CITY A.M.

No. 77 — THE MAGAZINE — AUG 19

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FOOD & BOOZE

How to throw the ultimate dinner party, from shopping to serving the right drinks

EXPERIENCE A PSYCHEDELIC RETREAT

We set off to Amsterdam to see if magic mushroom 'truffles' can cure your anxiety

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LAST SHADOW PUPPETS STAR MILES KANE

Award-winning chef Tom Brown interviews his rockstar friend, talking Michelin stars, authenticity and the joys of wrestling

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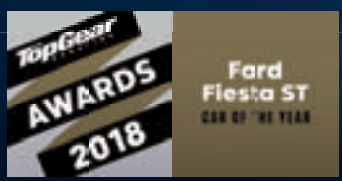

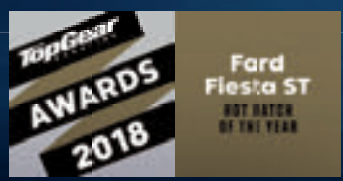

This award-winner has the critics gripped.

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FIESTA ST
ST

EDITOR'S LETTER

When I saw the footage of clouds of thick, black smoke pouring out of Gymkhana, the Michelin starred Mayfair restaurant, I was genuinely moved. It looked like the end for this amazing restaurant, which has done as much for the evolution and reputation of London's Indian cuisine as almost any other. Thankfully it sounds like the damage isn't quite as extensive as it first appeared, with whispers that it will reopen within the year.

With this in mind, what better time to examine our changing attitudes to Indian food, which over the last decade has evolved from standard curry house fare to one of the most varied and exciting cuisines in London. On P30 we speak to some of the movers and shakers in the sector to get their take on the rise and rise of the posh Indian.

In my restaurant review I talk about how our relationships with the places we eat are as much emotional as they are qualitative. Walking into the third restaurant housed within Bethnal Green's Town Hall Hotel brought back memories of my first years in London, when I lived round the corner and Nuno Mendes' superlative Viajante was there, followed a few years later by Lee Westcott's excellent Typing Room. Find out if new venture Da Terra can live up to its predecessors on P27.

While we're discussing emotional relationships with restaurants, you can forge some of your own when you join City A.M.'s exclusive members' club. Get benefits at some of London's top bars and restaurants, from preferential seating to free champagne and money off your bill. Find out more about the Club, including how you can claim £100 credit at Gaucho steakhouse, on P44. We all pay a premium to live in London, and the variety and quality of the food is one of the city's big selling points. Let us help you make the most of it.

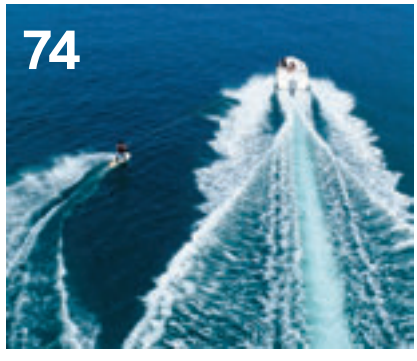
– STEVE DINNEEN

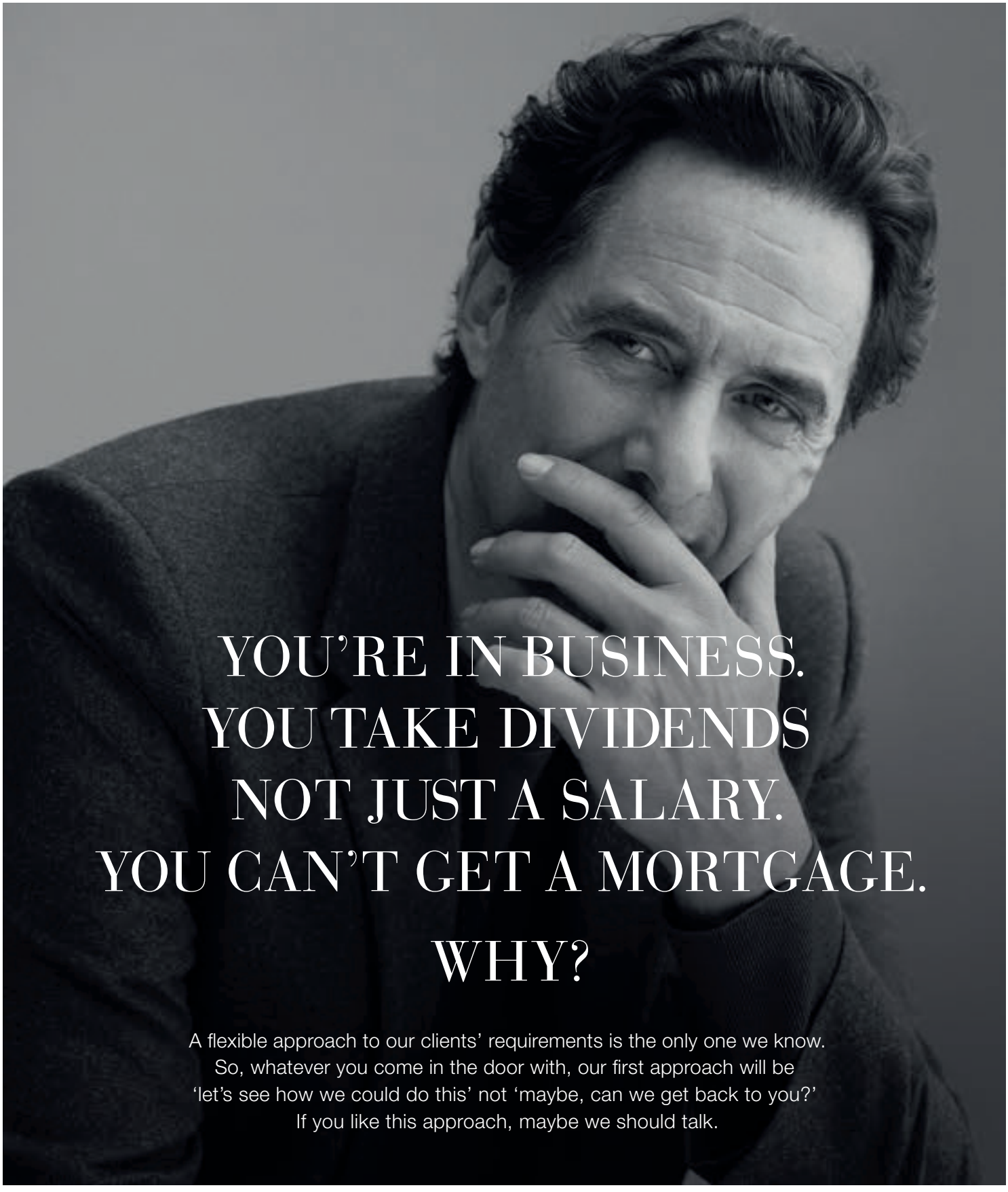
INSIDE THIS ISSUE

Above: What's it like to drive this tiny little Fiat 500? Find out on P58; **Below from left:** Forage for your dinner on a culinary trip to Thailand, P74; One of the dishes at hot new restaurant Da Terra

FEATURES

REGULARS





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CONTRIBUTORS

JOSH BARRIE is a food writer and restaurant expert. In this issue he delves into the reasons behind the meteoric rise of London's high-end Indian restaurants. Take a tour of the world's most vibrant and varied cuisine on P30.

SIMON THOMSON is *City A.M. The Magazine's* booze expert, specialising in fine spirits. He also writes film and theatre reviews for *City A.M.* Read his article on the new generation of super luxe tequila on P34.

SCARLET WINTERBERG is *City A.M. Magazine*'s luxury travel columnist. Each issue, she shares insider tips and frequent flyer information to help you get the best from your work trips. This month she welcomes the arrival of Michelin-quality plane food on P68.

LAURA McCREDDIE-DOAK is the country's leading expert on women's watches and jewellery. This issue she reviews the first line of timepieces ever allowed to use the fiercely guarded Le Corbusier colour chart as inspiration – P56.

MARK HIX is *City A.M. The Magazine*'s regular food columnist. His restaurants include HIX Oyster & Chop House, HIX Soho, Tramshed and Hixter Bankside. He talks about what makes the perfect dinner party on P24.

ADAM HAY-NICHOLLS is one of the country's leading motoring journalists, cruising around the world's most glamorous cities in cars most people only see in Park Lane showrooms. This issue he scoots down the Italian coast in a dinky bespoke Fiat 500 – P58.

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The uninhabited Rockall in the North Atlantic was the subject of a fierce legal debate over the definition of an island

THE ISLANDS THAT AREN'T

The politics of islands is no more pronounced than when they vanish entirely
Words: **STEVE HOGARTY**

On a voyage from Manila to Mexico in 1528, the Spanish captain Alavaro de Saaverda reported stopping off at a pair of islands a few thousand kilometres north of Papua New Guinea in the Philippine Sea. He named the islands Los Buenos Jardines, and wrote in his diary about the friendly natives he'd met there.

The cartographer Mercator added the islands to his map of the world later that century, but when American and Japanese navies set out to find the islands again in the early 1940s, they weren't where the charts said they were supposed to be. In fact, they were nowhere to be found.

Los Buenos Jardines is one example of hundreds of "phantom islands," non-existent places that were misreported, mostly during the age of discovery, either by mistake or wilfully. Empires would often pay their explorers for every new island they could discover and claim, and there were enough unscrupulous ship captains and demanding financiers that maps of the Caribbean and Pacific soon became littered with fictional isles that would stick around for centuries.

Others were borne out of myth. Hy-Brasil was believed to exist in the Atlantic Ocean west of Ireland, shrouded in a mist that lifted only once every seven years. Some were simply misidentifications of actual places, such as the long-held Spanish misconception that the Californian peninsula was an island.

> We are amused by the inexactness of previous eras' maps, but we should keep in mind that a map is always a particular perspective on the world

"The phenomena of phantom islands points out the authority we grant to documents such as maps and atlases," says Andrew Pekler, an artist and musican who documents these islands in his interactive audio map, the Sonic Atlas. "Once an island is entered on a map, it becomes 'real'. Or at least as real as any other feature on the map."

Even in the age of satellite photography, maps aren't immune to these kinds of errors. Until as recently as 2012, Google Maps included Sandy Island, a phantom island "discovered" by Captain James Cook off the coast of Australia in 1774 (now believed to have been a pumice raft ejected from a volcanic eruption). It appeared as an ominous blob of black pixels in the satellite imagery, where Google's algorithms had tried to reconcile the conflicting map data.

The debate over whether or not islands truly exist extends beyond cartographical trivia and into the realm of geopolitics. A nearby example, Rockall is an uninhabited chunk of granite barely jutting out of the Atlantic Ocean about 300km west of the Outer Hebrides, and over which the UK claims sovereignty. Whether or not the guano-spattered boulder met the legal definition of an island, which would have granted the UK full territorial and fishing rights for the surrounding waters, was a matter of debate until the mid-90s.

China has found a more direct solution to establishing territorial rights, dumping vast quantities of sand into the South China Sea to create around half a dozen new islands on top of existing reefs, an audacious act of terraforming that has strained geopolitical tensions in the region to breaking point. In an age of information, it no longer suffices to simply sketch a fake island on the map.

"We are amused by the inexactness of previous eras' maps," says Pekler, "but we should keep in mind that a map is always a particular perspective on the world."

To find out more about phantom islands visit the Dark Matter exhibition at the Science Gallery, london.sciencegallery.com. Follow Andrew Pekler at soundcloud.com/pekler

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THE RISE OF THE ASMR-TISTS

It's a lucrative business, but is it more than crypto-pornography, asks **DOUGIE GERRARD**

The slurp of a woman eating soup; the abrupt snip of scissors through hair; the crinkle of tinfoil being scrunched into a ball. For some people, these everyday sounds ignite a mysterious, near-ecstatic sensation known as Auto Sensory Meridian Response (ASMR). This reaction is characterised by a kind of low-level euphoria, similar to the prickly feeling of someone gently stroking your skin. Enthusiasts call it a 'braingasm', and claim it can salve anxiety and cure insomnia.

Like the Tide-Pod challenge and the Alt-Right, ASMR is an indigenously online phenomenon, its communities located almost exclusively on YouTube, where 'content creators' (or ASMRtists) post their videos. Despite this apparent insularity, it's astonishingly popular: some videos have north of 100m views, and the most successful channels boast more than 2m subscribers. Gibi, YouTube's top ASMRtist, makes an estimated $1.1m a year.

"It's growth is mostly to do with awareness," says Thomas Hostler, a psychologist at Manchester Metropolitan University, and one of the few academics dedicating serious time to this nascent craze. "The term was only invented in the past decade, and before that there was nothing designed to trigger ASMR."

Despite its meteoric rise, ASMR has been dogged by accusations that it's little more than a covert sexual fetish, a stigma that last year prompted YouTube to limit the ad placement on ASMR content. Watching some of the most-viewed videos, it's easy to be cynical about their appeal: they are made largely by attractive young women, and triggers – soft whispering, most obviously – often simulate aspects of sexual intimacy.

Hostler insists there's nothing intrinsically erotic about the phenomenon. "Some of the triggers are undoubtedly intimate, but our research suggests it's not a sexual experience, and is not linked with sexual arousal," he says.

Whether or not ASMR is a kind of crypto-pornography, the controversy surrounding it is reflective of a broader suspicion about the practice, which might explain the lack of serious commercial investment in the sector.

This, however, may be about to change. Hostler says there's substantial evidence for its efficacy as a form of physical therapy. A study conducted by a team he headed up found that people subjected to ASMR experienced lower heart rates, a sign of relaxation, as well as increased skin conductance (the sweaty palms feeling associated with fear or excitement). People also claim it acts as an effective sleep aid, even for those with persistent insomnia.

Given our anxious, wired generation, it seems impossible that ASMR won't soon be shepherded into the burgeoning "wellness" industry. Among the first international brands to dabble with the commercial potential of ASMR is Marriott's Moxy subsidiary, which recently created a series of ASMR 'bedtime stories'. These feature actress Bella Thorne interacting with "a series of playful props... everything from pizza to candy to sequins", for guests at their hotel in New York's Chelsea to fall asleep to.

Expect to find ASMR pods popping up in trendy start-up offices all around Old Street before the year is out.

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PLAYING GAMES IS BIG BUSINESS

YouTubers make millions playing videogames, and audiences are growing. Words: **DOUGIE GERRARD**

For the past decade, largely unnoticed by traditional media, scores of YouTubers have been racking up millions of views by posting videos of themselves playing video games. These videos, called Let's Plays, occupy a niche position in the new online ecosystem. Let's Players aren't competitive gamers; in fact, they're often pretty hopeless at video games. The point isn't to display your skills, but to entertain – to create comedy through incompetence, or to inspire the slow-burn thrill of vicarious achievement by completing a particularly challenging level.

Let's Play is an impressively diverse genre, encompassing long-form play-throughs of difficult titles, highly edited bite-sized clips (typically of comedy and horror games), and a slew of miscellaneous and unclassifiable videos. Let's Players often branch out into different video-forms, and innovation is rewarded. One channel, Funhaus, made a name for themselves by playing obscure and poorly-made games. Other creators make music videos – or, as British YouTuber KSI did last year, compete in boxing matches against other online celebrities.

Belying their seemingly parochial audience of YouTube and gaming enthusiasts, Let's Plays are astonishingly popular, sometimes bewilderingly so. A moderately successful channel can be a full-time job, and entire companies (like the Texas-based Achievement Hunter) exist just to produce Let's Play content. Prominent channels can receive more views than even the most watched television shows, which is as much a sign of the success of YouTube as it is a portent for traditional media. A particularly lurid illustration of this can be seen in the 206m views that the most-viewed video by PewDiePie, YouTube's most subscribed-to Let's Player, has received. By contrast, an estimated 40m people tuned in to the series premiere of the new season of Stranger Things.

> Our audience loves seeing the friendship, camaraderie and humour that comes from us playing together

"The popularity of Let's Plays is mostly down to the fact that a lot of people now watch YouTube instead of traditional programming," says Gav Murphy, one third of the Let's Play crew RKG. "But our audience also loves seeing the friendship, camaraderie and humour that comes from us playing together. We take the piss and try and make each other laugh but we also support each other, and talk personally with our audience."

Unsurprisingly for such a popular medium, Let's Plays can be highly profitable. RKG make over £25,000 a month through the crowdfunding website Patreon, an amount that persuaded the trio to quit their day jobs and pursue it full-time. YouTube funding is less straightforward, but the most popular creators can become eye-poppingly wealthy, especially once sponsors catch on. PewDiePie is worth somewhere between $35 and $50m; Markiplier, only the 53rd most-subscribed YouTuber, has around $24m to his name.

Despite being broadly embraced by the gaming community, some in the industry have argued that Let's Plays are having a deleterious effect on the quality of new titles. Games like Goat Simulator and I Am Bread have been derided for being 'YouTube-bait' – gimmicky and carelessly made games designed specifically for the Let's Play format, and boosted into undeserved popularity by being featured on prominent channels.

Murphy acknowledges this, but points out that Let's Plays can also be a valuable support for smart indie games that might otherwise be ignored. Plus, gamers aren't stupid: "They can tell when they're being pandered to, and know when a game is actually good. For every I Am Bread there's a million rubbish titles that go unnoticed."

Let's Plays are easily scorned, and some content can make for pretty grim viewing if you aren't a teenager, but YouTube isn't going anywhere anytime soon. Plus, their appeal may be more universal than it initially appears. A common feature of new cultural forms is that they function as an extension of one's social life, allowing viewers to feel like involved members of a community, rather than passive consumers.

More and more, this desire for interactivity is insinuating itself into traditional media. Observe the popularity of Gogglebox, for instance. Let's Plays offer a level of contact – of intimacy, even – that is absent from film or television. As Murphy puts it, "We're in immediate contact with our audience. It's about the personalities behind the Let's Plays."

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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

MONSIEUR LE DUCK, CLERKENWELL RD

WHAT IS IT? It's a restaurant that specialises in duck, believe it or not. Duck burgers. Duck salad. Duck wings. It's a celebration of the cuisine of Gascony, one of the pillars of French gastronomy in which duck isn't so much an ingredient as a mission statement, a rich and versatile figurehead for an inimitable style of cooking. It's the brainchild of Richard Humphreys, who spent 10 years working in finance (metal trading and mining, if you're interested), jetting off to Gascony at the weekends to get his fix of confit duck and Armagnac. He says Monsieur Le Duck aims to capture the Gascon concept of "douceur de vivre", or "sweetness of living", with a rustic aesthetic and leisurely pace.

WHO WILL IT IMPRESS? Humphreys says part of his inspiration came when his French friends complained they were unable to get a taste of their home cuisine in London, so if you do business with BNP Paribas or Société Générale, now would be a good time to show them how much you know about Gascon cooking.

WHAT ABOUT THE FOOD? Highly recommended. One of the two main events is the confit duck leg, which is as indulgently rich and textured as you could hope – crisp and molten and delicious. It's a mouthful of holiday to the south of France. The other is the magret de canard, either pan roasted or chargrilled, which is the colour of a storm cloud over a volcano and coated in a decadent blanket of perfectly browned fat.

The laid-back interior of Monsieur Le Duck, which captures the spirit of Gascony

DESSERT? Naturellement. There's a wonderful, deep creme brulee, a tarte aux pommes and some fromages a trois. Did we mention it's French? It's very French.

SET MENU? You can try the confit leg, chargrilled breast, pan roasted breast and duck burger for an astonishingly reasonable £34.

WHERE: 27 Clerkenwell Rd, EC1M 5RN
EMAIL: info@leduck.co.uk
WEB: leduck.co.uk

BABA G'S, VINEGAR YARD

WHAT IS IT? Proof that anything can be a burger if you put your mind to it, Baba G's Bhangra Burger is an Indian street food pop-up that's been popping up to great success around London for more than a decade. The nearest one to the City is in Vinegar Yard – the bustling food market behind London Bridge station, beneath the giant ant sculptures – though they've recently opened their first permanent location in Camden too. They specialise in towering curry burgers packed with Indian flavours and guaranteed to make a bit of a mess on your face. You'd be wise to bring some wet wipes.

WHO WILL IT IMPRESS? Anyone with a spicy tooth and a train to catch: Baba G's signature naga chilli burger sauce is

Baba G's food stall sits beneath Joe Rush's art installation of a train carriage besieged by ants

made using one of the hottest chillies going, and the pop-up is right next to the most recently renovated station we've got. There's a paneer burger here for the vegetarians, but vegans are out of luck.

WHAT ABOUT THE FOOD? The signature burger is the Crazy Lamb Jalfrezi, a spiced lamb patty between two buns, served with a mint cumin riatha, mango pulp and onion salsa. If you're after a burger that will bite you back, the Naga Delhi Double Burger builds on the good work of the Crazy Lamb Jalfrezi, adding a crispy onion bhaji and Baba's hot naga chilli burger sauce to the equation. The Indian street food fusion and top-shelf punning continues with a selection of naanwiches, delightful curry sandwiches in a buttermilk naan, and pachos, poppadom nachos topped with paneer saag, chilli pickle, mango pulp and tomato coriander salsa. Alliteration fans will also appreciate that Baba G's Bhangra Burger serves beers from Brixton Brewery.

SET MENU? You're eating street food handed to you out of the side of a van by an inexplicably furious woman, so no, there's no set menu here.

PHONE: 07859004628
WHERE: Vinegar Yard, London Bridge
WEB: bhangraburger.com

THE FANCY FORK, KING WILLIAM ST

WHAT IS IT? If you work in the City you're probably already aware of Farmer J, the healthy Mediterranean lunch spot located at the Monument end of London Bridge, where you can pick up "Fieldtrays" of freshly cooked harissa chicken or tofu steak with sides of rice, veg and salad. Which is all well and good, but hardly appropriate for client meetings... Well, now former River Cafe chef Shuli Wimer has launched a Middle Eastern and Mediterranean restaurant in the venue, with dinner courses starting at 5.30pm. And it's very good indeed.

WHO WILL IT IMPRESS? Farmer J has done a great job turning the fast-casual space into a cool, laid-back restaurant, with the muted greys and greenery providing a pleasant backdrop for an early evening meal. It's a great spot for vegans and vegetarians, with Wimer growing up eating meat only once a week – something that's reflected in the range and vibrancy of the meat-free options. It's also a safe bet for dedicated foodies, with Wirmer being a regular fixture on the high-end food scene, including a 10-day residency at Marylebone's Carousel.

WHAT ABOUT THE FOOD? It's designed around sharing dishes, all based around Wimer's Middle Eastern-Mediterranean-Israeli cuisine. Tuna tartare is given an interesting twist with tahini and green beans; padron peppers are enlivened with the savoury spice of za'atr; stuffed courgette flowers are filled with a decadent blend of ricotta, basil and olive

The laid-back dining room, which transforms from fast lunch space to high-end casual

paste (and score extra points for looking like something out of a van Gogh painting).

DESSERT? Two options, of which we tried the coconut malabi (a Persian milk pudding) with cherries, amaretto and almonds.

SET MENU? No, it's all small plates.

PHONE: 020 7621 1850
WHERE: 32 King William St, EC4R 9AT
WEB: farmerj.com

FLOR, BOROUGH MARKET

WHAT IS IT? The new venture from owners of the world's 38th best restaurant, Lyle's. This time chef James Lowe and his front-of-house partner John Ogler have opened a bijou restaurant/wine-bar/bakery in Borough Market, apparently inspired by the "buvettes of Paris and the pintxos bars in San Sebastián".

WHO WILL IT IMPRESS? Basically everyone. In the few minutes it took us to get seated, the front desk turned away no

The outstanding wine selection at this much-hyped new restaurant

fewer than four walk-ins. Anyone with even the most rudimentary knowledge of the London food scene will be aware of Lowe and Ogier's flagship restaurant, with its focus on provenance and impeccable attention to detail. Flor maintains that ethos but is cosier than its stark sibling, more suited to a friendly meeting than a formal engagement.

WHAT ABOUT THE FOOD? It's a combination of seasonal British ingredients and the finest continental cured meats and cheeses. There are no weak links, but highlights include intensely flavoursome scarlet prawns in yuzu kosho, served alongside their grilled, meaty heads. The selection of breads are to die for, especially the clam flatbread with tallegio soft cheese and a hint of truffle. We can also recommend the creamy black pudding with peach and peas, and the lamb rib, yoghurt, black lime and pistachio. It's the kind of place you'll want to immediately revisit so you can soak up anything you missed the first time round.

DESSERT? There's fancy neapolitan ice cream and the punchiest butter cakes we've ever tried.

SET MENU? Nope. But it's worth mentioning the gigantic wine list, which is a huge part of Flor's offering and includes some exceptional and unusual skin contact numbers.

PHONE: 020 3319 8144
WHERE: 1 Bedale St, SE1 9AL
WEB: florlondon.com

THE LAST SUPPER

The Saturdays singer **MOLLIE KING** tells us what she'd eat for her last dinner on earth, from sushi to chicken madras

There's no way a restaurant would serve my last meal. None of the courses follow on nicely from each other but it's what I like best. I'd like to say I could prepare all of them myself but I'm a terrible cook, just like my mum. She was strictly meat and two veg when I was growing up – to her food was just a necessity. That's definitely rubbed off on me, although she did do a killer Sunday roast and spaghetti bolognese. These days I prefer homely cooking and smaller restaurants, places line E&O in Notting Hill, or The Surprise pub in Chelsea, which does amazing bar food.

My starter would be tuna tartare. I'd never eaten raw fish or sushi until I was in the Saturdays. The rest of the girls were really into it but I was totally freaked out at the thought. Now I'm a sushi addict and it's become my go-to snack, as long as it's authentic and not too fussy. One of my big regrets is that the Saturdays never toured in Japan. It's now top of my list of places to visit. In London, there's a tiny restaurant called Hashi close to where I live in Putney and they prepare sushi perfectly.

I'm going to follow that with a curry for my main course. Indian food is a favourite when I'm in a hurry. I don't mind hot stuff, although a phall would probably be too much for me. For this meal I'll go for a madras. My new year's resolution was to learn to cook properly – I dream of preparing my own curry for friends when they come round – so the builders are currently fitting me a new kitchen, and I've bought loads of recipe books. I imagine it won't last and my friends and I will eat takeaway as usual.

I'd wash that down with a glass of prosecco, or a vodka, lime and soda. I'm learning about wine, so a sauvignon blanc is another option.

Chocolate is my biggest vice but not the fancy stuff, just a plain Galaxy bar or even Lindt milk chocolate truffles. You would be very disappointed with the contents of my fridge but it is stuffed with leftover Easter eggs and chocolate bars people have given me. So my final dessert would have to be a decadent chocolate fondant, perhaps with a dollop of ice cream. I could carry on eating chocolate until they shut down the restaurant and turned out the lights. I can smell it at 50 paces.

Mollie King is an ambassador for Land Rover

PRADO settee with cushion. Design: Christian Werner.

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CHEF'S TABLE

This month **TOM BROWN**, the superstar chef behind Hackney Wick's Cornerstone, cooks lunch for Last Shadow Puppets star **MILES KANE** Portraits: Laura Palmer

STARTER

Salmon pastrami; airdried monkfish; cuttlefish salami; oysters; brill tartare with egg yolk, peas and morels

MILES KANE: We met through my mate Gizzi Erskine, didn't we? She's a chef, and she told me bout the place. I was intrigued when I heard it was named after an Arctic Monkeys tune. I came for a meal over Christmas.
TOM BROWN: That was a good night, wasn't it?
MK: Yeah. I think we have a mutual respect, a mutual appreciation for each other's craft. I'm a massive foodie.
TB: I've always thought there was a synergy between music and cooking, because they both say something about your own taste. I can't make a dish I don't like and you can't write a tune you don't like.
MK: People always appreciate something they can tell is authentic.
TB: Totally. When I opened this place I wanted to correct everything that's shit about the restaurant industry, how stuffy and pretentious it is. So when you walk in, the bar is right by the door, and someone greets you and gets you a drink immediately. There are no bad tables, everyone can see each other. I wanted the place to have warmth. I choose all the music, too. Normally when I cook I have my phone next to the chopping board, and I curate the night as I go, because then I can see how everyone's reacting. If it's a quiet evening I'll put something chill on; if there's a party atmosphere I'll go for something a bit livelier.
MK: With anything creative it's about the vibe, about creating an atmosphere – in my dressing room before a show we dim the lights, put a cool playlist on. It's like a gig before the gig.
TB: When we had our first anniversary party, the PR sent over a list of celebrities and journalists for me to invite, but I just threw it in the bin and invited all our mates instead. I invited a bunch of our regulars too, and we cleared a space for a dance floor and had a great time.

MAINS

Hake, curry sauce, crispy potatoes; monkfish on the bone, roast chicken butter sauce

TB: You were in LA for a long time, weren't you? Why did you decide to come home?
MK: For the work, really. I had an amazing time there, it felt like being on holiday every day, and if I had what I have over here maybe I'd have stayed. But ultimately my work is in Britain. Also, I don't want to diss LA, but it's such a strange place. Everyone wants to show you their CV. Mexico's different though – it's much friendlier.
TB: My brother lives in Mexico: I love it there, the food's incredible. I remember being on a beach in Oaxaca. There was a guy there, a big fat geezer with speedos on, wearing a bucket like a backpack and a utility belt like batman, and he carries oysters, hot sauce, limes and a shucker, and just spends all day dishing out oysters to people.
MK: I love that! Food should be an event. Has that always been your philosophy?
TB: I was seventeen when I started cooking, just after I'd left school. I'd planned to be a doctor, but I didn't fancy being in a classroom anymore after doing my GCSEs, so I started working at the local boozer. I'd never really had an interest in food, but it went really quickly from there. I like the instant gratification you get from cooking, the way you can see immediately that someone's enjoying what you've made.
MK: I saw that you got voted the third best restaurant in Britain – that's pretty impressive for having only been open a year...
TB: Yeah, that was pretty nuts. It felt surreal, because I'm the new kid on the block. I was mostly glad because the awards dinner was a fucking good laugh with all my mates, none of that black tie bollocks.
MK: Speaking of awards, I've always wondered about the whole Michelin thing – how does it work? Do you know it's them?
TB: They do two visits – one announced and one incognito. On the unannounced one, when they reveal they're from Michelin it's like being pulled over by the police. Your mouth goes all dry, you start apologising for no reason. We'd had a really shit lunch service that day as well, so it was a pretty stressful few hours.
MK: How much do chefs care about getting a star?
TB: It's the big one, so anyone who says they don't care is lying. When the guide came out last year, everyone assumed we'd get one. Chefs all over the country who thought they might get a star were phoning me and asking if anyone called yet, because if we hadn't been notified there was still a chance they might get one. And in the end I got caught up in it, because if everyone's saying it will happen then it's a dead cert, isn't it? So I was a bit gutted when we didn't. The really sad thing was watching the award ceremony and seeing all my mates were there – it was like not being let in the club because I had my trainers on!
MK: That's how I think about awards – it's nice to have one on the mantelpiece, but you shouldn't start trying too hard. As long as you're fulfilling yourself creatively, as long as you like the music you're making, then it's fine to have one eye on awards. I wish people were more honest about the appeal of that kind of ►

Above: Miles and Tom at the Hackney Wick restaurant;
From left: The Cornerstone dining room;
Brill tartare with egg yolk, peas and morels

Above: Miles Kane (*left*) tucks into monkfish with roast chicken butter sauce at chef Tom Brown's Cornerstone restaurant; **Below:** Pickled oysters

► recognition – when musicians say they don't care about that stuff, I always think 'why do it then?' Why not release your music under a fake name? I hate that phoniness, the way some musicians love giving it the artsy one. Not everyone needs to know that you're taking a stand. Either embrace it, or shut up!
TB: Yeah, exactly. A Michelin star isn't what I do it for, but fuck me I'd love it to happen.

DESSERT

Strawberry pavlova,
clotted cream, lemon verbena

TB: I remember when you came the first time, you said to me that your favourite things in life were rock and roll, wrestling, good food and sex.
MK: In that order, too. The list hasn't really changed since.
TB: Do you still enjoy music as much?
MK: I think so. The way I make music hasn't changed since I was 18. I've always followed my gut, creatively – that's the best route to longevity. I've been working independently recently. We created my last tune, Can You See Me Now, totally by ourselves – no label, no publishing – and it's had an amazing response. We weren't even aiming for the radio and it's had a ton of radio play. We're planning to do that for our next album now.
TB: Is there more freedom that way?
MK: I've always felt creatively free, to be honest, I've always stuck to my guns and tried to better myself. I made my first album on my own, it's just that it was then put out by a major label.
TB: How long have you been making music professionally?
MK: Fourteen years. Someone told me that I'm an old man of the industry the other day, and I found it weirdly comforting,

> My favourite things in life are rock and roll, wrestling, food and sex. In that order.

because where I'm at now is the most enjoyable point in my career. I think of who I looked up to when I was in my early 20s, the way I spoke to them, and now when I meet young artists they speak to me that way. Not to be egotistical, but I like that.
TB: Is that because you feel you have nothing to prove?
MK: It's funny you say that, because I still feel like I've got a lot to prove. I think of music as a game; you never complete it, but

you've got to keep trying, and the goal is to get as close as possible. I know I'm not going to complete it, but I'm giving it my damnedest. What about the restaurant industry – do you think it's in a good place?
TB: I do, yeah. It's the best I've known it by a mile. There's more freedom than there's ever been – I don't mean that chefs are more experimental, just more relaxed. People make what they think is nice. The rise of the neighborhood restaurant has been massive, as has the rise of East London. That's the centre for good food now. It used to be really cutthroat: you'd hear all these stories about so-and-so ringing up so-and-so and making loads of bookings and then not showing up, just so they had an empty restaurant that night. It's not like that anymore, there's much more camaraderie now. Lots of my recipes are inspired by things I've eaten at my friends' restaurants.
MK: So the Gordon Ramsay screaming at people thing doesn't happen anymore?
TB: Not at all. You've got to look after people, even if they piss you off. Putting everything else aside, people won't work for you if you don't treat them well. I also get a kick out of doing nice things: when we opened, one of our guys didn't have enough money to move house, so I lent him the deposit money for a new flat. Another guy was living really far out and walking home every night, so I bought him a bike. There's a kitchen porter that works here, and she sometimes gets frustrated with her English, so we're putting her through a language course. You hope stuff like that will come back to you. I'm lucky that people have done similar things for me, and I'd rather get shafted trying to be a good guy than do well as a bad guy.

To book a table at Cornerstone go to cornerstonehackney.com or call 0208 986 3922 ■

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MY LIFE IN
RESTAURANTS
MARK HIX

HOW TO HOST A DINNER PARTY

From advanced preparation to the big night itself, our resident chef talks you through hosting 101

My editor asked me to write about how to throw the perfect dinner party. But there's a problem: while I host quite a few myself – and pull them off pretty well, I think – I don't have much to compare them to. You see, nobody ever invites me back. I can count this year's invitations on one hand (two, to be precise, and one of those I ended up doing the cooking). Who knows what amazing dinner parties people are throwing these days, what lavish accoutrements and flamboyant table decorations they're whipping out. Not me, that's for sure.

Still, there are some basic rules that should mean things won't turn out to be a complete disaster.

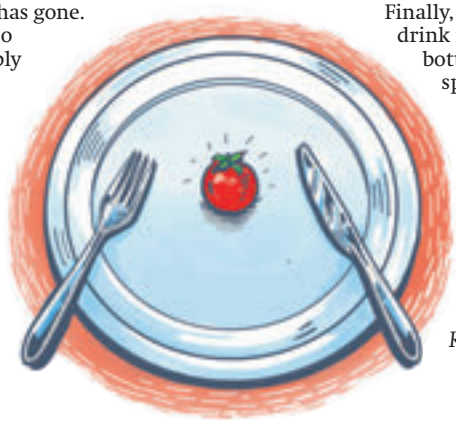
First up: tidiness. You should spend at least half an hour getting everything ready before you start any cooking. Organise your pots and pans. Put the seasoning and spices where they belong. You want to have everything to hand. Next find all the equipment you're going to use and set it aside. There's nothing worse than getting to a critical moment in a dish and realising you have no idea where the sieve has gone.

Getting everything spotless also means that when people inevitably end up gathering in the kitchen, they get a decent impression of your house.

If you have the luxury of a kitchen island, make use of it to prepare dinner. It means you don't have to get everything ready in advance as you can turn cooking into a bit of theatre while people sit and watch. I have a hob on the island so I can do everything there, but even if you're just preparing cold starters it's much better than shouting through from the kitchen or cooking with your back to your guests.

I always start shopping a few days in advance. I love to shop and try not to have any preconceived ideas of what I'm going to serve until I've seen what's available. If you pick a recipe before you set off, you might end up being disappointed when you can't get everything you need. Head somewhere like Borough Market, where you never know what you're going to stumble across. When you've found a couple of hero ingredients you can start to build your menu around them. If you're buying meat or fish, ask the butcher or fishmonger what goes well with it – they'll be happy to give you advice and will probably point you in the direction of another stall that sells it. You'll come home with some great ingredients that are bang in season.

As far as the structure of the meal, I'd go for a few sharing starters and even a sharing main – if it's good enough for most new restaurants, why not for your guests? It sure saves a lot of time. Mezzo is about as easy as it comes, requiring virtually no preparation, and it's always a hit.



Finally, stock up on booze; people always drink more than you expect. Get some bottles of fizz – preferably English sparkling – for when people arrive, a selection of reds and whites and some digestifs for after.

Remember: guests who are a little sloshed are usually happy guests, and they will be more likely to overlook any imperfections in your meal.

Mark's new book, Hooked: Adventures in Angling & Eating, is available for £20 from any Hix Restaurant

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Left: Bone marrow and whipped butter;
Above: Sorrel ice cream with strawberries;
Below: Mussels with courgette and almond

REVIEW

DA TERRA

BETHNAL GREEN TOWN HALL

Three's the dream for this storied dining room, says **STEVE DINNEEN**

Bethnal Green's Town Hall Hotel has been home to two of my favourite restaurants. When I moved to London in 2010, Nuno Mendes had just opened Viajante, his Portuguese-minded take on world cuisine.

It was his first proper restaurant – and his first Michelin star – after running lauded supper clubs and gastro pubs. It was also the first London restaurant that really blew me away, somewhere a few minutes walk from my flat that could be mentioned in the same breath as the world's top restaurants. If there's one chef who tempted me down the rabbit hole of the London food scene, it's Mendes, which means he has a lot to answer for – just look at my bank statements.

When he packed up four years later to set up every paparazzo's favourite restaurant Chiltern Firehouse, I was genuinely gutted.

In moved young chef Lee Westcott, who, with the backing of Jason Atherton, rebranded the place The Typing Room. And it was brilliant. Not *quite* as good as Viajante, but not far off. I'd pop back from time to time (Westcott once recognised me as "the critic who didn't like my scallops"), and I never failed to be impressed.

Then, just over a year ago, it closed *again*, apparently for good.

Until this month, when it opened *again again*, this time as Da Terra. So in I walked through that quietly grand entrance hall and into the dining room that feels as close to home as any in London. While the walls have changed from sage green to duck egg blue and now to pale grey, the rest remains unchanged, from the sweeping arches dividing the space in two to the open kitchen that spills into the restaurant.

I was also greeted by a familiar face: that of Rafael Cagali, the chef who cooked one of my top meals of last year in Simon Rogan's eight-seater 'development kitchen' Aulis. Da Terra is his joint venture with Paulo Airaudo, who will continue to run his Michelin starred San Sebastian restaurant Amelia.

"He's from Argentina and I'm from Brazil, so you know how that goes," says Cagali. "We're the perfect partnership, as long as he's in Spain when I'm in the kitchen." I'm sure there's an aphorism for this...

Ideally, this would be the point in my review where I introduce a dramatic twist. Da Terra is rubbish! Got you! But it's not. It's excellent. Technically brilliant, flamboyant, playful, the kind of place you'll find yourself daydreaming about days later, slumped at your desk, staring into the middle distance, idly curling a lock of hair around your fingers. The tasting menu – there are two only choices here, 'short' or 'long', of which I obviously go for the latter – is a masterclass in how to negotiate a 12 course meal. It leaves you sated, but without that feeling that perhaps you should get your stomach pumped.

It's a nightmare to write about, because each apparently simple dish contains an absurd number of ingredients that have all had terribly complicated things done to them. There are single-bite dishes you could write a thesis on.

Take the cod head croquettes with burnt chives, a carry-over from Aulis, which are made through some alchemic combination of dehydrated tapioca and potato broth. All you need to know, of course, is that they're delicious, with a shell that crackles between your teeth, giving way to heavy, aromatic fish.

Or the scallops, arranged into a neat little rose in the centre of an organic-looking bowl, which makes use of garlic koji (rice or soya beans inoculated with a fermentation culture), barbecued fennel and dainty little marigold leaves. It's mind-boggling the amount of time and effort that's gone into this single fleshy, crispy, ever-so-slightly smoky mouthful.

It isn't just a gustatory delight but a visual one, too. Chicken liver parfait comes in a baby-blue duck egg, which is in turn placed in an extravagantly woven nest. Scallop roe mousse is served in a pebble-like shell, which is hidden in a bowl of actual pebbles, beside a Lego scuba diver, a tiny treasure chest and a little shark; a later bread course comes with Lego-shaped blocks of butter.

There's a lot of Rogan's influence here. One of the desserts – an elegant puck of sorrel ice cream – features ingredients foraged from outside the restaurant. Try telling the last remaining East End geezer propping up the bar at the Salmon & Ball that people would be eating stuff off the ground in Bethnal Green and you'll make his day. Tell him how much you paid for it and he'll keel over. The only meat courses are a tiny morsel of chicken served with a golden egg yolk, all stashed beneath a canopy of brittle chicken skin; and a perfect cube of pork belly, so soft and uniformly cooked it could only have come out of a sous vide, then barbecued in black bean sauce.

Occasionally Cagali emerges from the kitchen to issue instructions: "Eat this dish in one bite, then mop up the sauce with the bread". I like this, not because I need to be told how to eat, but because the menu is so meticulously planned out that the chef knows how it should be tackled *right down to how many bites it takes*. This is the attention to detail I expect in a meal that costs £90 before I've even looked at a wine list.

There are dishes I don't have space to write about. There are dishes I've outright forgotten. But I ate enough to know that Da Terra is a worthy successor to Viajante and The Typing Room. Bethnal Green Town Hall has now been home to *three* of my favourite restaurants.

To book, go to daterra.co.uk

The Brew-le-Vardier is less a bourbon negroni as it is a bittered Manhattan. Served with a ramekin of Twiglets, it's a light-hearted antidote to the serious world of cocktails; Pictures: **Greg Sigston**

Ingredients:
- 40ml bourbon (Woodford Reserve works well)
- 20ml sweet vermouth (preferably Antica Formula or Cocchi Torino)
- 20ml Campari
- A dash of salt solution (3 teaspoons to 200ml of water)
- A dash of absinthe
- 25ml of IPA
- A dash of sugar to taste

Method:
- Stir over ice for 20 secs, strain into rocks glass on ice, spritz an orange zest over the top

Garnish
- A ramekin of Twiglets

HOW TO MIX BREW-LE-VARDIER

This update on a cocktail classic is a subversion of the trend for bitterness at any cost. Words: **STEVE DINNEEN**

Trends in drinks, like trends in anything, can be positive. They reflect changing tastes and can broaden people's horizons, introducing them to things they might not have otherwise experienced. But trends can also strong-arm you down a cul-de-sac, forcing the tastes of the few upon the many. This, says Elliot Ball, co-owner and mixologist at new Fitzrovia cocktail bar Murder Inc, was what inspired one of his signature cocktails, the Brew-le-Vardier.

"There's a slightly cringey trend at the moment for bitterness being a gauge of prestige," he says. "If you like really bitter things, you're super-cultured. Nah. So we thought 'rather than deny this, let's subvert it'.

"As it happens, different bitter tastes combine nicely; one naturally distracts your brain from another, so multiple kinds together actually produce something more rounded."

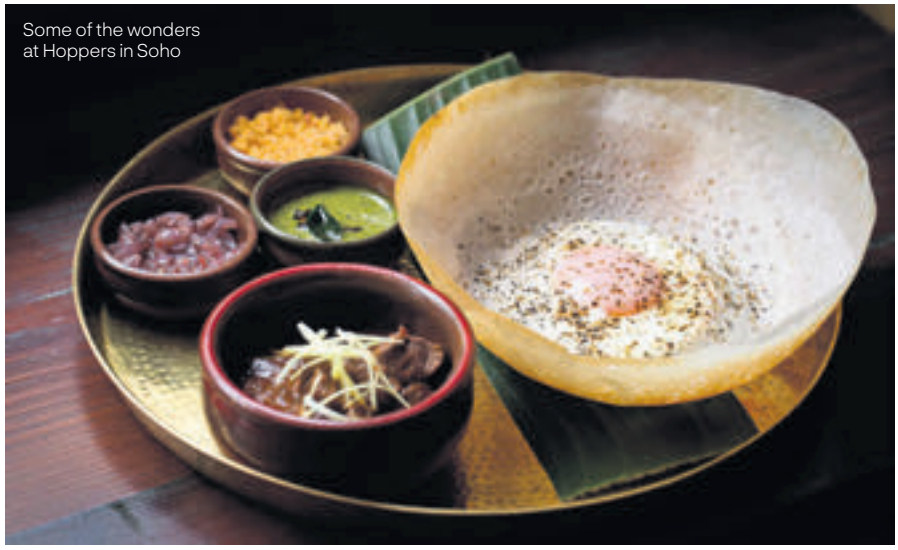
He and his fellow bar-keeps got thinking about bitter cocktails and landed upon the Boulevardier. It's a prohibition classic that's commonly attributed to Erskine Gwynne, an American-born writer who founded a monthly Parisian magazine of the same name. Gwynne was a socialite who enjoyed satirising socialites, living both within and outside of the system, a concept that appealed to Ball's sense of irony.

"The Boulevardier is often a terrible drink," he says. "The ingredients are usually equal volumes of bourbon, sweet vermouth and Campari, so there's little consideration for balance or seasoning, and the 'bourbon negroni' approach results in a pretty shoddy drink, only appealing to those who want to impress others with how bitter their palate is."

Rather than think of the cocktail as a bourbon negroni, Ball instead treats it as a bittered Manhattan, with a 2:1:1 ratio of full-bodied bourbon, sweet vermouth and campari, adding a splash of IPA, a dash of absinthe and a pinch of salt. And the pièce de résistance? A ramekin of Twiglets as a garnish.

"I can't imagine drinking one standing up – it's a cosy number. Corner booth, candles, good company." I can't help thinking Gwynne would approve.

- *Murder Inc is on 36 Hanway St, Fitzrovia, W1T 1UP*


Some of the wonders at Hoppers in Soho

LONDON IS HAVING AN INDIAN SUMMER

All across the capital, a new wave of Indian restaurants are changing our relationship with food from the Subcontinent. **JOSH BARRIE** dons a napkin and sets out to find out why.

You could spend a year's worth of Friday nights eating out at London's upmarket Indian restaurants and still have a few left over to carry into January. The capital is crammed so full of Kashmiri morels and quail naans there's barely room for kulfi. The last couple of years have seen critical and popular success stories including Indian Accent, Brigadiers and Kutir, each offering an inventive twist on recognisable classics.

In short, there's never been a better time to eat Indian food in London. While once we were stuck with remixes of essentially the same four or five dishes, today you can travel the length and breadth of the subcontinent without leaving Zone 1, from the far south at Ooty on Baker Street to the food of Uttar Pradesh, a state which sweeps across the North, served at Mayfair's Lucknow 49.

Our relationship with Indian cuisine is long, storied and, inevitably, tied up with colonialism. As far back as the 18th century Indian spices were being integrated into British food – Norris Street Coffee House, which opened in 1773, may have been the first establishment to offer curry on its menu. Within a decade "curry and rice" had become something of a speciality in more fashionable parts of town.

By 1810, Britain had its first dedicated curry house. The enterprising Sake Dean Mahomed, a former East India Company surgeon, established the Hindoostane Coffee House in Portman Square after emigrating to Britain. Veeraswamy on Regent Street, meanwhile, claims to be the oldest functioning Indian restaurant in the country, having opened its doors in 1926 – it's still known today for its opulence and unapologetically indulgent cookery.

The next major shift in our relationship with curry came in the 1950 and 60s with the influx of people from India, Pakistan and Bangladesh, fuelled by post-war labour shortages. It was then that the curry house as we know began to take shape, the India Club on the Strand being one of the best examples. It was the first port of call for many emigres and has barely changed since it served its first chapati.

The last decade has seen what future culinary anthropologists may call the "third wave curry house". The most obvious example is Gymkhana, the gastronomic powerhouse that launched in 2013 and soon after gained its first Michelin star (it was recently ravaged by fire but plans to reopen before the year is out). It's part of a lineage of Indian restaurants that employs the elaborate service and obsessive attention to detail once associated with French cooking (it's worth noting that an Indian restaurant didn't pick up a Michelin star until 2001, when both Zaika and Tamarind of Mayfair collected the accolade).

It's not only the top-end of the market that's changing – more casual, mid-market restaurants have played just as important a role. Dishoom, Kricket, Gunpowder, Hoppers, Smoking Goat, Tandoor Chophouse, Koolcha and Dum Biryani are all now integral parts of the London food scene.

So what's behind the surge in popularity of Indian cuisine? It's partly a result of the buoyant restaurant business as a whole (notwithstanding the current wobble), with the average Briton spending a higher ▶

Left to right, from top: The luxurious interior of the Cinnamon Club; A juicy lamb cutlet at Cinnamon Kitchen; A selection of dishes at Mayfair's Lucknow 49; The vivid cuisine at Baker Street's Ooty; Goat shoulder at Brigadiers

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Left to right, from top: The groundbreaking mid-market fare at Kricket; Light bites at Gymkhana, which is currently closed following a fire; The gymkhana dining room; A feast served at Dishoom

▶ proportion of their income on meals out than ever before (estimated figures vary so wildly as to be meaningless, but they all point in the same direction). But it goes further than that. "Going for 'a curry' has become aspirational," says Gymkhana founder Karam Sethi. "It's not just a Friday night takeaway staple: it's become an experience."

Asma Khan ofSoho's storied Darjeeling Express agrees that the Indian food industry has repositioned itself. "There's greater confidence in the sector – restaurateurs see themselves as separate from the traditional high street curry houses. There's also a shift in attitudes towards hospitality in the South Asian community, and many upmarket Indian restaurants are being financed by members of the Asian community."

Cultural crossover between the UK and India is also a a factor, with British travellers making up a sizeable portion of Indian's annual visitors, and London being one of India's fastest-growing tourism markets. The relationship is further cemented by wealthy Indians making the most of London's lucrative property market, and spending their money on a taste of home.

"When we started the likes of Cinnamon Club and Tamarind 20 years ago, we were doing something quite audacious," says Vivek Singh, who founded the Cinnamon Club in 2001. "The breadth and depth of Indian restaurants we have in London today was unimaginable back then. We built something. But India is huge, the variation in its food is endless. There's a lot more we can do." ■

Right A bottle of Maestro DOBEL 50 1·9·6·7, available from selected bars for £200 a glass

THE SUN RISES ON TEQUILA

The growing popularity of this Mexican agave spirit means there are more interesting artisanal varieties than ever entering the British market, says **SIMON THOMSON**

Tequila has come to connote summer, fiestas, and the rich culture of Mexico. It's also incredibly versatile: you can sip it, down it in one, mix it with soda, have it in a margarita, use it to replace the key ingredient in pretty much any traditional cocktail.

For those wanting to explore options beyond shots and margs, there's never been a better time. Interest in tequila shows no sign of slowing, so more and more products are making their way onto the British market. In addition to the increasing availability of artisanal tequilas and other mezcals (the former being the best known variety of the latter), demand is driving innovation and the development of ultra-premium agave-based spirits.

One of the hot new trends is cristalino tequila, which in just a decade has become the best-selling super-premium expression in Mexico. A cristalino is made when aged tequila is treated to remove the colour it picks up from resting in wooden barrels. Sometimes this is achieved through further distillation, but more often by filtering it with activated charcoal. These processes also remove some the harsher flavours that some drinkers find off-putting, leaving a clear liquid with more body and complexity than an unaged tequila, and in which bold agave gives way to more rounded citrus notes. Cristalinos' toned-down profile has been controversial among fans of agave-forward tequilas, but they appear to be drawing in consumers who might otherwise have been deterred, and they open up new possibilities for cocktails.

A trailblazer here was Don Julio 70; first released in 2011 to celebrate the company's 70th anniversary and available in the UK since May. Marketed as the world's first añejo claro tequila, Don Julio 70 is made with 100 per cent blue agave, triple distilled, and aged for 18 months in white oak barrels before being charcoal filtered. This process retains much of the deep vanilla and toasted oak that comes from the barrel, while reintroducing tempered notes of the raw agave you would expect in a much younger spirit. It's smooth, stable, and crystal clear.

Don Julio's UK brand ambassador Deano Moncrieffe recommends serving Don Julio 70 in place of gin in a white negroni: a fiendishly clever drink, the unassuming appearance of which belies its satisfyingly bracing bitterness.

For those seeking even greater extravagance, Juan Domingo Beckmann Legorreta – the 11th generation leader of the Jose Cuervo tequila empire – has crafted the first in a new line of ultra-premium tequilas, Maestro DOBEL 50 1·9·6·7.

Two years ago, Beckmann turned 50, and he decided to celebrate by making an exceptional tequila inspired by the year of his birth. He reflected on disparate events – the launch of satellite television, the publication of A Hundred Years of Solitude, and the birth of Nirvana front-man Kurt Cobain – to blend a tequila that captured, in some ineffable sense, the spirit of 1967. ▶

From above: The ridiculously tasty Don Julio Anejo; A stylish bottle of Gran Patron; Maestro Dobel mixologist Oliver Pergl with top chef Rafael Cagali

▶ When blending the 1·9·6·7, Beckmann dipped into his family reserves, selecting rare spirits to enhance the double distilled, French and American oak-aged, and sherry barrel-finished extra añejo tequila. Only 3,000 bottles have been produced, half of which have been reserved in Beckmann's cellar. Of the remaining 1,500 bottles, 1,490 were distributed in Mexico, with the final 10 being sent to the UK.

And it is, I can confirm, exquisite. The tang of agave is married with hints of sweet figs, walnuts and spices, easing into a rich butterscotch finish that's almost chewable.

It's intended to be the start of a new tradition, with a new version produced each year, drawing inspiration from the events of half a century earlier. So you can soon look forward to the lingering sour taste of a 1·9·6·8 edition, with flavours influenced by the Students and Workers General Strike in France, the assassination of Bobby Kennedy, and the birth of Celine Dion.

Bottles of Don Julio 70 are available from the Whisky Exchange (£70). If you want to try it in a white negroni, visit Hacha tequila and mezcal bar in Dalston (£9.95 per glass). Maestro DOBEL 50 1·9·6·7 is only available by the glass from bars including The Lanesborough Hotel, Rosewood London, Mandarin Oriental, and Coburg Bar at The Connaught, from £200 a glass. ■

EXPAND YOUR PALATE: When it comes to agave-based spirits, there are products to suit all tastes and budgets – here's an assortment of tequilas and other mezcals to expand your horizons.

Derrumbes Durango Mezcal (45.2% ABV, 700ml)
Made with cenizo, an agave native to the Mexican states of Durango and Zacatecas north of Jalisco, which is the hub of tequila production. This mezcal has a flavour all of its own, like a lightly smoked tropical fruit salad, perfect for sipping. Available from the Whisky Exchange (£50.45).

Don Julio Añejo Tequila (38% ABV, 700ml)
This is essentially the unfiltered precursor to Don Julio 70, tequila aged for 18 months in American white oak. Pale gold in colour; citrus, fruit and vanilla are supporting players to a confident blue agave. Available from Master of Malt (£48.83).

Gran Patron Piedra Extra Añejo (40% ABV, 700ml)
Extravagant but accessible, Patron's first extra añejo is aged for three years in French and American oak barrels. The climate of Jalisco accelerates the maturation of spirits relative to cooler climes, so it has a level of complexity equivalent to a much older single malt whisky. Available from the Whisky Exchange (£245).

Ilegal Joven Mezcal (40% ABV, 700ml)
This young mezcal is made in the southern state of Oaxaca using espadin, which is the next most commonly used agave for spirit production after the Weber blue agave, used to make tequila. Its characteristic but understated flavour makes it a great entry-point mezcal. Available from the Whisky Exchange (£49.75).

Maestro DOBEL Humito (40% ABV, 700ml)
This world-first is an unaged, smoked tequila. Instead of using ovens, the blue agave is slowly pit-smoked, with mesquite wood. A surprisingly elegant tequila with hints of roasted nuts, caramel, and barbeque. Available from Distillers Direct (£40).

Tapatio Blanco Tequila (40% ABV, 500ml)
Although not barrel aged, this peppery, vegetal tequila is made using a traditional stone wheel to crush its agave, and it is left to settle in steel tanks for a month after distillation, which gives it an atypically smooth finish for a blanco. Available from the Whisky Exchange (£24.45).

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COULD MAGIC MUSHROOMS FIX YOUR BRAIN?

Research into psychedelics is on the rise after a ban lasting more than 50 years. **STEVE DINNEEN** flies to Amsterdam to try Europe's first legal psychedelic therapy retreat.

Ten of us sit in a semicircle around a makeshift altar. In front of us lies a small statue of Buddha, various rocks and crystals, some pine cones, a carved mushroom, a small chemists' weighing scale, and a wooden bowl filled with psychedelic 'truffles'.

We're in a lodge on the outskirts of Amsterdam overlooking woodland and a picturesque pond. A tall man called Chi calls us forward one by one, eldest to youngest. First up is Debbie, a sprightly American in her early 50s. She kneels before the truffles – similar in appearance to the ones you might grate over a bowl of pasta, but lacking any discernible smell – weighs pieces on the scale and transfers them into her own, smaller bowl.

Chi performs a short 'blessing', asking that the truffle spirit guide Debbie on her journey, and taps her on the head with the wooden mushroom. Nervous like the rest of us, she tips all 20g into her mouth, and is hastily advised to spit it back out. "Take your time," cautions Chi. "These are living creatures, an intelligent species. Commune with the medicine."

Debbie's faux-pas is a welcome distraction. People have travelled from all around the world for this moment, and an anxious energy has settled over the room. Our group includes a Brazilian couple in their late 40s, a mother and daughter from New York City and a former US Marine. Two days of meditation, talking circles and 'sound therapy' have led towards this moment, when we will consume a bowlful of psychoactive truffles and, with any luck, embark upon a spiritual journey deep into our own subconscious.

When my name is called, I pick out half a dozen walnut-sized chunks and a handful of smaller pieces. Chi taps me on the head with the mushroom and it's time to eat. I gingerly bite into a piece the size of my thumbnail. It's nutty, not unpleasant, but is soon met with an intense acidic backwash that lingers at the base of your tongue. I immediately start to feel nauseous. We eat our way through our bowls in silence, alternating mouthfuls of truffle with squares of chocolate to mask the taste.

Then we unroll duvets, slip on blackout goggles (encouraging us to "look within"), lie back, and...

• • •

Truffles Therapy is the brainchild of Mitsuaki Chi, a charismatic American in his early 30s who made his money as a semi-professional poker player. He'd hit the casinos at night and spend his days in an existential funk, battling addiction and depression. "Poker was the only way I knew how to earn," he says, "But it was dirty money." So he left the city and travelled the well-

Opposite: A bowl of psychedelic mushroom 'truffles'; **Clockwise from left:** The dining room at the Truffles Therapy retreat; a talking circle on the lawn; the pond and hot tub; sound healer Eva

trodden hippy trail around India, South America and South East Asia. He enrolled at Buddhist monasteries, once spending 16 months on a silent retreat, before making a life-changing discovery: magic mushrooms.

He says his first trip was transformative. He sobbed for hours, and when he woke the next day, he felt like a new man. On the Truffles Therapy website he says his goal is "to surrender fully to psilocybin [the active compound in magic mushrooms] intelligence, with no regard to my own life." He started to organise informal 'retreats' with friends, during which they would take turns to 'trip-sit', providing a safe space for each other to ride out their psychedelic experiences. Around this time he met his partner Leti Passemier, who had been equally unhappy working in a corporate job in Paris. They hit upon the idea for Truffles Therapy, a business combining group therapy, luxury 'wellbeing', and psychedelic drugs.

Rarely seen without his magic mushroom hoodie and matching socks, Chi may not look like your traditional entrepreneur, but the business plan is sound. The retreats take place in luxury chalets in countryside around Amsterdam; mine was in a hunting lodge in a village called Beekbergen, an hour's drive from Schiphol airport.

It's exactly the kind of experience you can imagine bored investment bankers and people who enjoyed Eat Pray Love seeking out for an 'alternative' holiday to brag about at dinner parties, although Chi insists his target audience is people seeking genuine spiritual healing (in fairness, if one wanted to simply get high, there are cheaper ways of going about it).

The retreats – which start from £1,200 per person for a group or £5,900 for a private experience – are fully booked for the next six months. The company is expanding fast, advertising for new trip-sitters (there were two first-time members of staff on my retreat) and sounding out overseas investors.

Part of the appeal is that, thanks to a technicality, the business is completely legal. Magic mushrooms were criminalised in Holland in 2008 after a 17-year-old French girl died jumping from one of Amsterdam's canal bridges (not that the law is enforced; you can still buy them in most of the city's 'head shops'). But the law only applies to the parts of the mushroom that grow *above* ground. The mushroom 'truffle', the store of energy that grows beneath the soil, is fair game (there's debate over whether the 'oversight' may have been intentional).

Truffles Therapy has also benefitted the renewed interest in psychedelic research. Psychedelics were hailed as potential wonder drugs when they were 'discovered' in the West in the 1950s and 60s (indigenous peoples across the world have been ▶

Truffles Therapy co-founders Mitsuaki Chi and Leti Passemier, who organise retreats into the Dutch countryside where people eat psychedelic truffles

▶ using them for millennia), but a hyperbolic backlash led to them being banned across most of the world. It wasn't until the late 90s that scientists began experimenting again, albeit in small pockets.

Today there's a powerful lobby in the US for laws to be relaxed. In April, the world's first centre for psychedelic research opened at Imperial College London, and psychedelic therapy involving magic mushrooms is expected to be approved in Australia within the next few years. Studies suggest psychedelic experiences can help the terminally ill come to terms with their mortality and may be of use in the treatment of other mental illnesses including depression and anorexia.

High-profile authors including Michael Pollan have also helped to bring psychedelics into the mainstream (everyone on the retreat had read his book, How to Change Your Mind: The New Science of Psychedelics). There's a near-unanimous consensus among researchers, he argues, that psychedelics are amongst the safest category of drugs. Which is just as well...

•••

I was picked up from the airport (in a decidedly un-hippyish Mercedes people carrier) alongside Debbie, a teacher at an international school, and Adrian, a writer from Lisbon. Within 10 minutes we were discussing everything from philosophy to our parents, sharing personal anecdotes I wouldn't usually dream of telling strangers. Debbie was hoping to gain insight into her relationships with her family. Adrian, a lyrical "spiritual atheist", wanted to experience "total dissolution of the ego".

When we pulled into the retreat, we were met by Harry, a young Syrian man who lives in Amsterdam. He was topless and told us the airport had lost his luggage, which was true, although they hadn't lost his T-shirt; that was more about showing off his abs. Harry is a regular Buddha of Suburbia, speaking almost exclusively in metaphors, as if he's reading a never-ending fortune cookie, or forever composing a haiku. During one "talking circle" he regaled us with a story about Kintsugi, the centuries-old Japanese art of repairing broken pottery using golden glue, creating something beautiful out of something broken. *That's* how he was feeling. I was feeling a bit tired.

Roger, meanwhile, is a former Marine – he has the USMC tattoos to prove it – who arrived wearing a Metallica T-shirt. I liked Roger. He was hoping to work through the fallout from his time in Iraq. Also present were Olivia, a New York City investment banker, and her mum Anna, both of whom had become interested in psychedelics through meditation. Finally there was a Brazilian husband and wife in their late 40s, Marco and Maria, who were taking a much needed holiday from their three children.

> Microdosing is popular among Silicon Valley types. People claim it brings out their creativity, although I suspect it's just an acceptable way of getting high at work.

The three day retreat is structured around group therapy sessions. After breakfast is yoga, followed by 'sound healing' (a bit like guided meditation but with soothing instruments). Later there are talking circles on the lawn – apparently some groups discuss deep-seated traumas, but we kept it relatively light. During down-time we swam in the pond and took dips in the log-fired hot tub.

You're provided with as much home-made vegetarian food as you can eat, as much green tea as you can drink, and accommodation in a private or shared room. You *won't* be provided with coffee or alcohol, which are both prohibited, as are cigarettes and "sexual contact" with other guests.

On the first morning, with a caffeine-withdrawal headache throbbing behind my temples, we microdosed some truffles. This is an increasingly popular practice among Silicon Valley types, involving taking small amounts of psychoactive drugs every other day. People claim it brings out their creativity, although I suspect it's just an acceptable way of getting high at work. It made me feel groggy and stoned. During a silent, post-microdose walk in the woods ▶

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Clockwise from left: Trip-sitter Sam carries firewood to the hot tub; the retreat at Beekbergen, near Amsterdam; The excellent home-made vegetarian food; Steve taking his first bite of the mushroom truffles

▶ I caught myself marvelling at drops of dew and picking flowers. A few hours later, it was time for the main event.

●●●

Lying in the central hall in my day-bed, duvet pulled up, goggles on, the taste of rotten walnuts in my mouth, I waited for the journey to begin. And... nothing. Minutes passed. The butterflies in my stomach got bored and fluttered away. After an hour Chi offered everyone a second bowl, which I demolished in about 30 seconds. Still nothing.

Around me the room was growing restless. Maria began to giggle uncontrollably. She set off Marco, who spent the next few hours cackling like a drain, occasionally doubling up from the pain of his hysterical laughter. Someone to my left joined in, howling and then apologising in turn, over and over. I took off my mask to reassure him; we made eye-contact but he was elsewhere, on some other hilarious plane of existence. Behind me a woman began to sob uncontrollably, filling the room with big, tearful heaves of sorrow. It was surreal, somewhere between a slumber party, an opium den and a Victorian insane asylum.

I began to feel intensely jealous of everyone else. I wanted to laugh or cry or... something. Chi came over with a third bowl, which I ate without much hope. I must have gone through almost 50g of truffles, which seemed like a lot. My stomach churned.

I took my mask off and surveyed at the scene; Roger was scribbling incomprehensible hieroglyphics into a notebook; Harry was silhouetted against the window in a statuesque yoga pose; Marco was still gasping for breath in the midst of his laughing fit. I resigned myself to a nap, and tumbled into an uneasy, feverish dream.

Time passed slowly, and then seemed to speed up. The sun streaked across the sky. One minute it was light, the next I could see the moon and the room was full of candles. It looked like a cathedral, I thought. I dozed off again. Hovering between wake and sleep, I found myself dwelling on arguments I'd had with my girlfriend. At one point I felt an intense regret at not phoning my mother more. Was *this* the trip? I went to the bathroom and the colours looked off. Too bright. Back in bed, I squirmed uncomfortably, both too hot and too cold. When I next woke it was gone 1am and the room was empty save for Adrian, quietly chuckling to himself.

The next morning, everyone looked a little sheepish. Over bowls of granola we discussed our trips. Adrian was euphoric, babbling about "ego manifestation of the divine self" and his communion with relatives both living and dead. Roger described an intense rush of creativity, although he couldn't translate any of his notes, which appeared to be written in fragments of three different languages.

Time passed slowly, and then seemed to speed up. The sun streaked across the sky. One minute it was light, the next I could see the moon and the room was full of candles.

Harry felt an overpowering cosmic love for everything and described that feeling in great detail over what felt like a lifetime. Marco, who seemed to be having fun, was annoyed that he'd spent his long, dark journey into the soul giggling like a school-girl. Only Anna had an outright bad trip, unable to stop crying for reasons she couldn't quite fathom.

And me? I felt pretty good. My journey hadn't yielded any revelations. My ego remained intact. But I felt light, refreshed, pleased to be sitting in another circle with this strange, endearingly dysfunctional bunch of people.

There are aspects of Truffles Therapy I dislike. The propensity to wrap everything in New Age language triggers my gag reflex – I've never met so many people who felt "blessed" to be somewhere – and I feel uncomfortable with the cherry-picking of beliefs from different cultures: a dash of Ayurvedic medicine, a sprinkling of eastern mysticism, a liberal serving of South American shamanism (this is, I admit, mitigated by the fact everyone is *so nice*).

Our post-trip WhatsApp group is filled with messages about lowered anxiety levels and improvements in mood. I suspect a healthy dose of confirmation bias, but I can see the therapeutic potential of psychedelics, even if I'd rather experience them in a more scientific setting. personally, any benefits I felt were thoroughly squashed after a few days back at work. I have, however, been calling my mother more often.

Retreats at Truffles Therapy start from €1,200; For more information and to book go to trufflestherapy.com ■

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This summer we launched the City A.M. Club, a network especially tailored for London professionals who want to get the most out of this great city of ours. Consider it your key to the best doors in the capital.

The dragon in our logo means a lot to us. This fearsome creature has a long history with the City of London – cast your eyes around the City and you'll find an iron dragon sculpture at each of the 13 main routes in and out of the Square Mile. Designed by architect JB Bunning in 1849, the dragons act as the guardians of the City and really are part of the fabric of the oldest part of London.

That's how we see ourselves at City A.M: part of the fabric of the Square Mile. Our paper is a familiar and welcome sight to hundreds of thousands of workers as they make their way to work every day. The City A.M. Club is a way for us to engage with these people, the hard-working men and women who drive the UK economy, on a far deeper level than we've been able to before, and we're very excited about it.

HARRY OWEN
CHIEF OPERATING OFFICER,
CITY AM MEDIA GROUP

Today, 80 per cent of City workers want benefits and perks that go beyond a pay rise. We believe we have the answer with the City AM Club's Corporate Membership.

Not only is the Club valuable for individuals, but with over 70 carefully curated lifestyle partners – such as Turnbull & Asser, Virgin Active, Blow Ltd, and some of the most popular restaurants in the City and Canary Wharf – our members could be using their card every day of the week to entertain clients, saving a tidy amount in the process.

Over the last year, we visited 17 of the restaurants and bars within the City AM Club offering to experience the savings for ourselves. We spent £150 each time and saved over £600, an average of 24 per cent at each location. If you're working in the Square Mile, the City AM Club just makes sense. Interested in finding out more? Contact us at *clubmembers@cityam.com* for more information and details on how to receive your own set of keys to the City.

CITY AM CLUB

Enjoy this and many more steaks when you're a member of the City AM Club

JOIN OUR CLUB AND GET £100 CREDIT AT GAUCHO

Like the look of this steak? This could be the first of many once you join the City AM Club

Joining the City AM Club should be a no-brainer if you work or dine with any regularity in the Square Mile, Canary Wharf or beyond. But if you needed any further incentive to come on board, here it is: all members will receive £100 credit to spend at Gaucho restaurants, no questions asked. That's almost half the value of the card before you've even thought about getting measured up for a new set of shirts or collected the keys to your rented Lamborghini.

Gaucho restaurants celebrate a milestone 25th anniversary this year, having matured into a much-loved collection of special places to eat, known for the finest Argentine steak and wine in the UK with locations all across London. Its newly launched, seasonal menu features interpretations of dishes which have been loved across the company for many years and are considered classics.

New Argentine executive head chef Max Castaldo has also introduced a selection of dishes that reflect the innovation and creativity now inspiring a new generation of chefs and emerging restaurants celebrated across Latin America.

Quite simply, if you want to eat a delicious steak for lunch without putting your hand in your pocket, join up to the City AM Club today. And once your £100 credit is spent, don't forget that you can still claim 25 per cent off your final bill at Gaucho for as long as you're a Club member. Now you can't say fairer than that.

To sign up go to club.cityam.com; for more on Gaucho go to gauchorestaurants.com

CITY AM CLUB

LEICA
As the instrument of choice for legendary photographers including Henri Cartier-Bresson, a Leica AG camera is high on the wish list of any serious snapper. The brand 's reputation is founded on a long tradition of excellence in the construction of lenses – expertise which it now combines with cutting-edge technology to guarantee the sharpest images around. Its latest release is the V-Lux 5, a premium, compact model with 4K video capacility which is ideal for capturing travel, sports and the outdoors.
Club members receive 10 per cent off any purchase in Leica's City store, and a 15 per cent discount on a bespoke corporate camera workshop

MCCANN
Since it launched 15 years ago, McCann Bespoke has earned its reputation as one of London's leading contemporary tailors. Its mission? To help clients feel confident in how they look with expressive yet impeccably-fitted suits, jackets, shirts and jeans. Fans of the brand – and there are many – will also be pleased to hear that its range is no longer limited to just clothing, having recently branched out into smart shoes, trainers, hats and leather goods.
Club members receive a 20 per cent discount at McCann's Lime Street store

WATCHFINDER
They say a good timepiece lasts for generations – and if you pick well, it can even be a sound financial investment. So why not pick up a classic timepiece from Watchfinder? The retailer offers an unrivalled selection of luxury watches, whether you're looking for understated elegance or more of a conversation-starter. It also offers free next-day delivery, a 12-month warranty and interest-free finance.
Club members receive a £200 credit note to put towards their next Watchfinder purchase

TAYLOR & HART
It is ostensibly the most important piece of jewelery you will ever buy – so before you pop the question, make sure you pay bespoke engagement ring specialists Taylor & Hart a visit. The award-winning jeweller offers expert craftsmanship and a highly personal service, with a team of designers who will work with you to create a ring that celebrates the uniqueness of its wearer.
Club members receive five per cent off their first order (up to £200)

CITY AM CLUB

LUNA MAE
Founded by Claudia Lambeth, Luna Mae is a bespoke, by-appointment lingerie and swimwear brand inspired by the master tailors of Savile Row. Celebrating both British craftsmanship and the female form, the brand aims to revolutionise the way women shop for lingerie. by turning away from off-the-rack sizing in favour of a more tailored approach. Luna Mae's Elizabeth Street flagship opened its doors in October 2017.
Club members receive a free private fitting and exclusive previews

DREAM COLLECTION
Next time you get out of the city, why not rise to the occasion by taking the car you've always dreamed of driving? Hertz Dream Collection boasts the capital's widest range of luxury cars to rent, including the latest models from Range Rover, Aston Martin, Bentley, Ferrari and Maserati. With a regularly rotated fleet and online reservations, experiencing the drive of a lifetime couldnt be easier. Unfortunately, handing back the keys at the end may prove more difficult.
Club members receive 15 per cent off rentals of seven days or more and 10 per cent off weekend rentals

MAYFAIR INTERIORS
In 2015, international property entrepreneur Barbara Chanakira and esteemed interior designer Sarah Nicollier came together with a single aim: to create beautiful spaces 'that people want to exist in'. The pair have delivered exquisite interiors, renovations and refurbishments on a diverse range of properties, from a Mayfair townhouse to a lakeside residence. They bring their decades of experience to every project to create coveted spaces where their clients immediately feel at home.
Club members receive a free consultation plus 20 per cent off their high-end styling service

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TUDOR BLACK BAY 41 S&G

If you're setting sail for summer and find yourself in search of a hardy water-resistant watch, one that will effortlessly stroll from beach to sundowners at the terrace bar, then call your search off: Tudor's suave new take on its Black Bay diving watch is the perfect cocktail of saltiness and sophistication.

Also available in 32mm and 36mm, and in black lacquer as well as the woozy sunbrushed Champagne dial pictured here, the Black Bay S&G (which stands for 'steel and gold') brings bimetallic 80s bling to Tudor's legendary, military-endorsed diving heritage.

That heritage spans over 60 years, ever since the Tudor Submariner adapted parent Rolex's groundbreaking sub-aqua technology and kitted out the elite frogmen of France's Navy. A Spandau Ballet 'do and rolled-up jacket sleeves might be better suited than a wetsuit in this case, but even with so much gold you'll always believe in Tudor's soul.

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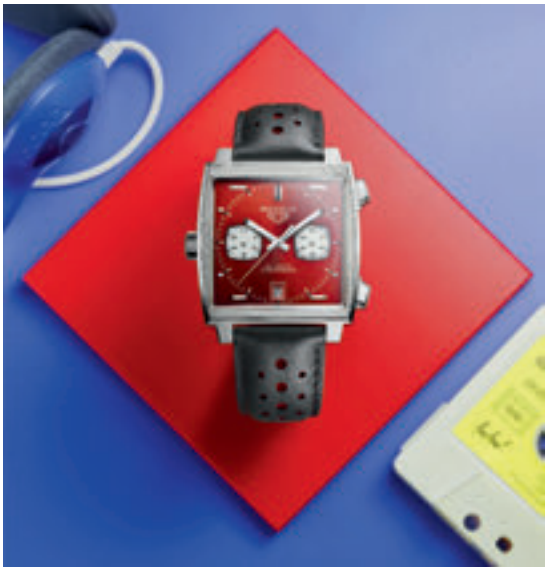
WHAT'S TICKING?

The latest goings on in the world of haute horologie, from new store openings to the adoption of Blockchain in the fight against counterfeiting



DEBUT OF DUBUIS

Given Roger Dubuis's bestselling watch (its Double Tourbillon) starts at around £230,000, it's only right that the Swiss watchmaker's third standalone European boutique should be on Old Bond Street, next-door to De Beers. And it is doubly appropriate that this self-styled enfant terrible of high Genevoise horology should be splitting number 45 into its own '45A' retail environment, given it's trademark 'disruptive' mantra when it comes to materials and mechanics.

For a start, the showroom's fractal shelving, pictured above, alludes to Roger Dubuis' 'skeleton' watches, which suspend precision mechanics from sparse, futuristic bridgework more at home in a Marvel comic than a Mayfair shop window. We urge you to visit and witness first-hand – there are even some watches for less than £230,000.

KINGS OF COOL

For an industry so defined by its past, this is a *big* year for watchmaking, with more golden anniversaries than you can shake a wrist at. There's Seiko's invention of quartz technology, launching the 'Astron' on Christmas Day of 1969. Then Omega's Speedmaster walking on the moon on 20 July. And even earlier in '69, both Zenith and TAG Heuer unveiled their own solutions to watchmaking's own Space Race: a 'chronograph' stopwatch that self-winds.

With Heuer's launch model, you're forgiven for forgetting the significance of the 'Calibre 11' ticking inside, when the square-cased Monaco is now more famous for its high-octane heritage rather than high-octane mechanics: Steve McQueen personally chose to don one during filming of Le Mans in 1971, cementing its ice-cool 'icon' status. His son Chad was at the Le Sarthe circuit to launch a commemorative red-dial edition at June's 24-hours race.

From top: TAG's incredible, square-cased Monaco; Roger Dubuis' new digs on Old Bond Street; The cover of new horology bible The Watch: A Twentieth Century Style History

A CENTURY IN THE MAKING

The mechanical principles may have been invented and fine-tuned long before the turn of the 20th century, but it was from the early 1900s when watchmaking found its groove not only as quotidian keeper of time, but as dynamic statement, evolving part-and-parcel with the burgeoning notion of style, trends and their susceptibility to societal upheaval.

It's a 100-year stretch of horological hyperactivity that Alexander Barter details definitively and beautifully with his new coffee table book, The Watch: A Twentieth Century Style History, set to publish in the autumn with Prestel Publishing. Barter spent more than a decade at Sothebys' watch division, becoming its deputy worldwide head in 2009 before founding his own lifestyle company, Black Bough.

With meticulously curated examples and sumptuous vintage ads, all accompanied by concise prose, any would-be connoisseur is left in no doubt as to the link between Patek Philippe's sublime 1940s dress watches and the plastic-fantastic Swatch of 1983.

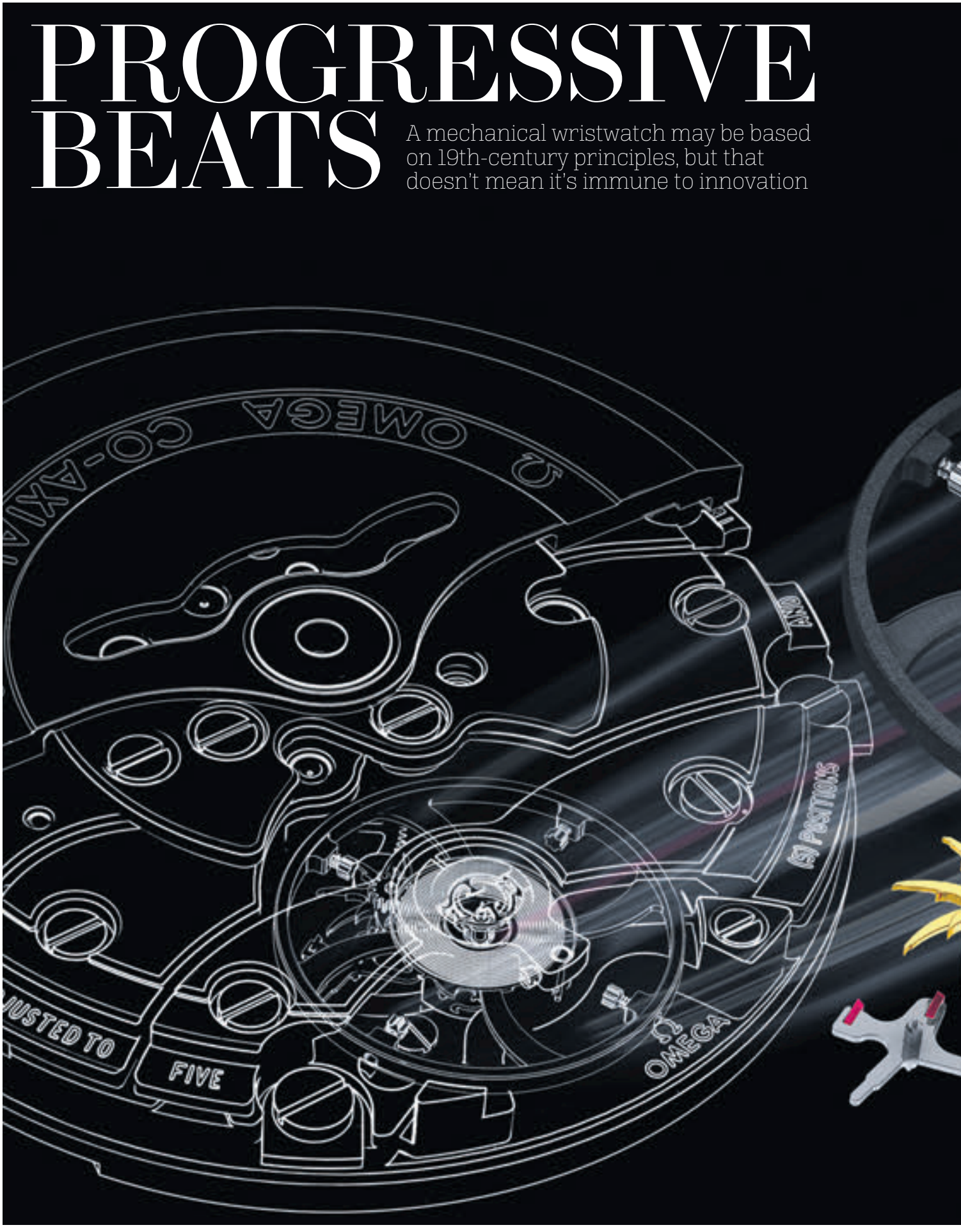
BLOCK-SOLID

In a particularly satisfying marriage of antique and cutting-edge, Switzerland's most venerable of fine watchmakers, Vacheron Constantin has chosen to hail its watershed adoption of Blockchain by applying the digital certification technology to its restored vintage line, Les Collectionneurs.

It's the industry's first move towards a means of anti-counterfeiting that will doubtless be followed by the majority of Vacheron's peers in short order, for new watches as well as old. Originally developed to verify cryptocurrency transactions, Blockchain gets around easily forged paper authentication, creating an inseparable digital certificate that follows a watch with every change of owner.

PROGRESSIVE BEATS

A mechanical wristwatch may be based on 19th-century principles, but that doesn't mean it's immune to innovation



Omega's envelope-pushing Master Co-Axial 8500

The idea of "new technology" in Swiss watchmaking seems rather oxymoronic – especially when you consider how much stock this rose-tinted industry places in heritage and hand craftsmanship. But as mechanical watches have reasserted themselves in recent decades, after near-decimation at the hands of quartz technology back in the 70s, the more forward-minded brands are distinguishing themselves from the competition beyond their glossy ad campaigns. In the process, they're proving that a spring-powered concoction of levers and cogs needn't serve solely as an over-engineered status symbol.

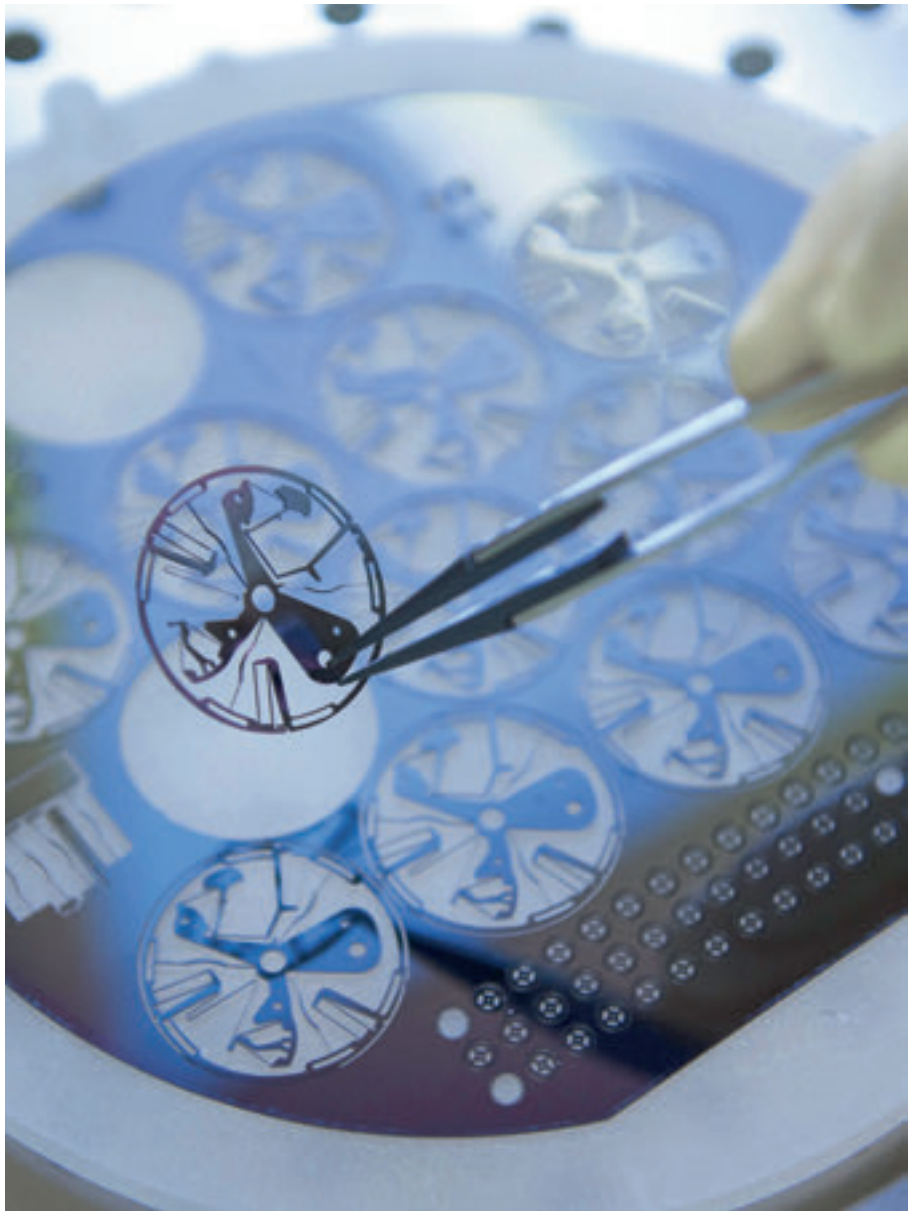
To be fair, recent progress has largely been pre-occupied with miniaturising 19th-century pocket-watch mechanisms to wrist proportions. Not until 1999, when Omega adopted George Daniels' revolutionary, friction-free 'Co-Axial' escapement wholesale, then 2001 when Ulysse Nardin produced a version of its 'Freak' spiked with mono-crystalline silicon, had any maker stepped beyond its comfort zone and attempted to make a better watch.

"Better?" you may ask. What could possibly make a mechanical watch 'better' than an electronic quartz watch, when five grand has next-to-never a chance of buying you something as precise as a +/-10-seconds-a-year, twenty-quid Casio? But it's not precision we're talking here – after all, most of us are still perfectly fine with our Rolex Submariner's +/-2 seconds a day. Instead, we refer you to the godfather of modern horology, Abraham-Louis Breguet: "Show me the perfect oil and I'll show you the perfect watch," goes his famous adage.

In other words, show me a watch that'll tick on and on, without needing to clean and refresh its gunky, dried-out lubricants every five years. A watch that, despite its primitive clockwork, will outlive every cheapo quartz battery or every smartwatch software platform; always repairable in capable, tweezer-wielding hands and never obsolete.

Breguet was lamenting a lack of perfect oil (watchmaker's oil is rumoured to be the second most expensive liquid in the world after the 'heavy' isotope of water used in nuclear power reactors). But thanks to technology never available in Breguet's day, the 21st century's watchmakers are going one better: they're removing the oil entirely. Thanks to the prevalence of other forms of 'personal tech' that never existed in his day, they're also battling a new threat to a wristwatch's delicate mechanics: magnetism.

Dr Daniels' and Omega's Co-Axial escapement of 1999 is an ingenious solution to those irksome five-year services, where nothing at the movement's beating heart slides against itself; things are instead 'nudged' along, tick for the tock for the tick. But even Omega had to concede that Ulysse Nardin was onto something in 2001 with its weapon of choice: silicon. Both frictionless *and* anti-magnetic, silicon has proved to be modern horology's silver bullet. And 18 years on, it's being adopted wholesale, from the entry-level ▶



From top: The Zenith Inventor's single-piece escapement, etched out of silicon wafer, which replaces all 30-odd parts of a traditional escapement assembly; Ulysse Nardin's Freak Next with its flying caroussel baguette movement

▶ luxury of Tissot up to Abraham-Louis' modern incarnation. In fact, it was Breguet who led the mainstream silicon revolution back in 2006, in alliance with Patek Philippe and Rolex, all drawing on the resources of Neuchâtel's Centre of Swiss Electronics and Microtechnology.

In collectively honing the process of 'deep reactive ion etching' a silicon wafer, something like the escapement's tiny, rocking anchor lever can be produced in hundred-strong batches, to tolerances less than a third of a hair's width, without the need for lubrication, plus it's immune to the magnetism of your MacBook. Needless to say, silicon has since become a mainstay of modern horology – as proved by Patek's 'Advanced Research' ref. 5550P perpetual calendar of 2012, Breguet's now-ubiquitous silicon balance spring, and Omega's 'Master' calibres, which boast service intervals of 10 years, a warranty of five years and certification by Switzerland's Federal Office of Metrology in resisting magnetic fields of 15,000 Gauss (a session in an MRI scanner, say).

Rolex's adventures in silicon remain under wraps for now, but we do know it's working with another anti-magnetic technology, coating its metal-alloy balance springs with so-called 'Parachrom'. When you're producing more than a million high-precision mechanicals a year, economies of scale and quality control take governance over experimental tech. That might sound like playing it safe, but Rolex's constant, incremental gains have made it the watchmaker it is. If you're venturing to the summit of Everest, there's no more reliable timekeeper to have by your side.

Making things out of mono-crystalline silicon wafers is no trivial undertaking, either. The clean suits and sci-fi laboratories may be at odds with the quaint vision of mountain-dwelling watchmakers hunched in chalet ateliers, but they share the same pursuit of precision. You might think of watch components as tiny, but the traditional metal ones are much heavier than they need to be, because they have to withstand the rigours of the manufacturing process. Cutting-tools in lathes and milling machines, however sharp, tear at the metal, hacking it off bit by bit, albeit on a microscopic scale. In contrast, plasma etching a silicon wafer simply vaporises the atoms, placing no stress on the material being shaped, so that very thin, light, components can be made in any shape you can draw.

Purists balked at first. But time has proven that silicon implants are by no means the emperor's new clothes. As well as an intellectual exercise in itself – tantamount to the art of fine-finishing, which can add as much as 40 per cent to the value of a painstakingly hand-polished 'haute horlogerie' movement – the European industry has realised that there is no reason why the Far East cannot produce top-quality mechanical watches of their own, not to mention buy them. In building a wave of patentable new technologies, Switzerland is maintaining an edge and

Clockwise from top: The Zenith Defy Inventor; The Patek Philippe 'Advanced Research' ref. 5550P perpetual calendar; a Girard-Perregaux constant-force escapement; Complex cogs from a Rolex

upholding its reputation as the world's leading horological community. In other words, staving off another 'Quartz Crisis', when the Far East's affordable new tech caught the Swiss napping.

It has taken hold beyond the escapement too, beyond all expectations. Far from simply replacing steel or brass components like for like, the limitless forms and flexibility of silicon have opened a treasure chest of 21st-century possibilities. Essentially, the wholesale replacement of multi-component mechanisms with monolithic silicon constructs – 2D tendril frameworks that twitch, pulse and flex in consistent, resistant and ultimately, low-maintenance fashion.

Girard-Perregaux was one of the first to take advantage of this versatility and finally realise a concept that has lurked in a designer's drawer for decades – a concept that until now was impossible using conventional materials. Five years in development, the Constant Girard-Perregaux constant-force escapement – a punning tribute to brand co-founder Constant Girard – mounts a dual-escape-wheel escapement within a butterfly-shaped silicon frame, bisected by a blade thinner than a human hair. The butterfly's wings are pinched slightly, so the blade is buckled into a lazy S-shape (silicon's elasticity being an advantage in this case).

As the blade buckles back and forth, a packet of energy less than one millijoule is fed into the oscillating balance. Likened to a micro-capacitor, the blade stores and releases the energy at a constant rate regardless of the power supply, which varies as the winding barrel unwinds. All dreamt-up by one of Girard-Perregaux' engineers on a lengthy rail journey, while absent-mindedly flexing his train ticket between index finger and thumb.

Ultimate silicon bragging rights (for 2019 at least) go back to Ulysse Nardin, whose 'Freak Next' sandwiches not one but *four* floating silicon oscillators, eliminating any need for axial attachment, let alone lubricating it in the first place. Ticking elsewhere is niche wild card, Zenith, with something arguably even more ambitious. If its far-out 'Defy LAB' concept of 2017 seemed far-fetched, then the thinking man's Swiss maison has truly – ahem – defied the naysayers by bringing a working product to market in less than two years – for just £15,500.

The renamed 'Inventor' does away entirely with the traditional, tick-tick-ticking assembly of balance wheel, hairspring and lever escapement, replacing its concoction of 30 parts with just one: a single wafer of silicon, stencilled into Kandinsky abstractness. It 'twitches' at 15Hz bringing the whole, openworked dial display to life, measuring an error of just one second across 70 hours' autonomy.

Nothing else mechanical comes close to that. For now. Whether silicon continues to be the future for watchmaking or some other micro-engineered alchemy steals a march, we can be confident that your next purchase from Watches of Switzerland will be far from nostalgic, let alone indulgent. ■

WOMEN'S HOUR

LAURA MCCREDDIE-DOAK

LET THERE BE COLOUR

Rado's range of watches made to Le Corbusier's famous colour system are deliciously on trend

Does your house have chic grey walls? Complementary saffron accents? Maybe a statement colour chair and tiled section? Chances are all of these shades have featured in Le Corbusier's Architectural Polychromy. Because, as well as designing buildings, planning towns and being an all-round polymath, Le Corbusier developed a theory of colour. Corbu, as he was known to his friends, believed that choosing the right shades was integral to spatial effects. Comprising 63 shades – the first and more nuanced palette of 43 from 1931 and a second bold colour board of 20 from 1959 – his selections were conceived as a guide to combining complementary colours. Organised like a keyboard, you slid a cardboard cut out along the colour scales to reveal the harmonious shades.

His theory comprised three basic concepts: you use natural colours to create atmosphere, bold hues are used for contrast, then slightly washed versions of those bold shades to subtly alter the space.

You may be wondering why you're getting a lecture on mid-century colour use in a watch column. Well that's because, for the first time, Les Couleurs Suisse, the company that controls who's allowed to use the colours from Le Corbusier's Architectural Polychromy has allowed Rado to choose nine shades and render them in ceramic for its Thinline range, the first-ever commercial use of these exact shades.

The collection is a wonderful celebration of colour; a veritable horological pick-and-mix. The more delicate hues – washed-out siennas, dusky pinks and muted minks – are from the 1931 palette, while the remaining contrast brights are from the additions that came in 1959. Getting the exact match on these shades was a headache that even Rado, with all its experience in colouring ceramic, found a little daunting.

"We had to match Le Corbusier's original colours exactly," explained CEO Matthais Breschan.

Rado was the first to seek permission to emulate Corbu's pigments but it's not the only watch brand seeking inspiration from his colour scheme. Last year, Oris launched an 80th anniversary edition of its Big Crown Pointer Date in a delicious shade of sludgy mint green, also inspired by the Swiss maestro. There's also more than a hint of mid-century about Montblanc's Heritage Spirit Pulsograph. This timepiece has everyone's pulses racing not least because of its dusky salmon dial, a shade that was echoed a couple of months later in Patek Philippe's 5270P.

Writing in a 1931 swatch book Corbu created for Swiss wallpaper brand Salubra, he said "Each of us, according to his own psychology, is controlled by one or more dominant colours". Now you can make sure the colour on your wrist matches the one inside your head.

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

Time for Bauhaus

The JUNGHANS max bill is proof that less really can be more. Puristic through and through, it focusses primarily on the essential: the time. The original Bauhaus watch from Max Bill celebrating the 100th anniversary of Bauhaus: max bill Automatic Bauhaus 100th anniversary edition, mechanical movement, sapphire crystal, glass case back with Bauhaus motive, water-resistant up to 3 bar, limited to 1000 watches.

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LIVING LA DOLCE VITA

Beachcombing Puglia in a retro-mod rental car, **ADAM HAY-NICHOLLS** discovers La Dolce Vita for €300 a day

I'm touring the heel of Italy in a car with no seatbelts and ropes for doors. Puglia is home to the mainland's best and most remote sandy beaches, and a 1960s Fiat 500 Jolly is the Insta-perfect way to nip between sun-lounger, ancient towns, and the region's ambrosial seafood restaurants. Known in its native land as 'la spiaggina', or 'the little beach', this is what it was designed for. La dolce vita in topless form. And now, a Milanese atelier has reimagined it for the summer of 2019. The body, the steering and the spirit are original, but now it runs on electric and is even more chic.

Garage Italia Customs is the bespoke builder and modifier founded by trustafarian style king Lapo Elkann, run out of a streamlined Bauhaus former petrol station. Lapo's grandfather, auto-industrialist and playboy Gianni Agnelli, was the man who midwifed the Fiat 500 (pronounced 'Cinquecento'). The 'Jolly' nomenclature came in when styling firm Ghia chopped the roof off it in 1957, sending the glamour needle off the scale. Grace Kelly, Aristotle Onassis – pretty much every millionaire and movie star on the Riviera – stepped off their yachts into one of these.

It's been an emotional project for Lapo, who inherited Agnelli's famous suits as well as his aesthetic verve. The 41-year-old has led a colourful, not to say controversial, life. In contrast, his Fiat 500 Jolly Icon-e is blissfully uncomplicated.

Garage Italia has taken original hard-top 500s, removed the roof and doors, and improved torsional rigidity by inserting a safety cell. My Azzuro Volare blue car dates from 1970. The instrument panel is now digital, but the fascia is as sparse as ever. There are rocker switches to engage forward, neutral and reverse, headlights, and that's it. There are two speeds; tortoise and hare. Maximum velocity is 85km/h and you'll be well tanned by the midday sun before you get there, but that's rather the point. There is no roof, no seatbelts (so go careful), no doors save a nonchalant rope that may have come from a Saint Tropez nightclub, and no storage space beyond room for a towel and a kaftan.

The combustion engine that sat in the rear has been replaced with an electric motor, while under the lid at the front is a box full of batteries. Power and components remain equal to those of the donor car to fulfil Italian homologation. The motor is flanged directly to the original gearbox. The brakes have a ▶

The Fiat 500 Jolly, which retails for €50,000, does not come with the luxury of seatbelts, storage space or doors

slight energy regeneration feature. The car sits on whitewall tyres from Michelin's vintage line. Most beautiful are the seats, woven by hand in natural rope that adds to the outdoorsy nautical theme and will soak up wet beachwear.

All of this screams Ultimate Vacation Car, which is why Hertz is the project's biggest customer. The Jolly Icon-e can be rented exclusively from Hertz' Selezione Italia, which includes fast Alfas, Abarths and Maseratis, through to mid September. The rental price is £300 a day, which is quite a lot for such little horsepower, but bear in mind this tailor-made car retails at €50,000. That's a mountain of cash for a holiday romance, but it's also a playful statement for eco-conscious, modern-day Onassises.

As we touch down at Bari airport I notice how flat the scorched earth of Puglia is. A good thing, too, because I'm not sure the Cinquecento could manage hills. I'm staying in the seaside town of Polignano a Mare, 30 minutes down the Achilles' tendon to the south. Known as the Pearl of the Adriatic, it promises crystal-clear waters and cliffs pitted with caves. My accommodation sits atop the most epic of these, with its acclaimed restaurant housed in a grotto. The Grotta Palazese's romantic location has been on the foodie map since 1964, but the hotel rising above it only opened last month. The view from its 15 bedrooms, directly above the cobalt blue and turquoise sea, is matched only by the spellbinding blue marble floor – inspired by the vista –stretching throughout the suite.

A five minute walk through the narrow streets of the old town leads to a busy pebble beach surrounded by high cliffs and a hotchpotch of whitewashed buildings, comprising Baroque, Byzantine, Roman, Venetian and Greek architecture. Devouring the most vivid plate of sea urchin troccoli, tasting like filtered ocean spray, we watch a rather nervous gentleman 30 metres up on a rock ledge take the plunge into the pool below. This place is a mecca for cliff diving. Red Bull hosts a world championship event every June. I shan't be trying it.

Every region of this charming country claims to have Italy's most delicious food, but Pugliese cuisine has one of the stronger claims. It's most often described as cucina povera – literally 'poor food' – and fish, offal and vegetables are the order of the day, as well as pasta of course. It produces over 100 varieties of bread, including taralli – a kind of pretzel softened with olive oil and sprinkled with tomatoes. Lamb's intestines are popular with locals, as is 'orecchiette con la rape', small ear-shaped pasta. Burrata, a personal favourite, tends to be on every menu; the Shah of Iran was so addicted to this cheese he'd have it flown weekly from Bari to wherever he was in the world.

> The tiny Fiat was the automotive embodiment of Italy's post-war economic miracle, the country's version of the Mini or Beetle

While Polignano is rocky, sandy beaches stretch further down this coast and, with our towels in the back of the 'Spiaggina', we set off for one of the many high-end beach clubs in the Parco delle Dune Costiere,

Clockwise from main: Polignano a Mare hosts the Red Bull Cliff Diving World Series each summer; The electric Fiat 500 retains its original and somewhat vague steering; Snapper tartare is on the menu at the Grotta Palazzese; Dusk falls on the Grotta Palazzese; Garage Italia's reworking of 'la spiaggina' is cute, customisable and environmentally clean

belonging to the nearby 'masseria', estates traditionally owned by farming gentry. Eight kilometres of coastline between the Torre Canne and Torre San Leonardo is bathed in the searing sunshine, with seafood straight from fishing boats to the buffet table. The sea bass and spinach spaghetti is, I discover when ordering the pasta of the day, particularly fab at the tranquil and exclusive San Domenico beach club near Savelletri di Fasano – once home to the Knights of Malta – while, 20km further down the cream-coloured coast, Le Palme is more of a party hub, although the seafood is, again, a triumph. Given that the Fiat drives like a golf buggy, rather than an actual car, you might need to remind yourself you'll be behind the wheel later and mustn't order a third glass of Franciacorta.

Bronzed up, or more accurately reddened, we head inland from here, past silvery olive orchards, towards the strange town of Alberobello. This picturesque place is a UNESCO World Heritage site due to its unusual districts of trulli, the fairy-tale conical-roofed houses of the area. A trullo is a small dwelling built from local limestone with dry-stone walls. Once, this was a town comprised of trulli alone. The story behind it was a typically Italian one; used on farms as sheds, Alberobello was built of trulli to fiddle taxes and fool the authorities.

The 'Spiaggina' scurries silently through these characterful streets, but it immediately captures attention. The first thing you'll notice about this car is people's reaction to it. They smile, wave, toot their horns. The vintage Cinquecento really means something to Italians. Perhaps even more influential than the Mini was to Britain or the Beetle was to Germany, the tiny Fiat was the automotive embodiment of Italy's post-war economic miracle. It was the country's Volkswagen, its people's car. It mobilised the masses and liberated a nation.

The Grotta Palazzese restaurant, perched in a cave from which diners may watch the Adriatic lapping below, arrived on the scene just as the Cinquecento was becoming a fashion icon, establishing itself as one of the world's most dramatically located terraces and a gourmet institution. This grotto has hosted banquets and parties since the 1700s, and lanterns and the sunset illuminate its natural beauty. The French discovered it on their Grand Tour of Italy, making sketches and watercolours. The artist Louis Jean Desprez's painting of what became known as the Grotta Palazzese hangs in the Louvre's permanent collection.

The four-course set menu on the night I was there is snapper tartare with melon and pomegranate; tubettino pasta with raw prawns and courgette; breaded sea bass and wild chicory with pistachio and yuzu; and for dessert, sweet cassata with raspberry chocolate and ricotta.

It is a menu born of local produce, gussied up but, in essence, joyfully simple. It's the same philosophy as Garage Italia's retro-moded roofless Cinquecento. For Italy-bound holiday makers, the latter is this summer's must-have accessory.

Every bit as unforgettable as the seafood-serving grotto of Polignano a Mare, the Jolly Icon-e is 'la dolce vita' distilled and made sustainable, and it's available at airport arrivals on request.

- Room rates at the Grotta Palazese start at €550 through to €2,500 a night for suites.
- To rent the Fiat 500 Jolly Icon-e by Garage Italia, visit hertz.com/selezioneitalia ■

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TRAVEL

THE VINTAGE HOTEL & SPA
LISBON, PORTUGAL

The five star Vintage Hotel & Spa in Lisbon underwent a dramatic renovation earlier in the year, and has emerged as a monument to mid-century interior design, the kind of place you'd expect to spot Don Draper nursing a whisky. The striking vintage aesthetic was achieved by Quiet Studios and begins the moment you step foot into the lobby to see the Alexander Calder-inspired Lappalainen brass and silver mobile hanging above the entrance. But the styling is not just skin deep – it runs down to the very finest details of the hotel.

The 56 modernist rooms and three large suites are each distinguishable by bespoke furniture and a unique bar trolley, one-off signature pieces stocked with a pair of welcoming gin and tonic kits. The toiletries are by the 130 year old luxury soap and perfume maker Claus Porto, the ceramics by Costa Nova. Even the toothpaste has been selected to be in keeping with the hotel's retro theme; it's Couto, originally formulated by the Portuguese pharmacist Alberto Ferreira do Couto in 1932.

The mellow and DJ-soundtracked rooftop bar offers pre-dinner cocktails against the backdrop of a living wall on one side and the distinctive red tiles of Lisbon's skyline on the other. Downstairs the popular Blue restaurant serves modern Portuguese cuisine, while the basement spa has the tranquil atmosphere of a subterranean hot spring, a dimly lit maze of steam, massage and relaxation rooms that converges on an indoor hydrotherapy pool.

The Vintage Hotel is a marvel of detail-orientated design. If it weren't for the Nespresso machine in your room, you'd swear you'd slipped backwards in time.

To find out more visit thevintagelisbon.com
TAP Air Portugal flies to Lisbon up to 12 times a day. Prices from £83 return. Visit flytap.com

MAURITIUS: PARADISE, BUT NOT AS YOU KNOW IT

This tropical island offers the cliched white sands and vivid blue seas, but **STEVE DINNEEN** finds there's more to discover at this most unusual of holiday destinations

POP QUIZ: WHAT IS THE ONLY TROPICAL ISLAND TO HOST ITS OWN CLASSIC CAR RALLY?

This November, Mauritius will be the unlikely home to some of the rarest and most expensive classic cars in the world. The inaugural event will see huge sections of the island closed to traffic to accommodate the tens of millions of pounds worth of vintage motors that will be rumbling around the Surrey-sized island.

It's the brainchild of Sanjiv Ramdanee, the chief executive of the island's Maradiva Villas Resort & Spa. The brother of the island's First Lady, Ramdanee has transformed the all-villa complex founded by his father into the most luxurious resort on the island, with accommodation to rival anything in the world. Each villa comes with all the accoutrements you would expect – plunge pool, indoor/outdoor shower, shaded private terrace – while those famous white sand beaches on the island's west coast are a nonchalant 30-second stroll away.

The suite of on-site restaurants – the Japanese Teppan, the international Coast2Coast and, my personal favourite, the Indian Cilantro – are all excellent. But the better option is to cook your own dinner. A new on-site vegetable and herb garden means many of the ingredients you find in the restaurants are grown on site, and taking a guided tour of it is like an Aladdin's cave for foodies. Along its manicured furrows grow star fruit; lemongrass; vast green and white pumpkins covered by snaking tendrils; chillies of varying colours and degrees of heat; okra; wild garlic; cucumbers; aubergines; and under the cover of nets (to protect the crop from the absurdly large fruit bats), mangoes, lychees and guava.

With a makeshift kitchen set up in the garden, you're invited to pick your own vegetables and, under the tutelage of chef Tarun Bhuttorah, cook traditional Mauritian dishes. I rustled up a simple chicken curry, made exceptional by these straight-from-the-ground ingredients. It's like a little slice of Simon Rogan's L'Enclume hidden away on a tropical island.

If a postprandial digestif is in order, simply ask one of Maradiva's drivers to take you to one of the island's 'Rhumeries', where you can get slowly sozzled as you gaze over balconies at impossibly complex, steam-punk machinery that somehow turns the island's sugarcane crop into delicious rum; the Rhumerie de Chamarel comes highly recommended.

POP QUIZ: ON WHICH ISLAND DID THE FAMOUSLY EXTINCT DODO LIVE?

One of several of Mauritius' endemic animals wiped out by humans was the dodo (others include its native giant tortoise). For once, this wasn't the fault of the British, but the Dutch, who were the first colonial power to occupy the island. They got so club-happy with these dozy birds that they'd soon smooshed them out of existence. Mauritius' remote location and varied landscape does, however, mean it maintains a thriving ecosystem. Sitting down for breakfast, tame birds will hop across your table, and upon returning from an excursion I found a mongoose tearing through my packet of biscuits. There's a wildlife park where you can meet some reintroduced giant ▶

tortoises, or you can set out on one of the island's many nature walks to experience the wildlife in situ.

The most famous planned trek is Le Morne, the mountain that towers over the south east coast of the island. This is an important site in Mauritian history, the enclave where a group of escaped sugar cane slaves laid low from the law. After the abolition of slavery, a British ship is said to have sailed in to break the news to the newly free men, only for them to assume they were being recaptured and leap to their deaths. The climb is tough, with sections that require scrabbling at a 45 degree angle; the views from the top are worth it.

POP QUIZ: THE ENGLISH HAVE ONLY EVER LOST ONE NAVAL BATTLE TO THE FRENCH – WHERE WAS IT?

The picturesque port town of Mahebourg is like a bingo-card of cliched terms beloved of travel writers. Sitting on the terrace of restaurant Les Copains d'Abord, I had a view across the harbour, which is dotted with islands and flanked from behind by imposing mountains. Back in 1810, this would have been a great viewing spot for the stand-off between the ruling French navy and the British aggressors, who sought to blockade the port. In a rare strategic blunder, the British found themselves outnumbered and outgunned, with one ship being sunk and a further two grounded and set ablaze. Three months later the Brits returned and the French surrendered the island.

After a traditional plate of octopus cooked in oily saffron and a glass of home-spiced rum, I hailed a local fisherman to take me out, motoring between the islands where once cannonballs had arced through the sky. Some of the limestone islands are big enough to embark upon (they have evocative names like dog island, monkey island and rat island), while others are barely big enough to support their foliage, which appears to jut directly from the ocean.

POP QUIZ: THE TWO OLDEST OPERATIONAL RACE COURSES ARE IN ENGLAND. WHERE'S THE THIRD?

Mauritius' Champ de Mars Racecourse held its first race-day in 1812, two years after the English conquered the island. The new colonial rulers were convinced the races would help to ease relations with the locals – including many French settlers – after years of bloodshed. They were right: Mauritians fell immediately and madly in love with the sport.

The site appears to have changed little in the past 200 years, and as I walked into the colonial, wood-panelled President's Box – after borrowing a tie, a prerequisite for entry – I got the feeling I could have been anywhere in the British empire circa 1850. It was full of white-haired white men in seersucker suits silently studying form guides. I took a seat next to an elderly gent who introduced himself as Armand Maudave.

From top: The Ayurvedic medicine centre and heated pool at Maradiva Villas Resoprt and Spa; The Champ de Mars Racecourse in the capital Port Louis; **Inset:** A dodo, which once lived in Mauritius

It turns out he's something of a Champ de Mars expert, having written a book on the track for its 200th anniversary. He asked if I would like any tips for the race but, having been handed a list of fancied horses from one of the track's directors, I politely declined. As the first race got underway, the white-haired men moved silently towards the balcony, betting slips in hand. Below, Mauritians in more appropriate attire – I'm sweating heavily in my blazer – leapt around and screamed at the horses. Mine did not come in; Maudave's does. The second race follows the same script: Maudave picks a winner and I do not. This is repeated in the third, fourth and fifth races. Maudave was on a streak and I was flat-broke. Before the sixth race I went down to the paddock to take a look at the horses. I stuck £20 on a ferocious looking beast that was foaming slightly at the mouth. It finished last. With one race remaining I had won nothing. Like a problem gambler I threw good money after bad, putting an absurdly high bet on an arbitrary horse with odds of 8/1. The white haired gents in the President's box silently observed the race.

After a shaky start, my horse streaked past the rest, and as it crossed the line first I was yelling and dancing like the young Mauritians at trackside. The win covered my losses and then some; Maudave looked a little disappointed at my display of emotion.

Most people, when they imagine Mauritius, lump it in with the Maldives and Seychelles: a picture-postcard beach resort for honeymooning couples and Russian oligarchs. And it is. But it's also home to weird and wonderful things that your brain tells you simply shouldn't exist here. Like a race track which, if you pick the right pony, can pay for your entire holiday in one fell swoop.

Seven nights during low season (until September) in an entry level villa costs from £3,100 for two people; Price as per Leading Hotels of the World on a half-board basis, excluding flights and transfers. ■

I'd rather have a passport full of stamps than a house full of stuff

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PLANE FOOD NOT PLAIN FOOD

Our aviation expert lowers her tray table and samples the best gastronomic delights the sky has to offer

Airline food used to be something to endure – now I actually look forward to lowering my tray table for it. Earlier this year I sampled the business class menu from seven-Michelin-star chef Anne-Sophie Pic on an Air France flight from Paris. The main was pollock with creamy black rice, butternut squash and coconut curry sauce, beautifully presented with a scattering of edible flowers.

Throughout 2019, the airline has been collaborating with other top French chefs: Arnaud Lallement between April and June; Guy Martin from July until September; and Michel Roth from October to December. In first class (La Première), it honoured the memory of the late God of Gastronomy, Joel Robuchon, with salmon tartare and caviar, and duck parmentier with truffle and potato purée gratin.

Drinking also plays a big part in the experience (as I can attest – just don't ask me to remember the names or vintages). Air France serves 800,000 bottles of wine and 750,000 bottles of champagne in first and business class each year. So it's no surprise that it's capitalising on its association with renowned sommelier Paolo Basso, who chooses all its labels, by launching a new online shop (*lacave.airfrance.com*) where people can buy the wine that is served in the air.

Even economy class passengers are starting to get the VIP treatment. This summer, anyone flying coach with Air France can pre-order scallops with citrus fruits to start and guinea fowl fillets with rosemary jus as a main from its Fauchon-designed "A la Carte" menu. Four courses cost £28 but it's worth it if you're having to endure 32 inches of legroom for nine hours.

Those flying with Scandinavia's SAS are able to pre-order vegetarian meals from the "New Nordic by SAS" menu. Made with ingredients from local farms, dishes include cauliflower roasted in Camelina oil with Gotland lentils, black beans and beetroot-flavoured wheat salad. It makes a change from tomato pasta.

In some cases, planes are becoming literal extensions of restaurants on terra firma. On routes from KL to Japan, Malaysia Airlines is serving business class passengers a new Japanese menu devised by the executive chef from the Hilton Kuala Lumpur's Iketeru restaurant. Chopsticks in one hand and IFE remote in the other, flyers can consume sōmen noodles with goma tofu and smoked duck salad.

Emirates, meanwhile, is presenting diners in first and business class with a regional summer menu including strawberry eclairs and Eton mess for dessert on flights between London and Dubai. Those going between Italy and the UAE get a fresh tomato and burrata salad to start. And on flights with Hong Kong Airlines out of Los Angeles business class passengers can expect charred avocado with shrimp Louie salad, kohlrabi Caesar salad and marinated Monterey Bay sardines, served with a Californian Canyon Road cabernet sauvignon, if one so desires.

Flying with kids has to be my worst nightmare (whether my own or someone else's) but at least Lufthansa has announced a partnership with Michelin-starred chef Alexander Herrmann who has created a long-haul menu for children under 12. Dishes include a rice pudding "mouse" and "dragon feet" made from chicken sausages, mashed potatoes and sauerkraut. I guess caviar would be a waste.

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

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MUSEUM OF FORBIDDEN ART REVEALS ITS SECRETS

How one man defied Stalin and risked the firing squad to rescue thousands of pieces of outlawed art. **SOPHIE IBBOTSON** on the museum that Igor Savitsky built.

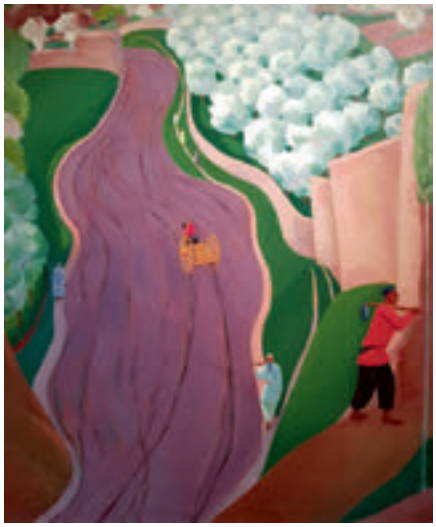
If you had to hide a work of art, where would you put it? And what if there were 80,000 of them, you needed to keep them safe for an indeterminate but undoubtedly lengthy period, and the penalty for discovery was imprisonment in a Soviet gulag, or even death? The man who accomplished this feat, Igor Savitsky, is quite probably the greatest unsung hero in the history of art.

The story begins in 1932. The Central Committee of the Communist Party decree On Restructuring Literary and Artistic Organizations disbanded all existing associations for writers and artists. Two official unions were established in their stead. Members of the new Union of Artists were expected to pursue the ideals of Socialist realism; those working in decadent, bourgeois styles such as impressionism, futurism, cubism, primitivism, surrealism – anything which fell under the avant garde banner, or was critical of the Soviet state – were cast out. Chagall and Kandinsky sought refuge in France, continued to work, and became household names; those who stayed behind in the Soviet Union were prohibited from selling or exhibiting their work, and in extreme cases were imprisoned in labour camps and mental hospitals, or even shot. The paintings, sketches, and sculptures which were not immediately destroyed languished in basements, attics, and outhouses, where mice, mould, and damp continued Stalin's bid to eradicate them.

20 years later and more than 1,600 miles away from Moscow, a young Soviet painter joined the Khorezm Archaeological and Ethnographic Expedition of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR. He studied the dozens of ancient desert fortresses that lie between the Amu Darya and Syr Darya rivers in Central Asia, and fell in love with the landscapes, culture, and people of Karakalpakstan. The man's name was Igor Savitsky.

When the expedition ended, Savitsky stayed on. He began collecting archeological finds and Karakalpak folk art – everything from decorative head dresses to a full size yurt. With the support of Karakalpakstan's authorities, he established a regional museum in the city of Nukus in 1966, which they literally named 'The Karakalpakstan State Museum of Art, Named After I.V. Savitsky'. He emphasised the importance of preserving cultural heritage and, at the same time, inspiring the next generation of Karakalpak artists. This required the purchase of plaster copies of Classical masterpieces, and also the drawings and paintings of artists linked to Central Asia.

Savitsky's approach to collecting art was obsessive. He didn't just want the highlights of an artist's career; he wanted to be able to illustrate every aspect of their artistic and intellectual development. Key artists ▶



Above: 'The Road' by Ural Tansikbayev; **Right:** 'Bull' by V Lisenkond; **Below:** The museum's founder, Igor Savitsky

▶ working in Central Asia in the 1920s and 1930s (many of whom were ethnic Russians) had experimented with everything from orientalism to Russian iconography, and from the avant garde to realism. They worked closely with other artists from other parts of the Soviet Union, influencing one another. Savitsky wanted every aspect of their work represented in his collection, including those degenerate styles which fell foul of the 1932 decree. The Karakalpak authorities had "some awareness" of the illegality of what he was doing, says the museum's current head of exhibitions Mirigul Erekeeva. "They didn't agree with it but couldn't say no, and they supported Savitsky because he included Karakalpak art."

The paintings Savitsky wanted were not for sale on the open market; they had long since been banned from galleries and auction houses. He therefore went house to house in towns and cities across the USSR, visiting artists, their families, and friends – anyone who might have a painting, a sketch, or a graphic tucked away. Savitsky made acquisitions using official museums funds (yes, the state unwittingly paid for the art), and he sold his own possessions to raise more cash. On occasions when there was no money left, he issued IOUs, or convinced owners to part with their paintings for nothing more than the promise of safekeeping. When he discovered Nikitin's portrait, Alisher Navoi, it was being used to patch a ceiling and was severely water damaged; Kurzin's Capital had been cut down to a fraction of its original size, apparently to remove incriminating evidence against the artist; and Solokov's sketches from the labour camp in which he was interred were done on the backs of cigarette boxes and scraps of paper, items which could easily have been swept into the trash. Savitsky regarded them all as treasures, and brought them back to Nukus.

> He went house to house visiting artists, their families, and friends – anyone who might have a painting, a sketch, or a graphic tucked away

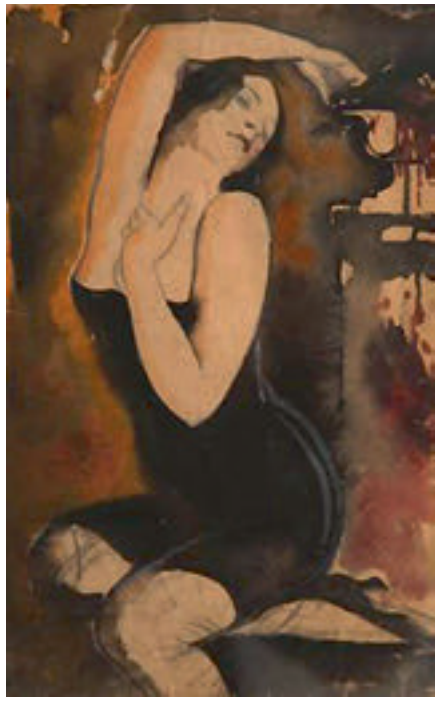
Savitsky's collection grew and grew. He amassed over 100 works by Volkov, more than any other museum in the world. He acquired in excess of 1,000 paintings, sketches, and works in progress by Tarasov; and 400 paintings and 1,600 graphics by Stavrovskiy. The only surviving paintings by Lysenko are all here, and so too are artworks by painters whose very existence the world has forgotten.

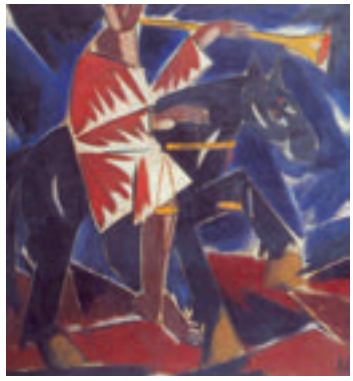
"There are wonderful artists people have never heard of, including many women," explained Charlotte Douglas, professor of Russian art at New York University, "and great works from artists we thought we understood but now realise we don't."

Only the tiniest fraction of works could be displayed, but the rest were catalogued and stored. They survived because no one senior ever asked what Savitsky was doing, or thought to look too closely at his obscure regional museum in a remote desert state.

Savitsky died in 1984, the stressful nature of his work having taking its toll. His chosen successor was a young woman, Marinika Babanazarova, who had no previous museum experience but was committed to Savitsky's legacy and would safeguard the collection through a tumultuous period as the Soviet Union fell and Karakalpakstan

Clockwise from left: Savitsky's Museum; 'The Old and The New' by Solomon Nikritin; 'Woman in a Black Swimsuit' by Sergey Luppov; 'Apocolypse' by Alexey Rybnikov; 'Walk in Gorky Park' by Lyudmila Bakulina





became an autonomous republic within newly independent Uzbekistan.

If Savitsky was the museum's father, Babanazarova was its mother. In her three decades at the helm she began to lift the veil on the masterpieces held in Nukus. She caught the attention, and earned the respect, of foreign academics; 100 futurist and constructivist graphics were loaned to the Stadtische Kunstsammlungen in Chemnitz, Germany for an exhibition; paintings toured France at the request of specialists from the Louvre; and she began two ambitious building programmes to upgrade the museum's facilities and put more works on display. Babanazarova published numerous papers and books, and set in motion plans for the hugely successful Treasures of Nukus exhibition at Moscow's Pushkin Museum in 2017. Visitor numbers have increased to 127,000 a year as word has started to spread.

Today, however, the Savitsky Museum is at a crossroads. Babanazarova, now in her 60s, left in 2015, after now discredited accusations of theft and forgery were made against her. Though she is beloved by her former staff, and her knowledge of the collection is second to none, she says it is not her wish to return. The Arts and Culture Development Foundation under the Ministry of Culture of Uzbekistan (ACDF) has announced an open call for a new director with international experience to lead the museum into a new era, and Babanazarova will be on the appointment committee alongside representatives of Moscow's Tretyakov Gallery, the Picasso Museum in Barcelona, and UNESCO. The art world is watching closely.

Leadership of the museum is a once in a lifetime opportunity, but also a huge undertaking. "We can use the methods of [galleries such as the] the Tate Modern here, but we need a concrete plan," says Erekeeva.

"The museum world is developing at a high tempo. We need a very strong director to control the museum's work; we lack museum specialists, and it's not easy to train them."

Recognising this, the ACDF's priorities for new directorial candidates include modernising the museum, introducing advanced museum management processes and technologies, and training staff. There's a desperate need for qualified restorers: "It's very urgent," current director Gulbahar Izentaeva told me. "I want to send our restorers to Moscow."

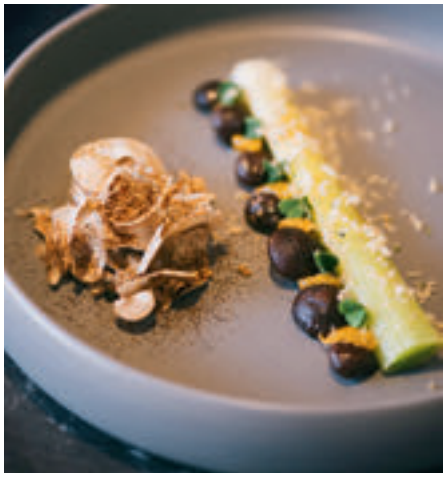
When the new director is appointed, hopefully later this year, he or she will also need to strengthen the museum's international ties. Uzbekistan is opening up, economically, politically, and culturally, and the Savitsky collection is an invaluable tool for soft diplomacy. Those foreigners who have been exposed to the country's culture are typically only aware of its Silk Road heritage; the modern and contemporary arts are a new and as yet unappreciated dimension of what Uzbekistan has to offer. "The reputation of a museum depends on visitor numbers," reminded Erekeeva.

But achieving that goal is interconnected with others: appealing to donors and sponsors so that the museum is on a sustainable financial footing; engaging visitors with professionally curated exhibitions and education programmes; and reaching out to the world's leading museums, galleries, and cultural organisations for partnerships and joint exhibitions, so that more and more art lovers have the opportunity to see the extraordinary artworks which Savitsky saved. The Karakalpakstan State Museum of Art built its treasure trove on isolation and secrecy; but it's finally time for it to make its stamp on the international stage. ■

Trisara is situated on the quiet and elegant north west coast, with stellar views of the Andaman Sea from every suite

FILL YOUR PHUKETS

It's increasingly fashionable to hunt down your own ingredients, but as **ADAM HAY-NICHOLLS** discovers in Thailand, foraging needn't come at the expense of comfort



Above: Every guest villa has an infinity pool and is completely private; Chef Jimmy Ophorst is responsible for earning the island's only Michelin star, using ingredients foraged from Trisara's garden; **Right:** In addition to the standard pool villas, there are 2-6 bedroom private residences available

Foraging is all the rage but, despite its fashionable foodie status, it does rather bring to mind getting grubby at the bottom of the garden, thrashing around with a set of secateurs, or simply pretending to be a badger. Surely there's a more glamorous way to liven up lunch? So, off to Thailand you fly.

The idea was mainly sold to me on the alliteration: Foraging in Phuket. Yes, I'm aware it's pronounced with a hard P, just go with it. The main thing is this; Thai food rocks, and much of its key produce – herbs, spices, roots, fruit, veg, flora and fauna – are to be found in the fields and forests a trowel's throw from my hotel.

This is where the glamour comes in. Renowned for its authentic food, Trisara is the grande dame of Phuket's five-star beachside boutique scene. In sanskrit, it means "the garden in the third heaven" and, since its opening in 2004, it's grown to 60 spacious pool villas and two-six bedroom private residences, all with breathtaking views of the Andaman Sea and its hibiscus-hued sunsets.

The property is spread across 40 acres of artfully-managed tropical gardens, tumbling down to a beautiful yet rugged private beach. Each peaked-roofed villa is protected by dense, verdant canopies of trees and bushes that lend absolute privacy. So, it's fair to expect that all the guests spend 80 per cent of their time at Trisara in the buff.

It's utterly tranquil, located in the upmarket north eastern part of the island, well away from the pumping heart of sleazy Patong, and a convenient 15 minutes' drive from the airport.

There's a coast-hugging yoga platform and, once you've got your stretching out the way, a Muay Thai boxing ring. The cyan sea is diverting, though, so if you've had your fill of the private infinity pool you may wish to hit the waves in one of Trisara's fleet of yachts. And if you find all that sun-soaking a bit knackering, head to the Jara Spa where the therapists were trained at Bangkok's Wat Po temple – the gold standard in Thai massage.

Trisara offers three dining options,

including PRU – the island's only Michelin-star winner. The menu is all about farm-to-table, and the produce doesn't have far to come. The restaurant's name stands for Plant Raise Understand. Sustainable fine dining is à la mode in the West, but at Thai tables it's a relatively new concept. On the north-east side of Phuket, set around what was once a tin mine, is the PRU Jampa farm and, surrounding it, bountiful jungle. The site totals 96-hectares. Chef Kla and I set to work with the secateurs.

Among the items in our baskets fall okra, aubergines, bananas, hot basil (the chef's favourite), white lotus, fingerroot, lemongrass (which is put in everything, seemingly, even the hotel soaps), tamarind, zedoary, and shoots of tender bok choy from the raised garden beds. In the wildlands, we discover butterfly pea – an edible flower that tastes exactly like peas – mangosteens, exotic bilimbi, dok dhala (ginger flower) and wild mushrooms. Back in the Pru kitchen, these riches are reimagined in an Asian-European fusion menu.

Snakehead fish, catfish and blackfish are caught in farm's three lakes, and chickens and ducks are also reared on PRU Jampa. The hotel's free range eggs are spectacular. Seventy-five percent of Trisara's ingredients come from Phuket. Meat is purchased at the morning market in Phuket Town, and saltwater fish arrives in hand-hewn rattan traps and nets delivered by the fishermen themselves; translucent-skinned tuna and hefty amberjack still flopping about.

PRU sets its six-course dining experience with wine pairing at 7,000 Thai Baht (£170). The menu changes seasonally, but there are some dishes that have become famous and are always on in some variation: black crab from the mangroves, in a Phuket coffee reduction; smoky roasted carrot cooked in its own soil, with fermented carrot juice and cured egg yolk; duck, dry-aged for five days for intense flavour, with shiitake. Artisanal goat cheese comes from the north of the country, Chiang Rai and Chiang Mai. I attack the buchette and colliné.

It wouldn't be a proper trip to Thailand if you didn't head to some down-and-dirty food shacks while you're here, and the Michelin inspectors are an adventurous lot. So, while PRU is the only place on the island with a star, other less polished places come officially recommended, and Trisara offers a gastronomic heritage tour of Old Town Phuket's highlights.

Situated in a 130-year-old Sino-Thai mansion with chipped mosaic tiles and 1950s tea and coffee ads on the walls, Raya is famous for its (rather spicy) crabmeat curry. Third generation-owned Go La serves Hokkien-style fried noodles with runny egg yolk. The table cloths are blue and green plastic, advertising Sprite, and the seats are upturned bottle crates.

Trisara meets the needs of every jet-set traveller in search of pools and pampering, but they go above and beyond when it comes to food; whether it be taking their guests foraging, presenting impeccable and inventive dishes, or pointing out the places the locals eat. You won't just come home with a tan, you'll return with a knowledge and appreciation for Thai ingredients and cooking, and probably some bags of seeds. Back to the bottom of the garden you go.

Room rates at Trisara start from £460 per night. For more information, visit trisara.com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Enter design studio Hølte, which exists to make your off-the-peg Ikea units look like a fully bespoke kitchen. "We built our own kitchen for fun in 2015, then we built kitchens for friends, and Hølte developed organically from there," says co-founder Tom Ginnett.

The idea is remarkably simple – order your Ikea units, send the plans over to Hølte with your choice of style, handle and worktop, and they will deliver your "fronts" within six weeks. "Ikea's proprietary cabinetry is the best, most flexible and most accessible on the market," says Ginnett. "We haven't had any contact with them, but they're a progressive brand and appear to have embraced the idea of small businesses supporting their products. Sometimes clients come to us with a fully established Ikea hack plan, others with a blank canvas."

Choosing the right products for your space just got easier – Hølte this month opened a studio in Broadway Market, where potential customers can browse the company's extensive catalogue and work with the team designing their kitchen. "There will be lots of samples, colour swatches, a fun and relaxed atmosphere and, of course, good coffee," says Ginnett.

Visit holte.studio to find out more, or pop in to the new studio at 16-29 Andrews Road, E8 4QF

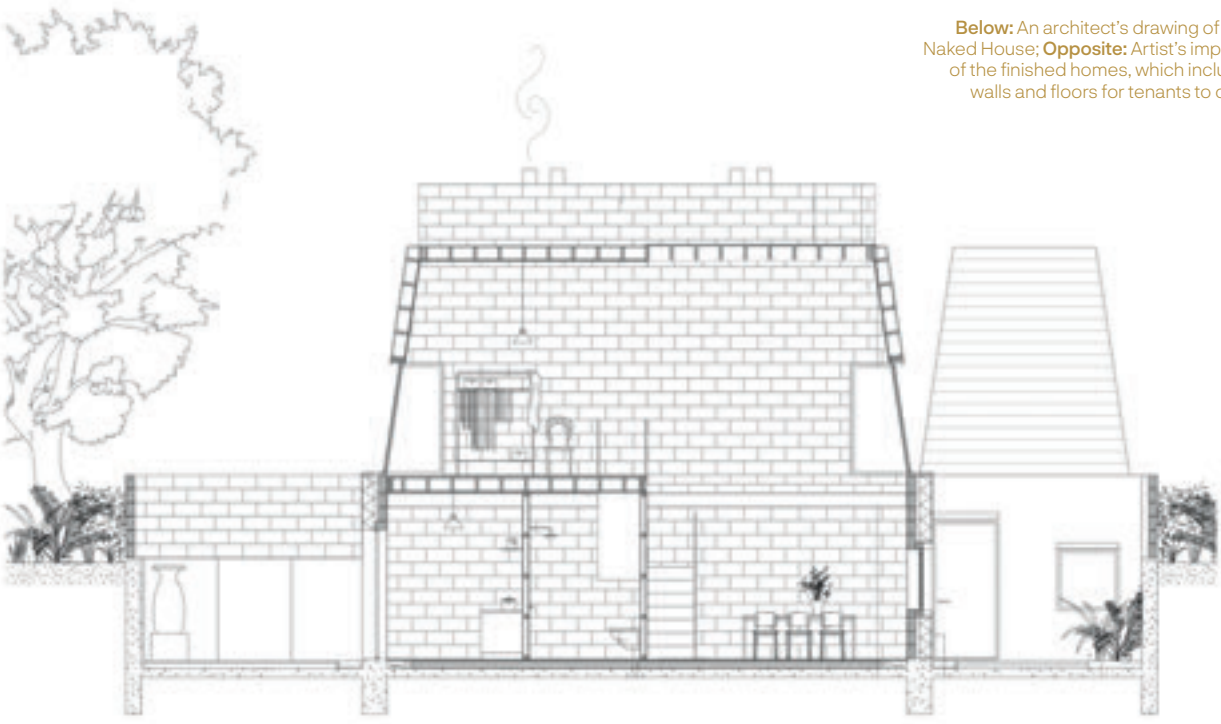
BASTONE SIDEBOARD
FROM £5,000, POIAT.COM
Designed by the winner of last year's Young Designer of the Year Award in Finland, the Bastone oak sideboard showcases Antrei Hartikainen's trademark interest in the interplay of light and shadow in furniture. A series of long and narrow wooden dowels at once obscure, illuminate and reveal the interior of the object, while the symmetry and rounded ends are an implicit demand that the piece be placed in an open space, where light can reach it from all angles. One half of the Bastone Case Piece collection, it is paired with a cabinet.

KOICHI FUTATSUMATA CUTLERY SET
£196, MONOLOGUELONDON.COM
Japanese designer Koichi Futatsumata was inspired by his own mechanical pencil when creating this set of four semi-octagonal brass cutlery pieces. Just perfect for grabbing that last mouthful of Pot Noodle.

LEVA CHAIR
£566, VIADUCT.CO.UK
The Leva chair is the result of a collaboration between British architectural studio Foster + Partners and Italian furniture designer Mattiazzi. Inspired by oars, it is subtle, stylish, and very unlikely to be cancelled by Sadiq Khan.

BEOVISION HARMONY
€18,500, BANG-OLUFESEN.COM
You really have to see the Beovision Harmony in motion to appreciate its unique design. At the press of a button, two oak veneer panels disguising a set of three-channel speakers gently unfold like butterfly wings, assuming a horizontal position at the base of the display. When closed the panels rotate back to a vertical position, partly obscuring the 77-inch screen as it sinks to touch the floor. Based on mid-century cabinets that hid the TV behind blinds to integrate with the living room, this setup is certainly more interesting than a sound bar.

MICROSOFT X LIBERTY STUDIO 2
SOLD AT AUCTION, MICROSOFT.COM
Auctioned for charity by Microsoft to celebrate the launch of its new flagship store on Oxford Circus earlier this month, this collaboration with Liberty London is customised with a floral print from 1975, the year the software giant was founded. The eye-catching and one-of-a-kind edition of the Studio 2 desktop computer is part of a limited run of only 100 devices, with proceeds going to Special Effect, a charity using videogames and technology to enhance the lives of people with disabilities. The store is open to the public now.



Below: An architect's drawing of a typical Naked House; **Opposite:** Artist's impressions of the finished homes, which include bare walls and floors for tenants to decorate

WHY BUY NAKED?

Unfinished homes like those marketed by Naked House give buyers a discount price and customisation options – but are they practical, asks **DOUGIE GERRARD**

In case you hadn't noticed, Britain is in the grip of its worst housing crisis since the 1940s. The verdict, delivered in a recent report from the Centre for Policy Studies, will be endorsed by anyone who has endured the vagaries of the London rental market, where a 'cosy one-bed' can be a garage with a wastewater problem, and 'compact studio flat' can mean 'the bed folds out of the oven'. And if the rental market can feel cruel and absurd, the prospect of buying property in the capital can seem quixotic, a privilege reserved for the children of aristocrats and arms-dealers.

In this dire context, the appeal of property developer Naked House is easily understood. Its pitch is simple: construct sparse, spartan homes stripped of everything but the barest essentials, enabling them to be sold for between £150,000 and £340,000 – an attractive proposition in a city where the average asking price is £618,880. "Naked" means load-bearing walls but no partition walls; floors but no flooring; a kitchen sink but nowhere to cook. Also removed are any of the accoutrements – rugs, blinds, coffee machines – that jazz up otherwise mundane property brochures, but amplify the price of fully-fitted homes.

While Naked House is a non-profit company, it's found support in exalted places, with the bulk of its funding coming from London Mayor Sadiq Khan.

"The basic idea is to build genuinely affordable homes for working Londoners on moderate incomes," says Simon Chouffot, one of the company's founders. "It's about empowering people to be part of their own solution to the housing crisis. We know around half the population have expressed an interest in custom or self-build but only a fraction do it – a huge unmet demand." Chouffot has himself felt the sting of the housing crisis: after finding he was unable to afford property in East London, he was driven to living on a boat on the Regent's Canal.

He's keen to impress upon me that Naked House has a civic as well as an economic mission, with the building process intended to nourish a sense of common purpose among its inhabitants. "Naked House residents literally build a neighbourhood together," he says. "This idea of community is so important to many people, especially in a large city like London. Strong communities improve wellbeing, and also reduce reliance on the state through shared childcare and transport costs".

It's worth mentioning that there aren't currently ▶

From top: A CGI render of an Unboxed Homes project in Peckham; Naked House project designs for its unfinished homes

▶ any Naked House residents; while projects are under construction in Lewisham, Croydon, and Enfield, no developments as yet exist.

But Chouffot has cause for optimism. Rival firm Unboxed Homes is currently nearing completion with a similar – albeit more high-end – project, Blenheim Grove in Peckham, which will constitute five terraced 'shell houses' selling from £899,995 (two are already under offer) and it has new projects slated for Sydenham and Pound Lane.

When the Dutch studio NL Architects won the 2017 Mies Van Der Rohe prize for its renovation of a dilapidated Amsterdam apartment block, its winning innovation was to allow residents to outfit their own homes. With similar projects already realised in Chile and Manchester, the idea of unfinished housing has begun to solidify into a movement.

So is the end of the housing crisis in sight? Not quite."Unfinished housing is an interesting concept, but it doesn't get close to addressing the key issue about the supply of housing, which is the price of land," says Louise Goodison, director of Cazenove Architects, a firm that focuses on urban regeneration. The real problem, Goodison says, is that progressively more land has been sold to private developers over the past two decades, resulting in the value of London land being driven radically upwards.

There's also the issue of finishing those unfinished houses, which can be time-consuming, complex and expensive. Housing codes are strict and complex, which means that owners will need to become au fait with London's often labyrinthine building regulations. They may also find themselves burdened by a host of hidden emotional costs, which Goodison argues are obscured by the "bauble" of an initial mark-down. "I've worked on self-build schemes, and I've seen people defeated by it. I've seen lives be swallowed up," says Goodison. "If you're a certain kind of young person, and have the time and energy to spare, then great. But if you have kids, or work a fifty hour week, will you be able to construct something worth living in?"

Chouffot avoids answering my question about how much it's likely to cost residents to "finish" their unfinished property, although he argues they are technically habitable from day-one, "in a minimalist sense". But while a Nespresso machine probably isn't an immutable feature of the Good Life, many would argue that the privacy afforded by partition walls are.

The housing crisis is not a monolith. For a niche subset of people – young, time-rich, proficient at manual labour – Naked House might provide an answer. But for many others it won't, and Chouffot's claim about "empowering people to be part of their own solution to the housing crisis" has the distinct whiff of overreach.

"In some ways I like the idea," Goodison says. "Self-build projects can be empowering and creative. But this isn't a solution to anything."

For more information go to nakedhouse.org ■

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OFFICE SPACE
ENNISMORE

Step into Sessions House, the courthouse HQ of the company behind The Hoxton and Gleneagles
By **DOUGIE GERRARD**; Photos by **GREG SIGSTON**

From the outside, Sessions House is a slightly menacing proposition. Squat and grimly imposing, it looks mistrustfully out onto Clerkenwell Green, seemingly miles removed from the surrounding buildings. If you're a frequent visitor to central London, you might recognise its austere, almost gothic facade, all dreary grey brick and prison-bar windows. Upon entering the building, however, the vibe shifts dramatically from ominous to warm. You are apprehended almost immediately by a vast, coffered dome, modelled after the Roman Pantheon. Painted a pretty off-white, and with its steep central skylight surrounded by neat decorative polygons, it's more akin to something you'd find in a Renaissance Church than a central London office.

"Sometimes I do have to pinch myself, as a reminder that I am actually at work," says Charlie North, head of design at the hospitality company Ennismore, which has been headquartered at Sessions House for the past three years. Ennismore is a young organisation, having been founded in 2012 by entrepreneur Sharan Pasricha, whose office-door plaque describes him as 'The Caretaker'. The firm first made waves by renovating the ailing Hoxton Hotel in Shoreditch, and in 2015 acquired Gleneagles, home to the iconic golf course, and the centrepiece of what some (with tongue firmly in cheek) call the Scottish Riviera. Its portfolio now numbers eight hotels and spans four countries, with locations in Paris, Portland and New York set to be joined later this year by new ventures in Chicago and L.A.

> "Inmates were dropped through a trapdoor into one of London's lost underground rivers. From there, they were hurried onto boats and ferried directly to Australia

None of that, however, is as interesting as Sessions House. Beneath that monumental dome is 250 years of history, as rich and storied as any office building in the capital. Built in 1779, it began life as a magistrate's office, and was at one point the largest and busiest courthouse in Europe. New employees are given tours to acquaint them with its past, which was often rather gruesome – North tells me that executions were performed out on the Green, where families used to gather to watch their loved ones die. One story, possibly apocryphal,

alleges that the building gave rise to the phrase "being sent down," because the holding cells were located in the basement.

Another, which I'm assured is true, describes how condemned inmates were dropped through a trapdoor into one of London's lost underground rivers. From there, they were hurried onto boats that took them to the docklands, and then ferried directly to Australia.

A keen awareness of history pervades the building's design, and the effort put into it is hard to ignore – with every step we take, we seem to bump into another original feature. At one point North opens a small, unassuming door to reveal a perfectly preserved 18th century staircase, now repurposed as a makeshift storage space.

"It seems as if there's been a lot of work on the building, but they've actually done nothing to restore it, apart from applying a couple of finishes to return it to what it was," he says. The walls have been carefully stripped back, revealing either exposed brickwork or the original Victorian paint job. Many of them are a beautiful mint green, which North tells me was a ▶

▶ popular choice in the Victorian era, as it provided colour to otherwise dimly lit rooms.

Ennismore's workplace structure emphasises constant communication, and the historical awareness it drills into its employees is (somewhat awkwardly) incorporated into its inclusive corporate ethos. Employees call one another 'inmates', a hierarchy-flattening policy that extends all the way to the boss (I do wonder how far this commitment to authenticity extends; bartering for cigarettes in the canteen at lunch?). No one has a private office; instead, there are hot desks and communal workspaces, though employees can book one of the quirkily named meeting rooms ('Good Vibes Only'; 'Dream on Dreamer') if things get too hectic. "As a company, we're reflecting the fact that people work differently now," says Martina Luger, Ennismore's head of marketing. "Some days you want to work at a table, some days you want to work on a sofa. We want people to feel comfortable here."

Ennismore organises regular wellness and fitness classes for employees, part of a strategy that Luger describes as 'investing in people'. "We hope to encourage discussion and collaboration; the idea that everyone has a valid point of view. The way the space is set out feeds into that, because there's no physical floor of seniority". This philosophy, she says, translates into an open, friendly workplace atmosphere: "More than any other company I've worked for, I think we've been really successful in fostering that closeness – everyone here is friends, genuinely."

This is lofty talk, though you shouldn't think that Ennismore is some kind of utopian worker co-operative. Its communal ethos is underwritten by the same bloodless calculation that leads Google to install table tennis tables at their offices: a happy worker is a hard worker. "When you walk in here, it's cosy and warm and collaborative, but it's also aspirational," says Luger. "You feel you have to step up and be productive". There's even a table tennis table on the first floor – though, appropriately, it doubles as a collective workspace.

Above: The Victorian staircase leading to the judge's old chambers; and hotdesking around the coworking space; **Left:** The buildings's dome, modelled after the Roman Pantheon; Soundproofed phone booths used for working

The first floor is also where the judge would sit, and the site is still marked by the original Victorian staircase. This part of the building is especially pretty, though it's more than matched by the ground floor Sessions Bar, which has the slightly shabby feel of a colonial mess hall, replete with fading period wallpaper and a palatial chandelier.

One of the building's neatest features is a pair of soundproof phone boxes, labelled 'Good News' and 'Bad News', that North picked up on a whim from a trade fair. Adjacent to them is an outdoor terrace, built in beautiful off-white stone, with an outdoor fireplace and covetable views over the smoggy streets below. Currently it functions mainly as an impromptu meeting room, though North tells me the company is planning to host work barbecues there over summer. Not for the first time that day, I am more than a little envious. ■

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THE BIGGER THEY COME...

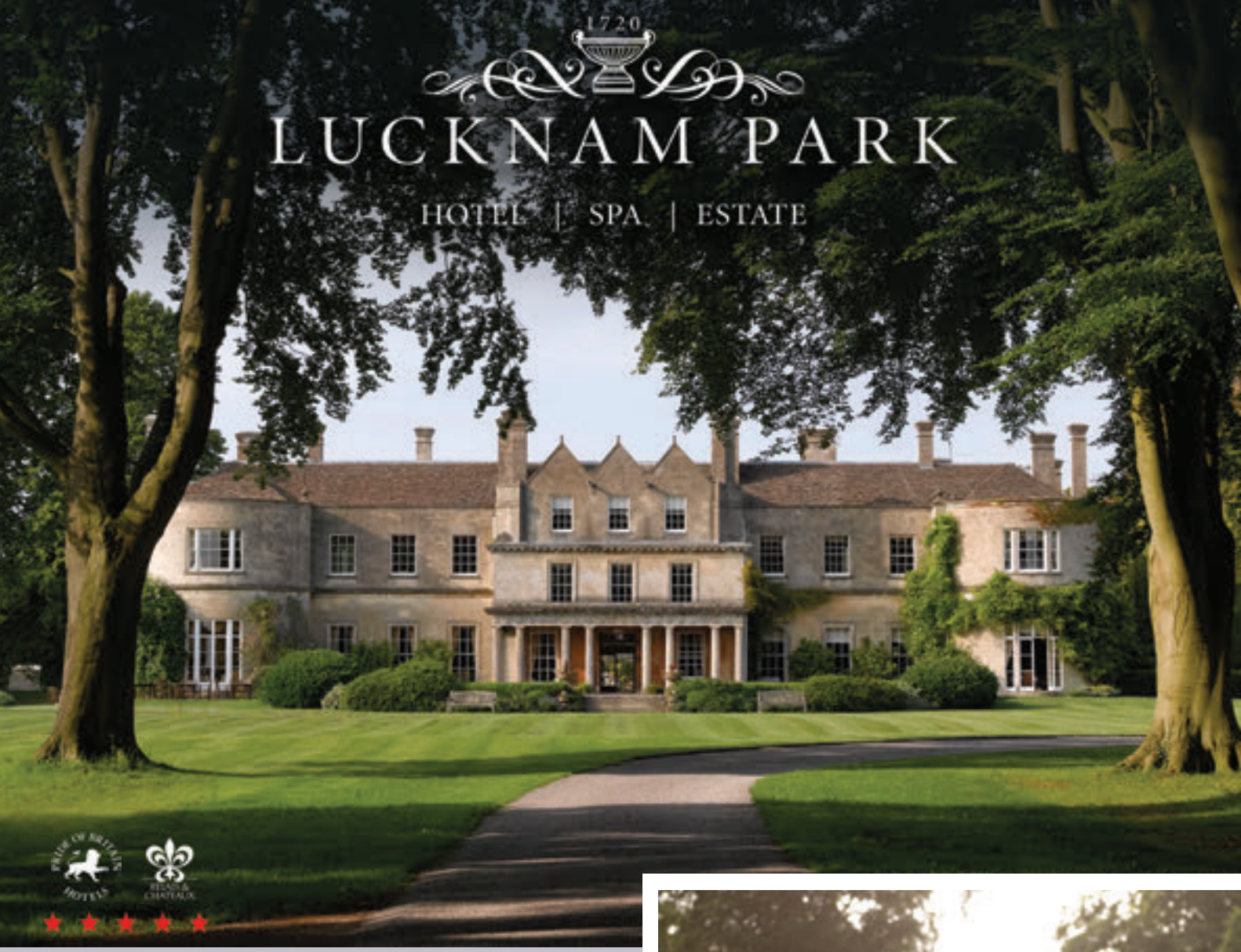
Wentworth Woodhouse, the biggest home in England, has a rocky history. **ELEANOR DOUGHTY** pays a visit to one of the UK's most extraordinary buildings.

You've heard of Chatsworth, and Castle Howard, that Brideshead dream. You've heard of Blenheim Palace, the Duke of Marlborough's monumental home. But what about Wentworth Woodhouse, the biggest house in England?

Wentworth Woodhouse, the former seat of the Earls Fitzwilliam, could have been a house lost to history. Five miles from Rotherham, it sits in the anonymous south Yorkshire countryside, surrounded by once-thriving mining communities. Its facade is 606 ft, equivalent to about 16 London buses. Once the home of one of the richest families in the land, it now stands empty. There is no gift shop through which to exit. It is said to have 365 rooms, one for every day of the year. Time was when servants were specifically employed there to light candles. Guests were given confetti to scatter behind them before dinner, so that afterwards they would find their way back through the five miles of corridor. Wentworth Woodhouse is a monument to great aristocratic wealth. So how has it been forgotten?

Although Wentworth's history dates back to the 17th century, the beginning of the end of its life as a great stately home came in 1946. During the post-war coal shortage, Labour minister Manny Shinwell decreed that the estate, where the Fitzwilliam family had run a thriving mining business, would be given up for public use. Despite research showing that the coal was "not worth the getting", Shinwell ordered that open-cast mining would tear through the formal gardens, right up to the Fitzwilliams' "bloody front door". The debris from this piled up "level with [the 8th Earl's bedroom window," wrote the author Catherine Bailey in her 2007 biography of the Fitzwilliams, Black Diamonds. Even the local miners were appalled. In April 1946 Joe Hall, president of the Yorkshire branch of the National Union of Mineworkers, described the work as "sacrilege... against all common sense."

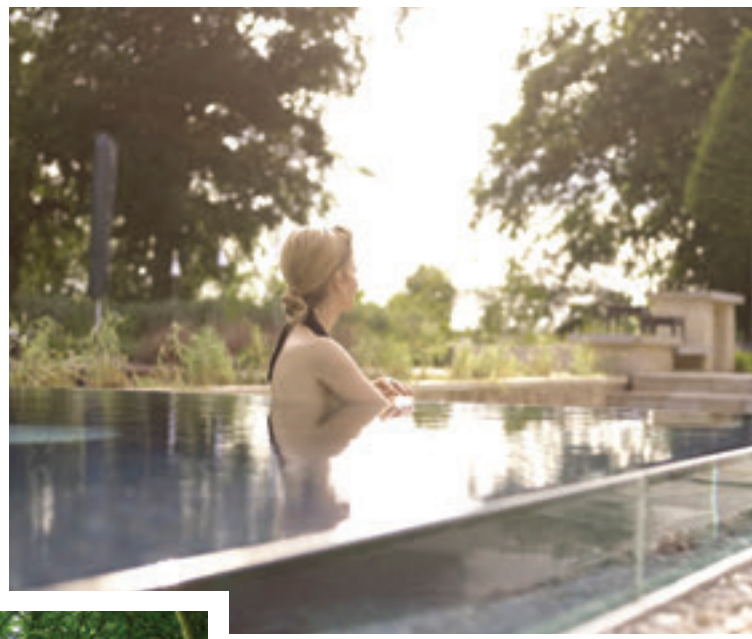
But the family were powerless to stop it. Peter Wentworth-Fitzwilliam, the 8th Earl Fitzwilliam, ▶



Lucknam Park

FIVE-STAR INDULGENCE

Located near the historic city of Bath, Lucknam Park is a magnificent Palladian mansion dating from 1720. Maintained as a family home until 1988, it then opened its doors as one of the UK's top country house hotels. Set in 500 acres of listed parkland and beautiful gardens, Lucknam Park has been lovingly restored to the elegance and style of the past era. The distinguished hotel boasts 42 individually styled rooms and suites, Michelin star dining in Restaurant Hywel Jones, casual all day dining in The Brasserie, an award-winning spa, equestrian centre with 35 horses, cookery school, family play facility and a three bedroom country cottage. Lucknam Park is truly one of England's finest hotels, providing 5-star luxury at every turn. To book, please call 01225 742 777 or visit www.lucknampark.co.uk.



watched as diggers wrenched up the gardens. Two years later, Lord Fitzwilliam was killed in a plane crash over France with his mistress Kathleen "Kick" Cavendish (nee Kennedy, sister of John F. Kennedy). With no sons, only a 13-year-old daughter (now Lady Juliet Tadgell), his title passed to a cousin, who had no heirs, before another, the 10th Earl, who died in 1979, also without children. That marked the end of the Fitzwilliams, and, some thought, the end of Wentworth Woodhouse. After all, what use would a house with over 300 rooms be without a family to live in it?

Having failed to convince the National Trust to take the house, the Fitzwilliams leased Wentworth to West Riding County Council, keeping a family apartment in the back. In 1949 Lady Mabel College of Physical Education moved in, and the 60ft square Marble Salon, where in 1912 the ballerina Anna Pavlova had danced for George V, became a gymnasium. When in 1988 the lease expired, the house went on the market. A year later it was sold to businessman Wensley Haydon-Baillie, and then to the architect Clifford Newbold in 1999. When in 2015 Newbold died, the house was once again up for sale. For a while, Savills had it listed for offers in excess of £8m, and reports circulated that it had been bought by a Hong Kong investment company. The National Trust were urged, again, to take it on.

Above: The Wentworth Woodhouse marble saloon;
Below: Textured wallpaper in the dining room

Succour came when architectural historian Marcus Binney, a former editor of Country Life, secured funding enough to rescue the house for the Wentworth Woodhouse Preservation Trust (WWPT) to take on. The Treasury stepped in, gifting £7.6m to help with emergency repairs, and the house was saved.

Two years on, and work has begun in earnest to rescue Wentworth Woodhouse. Chief executive Sarah McLeod was appointed in 2017 and given a mammoth task. There's dry rot to tackle, asbestos to remove, over 100 drains to replace, and 14,000 new roof slates to put over the state rooms. She breaks it down into separate projects: to restore the house, at a cost of £79m, the stables for £39m, and the camellia house, for £1.5m. Parts of the main house will be open for tours, and the state bedrooms will be available for bed and breakfast use. Thankfully, McLeod isn't alone in her quest. Local businesswoman Dame Julie Kenny is chair of WWPT, and her team has several other notable trustees – the Duke of Devonshire, whose uncle, the Marquess of Hartington was married to Kick Kennedy, and Sir Philip Naylor-Leyland, grandson of the 10th Earl, who might, in another

Above: The Ionic Temple, located in the garden; **Right:** Detail from the Whistlejacket Room

▶ universe, have inherited the house himself. Today, the Naylor-Leylands retain the estate surrounding Wentworth Woodhouse. Sir Philip's eldest son, 37-year-old Tom Naylor-Leyland is keenly involved with the project. "There's a series of businesses in Wentworth village, including the popular garden centre, and we'd like to offer more experiences, rather than straight retail," he says. It's early days yet, but these might include Go Ape-style high wires in the woods, and mountain bike tracks. He has been galvanised by his family's legacy. "My ancestors were great innovators, and my ambition is to try in that spirit to be an innovator in a different way, to make Wentworth an even more attractive place."

But why should anyone care about this apparently ruined building? Merlin Waterson, the National Trust's former director of historic properties, is another WWPT trustee. "Wentworth Woodhouse is like a cathedral, as opposed to a parish church, it's on a colossal scale," he says. "I hope that when people go there, they think, yes, this is quite remarkable." After all, it was a place where extraordinary events unfolded.

Wentworth Woodhouse was built as the result of a family feud. In 1695, William Wentworth, 2nd Earl of Strafford, left the Wentworth estate to his nephew Thomas Watson, and his titles to his natural heir Thomas Wentworth. The estates and title split, the two men set about outdoing one another: Thomas Wentworth built Wentworth Castle, seven miles away, while Thomas Watson's son, Thomas Watson-Wentworth, 1st Marquess of Rockingham, began building the two houses that make up Wentworth Woodhouse. The first of these was a Baroque mansion facing west, then the height of fashion. Yet by the time it was nearing completion in 1734, the wind had changed. Rockingham, keen to impress his Whig colleagues, extended the house to please them, with a grander Palladian building facing east. The result is a gargantuan structure.

When in 1782 the 2nd Marquess of Rockingham, the former prime minister who had inherited his father's estate died, Wentworth Woodhouse was passed to his brother-in-law, William Fitzwilliam, 3rd Earl Fitzwilliam. And so began the opulent Fitzwilliam story at Wentworth Woodhouse. In 1807, for the 5th Earl's coming-of-age party, 10,000 guests were invited, who consumed 26 roasted sheep, three oxen, 240 bushels of wheat, and 473 bottles of "good wine" amongst the scoff. When the 6th Earl died in 1902 he left £2.8m, more than £3 billion today. Royalty visited: in 1912 George V and Queen Mary stayed for four days, and upon their arrival 40,000 people gathered to see them.

McLeod's vision is not to restore Wentworth to its original state, as a prominent house belonging to an aristocratic family – not least, as there is no family left. Nor does she wish to make it into a museum. "It doesn't have any contents – I don't want to fill it with reproduction furniture and have people looking at rooms set out like they were in its heyday." Of course a Russian oligarch could have bought it, she agrees. "But it's in Rotherham, not London." Instead, she wants Wentworth to stand up for itself, as a beacon of hope for the local area. She has no desire to turn it into "another Chatsworth or Blenheim", where visitor numbers in 2018 totalled 605,653 and 906,885 respectively, according to the Association of Leading Visitor Attractions. "I want to retain its identity. People ask me if we are going to sandblast it, because it is black at the front [from the mining work] but I hope we don't. It's part of it." Revitalising Wentworth is key to the rebuilding of the surrounding area, too. "The project is critical for South Yorkshire," says Dame Julie Kenny. "Wentworth Woodhouse is a catalyst for change, and it can make Rotherham a destination of choice." As Bailey describes in Black Diamonds, Wentworth Woodhouse was a place where people came together. May Bailey, a scullery maid, remembered that "you could go anywhere in the park. You could walk right up't Wentworth House. You were never stopped." Dame Julie hopes that the restoration project will bring Wentworth back to the community. "The people of Rotherham feel that it's theirs."

> I don't want to fill it with reproduction furniture and have people looking at rooms set out like they were in its heyday. I don't want to see it become another Chatsworth or Blenheim.

Naylor-Leyland is realistic about the house today. "The truth is that it is far too large for us to afford. We couldn't afford to preserve it in the way that it should be preserved." The late James Lees-Milne, part of the National Trust's country houses committee, visited Wentworth Woodhouse in 1946. Afterwards he wrote in his diary. "It is certainly the most enormous private house I have ever beheld... Strange to think that up until 1939 one man lived in the whole of it." ■

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BARBICAN TURNS 50

The most divisive tower blocks in the country may have reached their half century, but they are still among the most popular places in London to live, says **STEVE IRISH**

Rising from the literal ashes of World War 2 bombs, the Barbican Estate has always been far more than a housing development. Designed by architects Chamberlin, Powell and Bon, it was envisioned as a utopian blueprint for post-war British living – a tower block that wasn't just about cramming in as many people as possible, but facilitating a new style of communal accommodation. Everything from the layout of the "podium" walkways to the placement of amenities was designed to bring people together, creating a space where you didn't just live independently, but would bump into your fellow residents, forming neighbourhoods and forging friendships.

The Estate, which opened in 1969 with an initial 2,014 flats (later growing to 2,088) was a masterwork of post-war construction, made using a mind-boggling amount of concrete (130,000 cubic metres, to be precise, enough to build over 19 miles of a six-lane motorway). The distinctive, mottled facade was created using a painstaking technique, whereby the top layer of concrete was chiseled away by hand using pick hammers.

There are roughly 100 different styles of flat across the development, each with a distinct layout and target resident. The most popular are the "Type 20" one-bedroom flat and the "Type 21" two-bedroom. Both similar in size, the Type 20 has a small study in place of a second bedroom (*see floor-plan, right*).

The flats were built with sophisticated Garchey waste disposal systems, which soak rubbish in water under the sink unit before flushing it into a central treatment facility; many are still in use today. The kitchens were originally designed by boat building company Brook Marine, and were made to have as small a footprint as possible. They are typically located at the rear of the property and are therefore windowless, hence the involvement of a maritime agency well versed in making the most of tight, dark spaces. The Estate also has two residents only gardens and a lakeside terrace that's open to the public.

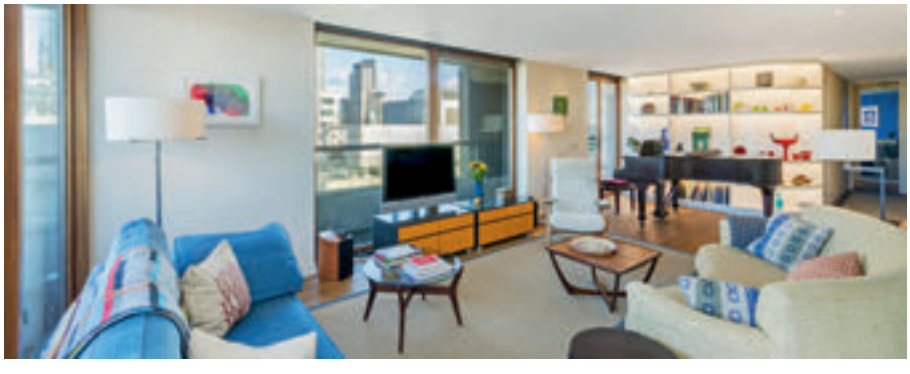
On opening, the flats were all rented out by the City of London – costing a not-inexpensive £12 a week – until Thatcher's right to buy legislation was introduced in 1980. Two years later the Barbican Centre – now one of the most respected arts and music venues in the world – finally opened its doors after more than a decade in development.

Already home to wealthy bankers and lawyers, the Barbican Estate became one of the hottest developments in the country, even as its brutalist aesthetic fell unceremoniously out of fashion (the Queen, upon opening the Barbican Centre, declared it "one of the modern wonders of the world"; two years later, Prince Charles dismissed brutalism as a "monstrous carbuncle"). Today the Barbican Estate is more popular – and more expensive – than ever. A type 21 two-bedroom flat that sold for £129,000 in 1989 recently changed hands for £935,000.

"It's been a brilliant place to bring up our children," says Michele Haynes, the founder of Haynes Interiors, who has lived on the Estate for two decades.

"More families have moved here in recent years. Living and working here has meant we've been able to spend more time together, and it's allowed me to stay on top of things culturally and professionally. There's a real sense of community and our children have benefited from living in such an exciting and socially diverse place."

Flats in Cromwell Tower and Andrewes House are available to buy through Frank Harris & Co; for more information go to frankharris.co.uk



Above: The floor-plan of a 'Type 20' flat; **Below left:** A flat in Andrewes House, on the market for £780,000; a flat in Cromwell Tower, on the market for £1.85m, both through Frank Harris & Co **Below right:** A modernised Type 21 kitchen designed by London studio Quinn Architects;

THE BACK PAGE

STEVE HOGARTY

THE DOCTOR WILL HEAR YOU NOW

Your smart speaker can dispense medical advice, but should you turn to Alexa when you're feeling under the weather?

Earlier this month, health secretary Matt Hancock announced a new partnership between Amazon and the NHS, which would allow Britain's sickly public to "ask Alexa" about their various medical problems. Bit of a sniffle? Simply consult with the friendly artificial intelligence in the corner of your living room. Got a dicky tummy? Tell Alexa where it hurts and she'll prescribe you a Calpol and a nice lie down. Worried you might have a hernia? Just wedge your £199 smart speaker between your thighs, turn your head and cough, please.

Privacy campaigners were up in anonymous arms, but the service isn't as intrusive as it first seems. Alexa is simply reading aloud answers taken from the NHS website, rather than emailing all of your symptoms to Jeff Bezos so that he can personally determine whether or not you've got athlete's foot.

This makes the reality of the partnership rather less exciting than the bold new future we were promised, in which every piece of electronics around the house could be a virtual doctor in disguise. We're still a while away from asking our toaster why our left arm is tingling, or buying a fridge that can sniff out a fungal infection from across the room before dispensing Canesten out of a special tube.

But there's something even more galling than the misplaced concern that we're handing over our medical histories to the same company that keeps Jeremy Clarkson in gainful employment. And that's the simple fact that nobody enjoys asking virtual assistants about topics any more personal than what the weather will be like at the weekend, what the capital of Angola is and whether you've left the kitchen lights on.

In a survey of the British public earlier this year, YouGov found that just seven per cent of us would rather be diagnosed by an artificially intelligent chatbot than consult with a human GP, which is very few of us, but also still alarmingly many. That's one in 14 people who would sooner entrust their health to those little pop-up chat windows that appear when you're browsing furniture websites, than to somebody who has spent years in medical school learning what the names of all the different organs are.

One in 14, I suspect, may also be the exact proportion of the British public with the kind of ailment they'd rather not have to show to another human being, one with eyes, a sense of humour, and friends to share stories with down the pub afterwards. For those too shy to disrobe in front of a medical professional, the rise of emotionless robotic doctors with their cold metal claws and wandering probes can't come soon enough.

For the rest of us, we'll stick with meat-doctors made of flesh and bone, thank you very much. For all their purported usefulness, virtual assistants have mostly been consigned to the role of friendly in-house DJ. Asking your speaker for medical advice feels about as appropriate as asking Mary Anne Hobbes to take a look at your rash. We all have our roles to play. You wouldn't ask your GP to come round your house to dim the lights and play the next episode of Sneaky Pete, so why ask your Alexa for advice about your slowly deteriorating body?

Steve Hogarty is a slowly deteriorating technology journalist for City A.M.

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