti-Semitism. "I kept thinking 'is anyone going to come in from the Labour Party and speak out on it', and nobody did, so I found myself saying my political thing."

She was encouraged to join Twitter in the late noughties by her early-adopter friends David Baddiel, David Schneider and Omid Djalili. At first, she loved it. "It was like being at the wittiest cocktail party, you could talk to anybody, follow anybody. I never had a negative tweet sent my way." She pauses. "Well, the odd dick pic," she

says, leaning towards me knowingly, "but you just block them and move on."

But after speaking out online about the anti-Semitism crisis in the Labour Party, things took a turn, and she began to receive abusive messages. "Thousands of people jumped at me and it was intimidating and scary, but I thought 'They want to drive me off and I won't let them'."

It was this experience that inspired her to start her podcast, *Trolled*, where celebrities and other public figures discuss their experiences of social media and being online. So far, the guests have included Gary Lineker, Luciana Berger and Al Murray.

She still thinks social media can be a force for good, though, and this is reflected in her new play, which is set before the social media era in 1998. The mother, Brenda, is portrayed negatively in the press due to her son's actions and finds she has little control over her own image. "In 1998, when the papers wanted to write that you were a dreadful human being and you'd been doing x, y and z, they could get away with it because there was no other redress. Today Brenda could control her own story, she could have her own Twitter account."

Thankfully Oberman has no such problem. Few public figures tackle the issues that count with such relish. Long may it continue.

● *Mother of Him* is on now at the Park Theatre in Finsbury Park, until 26 October. To book go to parktheatre.co.uk ■

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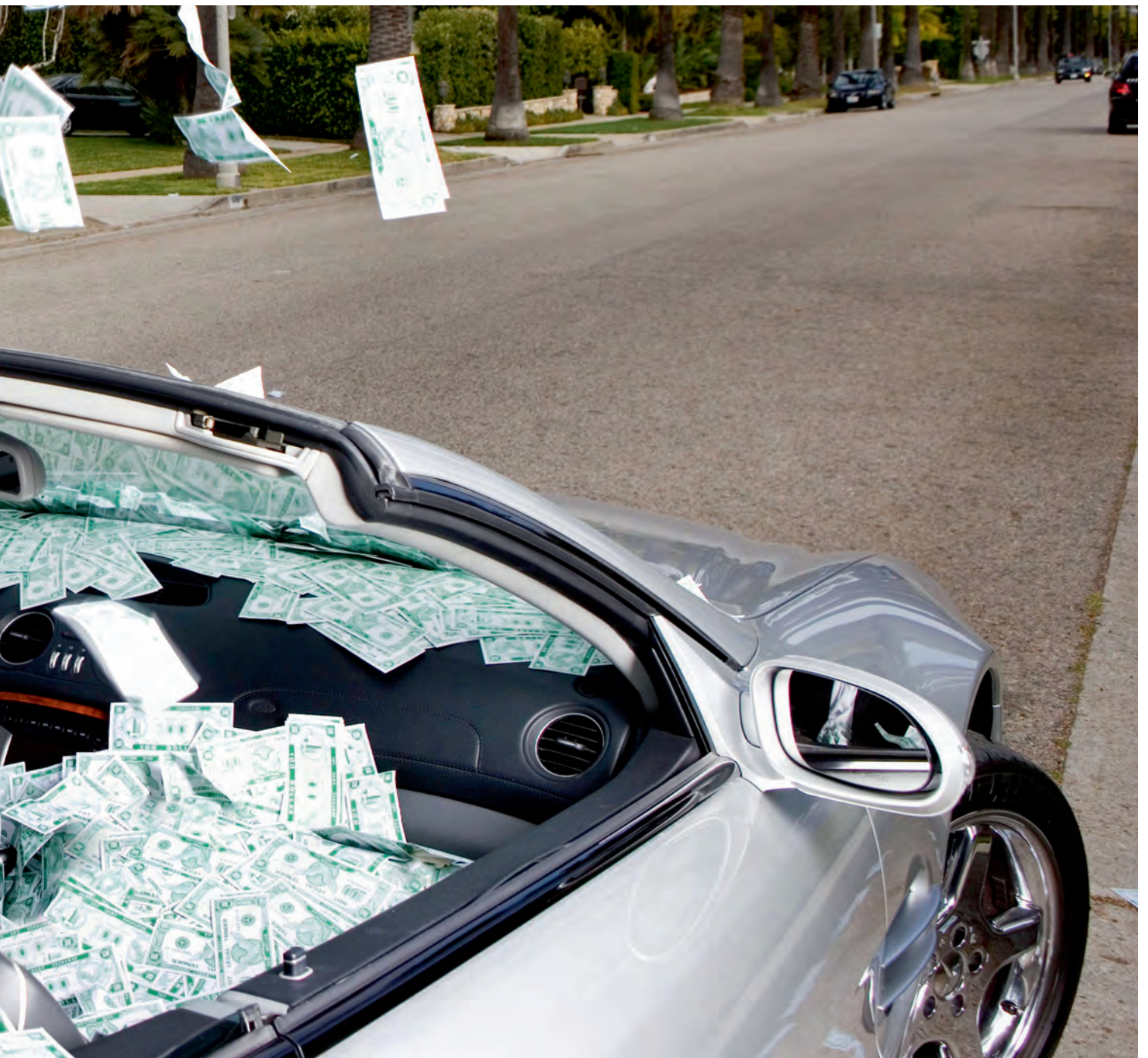
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THE WOLF AT THE DOOR

A new immersive production examines the life of the infamous Wolf of Wall Street Jordan Belfort. **STEVE DINNEEN** joins him for a Red Bull to talk about glamourising fraud and surviving Brexit.



The most remarkable thing about Jordan Belfort, the self-styled Wolf of Wall Street, is not his once-prodigious drug consumption or the Bacchanalian excess of his infamous company Stratton Oakmont – it's his sheer, bloody-minded staying power.

In his 56 years he's experienced bankruptcy, drug addiction and incarceration, losing more money than most people could earn in several lifetimes, and yet he sits before me a picture of manicured good-health, all Hollywood tan and 1,000 watt smile.

Belfort's story is at once tawdry and outrageous. In it he plays the protagonist, the villain and the fool. His meat-distribution business went bankrupt when he was 25; he became a millionaire stocks trader by age 30; he plead guilty to securities fraud and money laundering before his 40th birthday. In the years leading up to his stretch in the slammer, Stratton Oakmont made a fortune flogging worthless stocks to gullible investors.

His team, many of whom went from menial jobs to overnight millionaires, celebrated by taking monstrous quantities of drugs, ordering prostitutes to the office and organising niche entertainments such as dwarf tossing competitions. Then the FBI descended; Belfort was eventually sentenced to four years, of which he served 22 months, after agreeing to inform on his corrupt associates.

For most people, that would have been the final chapter. What use is a salesman who everybody knows is a crook? But Belfort started writing his memoirs in prison – apparently on the advice of his cellmate Tommy Chong of Cheech and Chong fame – becoming a published author and the inspiration for Martin Scorsese's epic movie. Now he plies his trade as a motivational speaker and online "educator", charging aspirational sales-people for access to his "foolproof system for closing", which will set you back anything from \$9.99 a month for a Patreon subscription to \$999 for his "Straight Line Marketing" video course. ►

► He leans heavily into the Wolf of Wall Street brand – his website even features a testimonial by Leonardo DiCaprio; it is not, I must admit, the actor’s most convincing performance. Belfort’s side-hustles include a business selling Phenomenal, a “revolutionary pheromone fragrance” that promises to “enhance your personal magnetism and intensify the power of attraction by subliminal persuasion.”

His latest venture is an unlikely foray into immersive theatre – a medium he says he’d never heard of until he was asked for the rights to his book – produced by the team behind *The Great Gatsby*, London’s longest-running immersive play. The production features a cast of 19 actors performing 25 hours of material during each 2.5 hour show.



We meet at London’s BAFTA club, Belfort wearing a blue sports jacket, defiantly untrendy boot-cut jeans and trainers. On his

wrist is a Hublot the size of my fist. He speaks with the rapid-fire staccato of a gatling gun, cramming an astonishing number of words into each sentence. He has a habit of punctuating his points with the same dainty ‘chef’s kiss’ gesture beloved of Donald Trump, a man for whom he admits to “grudgingly” voting for in the 2016 election.

“America is so incredibly corrupt it’s mind-boggling,” he says in his distinctive Bronx accent. Isn’t that a little rich coming from a convicted felon? “Who would know better than me? I’m not saying I was never corrupt. I was. I know both sides.”

This is where the whole Wolf of Wall Street phenomena becomes a little problematic. Former assistant US attorney Joel Cohen, who brought the case against Belfort, has since described him as an “unrepentant character” who he says is far less sympathetic in real life than he is on-screen. Is it even possible to tell Belfort’s story without turning him into a twisted anti-hero?

“There’s a version of this show that could be morally bankrupt,” admits *The Wolf of Wall Street* – *The Immersive Experience* director Alexander Wright. “But that’s not the tale we’re trying to tell. It’s a complex story about a complex time in history, seen from a complex place in 2019. This isn’t a production condoning his behaviour.”

I ask Belfort if he worries about glamourising his past. “It is glamorous,” he replies. “It just is. But people want the light



Above: Margot Robbie and Leonardo DiCaprio on the set of *The Wolf of Wal Street*;
Below: Belfort in his new career as a motivational speaker and online “educator”

side of it, not the dark side. They want to get rich and dabble in drugs. They want to experience beautiful women or beautiful men, and there’s nothing wrong with that. If you go to the movies and come out thinking ‘I want to do drugs all day long and lose people a lot of money and crash cars and bang women while my wife is at home – go and see a psychologist. Nobody with half a brain wants to be a drug addict and implode and go to jail.’

Does part of him miss those days? “Look, I’m 56, that happened when I was 26 – if I tried to do those things now, I’d probably die. I’ve also been sober for many years. My life has been a journey – you learn. My 26-year-old self was the start of a journey and if I were still that same person today I’d be a total loser, like the high school football star who’s still acting like he’s a quarterback aged 42. I try to evolve and grow and be my best self each day. I don’t look back.”

So if he had his time again, what would he change? “The actions I took that hurt other human beings,” he says in a manner that sounds rehearsed. “The people who lost money – I’d love to change that but I can’t.”

From his vantage point as a man who was once very much part of the problem rather than part of the solution, he says he can see choppy waters ahead for the finance industry. “Things are cyclical. After 2008 things got better, but they are starting to erode again. There will be another scandal in 5-10 years, for sure. Then you’ll see another huge crackdown and so on and so on... The cracks are already showing. It’s pretty sad but it’s human nature. I hope this time it doesn’t go so far.”

He’s less pessimistic about Britain’s chances post-Brexit: “I know as much as I know anything that Britain will be okay. It won’t matter. There’s a reason Britain ruled the world for so long. Sure there will be a little bit of pain, and opportunities will shift to different parts of the economy but it will be fine. There’s nothing wrong with nationalism. It isn’t racist. We should all love our country – you shouldn’t hurt others but your own country should come first.”

Belfort strikes me as a natural-born optimist, a salesman who believes his own



I never even thought I’d finish the book. Then Leo bought it. Then he actually made it. Then the movie became what it did...

pitch, the kind of person who, even during his darkest days, would have expected things to work out. Is that right? “Naaaaah, I never even thought I’d finish the book. Then Leo bought it. Then he actually made it. Then the movie became what it did...”

So was it all just dumb luck? “The most important takeaway is that wherever you are in your life, you can always come back from failure, it’s never too late to take a step in a new direction, but you have to work hard and take the lumps and take the critics. I got it right on my third try. I made mistakes and I paid for them, I learned and I grew – the day you stop learning you die. It’s a very circuitous version of the American Dream.”

The American Dream feels like the vital ingredient in Belfort’s story, the one thing that separates him from charismatic con-men across the world. If a Brit defrauded the English middle classes of their pension funds, that would be the end of them. But Belfort articulates something in the American psyche that foreigners struggle to fully comprehend. He’s a chancer, hustler, a felon – but he’s also a salesman, and to many, that trumps the rest. It’s what makes his story so compelling: it’s Glengarry Glen Ross with quaaludes.

He bounces out of the room clutching his can of Red Bull, a whirlwind of handshakes and teeth. He’s doing a talk in London this evening and flies out to Venice in the morning. His next big plan is a Broadway musical based on his life. Whether it’s the American Dream or a recurring nightmare, you haven’t seen the last of Jordan Belfort.

● To book tickets for *The Wolf of Wall Street* – *The Immersive Experience* go to immersivewolf.com ■





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HARRY OWEN
CHIEF OPERATING OFFICER,
CITY AM MEDIA GROUP

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● For more information visit cityinterrent.com; to join the club and receive your exclusive rewards, go to club.cityam.com



If you eat out in and around the City, you can guarantee to save far more than the value of your City A.M. Club membership dining at these fabulous restaurants – and many more



STK
Artfully blending the modern steakhouse with a chic lounge, STK is a fine dining restaurant that knows how to have fun. With its sleek, contemporary design and in-house DJ, you'll find a high-energy, infectious vibe that doesn't compromise on quality. Recently awarded continent winners in the Luxury Steakhouse category of

the 2018 World Luxury Restaurant Awards, the menu features reimagined classic American cuisine with signature dishes like bite-sized Lil' BRGs made with Wagyu beef, Lobster Mac & Cheese and highest quality steak. City A.M. Club members can enjoy 30 per cent off their total bill when dining from the à la carte lunch menu Tuesday to Friday from 12pm to 3pm.

SAVAGE GARDEN
Situated on the 12th floor of the DoubleTree by Hilton in Tower Hill, Savage Garden is a dramatic destination rooftop bar and restaurant offering incredible 360-degree views of the iconic London skyline. This privileged spot high above the City looks out over such sights as The Shard and Tower Bridge, and offers a changing menu of sharing plates and feasting boards designed to be enjoyed by large groups, as well as a range of amazing signature cocktails by the bar's resident mixologist. City A.M. Club members can choose to enjoy either a complimentary glass of wine, beer, or a classic cocktail with their two-course lunch, 20 percent off their entire bill, or 25 percent off all drinks whenever it's raining.



LIMA
With an exciting menu of modern Peruvian cuisine, the Michelin-starred LIMA brings South American dining to London in a contemporary style, as head chef Robert Ortiz and executive chef Virgilio Martinez showcase the very best of Peruvian flavours and ingredients. City A.M. Club members can enjoy a 20 per cent discount on their final bill including food and drinks, as well as a complimentary welcome drink when dining with a group of six or more.



MEI UME
Mei Ume in the stunning Four Seasons Hotel London at Ten Trinity Square offers two distinct cuisines, serving authentic Chinese and Japanese dishes with a modern approach from the dedicated Japanese sushi bar, and Chinese

main kitchen. The restaurant's signature dish is the Mei Ume whole Peking duck, served according to tradition across two courses. City A.M. Club members can enjoy an exclusive five-course City tasting menu and Mei Ume cocktail for £65 per person.



CITY AM CLUB



BÖKAN

Perched high above the capital with unrivalled 360° views of London's iconic skyline, Bökän offers an elevated dining and drinking experience in the heart of Canary Wharf. Executive Chef Guillaume Gillan brings exceptionally executed European dishes with a distinctly British slant. Cocktail

connoisseurs and evening pleasure seekers can flock to the 38th floor bar and 39th floor rooftop terrace for a tranquil escape from the buzz of city life. City A.M. Club members can enjoy a 15 per cent discount on their final bill when dining à la carte at Bökän 37, Bökän 38 Bar and 39 Rooftop, from Sunday to Wednesday.



RADIO ROOFTOP

Located on the 10th floor of the ME London hotel on the Strand, the Radio Rooftop restaurant and lounge boasts views stretching from the Shard in the East all the way to Big Ben in the West. The lunch and dinner menus offer a wide range of European-inspired dishes incorporating

seasonal and locally-sourced produce, accompanied by signature cocktails and an extensive wine list. Alternatively Radio Rooftop also offers a 'brunch to remember' and an afternoon tea with a Mediterranean twist. City A.M. Club members receive 25 per cent off breakfast, lunch and afternoon tea from Monday to Friday.

THE CORAL ROOM

The Coral Room is a bar like no other. Set in Bloomsbury, it aims to transport the ambience of a grand, country house to the heart of the city with its grand salon bar, which has been designed by Martin Brudnizki and its secluded cigar terrace. In the evening it serves an inimitable selection of stylish cocktails, but during the day this is the perfect setting to meet for breakfast, coffee or a light bite, offering an idyllic escape from the hustle and bustle of Central London. City A.M. Club members enjoy 50 per cent off afternoon tea in The Coral Room, normally priced at £50 per person.



WATCHES



FULL CERAMIC JACKET

BELL & ROSS BR 03-92 MA1

As the Cold War encroached, things were getting properly cold in the cockpit. Specifically, the cockpits of the US Air Force's newfangled jet aircraft, patrolling the skies at higher altitudes than ever.

Combined with tighter confines thanks to streamlining and the advent of bulky avionics, it was clear that the Best of the Best needed to jettison their shearling-lined leather jackets in favour of something warmer, lighter and trimmer.

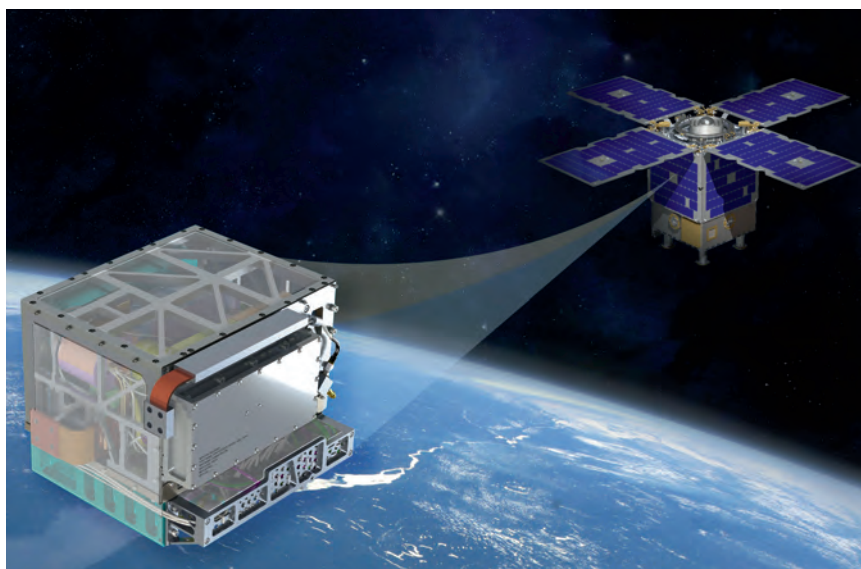
What you're looking at here is ultra-utilitarian avia-

tor watchmaker Bell & Ross's horological tribute to the USAF's sartorial solution – so perfect it's barely changed since, becoming a fashionista staple in the process. Insulated by polyester the iconic, nylon 'MA-1' bomber is reversible too, so its bright-orange lining serves as a wearable beacon while waiting for Search & Rescue (or dressing for a squat rave). Not only has Bell & Ross rendered its ceramic case in the MA-1's outer khaki, but cleverly an orange lining peeps through a stencilled dial. Roger that!

● £2,990, bellross.com

WHAT'S TICKING?

Happenings in the world of time-keeping, with watches in the deepest trenches of the ocean and the cold fingers of outer space.



MARIANA MASTER

What to do once you've retired as a highly decorated naval commander, conquered the financial world with your private equity firm, and completed the punishing Seven Summits challenge? Simple: start aiming lower. Or rather, the deepest point on Earth.

In May this year, Dallas-based Victor Vescovo used sonar imagery to determine the deepest point of the Pacific's Mariana Trench and entered the record books with a gain of just 20m on James Cameron's 10,908-metre descent of 2012, sneaking his way into the record books and allowing Omega to steal a march on the film director's own sponsor, Rolex.

Strapped to the outside of Vescovo's £45m purpose-built submersible was a miniature bathyscaphe in watch form – an experimental version of Omega's Seamaster actually good to 15,000 metres thanks to a special platinum alloy fusing the gap between titanium case and 28mm-thick crystal.

NASA'S ATOMIC CLOCK

Somewhat buried by all the Apollo 11 nostalgia this year, another NASA mission arguably of equal significance was successfully on its way this year.

Launched in June onboard one of Elon Musk's SpaceX rockets, NASA's mercury-ion 'Deep Space Atomic Clock' is up to 50 times more stable than the atomic clocks on GPS satellites, losing one second every 10 million years. For the next year it will test that accuracy ever-further into space and – all being well – uncouple navigators from an earthbound atomic time reference (an error of even one second meaning the difference between landing on Mars or missing it entirely) and potentially prove the feasibility of something light years ahead of the 60s Moon Shot: nothing less than manned exploration of deep space.



From top: Victor Vescovo, who dove deeper than any other man; the most accurate space clock ever launched; the Space Traveller II pocket watch; The new Junghans Max Bill

GENIUS ON DISPLAY

Throughout 2019, the watch world has been celebrating the 50th anniversary of the self-winding chronograph (viz TAG Heuer's Calibre 11 and Zenith's El Primero) as well as Omega's Speedmaster walking the moon strapped to Buzz Aldrin. But for the next three years, we urge you to seek out a watch inspired by the events of 1969 that trump all of the above for sheer horological brilliance and beauty.

On loan to the Science Museum, the Space Traveller II is a pocket watch entirely and singlehandedly handmade in 1982 by the modern era's greatest-ever watchmaker, George Daniels, in honour of the lunar landings, and the most expensive British-made watch ever sold (a cool £3.2m in 2017). Naturally, it shows the phase of the moon, but can also distinguish between two astronomical times: 'mean solar' plus 'sidereal', which is defined by the stars and runs about 3 minutes and 56 seconds faster.

A BOW TO THE HAUS

Like fellow countryman Nomos Glashütte, Junghans' Max Bill collection is defined by the minimalist modernity of Germany's Bauhaus – the difference here being direct pedigree. The titular Herr Bill, a protégée of the influential design school's founder Walter Gropius, designed an alarm clock for Junghans back in 1956, its crisp dial sashaying into wristwatch form come the 60s. Now, celebrating Bauhaus's 100th anniversary, a handful of knowing nods have been worked in: a prime-red date display, contrasted by a case and strap in grey coating that emulate the concrete cladding of the school building in Weimar. Flipside, Junghans sought special dispensation to reveal the mechanics through a stencilled-out image of said building – a proud flourish that wouldn't usually pass muster at the Bauhaus.





The painstaking production of an Audemars Piguet, one of the true Swiss heavyweights



HIGH FIVE

When it comes to 'haute horlogerie', you can count on a single hand the venerable 'manufacture' Swiss maisons who make the mark, says **ALEX DOAK**

Rolex is one of the best-known brands in the world, let alone watch brands. And for good reason – pound-for-pound they're arguably the best-built, most reliable and precise Swiss timekeepers on the market, as well as the most namechecked in pop lyrics.

When it comes to the 'finest', though, you move into another realm entirely – somewhere Rolex never deigns to tread. At 2,000 timepieces a day, production across Rolex's three vast plants is necessarily industrialised, occasionally roboticised.

In fact, that chocolate-box vision we all have of Swiss watchmaking – hunched, tweezer-wielding artisan, toiling to the tune of cowbells clanking through his chalet window – is a rarity across the board. Ever since the likes of IWC and Zenith introduced American-style methods of automated machining back in the late 19th century, the romance has been in steady decline, despite what the rose-tinted ad campaigns would have you believe. When you consider Zenith was the first watchmaker to introduce electric lighting in 1865, let alone computer-aided design in the 90s, it's a genuine wonder that, a full century prior, Switzerland was crafting its minuscule mechanics to a comparable level.

Truth is, every technological 'gain' has only facilitated or accelerated Swiss watchmaking – never 'bettered' it. But – and it's a big 'but' – there happen to be five names that prove the exception to the rule; five venerable grand dames who, on a relatively industrial scale (from around 20,000 per annum), somehow manage to transcend all others by combining five talents rare enough on their own:

- Copperbottomed and uninterrupted pedigree;
- The mastery of every trade required to create a mechanical watch from the raw metal, without resorting to external suppliers;
- The ability to make ('invent' in some cases) every highfalutin 'complication' going (e.g. whirling tourbillon cages, chiming minute repeaters, multi-time-zone worldtimers);
- The universal hand-application of flawless, dazzling polish to every single component (even the ones you can't see);
- Practising all of the above beneath one roof.

It's called being a 'manufacture'. Their ►



Above: Vacheron Constantin's innovative HQ and factory, located in Geneva's industrial suburbs; **Right:** A Jaeger-LeCoultre watchmaker uses traditional techniques; **Below:** An archive shot of the Audemars Piguet workshop



► components may these days be 'roughed out' by computer-controlled machines rather than with hand-operated lathes, but of those five criteria the hand-finishing alone can contribute as much as a third of manufacture watch's value.

Starting with the first of those criteria, we begin with the last in the alphabet, Vacheron Constantin, boasting the longest heritage of all: 264 continuous years and counting. The watches themselves embody a purism that feels more Latin, more cosmopolitan than Vacheron's contemporaries – in most part down to the brand's continued (now spiritual) foothold in the heart of Geneva itself, on the River Rhône's 'Quai de l'Île', while manufacturing and HQ has relocated somewhere completely different: a hyper-architectural 'folded' building in Geneva's industrial suburbs.

These days, Vacheron is wholly owned by the Richemont Group – a luxury behemoth who'd like to boast that most of the other watchmakers under its ward are true 'manufactures' as well. But despite names like Cartier, IWC, Piaget and A Lange & Söhne there is only one other Richemont brand that can hold a torch to Geneva's oldest son...

Perched by the Joux Valley's mirror lake, the view from Jaeger-LeCoultre's workshops has barely changed since Antoine LeCoultre settled on this exact same spot over 180 years ago. This particular enclave of the

Jura Mountains was the Silicon Valley of its day, and Jaeger-LeCoultre was Switzerland's go-to manufacturer of precision movements – the Intel of its day, if you like – supplying every other brand featured here at some point. It fell to Mr LeCoultre's third generation to team up with French marine-clock maestro, Edmond Jaeger in the early 20th century and form a watch brand in its own right: Swiss expertise packaged up with a distinctly Parisian aesthetic.

The coveted 'manufacture' status does exert some poetic license when it comes to autonomy, especially with tricky components like the ticking balance's hairspring. But short of an alligator farm for its leather straps, Jaeger-LeCoultre can be considered the

most complete of all Swiss manufactures. It says it all that back in 1844, Antoine LeCoultre was obliged to invent the millionometer, so determined was he to manufacture everything in-house down to a precision of a thousandth of a millimetre, essentially inventing the micron as we know it.

Proper access to the 'Big Five' came thanks to Jaeger-LeCoultre's ever-diversifying portfolio of classics: the Art Deco-era 'Reverso' (flippable to survive polo matches on the fields of the British Raj), the tiny Caliber 101 (worn by the Queen during her 1953 coronation), the impossibly balletic Gyrotourbillon... even a carriage clock, the 'Atmos' powered by tiny changes in air temperature, which comes close to being a perpetual-motion machine.

Literally down the road from Jaeger-LeCoultre's sprawling campus, you'll find the Joux Valley's other 19th-century technological unicorn, Audemars Piguet – the last to still be in family hands, and still stoically independent. Hyper-complicated mechanical wizardry remains a speciality, thanks in part to its Renaud & Papi skunkworks over the hills in Le Locle, but the modern brand is best known for inventing the luxury steel sports watch as we know it: the iconic, octagonal Royal Oak of 1972.

A slow-burner at first, reliant on the Italian market's more curious peacocks, AP has since taken the mighty Oak and run with it. With 1994's beefed-up, cuff-busting



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Above: The Girard-Perregaux tourbillon with three gold bridges
Right: Patek Philippe's World Time ref. 5231J



'Offshore' iteration, it also invented the ongoing 'oversize' trend, straddling Monaco quaysides and hip-hop music videos.

If a Royal Oak Offshore is what you want clambering onto your Sunseeker's teak deck, then come sundown (or more realistically Monday morning), you'll probably be hankering for something that's been conspicuous by its absence thus far. Patek Philippe, *naturellement*.

Patek has weathered the French Revolution, two world wars and near collapse during the Great Depression (when current owners and then-dial-suppliers, the Stern family bought the business) to qualify as Switzerland's *grande dame*, *non pareil*. Not to mention the best investment, if waiting lists and hammer prices are anything to go by. As slogans go, "You never actually own a Patek Philippe. You merely look after it for the next generation" is not only a marketing masterstroke but, for once, pretty good advice.

Founded in 1851 by Polish immigrant Antoni Patek and Jean Adrien Philippe, the firm's mission statement has been just as straightforward: 'Make the most beautiful and valuable watches in the world'. In doing so, Patek has pioneered the winding crown, made the first Swiss wristwatch (for a countess), and rules the 'grand complications' roost, as 1989's 150th-anniversary 'Calibre 89' proved. Its 33-count of functions smashed records, but by grabbing headlines with its then-

unthinkable \$3.17m auction result, heralded the return of our fascination with traditional horology, as quartz technology was beginning to lose its novelty factor.

Lately, in stark contrast to its classical style, Patek Philippe has even emerged as a leading exponent of silicon technology, replacing more and more of its oily metal mechanics with this antimagnetic, self-lubricating *wunder-material*. Back in the early noughties, purists were cynical, but silicon is becoming ubiquitous and ever-more accessible, as Tissot's £760 *Ballade* with silicon balance spring proves.

Which leads us to our fifth and final pillar of haute horlogerie. Like any fifth pillar, it's arguably surplus to requirement, given

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Patek's famous slogan, "You never actually own a Patek Philippe. You merely look after it for the next generation" is not only a marketing masterstroke but, for once, pretty good advice.

Girard-Perregaux is something of a curveball here. But whether or not you consider the La Chaux-de-Fonds brand too boutique to be keeping company with our other four titans of watchmaking, one thing is irrefutable: G-P has serious, unbroken heritage dating back to 1791, it is a true manufacture that hand-finishes its movements to first-class standards, and it has mastered every major complication while pioneering a few of its own – on one notable occasion, replacing the escapement's entire anchor lever mechanism with a single, flexing, hair-thin blade of silicon.

Ever the innovator, Girard-Perregaux was not only the very first in Switzerland to adopt mass-production of quartz technology in the 70s, establishing the titular crystal's now-standard frequency of 32,768Hz, but also one of the first to abruptly cease all R&D in that area and return to mechanical craftsmanship.

That was in 1981, when cheap Far Eastern quartz watches had decimated Swiss exports and reduced its workforce by a third. To set out Girard-Perregaux's stall in this brave new electronic world? A reissue of a 19th-century tourbillon pocket watch, gleaming with hand-polished gold bridges.

The fact we can end with 'the rest is history' is purely down to this dogmatic defiance of fashion, timeframe and, let's face it, budget. Come Switzerland's next 'Quartz Crisis', however that manifests, you can bet that the Big Five will survive. ■



WOMEN'S HOUR

LAURA MCCREDDIE-DOAK

ECO WARRIORS

From self-sufficient factories to watches supporting environmental efforts, watch brands are doing their bit for the planet

Amazonean forest fires, David Attenborough's impassioned pleas, Greta Thurnberg's spirited campaigning – warnings over the future of the planet abound. And maybe – just maybe – people are starting to listen. Coffee chains are rewarding people who bring in their own cups, tube carriages and gyms are full of people swigging from refillable bottles, fashion writer Hannah Rochell's *Enbrogue's* Instagram account, with its 26.1k followers, is now dedicated to a year without clothes shopping, suggesting people really do want to shop more consciously.

The watch industry doesn't actually have too much to worry about on the sustainability front. If you buy mechanical, you've invested in something that is built to last, that you'll spend money on fixing rather than throwing away and that will, if properly maintained, outlast you.

Added to that, many of the factories are built with environmental protection in mind. IWC uses rainwater rather than mains water and makes the most of ground- and waste-water as alternative sources of energy. In 2015 it gave its employees 100 per cent recyclable beverage sets so they wouldn't rely on single-use plastic.

Omega's new headquarters was designed by ecological architect Shigeru Ban with, among other things, a roof that houses 900sqm of photovoltaic panels that generate enough energy to power the entire building.

This year Rolex launched its Perpetual Planet initiative, which saw it partner with the National Geographic Society – to collect climate data – and Sylvia Earle's Mission Blue initiative to protect the oceans

through a network of marine-protected "Hope Spots". This exists alongside the Rolex Awards for Enterprise that recognise individuals with projects that advance knowledge on protecting human well-being and the environment.

On a brand level, Richemont's new baby Baume is all about appealing to the environmentally conscious consumer. It doesn't use precious metals or stones, or materials derived from animals, relying instead on natural materials or ones that have been up- or recycled.

Also trying to make a difference is Oris. Its Clean Ocean Limited Edition diving watch was created to highlight its partnership with new ocean conservation organisation Pacific Garbage

Screening, a non-profit fighting marine plastic pollution. To draw attention to the issue of our water-bottle and shopping-bag choked oceans, each of the 2,000 watches has a unique medallion made from recycled PET plastic set into the case back and comes in a box with an outer shell made of environmentally friendly algae and a recycled plastic inlay.

Ocean conservation is also where Breguet is focusing its CSR efforts with its newly redesigned Ladies Marine collection, which draws attention to the brand's partnership with Race for Water. This Lausanne-based foundation created by Marco Simeoni raises awareness about plastic pollution through its five-year around-the-world odyssey aboard a mixed solar-hydrogen-kite-powered vessel, with the project aiming to devise land-based solutions to stop plastics ever reaching waterways.

So even in these times of consumer guilt, you can pick up a fine timepiece with a clean conscience.

● *Laura McCreddie-Doak is one of the country's foremost experts on women's watches and jewellery*





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GERMAN DESIGN, MEET FRENCH ROADS

From Calais to Paris to Provence, **ADAM HAY-NICHOLLS** puts the new Audi R8 through its paces on some hair-raising ribbons of tarmac





The Audi R8 is a mid-engined supercar with multiple personalities. Ideal, therefore, for a blast through France to visit three characterful but very different hotels. The 2019 Audi R8 might have only received a mild facelift but it can still stop people in their tracks. From the front, I worry that the recent nip-tuck makes it look too much like the far more pedestrian TT, and that you need to catch sight of the enormous 5.2 litre V10 that's exposed under glass behind the seats, or the equally gargantuan side air intake which feeds it, to fully appreciate that this is a punk rock performance car, albeit one with a Waitrose loyalty card.

Worry evaporates when I reclaim the R8 upon docking at Calais to find a throng of vacationers making envious and congratulatory overtures. For the true supercar silhouette, one needs to mount the engine in the middle. And what an engine this one is; a naturally-aspirated 562bhp V10 that revs to 8,700rpm. I hit start and, set to Dynamic mode, the exhausts emit a savage bark that echoes down the length of the ferry. I set the sat-nav for Paris, crawl down the ramp and take the A26 autoroute south east.

In Ara Blue, with silvery white nappa seats and red brake callipers pulsing through the spokes of 20-inch forged alloys, my car echoes France's tricolour flag. My destination is Provence before returning to port, but first I have a night planned in the capital.

At the base of Montmartre, Pigalle has always boasted Paris' most eye-popping nightlife but in recent years the area, which is home to the Moulin Rouge and a shrinking community of bordels, has undergone a facelift of its own. Many of the seedier joints have become speakeasy cocktail bars. South Pigalle – or SoPi – has gone beyond hipster and is increasingly upscale. The boutique hotel du moment is Le Pigalle, on Rue Frochot, where I've chosen to stay.

Le Pigalle stands out thanks to its informal staff, young and fashionable clientele, and retro and contemporary furnishings. Everything feels locally-sourced, from the croissants and late night tapas menu right down to the risqué artwork, edgy photography, 60s bric-a-brac, and ready-mixed bottles of negroni in the mini-bar. Each room has a record player, and vinyl supplied by the "neighbourhood musicologist". My collection includes Brigitte Bardot, The Stooges and Roxy Music. The place is curated within an inch of its life, yet it doesn't take itself too seriously. This may be the sexiest pad in Paris and, as if to underscore that, the maids leave hotel-branded prophylactics on the pillows instead of After Eights.

It is fantastically well located for some of the best cafes (Le Mansart, Le Sans-Souci) and bars in town. Right opposite are two favourites of mine, Lulu White, which dispenses absinth-laced digestives in a 1920s former brothel, and Dirty Dicks, a tiki bar where Hawaiian-shirted mixologists serve burlesque dancers their after-work libations. One block away, on the Rue de Douai, among the guitar shops (one of the reasons Jarvis Cocker has called Pigalle home is the convenience of music stores and sex shops), is a newcomer to the scene. Below the Italian restaurant Pink Mamma you will find, if you walk through a large fridge door, then through a corridor of meat and another unmarked door, a buzzy ►



► speakeasy called No Entry. The negronis here are a step above the mini-bar.

Pigalle stays open till dawn. It's a late start, therefore, for the route de Soleil; a 470 mile drive down the A6 to Lyon and the A7 to Aix-en-Provence. The R8 is about a centimetre narrower than the ramp for the parking garage, and rear-quarter visibility is poor. That's about the only uncomfortable thing I've experienced with it. On the motorway, in Comfort mode, it hums along mellifluously, maintaining around 23mpg. The styling of the cabin's dash and the buttons on the transmission tunnel look, to my eye, a bit like a modern American muscle car's but the ergonomics and materials are exceptional.

Everything is where you expect it to be, which means I quickly feel at home. There may be more exotic badges available for a £128,200 outlay, but the solidity and all-round reliability of this car is superior to pretty much anything else in this lofty segment. Remember, Audi builds 1.8m cars a year, so they know what they're doing. McLaren builds under 5,000 and, though I've always found them to be excellent, people report issues, especially with the electrics.

My Provençal destination couldn't be more different from swinging Le Pigalle. The Chateau de Fonscolombe is a 300-year-old corn-coloured mansion, Italian Quattrocento in style, set on the edge of the bucolic

Luberon. Up until 2017 it was a private estate and the former owner was a renowned botanist, so I recommend taking a suite with a garden view. The grounds include a chapel, a vegetable garden, mossy statues and fountains, a vineyard, and a pond that served as the founding family's swimming pool.

There's a stylish and contemporary outdoor pool set away from the house for guests. Inside, it feels like a period film set, and one is encouraged to treat the formal drawing rooms as one's own, or take a bottle of the estate's delicious and well-priced organic rosé and sit under the lawn's cedar trees, one of which was planted by the Queen Mother during a stay in 1965.

Complementing the sense of aristocratic relaxation is the Fonscolombe's restaurant, which spills onto the terrace so you can dine under the stars. I'm ravenous for fine Provençal cooking, and it doesn't disappoint. The chef takes local produce and gives it a twist. I start with an heirloom tomato tart with medallions of lobster, served with burrata, raspberries and basil coulis, followed by fleshy and succulent maigre fish with girolle mushrooms and a sabayon of citrusy timut peppers. These dishes are worth the seven-hour drive.

In the morning, I head deep into the Luberon to Gordes, one of the region's most handsome medieval hilltop towns. Partly I

want to see where artists Marc Chagall and Victor Vasarely had discovered such inspiration, but mostly I want to see how the R8 performs on the tight and twisty B-roads between Lourmarin and Bonnieux.

It requires bravery, because there's a good chance you'll come around a blind bend, with little protection between rock-face and cliff-edge, to find an ancient 2CV leaning well over onto the wrong wide of the road. The R8's steering, though, is so sharp that if there's a gap it can fit through it will find it, and all-wheel-drive keeps the rear planted, so even if you leap off the throttle with the steering locked, as might happen on this ribbon of perilous tarmac, it shouldn't spin you backwards into the wall. Zero to 62mph takes 3.4 seconds and it keeps pulling all the way to 201mph. The V10 is so urgent that whenever the road opens towards the next corner the Audi is there already.

My favourite view of this car is the rear; stretched wide above its massive tyres, a huge exhaust either side, and mesh below the lights through which you can see some very expensive pipe work. It reminds me a lot of the Lamborghini Mucielago's derriere, but more elegant.

Having indulged in the best Provence has to offer, and got the Audi's fuel economy down to debaucherous levels, it's time to return north. This time I will stop 35 miles to



This page, clockwise from left: The 2019 Audi R8, which from the front bears a resemblance to the far more pedestrian TT; The rustic food available at Le Barn, France's more authentic answer to Soho Farmhouse; one of Le Barn's horses

Opposite page, clockwise from top left: The R8 in gay Paris; the sexy hotel Le Pigalle, with its risqué artwork, edgy photography, 60s bric-a-brac and record collections in every room; The facade of the super-luxe La Fonscolombe

the south west of Paris. Le Barn is enticing Parisians out to the sticks, and has been pitched to me as France's answer to Soho Farmhouse. It's another long day at the wheel, but the R8 is serene. I stop only for fuel, Red Bull and saucissons to eat on the go.

This car feels like a grand tourer in every way, apart from stowage capacity. Under the bonnet is just 112 litres of suitcase space, due to the front driveshafts. That's half the space of a Ferrari 488. Behind the seats there is more, but your luggage needs to be thin and soft. Overall, if you want a mid-engined supercar to drive through France for a week and you've got a passenger, you'd be better off with the McLaren 570GT with its 370 litres or more accessible baggage space.

The McLaren also feels slightly crisper but less appealing to drive everyday than the R8. If the McLaren feels more spartan, that's because it's 200kg lighter than the R8, but you may only feel the benefit of that on the B-roads. On the motorway, it takes far longer to tire of the Audi and, the more hours I spend in the driving seat, the more it beguiles. I had wondered whether, compared to the more expensive, slightly faster McLaren, the Audi might lack soul. But once you appreciate its breadth of talent, it's quite the opposite. Also, it sounds a million-times better than the forced-induction V8 McLaren.

Set near the Haute Vallée de Chevreuse, Le Barn sits on 500 acres alongside the Haras de la Cense riding school. Horses are a big draw for the guests, be they outdoorsy families or stressed out city types. There is a rambling scatter of buildings, including a 19th century watermill that's been turned into a spa and a handful of large two and three-storey barns where most of the 71 bedrooms are situated, with balconies overlooking the paddocks and Forêt de Rambouillet. Activities are low-tech and earthy; riding, cycling, fishing, petanque, archery. There are a couple of hot tubs, but no pool. Entering the reception one passes through a corridor of muddy boots.

At Soho Farmhouse, they woodchip all the paths so that no one has to deal with dirt. There is nothing rustic about Soho Farmhouse, it's a cult in the shires for social climbers. Le Barn is altogether more charming, with its simple food, schoolhouse furniture, stuffed foxes and flea-market finds. Over breakfast in the greenhouse I watch, fascinated, as one of Le Barn's two resident cats tortures a mouse. Forget about the poseurs up in Great Tew and come here to Wes Anderson's Moonrise Kingdom.

Rather than take to the saddle myself, I go hacking across the Haute Vallée de Chevreuse in the R8. The biggest gripe I have with this car is the tininess of its gear-change paddles. I like to drive with my hands at ten-past-two. If

you want to go manual, one needs to slip them to quarter-past-three, and even then Donald Trump would have no hope of reaching them. Audi needs to look at the big chunky paddles on the Ferrari 488 and Porsche 911 GT3, then copy them. With a powerplant as sensational as the R8's, you really do want full control of it.

With this normally-aspirated V10 Audi has bucked the trend. Enjoy it while it lasts. A hybrid V6 or twin-turbo V8 is sure to follow, which will destroy its character. As it is, the R8's brilliance stems from its ability to match your mood. It's got the sex appeal of Le Pigalle, the luxury of La Fonscolombe and the no-nonsense charm of Le Barn. When you put the hammer down, it's Sid Vicious, but when you want to chill out it's Enya. The thrills are on demand, and there's never any fuss. It's the dream holiday companion, apart from the lack of luggage space. ■

- Double rooms at Le Pigalle are from £145: lepigalle.paris
- Room rates at Le Chateau de Fonscolombe start at £165 in low season and £215 in high: fonscolombe.fr/en
- Stays at Le Barn from £125 per room, on a B&B basis: lebarhotel.com/en
- Dover to Calais and Dover to Dunkirk crossings start from £45 each way for a car and up to nine passengers: dfds.co.uk



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TRAVEL

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SILVERSANDS GRENADA GRENADA, CARIBBEAN

The one hundred metre long infinity pool that joins Silversands Grenada's atrium style lobby to the pristine sands of Grand Anse Beach is the longest in the Caribbean.

But that's not the first clue that this modern hotel is a unique proposition on this historic island. That would be the moment you're collected from the airport in the island's only Tesla, an SUV that turns heads even in London, but has already become a familiar sight to the locals as it ferries guests to and from the hotel.

In stark contrast to the older, more established resorts farther along the

beach – which pride themselves on a more formal and traditional style of service – the sharply cool Silversands Grenada is instead courting a younger, more design-conscious demographic. Large rooms are white and bright, with floor-to-ceiling windows and a clean and natural aesthetic of wood and stone. The beachside bar slowly takes on a clubby vibe as the sun dips below the horizon, a DJ appearing as if from nowhere to start dropping some distinctly non-Caribbean beats.

The gym and spa is an attraction unto itself, incorporating its own relaxation pool in a central courtyard flanked by saunas, Turkish baths, an ice room with a wall-

mounted cold-water dunking bucket, and various other massage nooks and therapy areas. In one, you'll find a one-of-a-kind "experiential shower", which blasts you with water at varying temperatures as coloured lights and soundscapes serenade you. Strange? Yes. Effective? Perhaps.

Magical showers and record-breaking pools are certainly something to tweet about, and at the ultra-trendy Silversands Grenada, that seems to be half the point.

● Rates start from \$800 per night, including private airport transfers; daily breakfast; complimentary selection of soft drinks, coffee, bottled water and beer from the private bar. Visit silversandsgrenada.com



The sunken USS Kittiwake, which rests on the ocean floor off Grand Cayman



DIVE AND CONQUER

In 2011, the US Navy sunk its own vessel off the coast of the Cayman Islands to form an artificial reef. **ADAM HAY-NICHOLLS** grabs his camera and descends into the depths in search of it.



Above: The Southern Cross Club, a fishing and diving resort on Grand Cayman's southern coast; **Below:** Green sea turtles are in such abundance around the Cayman Islands, that Christopher Columbus named the islands "Las Tortugas" in 1503



The sound of whirring rotor blades carries across the bay. I'm staring at a framed photo of Tom Selleck inside the office of Cayman Island Helicopters, while its proprietor, Jerome Begot, readies the chopper. Jerome is a Frenchman who, inexplicably, flew in the US Air Force decades ago, and Magnum PI is his hero. After flirting outrageously with the females in our group, he straps himself in, we take off, and he cues up the theme music to his favourite 80s TV show through the PA before slamming the joystick forward and giving us a thrilling plunge towards the cerulean ocean. In its depths is a large shadow; the sunken wreck of the USS Kittiwake.

Well, 'wreck' isn't an entirely accurate descriptor. The Navy ship was sunk on purpose to the delight of scuba divers. Commissioned in 1946 as a submarine rescue vessel, it operated throughout the Cold War and, in 1986, recovered the black box from the space shuttle Challenger, which disastrously disintegrated above the Atlantic 73 seconds after lift-off. Now the Kittiwake's mission is to form an artificial reef, and for wreck

divers it's an absolute paradise; clear warm sea, relatively shallow (20m) for good visibility. You can enter hatches on deck and plunge into the darkness; occasional shards of light bursting through portholes like searchlights. The ship is on its side and you can swim throughout its 76m length.

Such a pristine wreck is the ideal place to practise underwater photography. I've come to Grand Cayman with the Leica X-U, the celebrated brand's first and only waterproof camera. It's much chunkier than the usual minimalist offerings from Leica, encased in anti-slip rubber. It's guaranteed to 15m's



'Lady Di' takes us around the island to visit blue iguanas, the world's most endangered species, and, at my behest, the cheapest cigar shops in town

depth, though I took my chances on the Kittiwake. How wise that is with a £3,000 bit of kit is open to debate.

If one is to invest in such an undertaking, then why not improve your skills with some professional instruction? At the top end of Seven Mile Beach are the classy hotels, like The Westin, the Ritz-Carlton and the Kimpton Seafire Resort, where we've spent 48 hours acclimatising, but on the third day of the trip we head to the bottom end, past downtown George Town, where the hardcore divers hang out. Sunset House mightn't trouble the star ratings, but it has a buzz. Every balcony has wetsuits and scuba octopuses hanging over its railings. In the evenings, the outdoor bar is filled with salty-haired souls swapping war stories of the deep.

Most conveniently, it is home to Cathy Church's Photo Centre. Cathy is a 74-year-old marine biologist who was picking up lifetime achievement awards for her photography in the 1980s. She's been teaching for over 50 years, mostly on Grand Cayman. After an hour's classroom work, taking pictures of cuddly toy fish, we make the first of two shore dives, a special flash attached to my camera.



Clockwise from main: The Caribbean has lost 80 per cent of its coral reefs, though efforts are underway to restore these vital marine habitats



A short swim from Sunset House is one of several sunken bronze statues around the island. This one is nine feet tall, depicting Amphitrite, the wife of Poseidon in mermaid form. A weighty shoal of barracuda pass overhead, and a stingray underneath. From behind the green and yellow coral, a hawksbill turtle emerges. There is so much sealife to photograph. My best find is almost mistaken for a rock; an ugly brown and reddish thing, about a foot long, covered in warts and trying to camouflage itself in the sand.

It has dorsal spines and is entirely motionless. Cathy points and encourages me to get closer, to kneel and point my camera forwards, angling the strobe. Using sign language, which I struggle to understand – all the while trying to maintain the correct buoyancy – she tutors me in exposure, aperture and strobe angle. It's only afterwards that, having been just inches from the fish, Cathy reveals to me that the stonefish – for that was his name – is one of the most venomous creatures on the blue planet. A single prick from those spines will render one paralysed, gasping for air, and most probably dead. Eek.

As any diver will tell you, you can't get straight on a plane after a dive, unless you

wish to plunge into the title of Radiohead's second album, but there are plenty of ways to kill a day in Grand Cayman. We have an avuncular local guide – she goes by 'Lady Di' – who takes us around the island to visit blue iguanas, the world's most endangered species, and, at my behest, the cheapest cigar shops in town.

The next day we take the tiny Cayman Airways Express from Grand Cayman, flying over Cayman Brac and onto the third main island, Little Cayman. While Grand Cayman is a cruise ship mecca, and Cayman Brac the region's metropolis, Little Cayman is completely unspoiled and the population is such that after a few days wandering around you'll probably be on waving terms with everyone on the island. Sixty miles north-east of Grand Cayman and by far the smallest of the islands, as its name suggests, the total number of residents is 170.

The Southern Cross Club was opened by fisherman in 1958 and is now the island's most exclusive hotel, though its beach bungalows still have an authentic rustic vibe. Set on white sand, it's utterly tranquil, and for complete solitude you can take a kayak across the lagoon to Owen Island, which the Southern Cross Club faces, and explore

the coves where pirates used to drop anchor. Most guests are there for the diving, and this is where Little Cayman really excels. We take the hotel's dive boat out to Bloody Bay Wall; a 2,000m sheer drop which inspired the movie *The Abyss*. Vertical forests of fan coral and tube sponges form a technicolour playground for trigger fish, groupers, eels, rays, and sharks. It is one of the Seven Wonders of the Underwater World. It demonstrates the enormity of the sea.

My photographs don't do it justice, one would need Cathy Church's experience for that. But as a place to practise with an underwater camera there's nowhere better. You can live out your Jacques Cousteau fantasy and record yourself doing it. ■

● **British Airways** flies four time a week from Heathrow to Grand Cayman. Visit ba.com/grandcayman, and caymanairways.com for connecting flights to Little Cayman.

● A seven-night stay at the **Southern Cross Club** costs from £1,775 per person based on double occupancy and full-board. Visit southerncrossclub.com

● For more information on **Cayman Islands** tourism, go to visitcaymanislands.co.uk

BARBADOS: WHERE ADVENTURE AWAITS BLISSFUL BEACHES ARE JUST THE BEGINNING...

In beautiful Barbados, clear turquoise sea, powder-soft sand and year-round sunshine are standard. But beyond the picture-perfect beaches, this vibrant tropical island is the ultimate destination for those seeking adventure, culture and luxury. Whether a dream holiday means adrenaline-fuelled sports, world-class dining, historical attractions or a bit of each, Barbados really does have it all. It's a place to relax and spoil yourself, slow down and make time for the things that make you smile, from thrilling watersports to soaking up the sun on those glorious white beaches. In Barbados, the holiday of a lifetime awaits!

With paradise just a direct eight-hour flight from London, there is no better time to visit than in 2019. Designated the Year of Wellness and Soft Adventure, boredom is not an option for visitors who want to explore Barbados' spectacular landscape on foot, bike

or even horse-back. From hiking trails to paddle boarding, there is an activity to suit every taste and fitness level and all certainly make the most of the island's breathtaking natural beauty.

For those who love to see the sights at their own pace, Barbados is ideal for walkers of all abilities, whether hoping for a strenuous hike along cliffs pounded by the Atlantic or a sunny stroll through colourful villages. The island's cooling breeze and astonishing scenery means walking is one of the most enjoyable ways to see the real Barbados, and presents the perfect opportunity to meet some of the world's friendliest locals along the way. Simply choose one of the island's numerous walking trails to uncover fascinating historic districts, marvel at the sweeping views from Chalky Mount, wander through verdant botanical gardens or encounter rugged coastlines resplendent with dramatic rock formations. There is also a full calendar of organized hikes throughout ►





Above: Barbados is the ultimate destination for those seeking adventure and culture **Below:** Plunge into the turquoise water for a swim alongside protected species of sea turtles **Right:** Dedicated runners should be sure to visit during the Run Barbados Marathon Weekend



► the year for anyone who yearns to go off the beaten track or just prefers a little company. Or if you crave something a little different, join an unmissable guided tour of the island on horseback to truly get away from it all and see serene hills, unspoilt beaches and wild coastline at a gentler pace.

If no holiday is complete without trainers on your feet and the wind in your hair, there is nowhere better than Barbados. Barbadians love running so the island boasts an unrivalled programme of races including weekly fun runs. Dedicated runners should be sure to visit during the Run Barbados Marathon Weekend of 6th – 8th December 2019, where events include both a 5k walk for charity and a Fun Mile, as well as the prestigious Barbados Marathon, where stunning views along the course will provide more than enough motivation to make it to the finish line!

With lively supporters and a climate that begs to be enjoyed outdoors, sport of all kinds is a national passion in Barbados. From games on the beach to world-renowned cricket at the Kensington Oval, tourists and locals come together to participate in, spectate and enjoy the best sporting opportunities in the Caribbean. Take in a civilised afternoon at one of the island's world-class polo fields, or get on your bike to follow one of the island's many picturesque

off-road trails or learn the uniquely Bajan and brilliantly fun game of road tennis. Golfers are especially spoilt for choice with five PGA Standard gold courses as well as a 9-hole course at Rockley Resort and year-round events and tournaments including the renowned four-day Sir Garry Sobers Tournament involving almost 300 players.

Of course, the adventure also continues on the water. Swim in the warm, crystalclear sea or try snorkelling to get up close and personal with Barbados' colourful aquatic life. For a dip with a difference, head to the stunning Animal Flower Cave, the island's only accessible sea cave that opens directly into the Atlantic Ocean. On calm days, a swim in its natural rock pools gazing through the cave openings to the ocean beyond is an experience not to be missed.

EXPLORING THE ISLAND

Those hoping for more of a challenge on the sea will not be disappointed either. Barbados is heaven for beach-bound thrill-seekers with boogie boarding, jet-skiing, surfing and spearfishing on offer, while paddle-boarding is the perfect way to tour the island's tranquil shores. Barbados will even be part of the APP World Tour between the 9th and 17th November this year where the world's best Stand-up Paddling enthusiasts will celebrate the sport in the island's divinely

warm waters. This follows the famous Open Water Festival between the 6th and 10th November 2019, when swimmers from around the world enjoy the ideal open water conditions in Carlisle Bay, once a bustling seaport where Lord Nelson docked and now a protected Marine Park.

But to really enjoy the water in style, try a luxury catamaran cruise and make the most of the perfect weather, calm seas and captivating coastline. Sit back with a glass of rum punch onboard and soak up the sunshine, snorkel with colourful tropical fish and stop in a secluded cove to enjoy a delicious lunch prepared on board by a top chef. Afterwards, plunge into the turquoise water for a swim alongside protected species of sea turtles for a holiday experience you will never forget.

With over 80 idyllic white sand beaches, it's certainly tempting to enjoy your whole holiday in Barbados sipping cocktails on a sun-lounger or cooling off in the sea. But spending time on dry land is a must-do to appreciate the island's majestic rainforests, bustling towns and host of natural wonders unlike anywhere else on earth. A 4x4 jeep safari is the ideal introduction to the island's most beguiling corners away from the tourist trail, an exhilarating way to glimpse thick forests, remote bays and vast gullies.

One of the island's greatest natural



Above: Barbados is always ready to party **Below:** Swimmers from around the world can enjoy the ideal open water conditions in Carlisle Bay, during the Open Water Festival (6th – 10th November 2019)



treasures is the extraordinary Harrison’s Cave, a unique crystallised limestone cave at the heart of Barbados. The knowledgeable guides lead visitors deep beneath the earth’s surface, travelling by tram to the entrance used by early explorers who first attempted to enter the caves in the 18th century. Open to the public since 1981, there is now more than two kilometres of magnificent cave system to explore, encountering rushing streams, mysterious pools and interactive exhibits for both adults and children along the way.

Equally mesmerising is the nearby Welchman Hall Gully, still geologically connected to Harrison’s Cave and formed after the collapse of an ancient cave. A chance to glimpse Barbados exactly as it would have been 300 years ago, this enthralling gully is a soothing spot to relax a while and embrace nature in all its glory. Home to wild monkeys, tropical plants and a teeming rainforest, visitors can enjoy guided tours, a café and a children’s adventure park or luxuriate in the hypnotic peace and quiet of the shaded forest.

Another must-visit for history buffs and rum fans alike is the fascinating St. Nicholas Abbey, built in the 17th century and one of only three genuine Jacobean mansions in the Western Hemisphere. Visitors can watch a video of the Abbey’s compelling history,

roam through the exotic gardens and orchards and tour the boiling house and rum distillery before sampling the unique St Nicholas Abbey single cask rum. Afterwards, ride the historic St. Nicholas Abbey Heritage Railway which opened earlier this year following a million-dollar restoration of the 19th century locomotive. Travelling through plantation fields, mahogany woodlands and an abandoned coral limestone quarry, the railway rides up the picturesque Cherry Tree Hill for incredible views of the island’s East Coast.

THE BIRTHPLACE OF RUM

As Barbados is considered the birthplace of rum, the Abbey is by no means the only place you can try the island’s oldest and greatest export however. The local rum shops are legendary around the world and are the perfect spot to enjoy a drink (or two) with locals, try some traditional snacks and ease into the easy-going Barbados pace of life. Connoisseurs should not miss the famous Barbados Food and Rum Festival on the 24th – 27th October too, celebrating its tenth year in 2019. Showcasing the work of some of Barbados’ finest chefs and mixologists, the lively festival features fine dining events, spirited beach parties, food and rum pairings and the best Bajan street food for a mouth-watering tribute to the

island known as the Culinary Capital of the Caribbean. Keen foodies should also make a beeline for Oistins on the South Coast, the island’s principal fishing port and the ultimate destination for seafood lovers. For music performances, craft stalls and fried fish fresh from the sea, follow the locals and go at the weekend for a truly memorable evening.

But no matter when you visit, Barbados is always ready to party. From chic nightclubs to dinner cruises, reggae bars to street festivals, the fun really starts when the sun goes down on the island. Try karaoke at a rum shop, sip cocktails at elegant beach clubs or head to the popular Harbour Lights where you can dance the night away on the sand to local DJs at this famous waterfront venue. Just don’t expect to leave until dawn...

Then get ready to do it all over again the next day. With so much to do, see and discover in Barbados, one trip is never enough to fit it all in. But whether it’s your first time falling for the island’s charms or you plan to return again and again, there is always a new memory waiting in Barbados.

Just let your adventure begin... ■

BARBADOS

TEA TIME IN RWANDA

In one of the last mountain rainforests on the planet, a tea estate is doing its part to conserve Rwanda's rich biodiversity. Words: **SOPHIE IBBOTSON**





There are only two things that most people think about when they hear “Rwanda”: the country’s unfathomable genocide, the 25th anniversary of which is in 2019; and, to a lesser extent, the critically endangered mountain gorilla. But Rwanda is unrecognisable from how it was in the mid 1990s, and although the gorilla population is steadily growing thanks to conservation efforts, there are still just over 600 of these precious primates living in the Virunga Mountains. I wanted to dig deeper, to build a more well rounded picture of what is one of the smallest but most exciting emerging destinations in Africa.

Rwanda has a colour. It’s a brilliant, verdant green. Volcanoes dot the horizon, and water from the lakes in the Albertine Rift Mountains run through numerous tributaries to the Nile and Congo. The highland areas are temperate tropics, and their montane forest ecosystems are wonderfully biodiverse. The Nyungwe Forest alone boasts 13 kinds of primates, lions have been reintroduced into Akagera National Park, and there are more than 600 species of birds.

The altitude, climate, and soil here are ideally suited to the cultivation of tea. You might raise an eyebrow at the thought of Rwanda as a tea producing nation, but the chances are that you’ve already drunk the nectar unknowingly. Tea is the country’s largest export, and PG Tips and Lipton’s are both major buyers.

I’m a lifelong tea addict, and the prospect of a tea tour in an unexpected destination will get me on a plane faster than almost anything else. Darjeeling, Assam, Nilgiri Hills... the tea’s superb, but you’re unlikely to try anything new. But Rwanda? Curiosity is a fearsome, irresistible beast.

One&Only Nyungwe House opened its doors at the tail end of 2018. Flying overhead, you’d be hard pushed to spot it: the low rise buildings are at the very edge of the working Gisakura Tea Estate, tucked against the fringe of one of the last mountain rainforests on the planet. Birdlife International describes the Nyungwe Forest as “the most important site for biodiversity conservation in Rwanda”, and in addition to the birds, you’ll be surrounded by rare orchids and confetti-like clouds of butterflies. The hooting of chimpanzee will serenade you on a nature walk. Mornings start with tea, of course, and in my case a tea estate tour. Out on the plantation, I learned to pick the two top leaves and bud from each stem, clipping them off the plant with my nails.

The women around me made it look effortless, but as I proved through my own slow pace and lack of dexterity, there’s a definite knack.

In the tea factory, the processing is a sophisticated art form. The foreman must know exactly how much the leaves have oxidised before he dries them; too little or too long, too hot or too cool, and the flavour will be completely spoilt. And no one likes the taste of burnt tea. Thankfully, he has years of experience under his belt, and there is a warm fug in the air that smells as if he has got it just right.

The tea bushes are omnipresent, wherever you are at Nyungwe House. They create a sense of calm, whether you are sipping tea (or even Rwandan coffee, if you are feeling like a rebel) outside on the deck, or gazing out through the windows of the spa.

But just as green, just as enticing, is the rainforest that is the tea garden’s natural backdrop. The forest is so dense, so vast, that you feel if you turned your back on it for too long it would almost certainly envelop you with its magical creepers and tendrils. The light and the kind of creatures you will see are constantly changing, so it’s necessary – and desirable – to take ►



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The first thing to grab me in the forest was the abundance of butterflies and birds. The vegetation is dense, so I typically heard the chirruping, shrieking, and cooing before I spotted the flash of feathers higher up in the tree canopy. 27 of the bird species found are endemic – you will find them only here – and the guide could not only tell me the name of each bird we saw, but also tidbits of information on its mating habits, how it built its nest, what it most likes to eat, and so on. I was enthralled watching the sunbirds and flycatchers, but didn't want to linger too long in any one place else I miss the next exciting sighting which was undoubtedly just up ahead.

It's the unexpected nature of a forest walk which makes it such a delight. The guide might start out with a plan to head in a particular direction, but there are all manner of things which could make him change track, from a noise to a print to a fresh pile of poo.

Above: The view from the hotel's spa; **Below:** The estate offers exceptional birdwatching and wildlife opportunities



The latter, depending on its size, shape, composition, and, yes, smell, could bely the nearby presence of a chimpanzee, or perhaps a Colobus or L'Hoests' monkey. Many of Rwanda's visitors come to track the mountain gorillas, but their slightly smaller, less rare brethren are arguably a much more entertaining attraction on account of their energy and agility.

There's a huge pride in the forest and keeping it pristine, which extends well beyond those employed by the resort or the national park. One of the most admirable aspects of Rwandan culture – and one which we could certainly learn from – is the concept of Umuganda. There's no exact translation, but it equates to coming together to perform public service for the good of society.

Umuganda takes place of the last Saturday of each month, usually for three hours in the morning. Every able bodied adult joins in, and Nyungwe House's guests are actively encouraged to participate, too. Most tasks on the estate revolve around environmental protection or improving infrastructure: things which everyone in the community can benefit from. So often we hear hotels and tour companies talk about "giving back" in abstract terms; here, it's much more physical. You contribute with your hands, your time. As you do so, you build rapport with those around you, supporting one another and occasionally bursting into fits of laughter when something doesn't go quite to plan.

I came to Rwanda for its tea and to enjoy the peace of a tea garden. What I will take away with me, however, are the unexpected sights, sounds, and smells of the rainforest, and the joy and camaraderie of joining in the weekly Umuganda. Rwanda has rebuilt itself, and continues to grow, one collective act of public service at a time.

📍 *Africa specialists Africa Exclusive (safari.co.uk; 01604 628979) will create a bespoke tea estate experience in Rwanda, staying at One&Only Nyungwe House (from \$899 per night).*



FREQUENT FLYER

SCARLET WINTERBERG

PLANE SAILING

The liquids ban will soon be a thing of the past – and now a new generation of airports are helping make life in the skies blissfully stress free

One of life's big frustrations is fumbling to cram miniature bottles into clear plastic bags as you prepare to be frisked by airport security. Even more annoying is when your hand-luggage is taken away to be searched after a stray bottle of perfume slips through. But the end is in sight for the maligned liquids ban. The government is planning to install 3D baggage scanners, which will grant them superhero-style X-ray vision, speeding up queues and lowering blood pressure across the travelling population.

I'm enjoying flying more now than ever, and the optimist in me thinks it's only going to get better. Standing in line, even when flying in premium cabins – it does happen – is one of the biggest pain points, but with biometric facial scanning starting to replace manual passport checks, everything from immigration to boarding is being sped up. British Airways has been experimenting with it for a while in the UK and US, but other airlines such as Lufthansa, Delta and Jet Blue are working to install it too, with airport partners including Miami, Atlanta and JFK. And while the luddites and paranoids among us will resist on grounds of privacy, I relish the reduced stress.

For years I would hurry straight to the haven of the business or first class lounge, but now the public departure halls hold almost as much allure. While once it was the domain of sad Wetherspoons pubs or Comptoir restaurants, airports are now hotspots for foodies and drink connoisseurs. This autumn, Terminal 3 at Melbourne airport

will welcome a Stomping Ground craft brewery with a bar that has views of the airfield and "tinnies to takeaway". Edinburgh airport has a Brewdog bar, while at Rome Fiumicino you can order cacio e pepe at Attimi, from three-Michelin-star chef Heinz Beck.

San Francisco airport has the Manufactory Food Hall, where travellers can sample Michelin-starred Thai cuisine from a Kin Khao outpost, along with tacos from Cala and pastries from Tartine. And next year, David Hawksworth's Hawksworth Kitchen (serving organic pasta and wood-fired pizza) will land at Vancouver International. At this rate, I'm going to be planning my trips around the world's tastiest airports, flying economy and spending the excess on food.

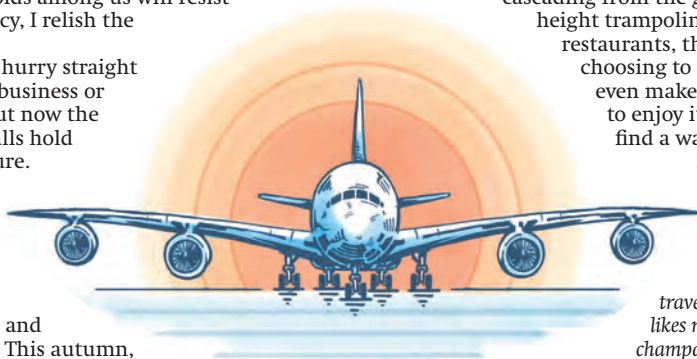
Also new is the arrival of Beijing Daxing International. Opened this month, it will be able to accommodate 170m passengers a year by 2025 (Heathrow currently handles about 80m). Even at that scale, Zaha Hadid's architectural firm has managed to design it so that no one will have to walk more than eight minutes from security to even the most remote of gates. Over at Singapore Changi, so much effort has gone into turning its new Jewel Terminal into a jungle

paradise, complete with an enormous waterfall cascading from the glass-ceiling, canopy-height trampolines and 280 shops and

restaurants, that people are choosing to check in early and even make a stopover there just to enjoy it. Now we just have to find a way to stop travel

ruining the planet, which really is something to worry about.

● *Scarlet Winterberg is a seasoned business traveller. There is nothing she likes more than sipping champagne while staring through an aeroplane window.*





THE MAGIC OF MACAO

The saying goes that good things come in small packages, and nowhere lives up to this more than Macao, the diminutive Chinese region located on the country's south-east coast. Measuring at just 13 square miles, it still manages to pack a vibrant cultural punch, with its Portuguese-Chinese heritage creating an eclectic backdrop on which everyday life now unfolds. This blend of influences results in an intoxicatingly heady atmosphere for visitors – small wonder it's fast gaining a reputation as one of the most exciting destinations in the Far East.

Just 40 miles from Hong Kong, visitors can reach Macao in an hour by high speed ferry, or cross via the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge, a feat of modern engineering and, at over 34 miles, the longest sea crossing on earth. And with a wide choice

of flight connections into Macao International Airport from around the region giving further access options, visitors can enjoy Macao as a day trip or, better yet, a two or three night sojourn in which there's time to uncover the area's true essence.

And there's plenty here to be discovered. Macao is alive with cultural hybridity – think traditional Portuguese cobblestones and Baroque churches alongside the splendour of Chinese temples, and the echoes of Cantonese and Mandarin reverberating through colourful streets and alleyways. There's a sense of old juxtaposing new around every corner (be sure to spend time at the Historic Centre of Macao, which is Unesco World Heritage listed), the two living seamlessly alongside one another, simultaneously embracing both past and future. The result is a fascinating identity that weaves together a unique culture,

delicious food, world-class nightlife and entertainment – all combining to create a one-of-a kind experience.

MOUTHWATERING MACAO

With easily one of the most intriguing culinary scenes in Asia, Macao is a must-visit for foodies – in fact, it was designated a Unesco Creative City of Gastronomy in 2017. And it's not hard to see why. The region features some of the best Portuguese food outside of Portugal not to mention a rich tapestry of Cantonese and Michelin-starred restaurants. It's also home to the local Macanese fusion cuisine, which combines Chinese, Portuguese, South American, African, Indian and Malaysian flavours and influences. For a one-stop sample of it all, take a trip to atmospheric Taipa Village, whose bustling lanes are home to a huge choice of local restaurants and street food favourites.



Appetite sated, visitors should have plenty of fuel for exploring. One of the best ways to discover Macao is by following one of the eight 'Step Out' walking routes that zigzag among the most iconic sites as well as more off-the-beaten track districts. Don't miss the wealth of stunning historical buildings, for instance the iconic Ruins of St Paul's. Or for an encounter with the future, head for 338m Macau Tower, where the brave attempt the world's highest commercial bungee jump, or reverse gravity with the Tower Climb – a 100m scramble to the building's pinnacle. For something more relaxing, head south to Coloane's beaches and countryside or, for a spot of retail therapy, to the plethora of luxe designer stores.

MACAO BY NIGHT

As night beckons, Macao steps up the pace and the sun is replaced with a glittering

skyline. Head to one of the cosmopolitan bars for a cocktail or two, then make haste for one of the cool clubs, glamorous casinos or spectacular shows, like The House of Dancing Water, with its breathtaking, high dive acrobatics and stunts. Glitz fix attained, lay your head at one of Macao's exceptional luxury hotels or traditional Portuguese pousadas.

MAKE THE MOST OF MACAO

While a visit to Macao at any time of year is an unrivalled experience, it's worth taking note of its impressive calendar of genre-spanning events. Art Macao is a mega arts and cultural event running until October 2019; the Macau Grand Prix (14-17 November) is the world's only international street circuit racing event for both cars and motorcycles; the Macao International Marathon takes place on 1 December; and for glamorous, red carpet appeal, the 4th

International Film Festival & Awards, Macao will be held between 5-10 December.

Whenever you visit, there's simply no escaping the eternal appeal of this unique Chinese region that thrums with the spirit of Southern Europe.

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For further information about Macao, visitmacao.co.uk

EXPERIENCE MACAO



EMOTIONAL BAGGAGE FREDRIK CARLING

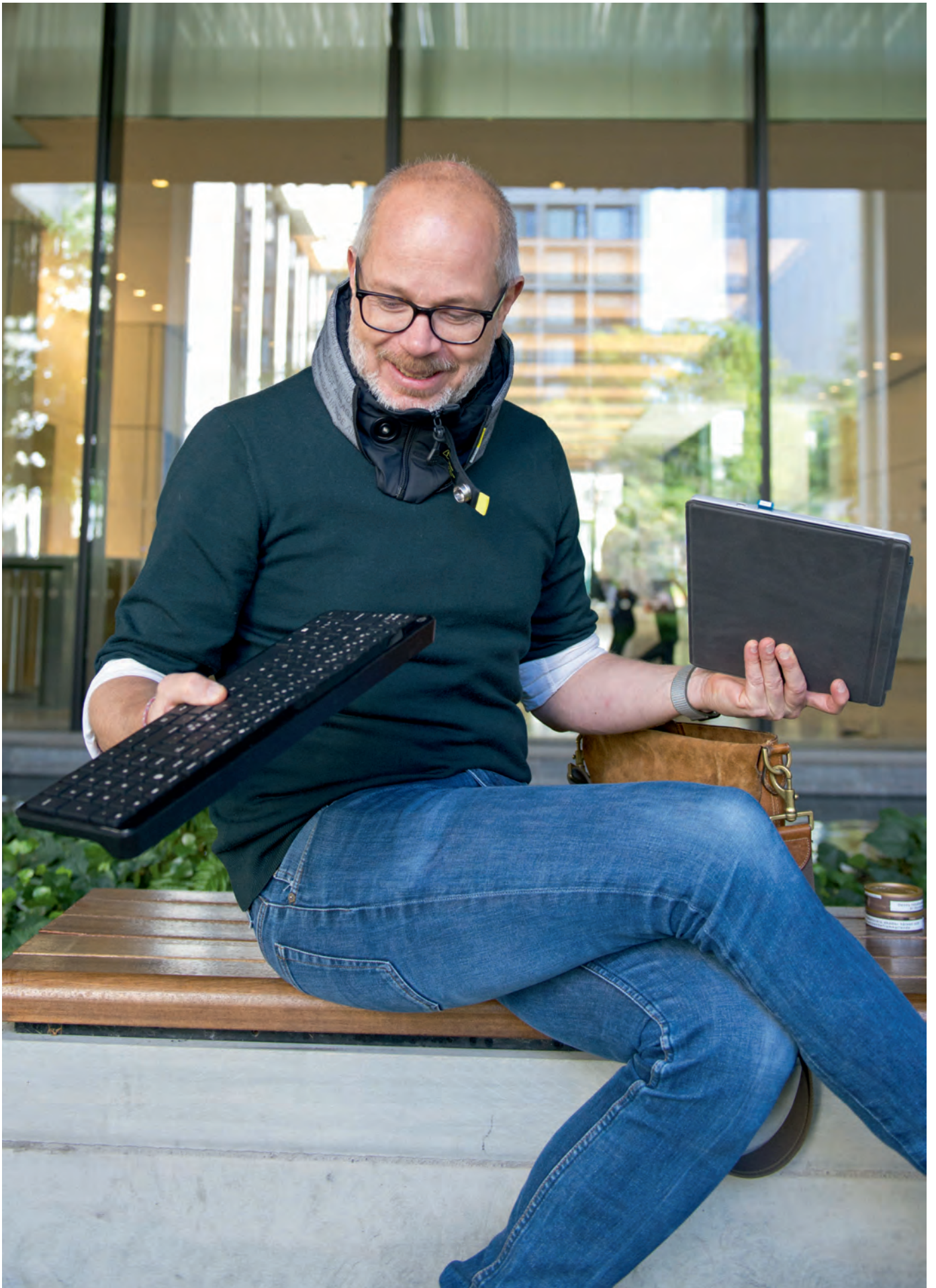
What we pack in our carry-on says a lot about who we are. This month, we dive into the satchel of the CEO of Hövding, makers of the world's first airbag bicycle helmet.

Words: **STEVE HOGARTY**; Photos: **GREG SIGSTON**



The contents of Carling's carry on include a Microsoft Surface Pro tablet, an ancillary keyboard and mouse, a Smythson passport holder, a power bank for battery emergencies, a mess of various chargers, a highlighter, and pens (but no paper)







Fredrik Carling, CEO of Hövding, modelling the airbag helmet.

Designed in Sweden, the Hövding is an alternative to the traditional bicycle helmet. It's been trained on countless hours of cycling data to detect a crash, at which point the collar deploys an airbag that inflates in milliseconds, wrapping around the head and protecting it from impact eight times more effectively than a conventional helmet.

While it's already saved a few thousand domes in the wild – mostly in the Netherlands, where the device is popular among urban cyclists – only one person on the Hövding team has been unfortunate enough to experience the airbag as intended. "Our sales director fell off his bike just this week," CEO Fredrik Carling tells me. "It's unfortunate, but let's just say he's a better sales director than he was last week."

After four years of research and development, and just as the company enters the UK market, Hövding has launched the third iteration of its cycling airbag. The new version is adjustable for a more comfortable fit, can be synchronised with an app, and includes tracking software that can be used to improve cycling safety and infrastructure in cities. It can even send an SOS message to a contact in the event of a crash, with GPS co-ordinates of your whereabouts.

Carling travels light, fitting his own folded Hövding into a brown leather satchel

alongside the rest of his travel essentials, which include the usual suspects of any tech-minded international traveller: battery packs, charging cables and plug adapters. We asked Carling to talk us through the contents of his carry on, and the items he couldn't leave home without:

...

“In my experience you can never be too careful when travelling to London, so I always pack an umbrella. But other than that I try to travel light. If you're only away for one night you don't have to pack a whole lot, just a pair of socks, a underwear and a shirt.

I can usually get away with taking just my satchel, which I inherited from my fiancée, but I try to get as much else in there as I can fit. I used to commute between Malmö and Majorca every week, and being able to breeze through the airport as quickly as possible takes away so much of the stress of travelling.

Now that you're often stopped and asked to put your carry on in the hold if you're late in line, it's more important than ever to try to travel with as little luggage as I can.

I absolutely adore the Microsoft Surface Pro because it's so light and thin. I've got the felt keyboard case attachment on there and rarely use it as a tablet. I don't need much processing power as I only really use it for answering emails and web browsing while on the move, so this is perfect.

I've also got a second Bluetooth keyboard because while the tablet keyboard is cool, if I'm on a flight or on a train I can't type on it for too long. So even though I chose the tablet because it's so slim and handy, I take another keyboard with me everywhere I go. It is completely ridiculous now that I think about it. There's no real logic to it.

I finish the set with a wireless mouse that's about the size of a football field. It could be from the 80s.

My JBL wireless earphones serve me well on my commute. I travel by train every day, so a decent pair of noise-blocking earphones is a must. I also find my Apple Watch incredibly useful when I'm travelling. I've had it for about a year and a half now, and what I like most is that it's not connected to my phone. There are times when I prefer to leave my phone at home or at the hotel, so it helps me to disconnect for a short while. The background is a picture taken near to where I was born in Sweden, just north of Gothenburg. And the background on my tablet is the view from my home when I lived in Majorca.

Finally I have my snus – Swedish tobacco. It's illegal to sell anywhere in the EU, except in Sweden, where it has a special exemption as it's a Swedish tradition and part of the country's culture. I can't go anywhere without it, and I've packed two of them just to be on the safe side. Before I leave the house I've got to check I've got four things: wallet, keys, phone and snuff. ■

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One of thousands of trees in the UNESCO-listed Frankincense grove of the Wadi Dawkah desert valley

UNCOMMON SCENTS

We travel to Oman to discover the secrets behind frankincense, the star ingredient in the world's finest rejuvenating spa treatments. Words: **LISA KJELLSSON**

The sun is blazing and the air is hot, dry and dusty. Gazing out over the horizon, there's nothing but parched, rocky land as far as the eye can see in any direction, except for the strange-looking trees that shoot up from the ground like gnarly, overgrown bushes. You wouldn't think much could thrive here, in the semi-desert landscape of the Dhofar region in southern Oman, yet these arid conditions produce a precious natural resource – the world's finest frankincense.

Perhaps best known in the West as one of the gifts, alongside gold and myrrh, given to baby Jesus by the Three Wise Men in the Christian nativity story, for thousands of years the fragrant tree resin was harvested and traded along the Frankincense Trail, which stretched between the kingdoms of southern Arabia and Africa, the Mediterranean and all the way to India and China. The ancient Egyptians used it to embalm their pharaohs, the Greeks and Romans prescribed it against virtually any illness, and due to its many uses it was once more expensive than gold. Today frankincense is burned ceremonially in churches, temples, mosques and synagogues all over the world, and in Oman it is still a big part of daily life. You'll spot a burner in every home, office, shop and

hotel here – almost everywhere you go, the sweet scent of incense hangs in the air.

Keen to learn more about its origins, I'm being shown around by Hussain Balhaf, a local guide who works for the Al Baleed Resort Salalah by Anantara where I'm staying. We've driven 40 kilometres north of Salalah – a coastal town known as the perfume capital of Arabia – to the Wadi Dawkah desert valley, where a few thousand frankincense trees grow in a UNESCO-listed grove spanning five square kilometres. "Some of these trees are up to 200 years old," he says, but we also spot much younger ones, planted to ensure the regeneration of this important part of Oman's natural heritage.

The plantation in Wadi Dawkah isn't harvested for commercial use, but a bit further along Hussain shows me trees where the bark on some of the branches has been chipped away to allow the white, gum-like sap to seep through. I break off a drop of the gluey tree milk. It smells like pine resin, with a hint of citrus, and is sticky to touch when fresh but will gradually harden until it is ready to harvest after about 20 days. Once dried and bagged up, it's sold at markets such as Salalah's Al Hafah souk, the best in the country for frankincense.

Among the rows of shops there I find Makka Trading which sells the most exclusive variety, green Hojari frankincense. As I arrive the proprietor is busy negotiating a deal with an official from the Sultan's ►







Clockwise from left: Frankincense being harvested from the frankincense tree; the collected resin; and a selection of decorative frankincense burners



► court who buys dozens of bags at £110 per kilo, to be gifted to visiting dignitaries. Having seen the raw ingredient, I'm later excited to find the green resin in its liquid form at Alshoala, an organic perfumery in Salalah Gardens Mall, where the friendly sales assistant helps me pick out two exquisitely scented frankincense products, a hair repair serum and a body oil.

Unlike Yemen and Somalia, Oman doesn't export the dried resin – just the distilled oil – in an effort to prevent over-harvesting. It's very valuable as it has an anti-inflammatory and rejuvenating effect on the skin, while its aroma can help reduce stress and anxiety. This of course makes it an ideal ingredient in beauty and body treatments, and all the best spas and salons in Oman offer frankincense-based treatments.

During my stay at the luxurious beachfront Anantara resort in Salalah I try the signature four-hand full-body massage that's the epitome of spa decadence. Wafts of incense fill the room and I feel the tension in my muscles dissolve as the therapists skilfully knead my body in perfectly

synchronised movements aided by lashings of locally produced frankincense oil. (90 minutes, £348; salalah.anantara.com).

In Muscat, Oman's capital and a trending holiday destination due to its beautiful coastline, thriving cultural scene and proximity to both the Wahiba Sands desert and lush Al Hajar mountains, I head straight for the Hareer Spa by L'Occitane at the Shangri-La Al Husn hotel. Its frankincense and rose scrub (90 minutes, £162; shangri-la.com) leaves my skin super soft, while next door at the sister resort Shangri-La Barr al-Jissah's Chi Spa the frankincense and rose oil-infused marine clay body wrap (60 minutes, £104), is a soothing after-sun treatment.

I also visit Ayana Spa in Muscat's upscale Shatti Al Qurum neighbourhood, where local ladies go to get preened and pampered, as I'm keen to see how its frankincense polish and massage ritual (100 minutes, £91; ayanaspa.com) compares to the hotel treatments. Having been scrubbed vigorously from top to toe with a delicious-smelling sugar, frankincense powder and oil paste in a

hammam-style wet room (a practically nude affair, not for prudes), I'm treated to a full-body massage with a blend of frankincense, myrrh, lavender and petitgrain oils – as heavenly as it sounds. I leave feeling relaxed and revived, and can't resist buying a few frankincense soaps to take home.

● The **frankincense intense facial rejuvenation** at Neal's Yard is a 90-minute deep-tissue massage using products from its bestselling Omani frankincense range. The result is like a non-invasive mini facelift. Available in Neal's Yards across London. From £90; nealsyardremedies.com

● Getting there: **Oman Air** (omanair.com) has twice-daily direct flights to Muscat from Heathrow from £499 return, business class from £1,899 return, and multiple daily departures from Muscat to Salalah from £109 return.

● Where to stay: **Shangri-La Al Husn** in Muscat (shangri-la.com), from £234 in low season (from mid-May); Al Baleed Resort Salalah by Anantara (salalah.anantara.com), from £210 in low season. ■

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But increasing numbers of us just don't have space in our lives – be it literally or metaphorically – for room-dominating audio equipment. We want something that can blend into the background when not in

use, that you can connect your phone to use over Bluetooth, maybe even sling into your rucksack and take to the park on a Sunday afternoon.

With the MR1 MK2 speakers, those audio wizards at Ruark have created something that somehow ticks all of those boxes, and will even win over some hardcore audiophiles to boot. These little speakers – less than 20cm high – produce some frankly unbelievable noise. Winners of various accolades, they're capable of filling

a room with well-balanced audio.

Whether you're using them for your desktop PC, a turntable as pictured above or to improve the sound of your TV (it comes with an optical audio socket allowing you to connect them directly to most sets), these are an outstanding solution to your sound-based needs.

They offer Bluetooth connectivity and you can even pick up a separate battery back to turn them into portable party speakers: for this price, you won't find anything better.



KAYAN 3D PRINTED SHADE
FROM £139.95, UKSHOP.PLUMEN.COM

These lampshades are the result of a collaboration between Plumen and Italian 3D printing specialist Formaliz3d. The production method allows the pair to give these lamps a style that would be impossible with

traditional manufacturing, and provides a wonderful soft glow. They come in a range of styles and colours, allowing you to tailor them to your decor and taste. They are also sustainable, made using 90 per cent recycled plastic, so you can light your home with a clear conscience.



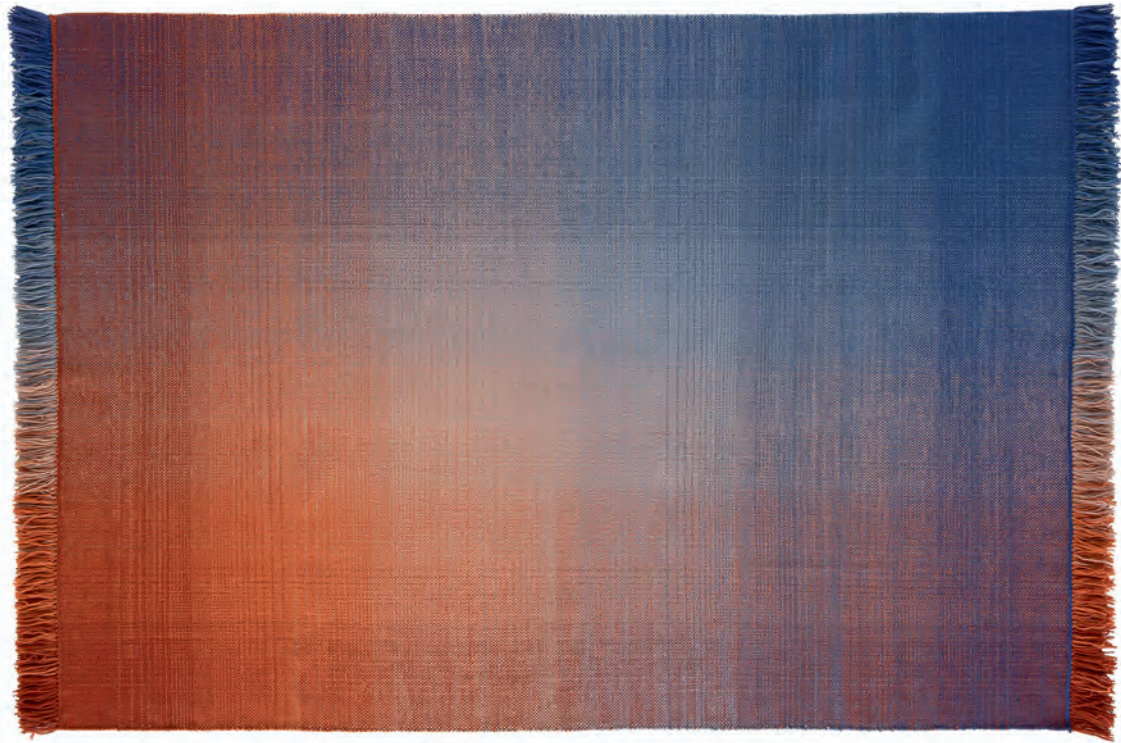
JOY RESOLVE COFFEE TABLE
£1,130, JOYRESOLVE.COM

Coffee tables are often low-slung things made of wood, home to a stack of artfully positioned magazines. But this one means it literally – it's built with a new material made from recycled coffee grounds and ocean plastic.



SIMON ORRELL DESIGNS LAMP
£1,275, SIMONORRELLDESIGNS.COM

This classy statement lamp with a geometric straw marquetry design features a pattern inspired by the cut of a diamond. It has a solid brass base and will make a perfect corner lamp in a modern, monochrome home.



SHADE RUG

£1,611, VIADUCT.CO.UK

This finely crafted rug from designers Begüm Cana Özgür and Marcos Catalan is inspired by “magical moments in nature where colours speak for themselves”. We’re not entirely sure that’s what we see

when we look at it, but we’re sure we love its fine craftsmanship and pleasant hue. At 170x240cm it will make a great centrepiece for a room, helping to deaden the echo from your exposed wood floorboards, which show no sign of going out of vogue any time soon. A very classy little number indeed.



SONOS MOVE

£399, SONOS.COM

The first portable Bluetooth speaker from Sonos is powered by a battery, and punches well above its weight when it comes to audio quality. It can be controlled using your voice through Amazon Alexa.



CH20 ELBOW CHAIR

£787, VIADUCT.CO.UK

Hans Wegner’s stackable Elbow Chair is a Danish modern classic. Designed in 1956, the plans for the chair remained in his archives for half a century until they were discovered and brought back to life in 2005.



Above: Weston Group's modular housing factory. Right: A Tide Construction student housing building in London

THE MODULAR REVOLUTION

Homes built in factories are being touted as a solution to the housing crisis. **HELEN CRANE** asks whether people will really want to live in them.

Picture a vast warehouse somewhere in the north of England. Workers in hard hats are poring over intricate plans against a background of humming machinery. Robot arms slice through sheets of metal and wood as they pass by on a conveyor belt, precisely cutting out shapes that look like huge versions of Airfix models. Across the production line, windows are carefully fitted on to a glossy, new frame. The unit is then packed on to a lorry to be driven hundreds of miles across the country, where its new owner will arrive in a couple of weeks.

This isn't a car we're talking about, by the way. It could be your next home.

Modular construction – homes being built in factories, in other words – is being touted by some as a high-tech solution to the UK's housing crisis. For others, these homes are no different to the low-quality, temporary prefab housing that went up across London in the 1950s to replace homes lost in the Blitz. So can a home built on a production line ever be a desirable place to live?

Dave Sheridan is the executive chairman of Ilke Homes, which from its Harrogate factory builds neat, modern family homes that wouldn't look out of place on any suburban housing estate. It completes eight on an average day. "We want to go where the housing need is greatest," he says. "Most people want to live in a house with a front door and a back door."

Meeting housing requirements in the UK, according to government estimates, means building 300,000 additional homes a year – a target that was missed by around 82,000 in both 2017 and 2018. Ilke's homes cost between £65,000 and £79,000 to buy, although you also need to have a plot of land to put it on.

The real selling point is speed. Houses and apartments are built as a series of identical blocks or 'modules,' often with bathrooms and kitchens already fitted. Because walls and floors are precisely engineered and there are no real-world variables like bad weather, a home can be made in a couple of weeks. The modules are then transported to the site and craned in on top of each other to make a house, or stacked around a concrete core to create an apartment block. Projects vary, but using modular elements usually cuts construction time by at least half.

This might seem like cutting-edge new technology to us, but – somewhat predictably – countries including Germany and Japan have been doing it for decades. The latter's largest housebuilder, Sekisui House, has produced more than 2.4m modular homes since 1960, and has now signed a deal with the UK government and developer Urban Splash to set up a factory and build 2,000 homes a year here over the next decade. Although it's a huge corporation, Sekisui brands itself as a friendly homebuilder with a social conscience.

These are not piled-up, boxy apartments, but large, light, airy family homes. "They have a love of humanity, they understand how people want to live ►





Clockwise from top: A Zedpods home above a car park; Tide Construction and HTA Design's Apex House in Wembley; a Zedpods living room



► and what makes homes better and more attractive,” says Urban Splash founder Tom Bloxham. For example, Sekisui plants five indigenous trees around each of its homes – ‘three for birds and two for butterflies’. Its utopian vision of the world extends to humans, too. In Japan, homes are generally considered worthless and demolished after 30 years – so Sekisui buys them back and retrofits them before re-selling them to cash-strapped youngsters at a low cost.

Urban Splash has already been building its own modular homes under its HoUSE brand. They are a modern incarnation of perennially popular Victorian and Georgian properties – high ceilings, three storeys, big windows – but wrapped up in a contemporary exterior. “If all you want is a house that looks like it’s built out of brick, build it out of brick,” says Bloxham. “For us, it’s more about how they perform.”

On the other end of the scale are the vast apartment blocks that have predominated in London so far. Tide Construction and Vision Modular Systems’ 101 George Street in Croydon, which is currently being built, would have been the world’s tallest modular tower at 135 metres and 44 storeys, but a block planned for Singapore will surpass it by five metres. “If you’re going to build a 44-storey building, it has to look great,” says Simon Bayliss, from project architect HTA Design. 101 George Street will be covered in iridescent, dark green triangulated panels

that reflect the area’s art deco architecture, and there are certainly worse-looking towers in London. But some believe modular construction is at odds with attractive design. “I can’t see how you can create great architecture with modular,” says Peter Leiper, architect at CZWG. “You have to create [buildings] that are quite linear, where everything stacks up one above the other.”

On completion, 101 George Street will be one of the growing number of build-to-rent blocks in London, owned by a corporate landlord with the 546 flats rented out to young professionals. Some argue this is the *only* model – that modular only works with homes that aren’t for sale. This is because, no matter how quickly you build them, houses take time to sell – and housebuilders don’t want to end up with stock they can’t shift. “It’s being hailed as the great saviour of housing in Britain, but speed is the last thing housebuilders want,” says Leiper.

One area where this isn’t an issue is affordable housing. Demand is bottomless, and factory-built homes are hard-wearing and cheap to heat. Boklok, the modular company owned by Ikea, has already struck a deal with Worthing Council in West Sussex to build 162 flats, of which a third will be handed over to the council at cost for affordable housing. It also allows homes to be built in places where “conventional construction won’t work”, according to Dr

Rehan Khodabuccus, operations director at Zedpods. His firm has installed homes on stilts above car parks, for example.

The sticking point is that it’s not cheaper than building a bricks-and-mortar home, because so much has been invested in developing the technology. “It will get cheaper, in the same way that cars and TVs eventually get cheaper,” says Bloxham.

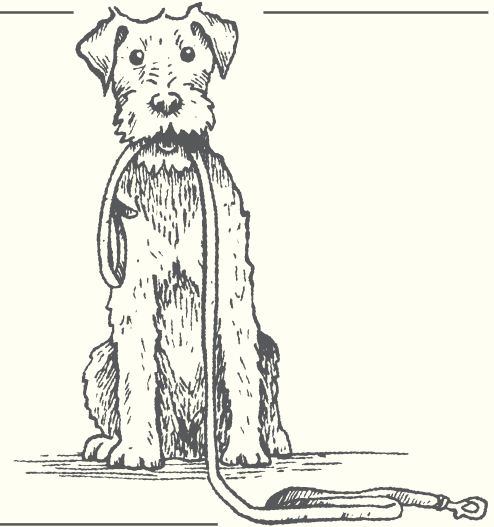
Modular homes are also eco-friendly, which is significant given that the construction industry accounts for 38 per cent of the world’s energy-related carbon emissions. Bayliss thinks it’s “the only way” the UK can achieve its target to reach net zero emissions by 2050, and this could be a selling point for eco-conscious home buyers. But the average person still doesn’t know what a modular home actually is. “It’s not penetrated the mainstream yet,” says Rory O’Hagan, architect at Assael. “But if you’re delivering really great homes, why should the technology be the first consideration for the purchaser?”

The idea that these are small, identikit, prefab homes will be a challenge to surmount, and the people building them know it. “We owe it to the British public to build only high-specification, quality, permanent housing that will create popular, aspirational dwellings,” says Khodabuccus. But given the need for new housing isn’t going away, the production lines look set to keep rolling. ■



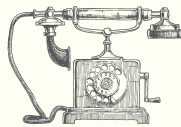
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OFFICE SPACE TRANSFERWISE

We take a tour of the offices of the money transfer service and find a richly textured building filled with design flourishes.
Words: **STEVE DINNEEN**; Photos: **GREG SIGSTON**



Left: The bleachers at the heart of the office, which are housed in the hole knocked through when the company expanded

Tech start-ups are famous – or perhaps infamous – for their idiosyncratic offices filled with ping pong tables and hammocks and games consoles. But what happens when the start-up grows up? This is the position in which TransferWise finds itself: now eight years old, with nine offices around the globe and a total head-count of more than 1,700, it's no longer a plucky upstart.

Its office in the iconic Tea Building – also home to Shoreditch House – is a living history of its evolution, a sprawling, richly textured maze of corridors and nooks and meeting rooms. The company moved in six years ago, initially occupying the sixth floor and subleasing some of the space to an agency. Later it reclaimed the entire office, and eventually expanded into the floor below. This required a gigantic hole to be knocked between levels, which now houses a set of wooden bleachers used for group conferencing and social events. “There were requests for a slide or a fireman’s pole but we had to veto those,” smiles office manager Geraldine Jardeleza.

TransferWise did consult its staff before starting the work, however, with suggestions ranging from the placement of desks to the purchasing of massage chairs to the names of the myriad meeting rooms (examples include Game of Phones and The Bat Cave).

Much of the office’s design is a delicate tango between the necessities of a modern office and the spatial realities of the building, a former bacon factory constructed for the Lipton company in the early 1930s. Making bacon and facilitating international bank transfers, it turns out, require very different working spaces, so TransferWise head of design Duncan Lamb has had to come up with some inventive workarounds.

“The space is just bananas,” he says. “This building has had more lives than a cat. It was a factory, a warehouse, an art and sculpture studio. I’m sure it’s been a crack den at some point. Thankfully we never found any bodies. There are all these weird corners and alcoves, elevator shafts that are now booths, areas without enough light, areas with *too much* light. Taking advantage of all the different spaces and ceiling heights and materials has been a challenge.”

Seemingly simple design fixes, such as putting banks of desks against windows to give each team as much natural light as possible, is made difficult by factors such as the building’s low ceilings and the uneven floor, which is a muddle of poured concrete and original tiles. ‘Problem areas’ include high-traffic corridors such as the one leading to the canteen, where Lamb has experimented with sound dampening partition walls and rows of pot plants.

Even the ground-floor entrance foyer is a strange mix of old and new, with a cobbled pathway leading past a plywood reception booth. It’s currently having a major refurb, with plans to install a coffee shop where employees from the various offices can meet and potentially work together. When I arrived a man in rolled-up jeans was walking a greyhound past a bunch of builders on a mechanical cherry-picker, which I think sums up the personality of the Tea Building.

Lamb says he’s not interested in interior design philosophy, preferring to “design things for humans, whether that’s machines, interfaces or spaces”. ▶

► He started out looking at the way TransferWise employees work, which tends to be in sub-teams of eight to twelve people. Each team needs their own space, as well as places they can work individually, and areas for intra-team meetings of two or three people.

“There are a lot of different furniture set-ups in different rooms,” he says. “Having a table with chairs around it affects how people behave. Give someone a standard 75cm table and people will sit at it, which seems like a statement of the obvious. But when people are sitting, they open their laptop. Watch a meeting and you’ll see people behaving in a very un-meeting-like way, and it ends up being a waste of time. Tables and chairs are the suit and tie of the modern office. You put a suit tie on and you behave in a certain way, and people have certain expectations of you. It’s the same with furniture and space and layout.”

The choice of furnishings leans into the jumbled nature of the building, with sleek modern stools and standing desks sitting beside glass-fronted granny cabinets and leather winchester sofas. Unlike many tech companies, TransferWise doesn’t have a strict design code, allowing each of its global offices to reflect their surroundings. “We wanted to bring a bit of Shoreditch into the office,” says Lamb, “just like the Budapest team wanted to bring in a bit of Budapest and the Tallinn team wanted to bring in a bit of Tallinn.”

Rather than overtly branding everything, TransferWise got an artist to paint an original mural using the company’s distinctive blue and gold colour scheme. Colour is also used to subtly section off different ‘zones’ within the office.

Much of Lamb’s work is trying to bring structure to chaos. “There’s a fetishisation of office spaces. You see pictures in magazines of pristine spaces, but they’re usually empty. You don’t see the footprints on the walls or the bags on the floor or the chairs left after a meeting. To think you can create a perfect office is totally naive – it needs to be hackable, an open-source space where people can move things to suit their needs.”

The international nature of the business



Clockwise from top: A meeting room called The Magic Roundabout; a meeting nook; bike racks;

also informed the design, with every team given access to video-conferencing equipment. “We learned not to compromise anything to do with acoustics,” says Jardeleza, pointing out the sound dampeners fitted to many of the walls. The space is also designed to be *used*, with virtually all the interior walls covered in screens or work-flow charts or floor-to-ceiling white boards for impromptu

brainstorming sessions.

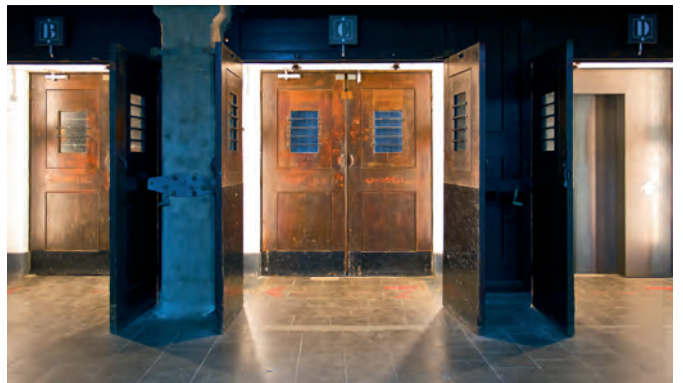
And then, of course, there are the features you would expect to find in a company that was, until recently, very much a start-up: the hammocks and the ping pong table and the games console, the latter of which is housed in a purpose-built room with low-hanging edison light bulbs and beautiful original tiles; when I popped my head in, two employees were zipping around Mario Kart 8’s Rainbow Road.

If you prefer real-life racing, there’s a row of electric scooters parked beside the reception desk. Other features include a snooze pod complete with sleep mask and phone charger, which is particularly helpful for jet-lagged international visitors; a private room for meditation or prayer or breast-feeding; a well-stocked library; and a sauna, which is a common theme across each TransferWise site, reflecting the founders’ Estonian roots. The company also organises dozens of events, listed on the screens around the office, which range from daily running classes to an annual Oktoberfest celebration.

Perhaps the piece de resistance, though, is the terrace, which overlooks both the City of London skyline and the adjacent Shoreditch House swimming pool. It’s a ridiculously pleasant space to while away your lunch hour.

On my way out of the office, I noticed a plastic banana stuck to the ceiling. “There’s a sinister backstory behind that,” says Lamb. “But I can’t tell you about it.” Now I’m desperate to know about the banana, another little mystery in this weird and wonderful office. ■





clockwise from top: The electric scooters, on which you can explore the office; The library; The original freight lift doors; A TransferWise mural; Sound dampeners in a conferencing room





AN ICON REBORN

As John Nash's famous designs at Regent's Crescent near completion, we look at the history of the architect who, alongside Christopher Wren, has defined London more than any other. Words: **ELEANOR DOUGHTY**



Walk around London's west end, your eyes skywards, and you'd be hard pressed not to spot the work of John Nash. The architect to the Prince Regent (later George IV) built countless buildings in central

London – from Marble Arch, to Clarence House, to All Souls Church on Langham Place.

And then there's Park Crescent. It sits pretty, this 19th century crescent at the top of Regent Street. To get to it from Oxford Circus, one passes the Royal Institute of British Architects at 66 Portland Place. Just 100 metres from Regent's Park underground station, and a seven-minute walk from Marylebone High Street, Park Crescent is at the centre of its own polite universe. For some years hoarding has covered its famous white stucco but this month it came down to reveal the restoration of one of Nash's famous crescents to a new, modern standard of luxury.

Yes, it's another new development. Regent's

Crescent, by developer CIT, is a collection of 67 two to five-bedroom apartments due to launch in 2020, with a 9,000sqft basement containing the amenities commonplace in such buildings, amongst them a spa, 20-metre swimming pool, cinema and parking.

Around the back, a series of 16 lower-ground one-bedroom apartments can be acquired for staff usage, visitors, or as additional investment opportunities. Prices for the main apartments begin at £2.9m. All of this in a Grade I-listed building.

The history of Park Crescent is key to the project, says Henry Barrow, sales manager at CIT. "It isn't something we need to manufacture." Rare too is a historical development of this scale. "When you get a refurbished property in a period building, it's usually just one unit, or you might get a house with four one- or two-bedroom flats. To repeat something like this is going to be hard for any developer – where are they going to get a whole crescent to do it?" These are in limited supply. There are about 70 streets containing the word "crescent" in London, the most notable being ►



The lobby of the new development, which is every bit as grand as it was in the early days of the 19th century

► Pelham Crescent in South Kensington, and Hans Crescent in Knightsbridge.

Research conducted in 2014 by Wetherell estate agents found that properties with “crescent” in the address commanded an average price of £2,103 per sq ft, 40 per cent higher than the average for central London.

“Crescents are cool,” says Nicholas Boys Smith, founder of Create Streets, a housing and planning research institute. “We should create more of them.” Research by Create shows “that people like walkable streets with a sense of enclosure, some level of symmetry, and a sense of place. We like patterns that remind us of natural forms.”

Curved streets – crescents – do this brilliantly. The word “iconic” is ubiquitous, but it is the correct one to ascribe to London’s crescents, says Dr Geoffrey Tyack, emeritus fellow at Kellogg College Oxford and author of *John Nash: Architect of the Picturesque*. “They were part of the way that people planning towns thought about bringing together the urban and the rural image. Regent’s Park, as Nash conceived it, was a pastoral vision incorporated as part of what was by that time one of the largest cities in the world.”

Work on Park Crescent was completed in 1821, having begun in 1806. Nash’s original proposal for the scheme would have made it a “circus”, one of three including Oxford Circus and Piccadilly Circus, to link Whitehall and Westminster with what is now Regent’s Park. When this scheme proved too ambitious, a private garden, Park Square, was built, an alternative entrance to Regent’s Park. When complete, the houses

around Park Crescent filled up with residents – MPs, a judge, peers and a Portuguese man-about-town were listed in an 1841 directory of the street.

Later, Joseph Lister, a pioneer of antiseptic surgery lived at number 12. These properties were pricy then, too: in 1826, number 10 sold for £7,200, equivalent to around £700,000 in today’s money. Following the Second World War, when parts of Park Crescent were badly damaged, houses around the crescent on both sides found other uses – as council facilities, and hostels for overseas students visiting the UK.

Despite the damage, given the significance of Nash’s work, it was decreed that the crescent must be retained. A report published in 1947 on the future of the Regent’s Park terraces determined that Park Crescent was one of seven that would be kept at all costs, and “preserved so long as possible with the present facade... the gaps left in it by bombing should be made good by new building.”

That a developer has come in to rejuvenate the building, says classical architect Francis Terry, is of little consequence. “I don’t mind... whether that building is actually by Nash or whether it was built yesterday – it’s a good piece of civic architecture.” The interiors don’t matter either: “These buildings have been all sorts of things.”

The debate surrounding the merit of pastiche in architecture is a tedious one, says Terry. “Nash didn’t invent the ionic order, or the sash window. The whole history of classical architecture is copying –

Nash copied the Romans, the Romans copied the Greeks, the Greeks copied the Assyrians, the Assyrians copied the Egyptians.”

But who is going to buy at Regent’s Crescent? Will Watson, head of London for Knight Frank’s The Buying Solution has his money on the international market. “I’ve got a US buyer coming in a few weeks who wants to look at it for a pied a terre – he loves Marylebone and Mayfair but there’s nothing close to what he wants in those areas.” For now, the development is unlikely to be too tempting to domestic buyers, says Barrow. “When the building wrap comes down we’ll start to see the domestic market pick up – they prefer to buy completed stock.” Londoners who do come to Regent’s Crescent are likely to be local. “We’ll probably have a lot of downsizers, people coming from St John’s Wood,” Barrow reckons. “With the domestic buyer it will be where they live full-time, so they want to get things right.”

The work of John Nash, in whatever form it is presented – in the original, or rebuilt – is critical to London’s architectural landscape, says Dr Tyack. “With the exception of Sir Christopher Wren in the City of London, Nash’s contribution is the most important of any other architect.”

This owes to the scale of his work. “If you go from the top of Regent’s Park to Trafalgar Square, what you’re looking at is a scheme prepared by Nash.” He is integral to the city. “The way we look at the west end of London is to a large extent determined by what Nash did.” ■



The interiors of the new Regent's Crescent are ridiculously opulent, designed with a unifying vision that's both modern but true to the historical nature of the development; something Nash would surely approve of



THE BACK PAGE

STEVE HOGARTY

ONCE BITTEN, TWICE SHY

The bane of travelling, the ruiner of holidays, mosquitoes only appear to be growing in strength. How do we stop them?

Great news everybody. About half a million mutant mosquitoes have escaped from a laboratory in Brazil, and are currently spreading across the continent in an unstoppable, buzzing wave that will surely one day consume us all. In an attempt to curb the spread of mosquito-borne illness, scientists had genetically modified a new breed of “dud” mosquito, tweaking their DNA so that their mosquito kids would have a much greater chance of dropping dead immediately after hatching. They then released the wonky mozzies into the wild to do the deed.

The mosquito population plummeted at first, but then quickly and unexpectedly bounced back. The discerning local ladies weren’t DTF, and those who did fall for the scientists’ honeytrap created a whole new strain of hybrid mosquitoes, more resilient to pest-control than ever before. It was like introducing electric cars to destroy petrol cars, only to find yourself faced with a fleet of angrily revving Toyota Priuses.

This matters because mosquitoes are a growing problem everywhere. Most seriously for those at risk of contracting mosquito-borne diseases, obviously, but also for anybody trying to fall asleep in a room with one. For international travellers, mosquitoes are the great leveller. They don’t care whether you’re on a Learjet to your cousin’s island in the Indian Ocean, or an easyjet flight from Luton to Magaluf. To them, we’re all just wandering sacks of hot, delicious blood. From the unbiased perspective of a mosquito, the Queen of England cannot be told apart from a convicted murderer with the words “the actual queen” written on his forehead in marker pen.

The blind indifference of mosquitoes would be a humbling commentary on the human condition, if they weren’t such little bastards. And lately, the unwritten social contract between human and mosquito is being tested to breaking point.

As you might have guessed, mosquitoes have taken over my flat. A kind I have not encountered before, one that tears up the rulebook and does away with the conventions that until now have held the human-mosquito relationship in uneasy balance. This new lot foregoes the agreed-upon biting zones of the ankles and wrists – which we begrudgingly tolerate in light of the alternatives – instead going for the face and eyes. And they are entirely unfazed by efforts to repel them with chemicals and oils, happily bathing in corrosive gases like they’re on a spa day.

My life has become a waking nightmare. I look like an extra from Chernobyl, and fantasise about being able to reason with an animal five thousand times smaller than me by offering it a saucer of my own blood in exchange for one night of uninterrupted sleep. Just one night without hearing that high-pitched whine. I refuse to sleep inside a net because it makes me feel like a big onion.

Most entomologists agree that mosquitoes are entirely useless animals, contributing nothing to the ecosystem besides misery and contempt, and so efforts by the scientific community to play God by wiping an entire species off the face of the planet will hear no objections from me. Just try to get it right next time, or we risk creating a new race of superpowered mega-mosquitoes able to crack us open like a tin of Fosters and chug down litres of blood in one go.

● Steve Hogarty is the very itchy travel editor at City A.M.

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