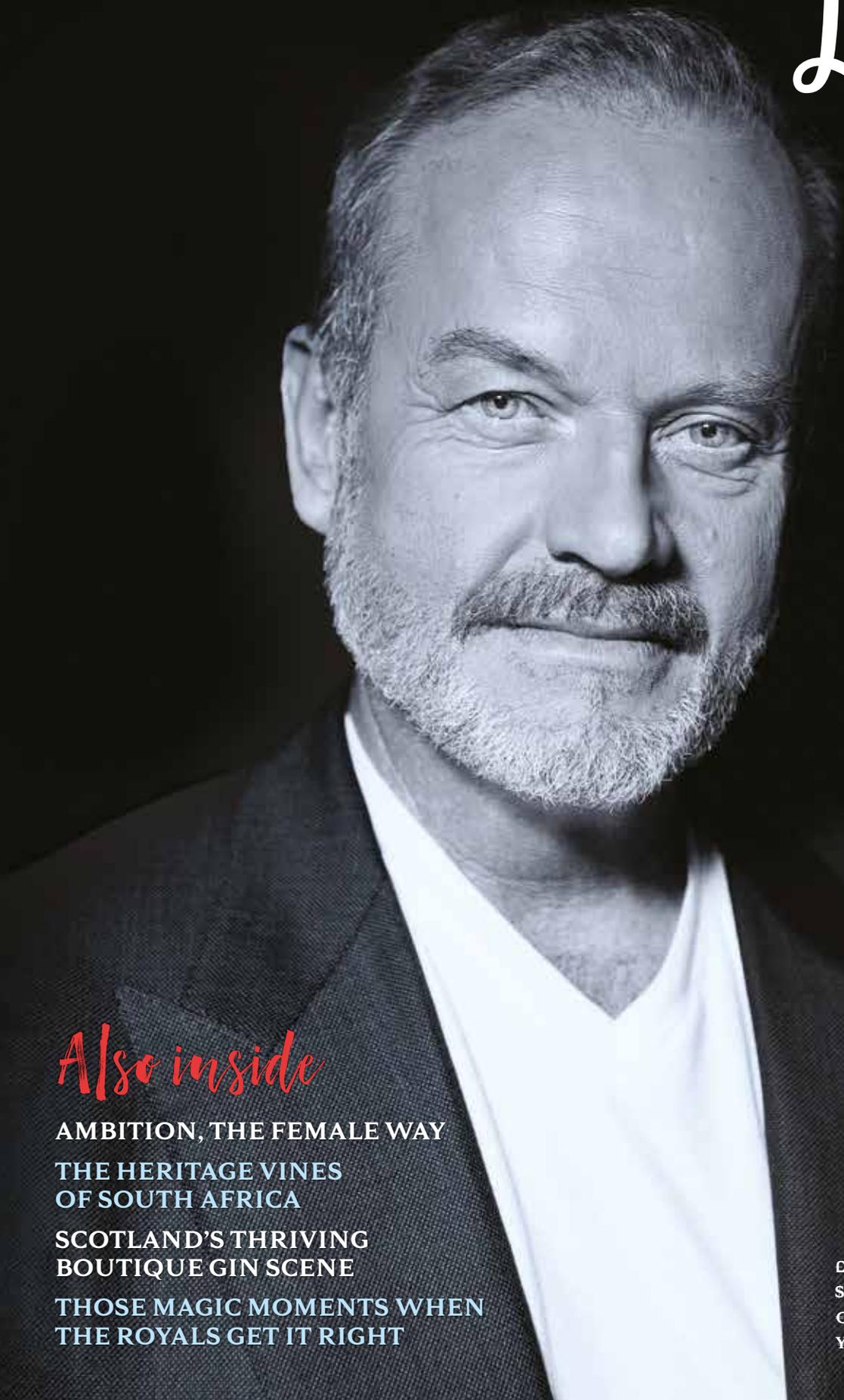


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Life



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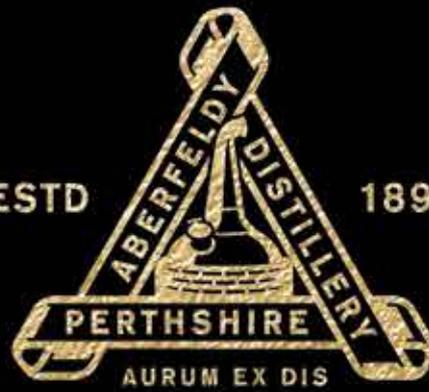
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Editor's Letter

I am delighted to say that this is a Coronavirus-free publication, but not one without prophetic judgement. And what could be more pertinent to our mental health these days than to consider the imperfections of the human condition with warm-hearted humour and insightful psychiatric advice by enjoying a new series of *Frasier*? In this, the 19th edition of *Boisdale Life*, I am delighted to welcome our wonderful and extraordinarily talented friend, Kelsey Grammer, who reflects on his career with great charm and muses about resurrecting his most famous role (p30).

I dare say that when our esteemed Food Editor, William Sitwell, conceived his new book, *The Restaurant: A History of Eating Out*, he did not foresee that, on publication, restaurants would be facing the most challenging trading circumstances in the history of eating out. Jam-packed with delicious inciteful wit and scholarly erudition, this is a three-line whip, must-read, fun-filled book that will thoroughly entertain you as well as enhance your understanding of how civilisation evolved through vinous culinary-tinted lenses.

There are three notably convivial new contributors to the racy 'On the Menu' section of our magazine (p45). Valentine Warner, a magnificently handsome messianic gourmet, confidentially shares with us how food saved his life (p52), while danger man Damien McCrystal reminisces with whimsical affection about his one true love, the long lunch, which might have easily cost him his (p50). Finally the mighty Joe Warwick, no stranger to lunch, fails to hold back

the punches as he judiciously lampoons the new self-appointed food police of the restaurant scene in London (p56). And we're also thrilled to welcome back the gorgeous millennial, Joanna Bell, who fears she exists in the wrong era, as she lives for red meat and booze (p48)!

We are all dreaming of travelling again soon, and even if flying continues to be restricted for a while, we will soon hopefully be allowed to explore our own glorious country. I can think of no more wonderful travelling experience than taking the high rail to Scotland and luxuriating in the sublime comfort of the new Caledonian Sleeper to enjoy the most beautiful landscape in the world pass by while having a First Class breakfast. Join the intrepid Rob Crossan on his inaugural journey to the land of whisky and tartan (p70), and why not en route learn more about Scotland's national fabric in an illuminating and fascinating short study of the history of tartan by Rebecca Pearson (p38). And if you are going to enjoy a wee dram while doing so, take a peek at Henry Jeffreys' revelations on the very best way to imbibe the "water of life". The secret is in its name: The word 'whisky' evolved from the Gaelic *uisge-beatha* – read Henry's piece to learn more (p67). You may even be inspired to acquire your own personal cask of malt whisky (p58)!

Meanwhile, Madeline Grant is clear that if anyone in the Royal family has an opinion on any of these issues they should keep it to themselves (p28). Auntie (the BBC) treads very carefully with her own views too! But it is an almost impossible task not to have some



From left, Ranald Macdonald, Paddy Renouf and David Hasselhoff at Boisdale of Bishopsgate

level of bias in coverage of our national affairs by a self-selecting BBC. Overall I believe the vast majority of people respect and love the Beeb as one of our greatest British institutions, although its funding principles are hard to reconcile. Paul Robinson, former Head of Strategy for Radios 1 to 4 and 5 Live, eloquently explains the dilemma and outlines possible solutions to consider (p21).

Hopefully there's an opportunity here to take a breezy stroll in someone else's shoes. If they're not comfortable, you don't have to keep them!

RANALD MACDONALD
 Founder, Editor & Chief of Boisdale
 Restaurants and Bars

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FEATURED CONTRIBUTORS

KATE ANDREWS

The *Spectator's* Economics Correspondent previously served as Associate Director of the Institute of Economic Affairs. She writes about the bitter divided nation left behind by the Trump administration on page 28.



MADELINE GRANT

The Assistant Comment Editor at *The Daily Telegraph* is noted for having captained St Hilda's College for Oxford's University Challenge team and being the youngest-ever contestant on *Mastermind*. Madeline writes about how the Royal Family can remain relevant by focusing on small, local causes that mean something to them – and us – on page 26.



VIV GROSKOP

The journalist and stand-up comedian has written three books, including this season's *Lift as you Climb*, produces documentaries and is a frequent guest on national radio. She also hosts the popular podcast, *How to Own the Room*, whose diverse female guests include Hillary Clinton, Julie Andrews, and Ann Patchett, discussing how to manage public speaking. She contemplates women and the art of ambition on page 18.



DOMINIC MIDGLEY

The journalist, author and broadcaster writes for the great and good of the British press, including the *Evening Standard*, *The Spectator* and *The Daily Mail* when not appearing on Sky News or the News at Ten and writing biographies of Sir James Goldsmith and Roman Abramovich. He meets the entrepreneurial athlete-turned-cigar maker, Mike Edwards, on page 42.



VALENTINE WARNER

The chef and broadcaster has presented and featured in ten TV series, including *What to Eat Now* and *How to Cook It*, and has written five books and numerous articles. He reflects on the motivation behind his latest book, *The Consolation of Food: Stories About Life and Death*, on page 52.

ON THE COVER Kelsey Grammer, who reveals his latest project on page 30. Photograph: Getty Images

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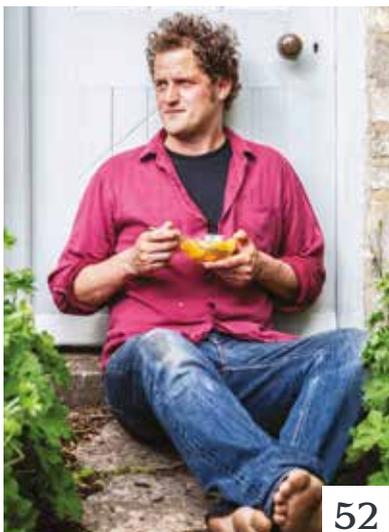
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LIFE & TIMES

WHAT BOISDALE'S STRANGEST YEAR LOOKED LIKE

VINA CARMEN CIGAR AWARDS



Actor, filmmaker, and martial artist Dolph Lundgren is the Cigar Smoker of the Year 2019

2 December: The highlight of the Boisdale calendar, and quite possibly the most important cigar event outside Cuba, the seventh annual Cigar Smoker of The Year Awards & Dinner saw a panoply of cigar aficionados, Hollywood stars, and London glitterati descend on Boisdale of Canary Wharf to celebrate the world's finest cigars and discover who smoked it best.



The Queen of the Blues, Rebecca Ferguson



The awards were hosted by food writer, Tom Parker Bowles

JEREMY GODLONTON



Broadcaster Andrew Neil with legendary music promoter Carl Leighton-Pope (right), to whom Dire Straits, UFO, Bryan Adams, and more owe their careers



Roy Sommer of Davidoff (left) and Ranald Macdonald (right) present the Communicator of the Year award to Jimmy McGhee of Hunters & Frankau



Daniel Marshall (left) accepts the Lifetime Achievement award; David Soul hosts an auction to restore Ernest Hemingway's 1955 Chrysler convertible



Thierry Di Raffaele (right) and guest enjoy their El Septimo cigars



Jourdan Riane performs 'At Last' by Etta James

SPEAKEASY BLUES BAR LAUNCH PARTY

25 February: Boisdale of Bishopsgate teamed up with Aberfeldy Single Malt Whisky and Yamaha Music London to launch the Speakeasy Blues Bar in the City of London.



Our host, Paul Jones of Manfred Mann



Ray Wallen (left) and Davide Mazzantini of the Dust Me Down Blues Band



Singer Mica Paris (centre), with fellow musicians Elizabeth Dearsley and Eric Ranzoni



Vocalist Nicola Emmanuelle and Simon Skillen



Singers Tony Momrelle (left) and Omar

BERTIE WATSON



From left, Glen Matlock of the Sex Pistols, Omar, and Earl Slick (David Bowie's former lead guitarist)



Lance Rose on the double bass



Boisdale's Andrew Davies (left) with Ian Taylor, Global Brand Director, Malts, at Bacardi



Andrew Tindall (fourth from left) with the team from Aberfeldy Scotch Whisky



Errol Linton (left) with bandmates Petar Zivkovic and Lance Rose



New Orleans born-and-bred blues artist, Acantha Lang

BURNS NIGHT

25 January: Burns Night is like a second Christmas at Boisdale – a veritable home from home for London’s most prominent Scots – so much so that we celebrate for a fortnight. This year’s VIP celebrations at Boisdale of Bishopsgate were lubricated by some of the finest whisky available to mankind from the Annandale Distillery.



Colin Cameron and Donna Hadsley-Chaplin



Tallia Storm enjoys an Outlaw King whisky sour



From left, Richard and Lizzie Darbourne with Hayley and David Hasselhoff



From left, Anneka Munch, Sophie Agar, and Sophia Money-Courts



From left, Stanley Johnson tells a joke to Tom Tugendhat MP and Nick Ferrari



Janelle Raeburn



From left, Tommy and Poppy Roper-Curzon with Paddy Renouf



Rachel Cunliffe of City AM (left) with Olivia Utley of The Daily Telegraph

JEREMY GODLINTON



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Society

WOMEN AND THE ART OF AMBITION

Is the female workforce obliged to “lift as they climb” to enable everyone around them to achieve their goals?



VIV GROSKOP

Journalist, author and stand-up comedian

Twenty years ago, when I started my first proper job in a newspaper office, I found out that a male colleague with an identical job was on a salary that was close to double mine. I was ambitious, hard-working, and very cross about this. There really was no good reason for this difference in pay. And what made it worse was that I was extremely swotty and he was extremely workshy. I was angry but also clueless as to how to respond, since I felt too young and too green to go nuclear. I don't think it even occurred to me that there could be a legal issue. All I wanted was to fix it. I thought about what my father – a pragmatic, sensible and modest man – would advise. I mentioned it discreetly and inquisitively to my boss, without losing my temper. He smiled and said, “Yes. But we keep you in shoes, don't we?” I almost bit off my tongue. In the end, I secured a job offer from a rival company and asked my then-employer to match it. They did. So I stayed.

Would this happen the same way now? Maybe not. I hope not. In most workplaces, salaries have been scrutinised and

MARTIN KINGDOM

cautionary measures undertaken. A third of places on FTSE 100 boards are held by women, which is major progress compared to several years ago. However... Despite close to seventy years of feminism, many of the statistics around progress are still brutal and stubbornly unchanging. At the same time the climate is more open and no-one is willing to be discreet or patient about these things anymore. And why should they? Quality and fairness are seen as a necessity, not a well-meaning luxury. Two decades on, I don't think a woman would bite her tongue and keep her mouth shut.

Where are we up to with women and ambition? Only 33% of partners in law firms are female. Women make up just 15% of FTSE 100 finance directors. According to the financial advisory firm, The Finance People, for managers, directors, and senior officials in businesses, the difference between male and female pay has actually risen by two percentage points to 15.9% since 2018. In Silicon Valley, only 11% of senior executives in the tech industry are women. This is a particularly galling figure given that the tech industry has a younger median age than most industries and you'd expect generational changes as a result of that. And yet it's the same old story.

Money and status are, of course, only two ways of measuring ambition and this is where things get interesting. Over the past 20 years we have seen a huge sea change in what men and women expect from life. Younger people define ambition as something very different to those of us who grew up in the Sixties and Seventies: They want freedom, work-life balance, adventure, inspiration, sabbaticals, and free turmeric lattes. I see corporates everywhere wrestling with this – and older people grumbling about their younger colleagues who baulk at staying until midnight to finish a pitch because it's "bad for my mental health and I'm having a self-care day".

I know whose side I'm on. Why is the work not getting done in the allotted time? Is it because you haven't hired enough people? Or because you're used to pushing against deadlines because there is not enough discipline in the organisation? Or because no-one knows how to say "No!" to the boss?

These changes are crashing against radical shifts in how we relate to gender. It's no longer a big deal for a woman to be the prime minister, CEO or the world's most famous 17-year-old climate crisis activist. But these roles are what Malcolm Gladwell calls "outliers": Women occupying these positions often stand out because they are still the exception not the norm. We're in a period of anger and flux about all this because sometimes reality is slow to catch up with changing attitudes. Increasingly, young men and parents of sons complain about how the statistics are reflecting new norms: 57% of students in higher education are female. Last year the number of female students taking A-Level sciences overtook males for the first time ever.

It's no longer a big deal for a woman to be PM, CEO, or the world's most famous 17-year-old climate crisis activist. But they're "outliers"

In fact, the statistics over the past ten years show the gains are small and they fluctuate every year. The gap between male and female achievement in teenage years is very small and liable to flip back in any given year. The interesting thing is the way it is reported. When there are small – or any – gains for women, it's unpopular: Headlines reference "Britain's Boy Crisis" and "The War Against Boys" when often the evidence being cited is a 0.2% difference in A-Level grades. It's fascinating to think about those positive, female science grades in relation to the Silicon Valley research. Yes, girls might be getting better results at school. But it makes little difference ten years later when they're in the world of work. Why is that?

How, then, can we continue to encourage women to be ambitious (whatever that means to them), without disadvantaging our sons? I have two sons, aged nine and 16, and a daughter, 13, and we have this conversation all the time. Younger generations don't

have the same hang-ups around gender that we do; they are less likely to feel pigeonholed and limited by societal expectations or to think, "Well, this is just the way it is."

There's a useful message in the expression "Lift as you climb", which was coined during the 19th-century civil rights movement in the US. It means thinking about other people as you move forward. Yes, do things in your own interest and figure out what you need to get to where you want to get. But while you do that, think about how you can advance others at the same time. For younger people, this might be about using social media to highlight the achievements of others. For those of us who are more experienced, it might be about considering being a mentor or recommending someone for an opportunity we have to turn down.

Madeleine Albright, the former US Secretary of State, coined the expression in relation to women and ambition: "There's a special place in hell reserved for women who don't help other women." It's easy to understand what she's saying: Don't throw other women under the bus; don't pull the ladder up behind you; reach out a helping hand. Be kind. But I wonder whether we should extend this expression to everyone, regardless of gender: Surely we're all going to hell – men and women – if we don't do anything in this life to help others? We are creatures of community and society, even in our weirdly divided, digital 21st-century world. The only way we move forward and truly achieve anything resembling "ambition" is to do it without disadvantaging others. It's not about fighting over everyone's share of the same pie. It's about making a bigger pie. Or more pies. Or making something other than a pie that is easier to share than pie. Let's do that. Just please do not make the women make the pies. That would be sexist.

Viv Groskop's new book, 'Lift As You Climb: Women and the Art of Ambition' (Bantam Books, £12.99), is out now. She also hosts the podcast, 'How to Own the Room', whose guests include Hillary Clinton, Margaret Atwood, and Nigella Lawson discussing how they manage public speaking.

Renaissance

RUBBLE
WITHOUT A CAUSE

A catalogue of catastrophe has forced Beirut to rebuild itself over and again. It is up to the task



MICHAEL
KARAM

Author, wine
writer and
communications
consultant

In the 90s, I was the features editor of the Beirut *Daily Star*, an English-language newspaper with an office in the East Beirut neighbourhood of Gemmayzeh. It was home to a motley crew of keen-as-mustard young writers and cynical old hacks who had told too many editors to eff-off once too often and were running out of options.

I would hand in my stories by 10.30am, and then slope off for a late breakfast at Le Chef, a cheap-as-chips family-run restaurant on Rue Gouraud that catered to a curious mix of sullen, working-class Christians, who felt, possibly quite rightly, they'd got a raw deal at the end of the civil war in 1990; local artists; and young expat workers on a budget.

My usual dining companion was Gareth Smyth, then the *FT* correspondent, who ate there so often that he never needed to shop. For breakfast we had the "full Lebanese" – fried eggs, mince, and fava beans with tomatoes and mint, washed down with burning-hot tea. Recently I'd been going for lunch – hummus topped with beef, a tabbouleh, and arak.

Charbel Bassil – the owner's son, head waiter, and all-round savant – elevated Le Chef from greasy spoon to a destination diner of global fame. His energetic repartee, combining Arabic, French and English, was punctuated by the rhyming slang we taught him: "I'll get the 'Jack-and-Jill' Mr Michael."

Charbel lived the civil war. He would explain which side of the road to use to avoid being shot by the sniper on the Murr Tower, who had strategic views down Rue Gouraud. He thought he'd seen it

all, but on the 4th of August, Le Chef took the full force of the biggest non-nuclear blast in history, which ripped through much of East Beirut.

I lived in Lebanon for 24 years, through two wars, a revolution, an attempted coup and many assassinations, but even I was shocked by the misery, trauma and devastation of the blast. The country was already crippled by hyper-inflation and the pandemic, and it was unthinkable that further heartache could be unleashed. But it was.

Miraculously, Charbel and his staff survived. I rang to find him surprisingly cheery for someone who a few days earlier had been thrown through the air. "Hummus with meat, tabbouleh, and arak, Mr Michael," he said. "We are waiting for you!"

Beirut was where I met my wife and where my children were born. It is a city like no other, layered by multiple cultures – Phoenician, Hellenistic, Roman, Arab, Crusader, Ottoman, and French – that have shaped the DNA of its people, fed their anxiety, nurtured their paranoia, and polished their cosmopolitan, outward-looking identity.

Step off the plane in Beirut and you inhale the nation – a bouquet of aircraft fuel, cologne and just a suggestion of sewage from the nearby dump. Beyond passport control with the well-groomed, flirtatious and chatty security officials who check for Israeli stamps, is a bustle of porters, duty-free salesmen and expectant families. Push past them and you reach the taxi drivers eager to whisk you off as a symphony of sharp police whistles fill the air.

Heading into town, you pass billboards of stern clerics, politicians, and Hezbollah martyrs; all-night pharmacies; shisha cafés; bakeries; and moped gangs. You reach Centre Ville, the newly-built city centre known as Downtown, el Burj (if you're of a certain vintage), or Solidere – the name of the controversial real-estate company that rebuilt the area. It was the brainchild of the late Prime Minister Rafik Hariri, who hoped that Arab tourists would see its cobbled streets and Mandate-era buildings as a welcome respite from the heat of the Gulf; a place where they could stroll, shop, smoke, drink tea, and enjoy Beirut's many murky pleasures. The plan worked when Arabs had nowhere to go after 9/11; before the Syrian war and Hariri's murder, with 21 others, on Valentine's Day 2005 in a massive car bomb as his convoy drove past the Hotel St Georges.

St Georges Bay, what is left of the eponymous hotel, and the nearby Hotel Phoenicia are the last remaining symbols of that mythical era before 1975, when Beirut was a playground for the Jet Set. The carcass of the St Georges, which still runs a beach club, is a far cry from its glory days when Lebanon was a Cold War bed of intrigue, and journalists, diplomats and spies swapped secrets at its bar. Kim Philby would drink there, possibly even on the day the Russians got him out by boat in January 1963.

Those days are gone. But Beirut reinvents itself with reassuring regularity and it *will* bounce back.





Television

SCREEN SAVERS

The BBC's new Director General knows that it can compete with online rivals for our affections, but can it win over our wallets?

Paradoxically, the unprecedented upheaval brought by the pandemic has benefitted the BBC. Viewing, listening and online consumption of BBC News content during the Coronavirus crisis has soared. According to market research company IPSOS, 60% of the UK population trust the BBC first for its news provision. But the number of households choosing not to pay the BBC licence fee has risen, suggesting that they no longer perceive the BBC as indispensable.

The Corporation also has a new Director General, Tim Davie. He has proven his ability to win over BBC creatives. When he was caretaker DG after the somewhat shambolic tenure of George Entwistle, he got the thumbs-up from producers. He also has commercial expertise from running BBC Studios (formerly BBC Worldwide) and significant executive experience outside the BBC.

In his speech to BBC staff in Cardiff back in September, Davie made two very significant points. First, he underlined the necessity for the BBC not to

see itself as indispensable to the UK population and the fundamental requirement for universality. He also ruled out the BBC being funded by subscription, as a sort of public-service Netflix. This was a crucial statement. If the BBC is to continue to expect all households in the UK to pay for it, then the BBC must “deliver value to every member of the public”. To achieve this, Davie set out key objectives – a new commitment to impartiality requiring a wider range of views; a BBC comprised, on- and off-screen, of people that more closely mirror the general population of the UK; and the imperative to deliver “unique, high impact content”.

Achieving both of these goals is fundamental. The BBC does frequently receive criticism from multiple sections of society over its impartiality. In recent months there have been some own-goals by the BBC, where careless, or over-zealous journalism, such as the Emily Maitlis debacle, have needlessly put the BBC's impartiality under pressure. However, despite this, the majority of UK citizens regard the BBC as balanced. Sometimes that balance is poorly executed. There are occasions on BBC news programmes where in a desperate bid to achieve “impartiality”, opposing views are given an airing for which there is zero evidence or rationale. The journalist may believe in so doing they have delivered balance, but the palpable lack of analysis or insight is not good enough from our publicly-funded, leading public-service broadcaster. The BBC can and must do better and Davie appears to acknowledge this.

The licence fee is the least-worst mechanism for collecting money from all UK households and Davie seems to be planning to continue with it, while also increasing commercial income. However, the BBC realised many years ago that there was a risk to its brand reputation by incarcerating otherwise law-abiding citizens for non-payment of the licence fee, and while it is the public body responsible, has attempted to distance itself from the collecting body, “TV Licensing”. However, secretly the BBC likes evasion being classified as a criminal act. While that might not seem very liberal of the BBC, the Corporation fears that downgrading the penalty for non-payment could lead to a loss of income.

A loophole in the licence fee was plugged relatively recently at the instigation of the BBC. When it was created, the BBC envisaged the iPlayer as being a TV catch-up device only. It is worth noting that the BBC was a pioneer here. When iPlayer was launched, Netflix was still sending out DVDs to its customers through the post. However, iPlayer's success has even surprised the BBC. In 2019 there were 3.6 billion views on iPlayer, and it is now the “first window” for some content, with shows commissioned direct to the service.

The criterion for paying the licence fee formerly only required a household to watch “broadcast” or “transmitted one-to-many content”, meaning that a



PAUL ROBINSON

Director of Creative Media Partners Ltd, and former Managing Editor of Radio 1 and Head of Strategy, BBC

household confining itself to on-demand or catch-up services delivered “over the top” via an internet-connected device was exempt from paying the TV licence. Now a licence fee is payable if *anyone* in the household watches iPlayer, although of course 100% of the net revenue collected from the TV licence goes to the BBC. All the other media players in the UK – ITV, Channel 4, Channel 5, Sky, Virgin Media, Netflix, Amazon and so on – are funded by advertising and/or monthly subscription.

The challenges to the BBC in the next decade are formidable. It is at risk of being marginalised not by UK or even European competitors, but giant US corporations of scale that are taking a larger and larger slice of world media revenue. The drivers of this change are rapidly shifting consumer habits enabled by rapid technological advance. The arrival of ubiquitous high-speed internet in homes has made possible the delivery of full-motion video (TV shows) on a global basis. Further, the business model of creating new content originals with most or all of the rights held by the media company enables identical content – with the addition of a local language track, other than English – to be sold around the world, generating huge revenues and highly cost-efficiently. Recent data from Ofcom indicates that young UK audiences are now spending more hours each week watching “on demand” content from Netflix, Amazon and Now TV than scheduled, “linear” TV channels such as BBC 1 and ITV. And I include in that the pay-TV channels such as Sky Sports and Sky Movies.

The BBC likes the licence fee as a funding mechanism and historically it has worked well. But now there are signs, particularly among younger households, that it’s coming under pressure. In 2019 the licence fee generated £3.69 billion for the BBC, which when supplemented by commercial revenue took its total annual income to just under £5 billion. However, in 2018 the TV licence brought in £140 million more than 2019, which means that around 900,000 fewer households paid the fee in 2019.

If you wind back only twenty years, virtually everyone in the UK watched BBC1, and the BBC still reaches 91% of the UK population. All its other services were effectively value-add or tailored to particular needs or communities. It is not surprising, then, that in the most recent BBC report a great deal is made of the need to reflect and serve the diverse communities of the UK, and that includes Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. The successful implementation of this strategy is therefore mission critical to the BBC’s goal of retaining the licence fee.

BBC Studios – a merger of the distribution and studio lines of business, formerly known as BBC Worldwide – will be asked to do more. In 2019 the total commercial income generated by the BBC was around £1.2 billion, but after costs were deducted it only returned £255 million in cash to the BBC – a margin of 21% but representing just 5% of total BBC

The real challenge is to convince the general public that a strong and well-funded BBC is something we are all willing to pay for

income. So, the option of the BBC whipping the BBC Studios to replace licence-fee income seems a remote possibility.

Netflix has been hugely successful, with almost 200 million paying subscribers worldwide, achieved through smart marketing and a very strong offer of original programmes and intelligent acquisitions. Netflix’s strike rate at pulling in stunning content has been incredible and exceeded most people’s expectations. It also has the benefit of scale: Netflix is now the world’s largest investor in original TV content, exceeding even the Hollywood studios.

The current mood music is focussed on not locking up people for refusing to pay the licence fee, but the real challenge for the BBC is to convince us – the general public – not just the Government of the day, that a strong and well-funded BBC is something that we are all willing to pay for. And even more crucially, that BBC content is a must-have, daily habit that is central to our lives.

Pandemics

MENS SANA IN CORPORATE SANO

The Coronavirus crisis has taken corporate virtue signalling from woke to wake – as we bury the bones of reason



OLIVIA UTLEY

Assistant
Comment Editor
of *The Daily
Telegraph*

The office where my aunt works recently installed a state-of-the-art freestanding thermometer, capable of reading body temperature to two decimal places. Before starting work each day, she dutifully troops into a socially distanced checkroom where a PPE-clad caretaker solemnly declares her fit to enter the “Covid-secure” building.

The minor flaw in this otherwise slick process is that since checks started six months ago, the caretaker has only registered temperatures between 32-33°C. So, either my aunt and her colleagues are all suffering from extreme hypothermia – and being very stoic about it indeed – or the snazzy thermometer isn’t quite what it’s cracked up to be.

Her employers don’t consider the malfunctioning technology a problem. Of course they don’t, because

GETTY

they know as well as I do that its purpose isn't actually to weed out workers carrying the virus. No, the swanky piece of kit is there for one reason and one reason only: It's a prop (one of many) in this year's main event, the "Covid-secure" Olympics.

You'll have noticed the unedifying remake of the Games kicking off if you've spent time on the High Street this year. Go into Topshop when you can and the place will be littered with sparkling bottles of complimentary hand sanitiser. Go into Zara next door, and you'll find even fancier sanitisers – and will pop a free, sustainably-produced, subtly-branded mask into your bag for good measure.

The big banks are throwing their hats into the ring, too. A friend at JP Morgan receives gleeful weekly updates from her HR department, pushing back the date for reopening the office – the latest suggestion, *post-vaccine* announcement, is January 2022.

What's special about January 2022? Nothing. But HSBC has said it will bring back its employees in summer 2021. Unspoken competition rules dictate that you rack up a few extra Covid-security points for every extra week you "prioritise worker welfare" and keep vaccinated people away from Canary Wharf.

Of course, virtue-signalling contests are nothing new. The Oscars, for example, long ago deteriorated into a competition to find the most morally superior celebrity. (Tip for any Hollywood A-lister: Choosing black ballgowns to "show solidarity" with the victims of sexual abuse worked a treat in 2018; why not try the same trick again and don some scrubs to show you're down with medics on the front line?)

But the Covid edition of the "Virtue Olympics" is particularly troubling because it has a tangible, terrible, and long-term impact on the economy.

Offices closing their doors for good will likely have a massive effect on business productivity – and will mean the end of thousands of sandwich bars, as well as drycleaners. "Covid-secure" Christmas shopping is such a miserable experience that even shopaholics like me are turning their backs on the High Street. And Brits still nervous about leaving their houses won't be reassured to go out and spend when their town centres look like Porton Down.

I wish the vaccine would put an end to it all, but I have my doubts. An agonising new poll from JL Partners reveals that 48% of the UK population believe restrictions should be lifted after a vaccine has been rolled out – and employers will be terrified of getting into trouble should a cautious employee contract Covid at work. More depressingly, the woke graduates who run the social media accounts for big companies are having the time of their lives with their virtue-signalling one-upmanship of rivals on Twitter and Instagram – and won't want to throw in the towel any time soon. So what's the answer?

In the long term, the Government must find a way to persuade the people it has terrified into staying at home that the vaccine really will make it safe to come out of hibernation. But in the short term, the



best solution may be for big corporates to abolish their social-media departments altogether – and pronto. After all, what's the point of them? Yes, there's the odd genuinely funny, deservedly popular post from a big business's social account. But for every one of those, there are dozens that turn thousands of potential customers away from the tweeting company for good. I doubt very much whether the sales of cosmetics brand Lush improved after a 20-something on their social-media desk chose to wade into the delicate trans-war on Twitter, for instance. And Ben & Jerry's cringe-worthy thread about immigration in the summer infuriated legions of Conservatives – many of whom eat ice cream.

I know that getting rid of corporate social-media desks is no silver bullet, and that the Virtue Signalling Olympics will be with us long after Covid has been stamped out. But I can't help thinking that if brands didn't have to stay true to the woke values their junior staff have professed online – a creepy obsession with health and safety being a prime example – they may begin to put their business interests above their woke credentials.

And the dog might wag the tail once again.

Reputations

NAKED TRUTHS

It's time to reframe the reputation of the late Christine Keeler, who is long overdue much kinder treatment



“Sexual intercourse began / In nineteen sixty-three / (which was rather late for me) / Between the end of the Chatterley ban / And the Beatles' first LP,” wrote Philip Larkin in his poem, ‘Annus Mirabilis’. He might easily have used “a randy Conservative MP” for his rhyme. For over one hot, crazy summer, the country was fixated first by rumours and then revelations of a fling between the Secretary of State for War, John Profumo, age 47, and a beautiful teenage model, Christine Keeler.

Photographed naked by Peter Morley, with her long legs wrapped around an Arne Jacobsen chair, in the stuffy world of early-Sixties Britain she didn't just look like a girl of the future – she might as well have come from another planet.

With film-star looks and a disconcertingly male disinterest in being pinned down, it's easy to see how she drove men wild. But as much as she was an emissary from a more relaxed era, when

women could act as casually as men, far more tragically she was the working-class girl caught between the times. Even after she became an emblem of the permissive Sixties, she was always at pains to point out that though her pants were hidden in the famous photograph, they had, in fact, stayed on. For all his kinkiness, her well-connected friend Stephen Ward still had to ask her mother's permission to take her on that drive to Cliveden.

For a moment she was the most famous woman in Britain – how could any picture editor resist running as many pictures of her as possible? As she later said, she was “rolling news” before the concept was invented. Pants on or off, Lewis Morley's photograph is still visual shorthand for the Swinging Sixties, but there was nothing liberal about the way she was treated. The grotesque double standards applied to her and Ward were recently viscerally brought to life in the TV series, *The Trial of Christine Keeler*, and we're all talking about her again.

The expensively educated politician, Profumo, should have known better. But it was Keeler, who had left school at 15, who was punished – with a real prison sentence for perjury after police questioning, and a life sentence of notoriety. As she wrote in her autobiography, *Secrets and Lies*, “I have been serving a sentence almost all my life. For more than half a century I've been branded by events.” For the way in which the Home Office leant on the police as if in some sort of banana republic, Geoffrey Robertson QC labels the trial of Stephen Ward (based on evidence bullied out of Keeler and others) as one of the UK's worst miscarriages of justice.

For her entire life, she could not escape that verbal “branding”, her greatest dislike being the tarnishing of her name, which she eventually changed to Sloane.

Ward killed himself while the jury deliberated over trumped-up vice charges. Tom Mangold, who covered the trial as a cub reporter

and made the must-watch documentary *Keeler, Profumo, Ward and Me*, says that he could have coped with prison but not the loss of his reputation.

As Keeler wrote in her sixties, with admirable honesty: “I was set up by the authorities and branded in court... I was not the common tart they tried to paint me. It's true that I have had sex for money, but only out of desperation, and that is something that I hate to have to admit even to myself.”

A teenage runaway, barely educated, with sensational looks as her only currency, Christine Keeler might not have forgiven herself, but the extreme poverty and horrific physical and sexual abuse she survived show to what extent she has long been overdue a kinder assessment. I hope we no longer live in a society that punishes desperation.

But well into her old age, that punishment was still meted out, with the same newspapers running pictures of her – poor, old, and perhaps most cruelly, overweight, as a result of medication for emphysema. For all this, her voice and grit speak out from her memoirs, which are funny and spirited.

Keeler died in December 2017, just after the first #MeToo revelations began to surface, starting a whole new debate about sexual power play. And it's in that context that her story has been retold so electrically on screen. Her son, Seymour Platt, is campaigning for a pardon, but more immediately would like to “just change the colour of the conversation around her”.

I think it's changing as I write. I recently read a press cutting covering the scandal from the *Houston Chronicle*. To a Sixties' American editor these girls were “playgirls”. I'm sorry she didn't get to see *The Trials of Christine Keeler*, which drew so much from her autobiographies. But it's not too late for history to tell a fairer story about Christine Keeler. The future catches up, eventually.



OLIVIA COLE

Literary editor
of *GQ* and poet

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Monarchy

HEAVY IS THE HEAD

How the Royals can remain relevant



MADLINE GRANT

Writer for *The Telegraph*

Within days of his recent disastrous interview with Emily Maitlis on *Newsnight*, Prince Andrew was recalled from royal duties, forbidden from joining relatives for the Sandringham church service, excluded from photo calls, and expelled from his private office in Buckingham Palace. The sheer speed of his defenestration shows that ‘The Firm’, though hardly in rude health, still works with cold-eyed efficiency when required. Witness the Queen’s swift move to prevent the Duke and Duchess of Sussex from using the word ‘Royal’ in their future projects.

Neutering tricky branches of the family tree may be part of the solution, but the Royal Family is still ignoring an increasingly iconoclastic public mood. These days, much of the public is tiring of celebrities preaching liberal-left orthodoxies. That is why host

Ricky Gervais’s speech at the Golden Globes in January, eviscerating Hollywood’s A-list for double standards, was a hit.

Yet the Royals have too often acted like celebrities themselves, projecting ‘virtue’ while exposing their own hypocrisies. Earlier this year, Prince Charles flew 125 miles by helicopter to make a speech about lowering aircraft emissions. The Sussexes’ decision to take a private jet last summer after campaigning on climate change has not endeared them to the public. Nor has their obvious desire to commercialise their royal status, despite claims of wanting a more private life.

After a dramatic 2019, the House of Windsor can reassess its future. First, it could abandon the focus on complex issues such as climate change and inequality. These cannot be solved with royal intervention, and making lofty pronouncements about them may further divide the nation. Instead, it should return to its traditional beat – highlighting deserving causes and spreading joy. The Royals must rediscover their traditional commitment to charity and social justice, rooted in the local – hospitals, hospices, veteran welfare, school sports, worthy and sometimes weird and wacky causes. The success of schemes such as the Duke of Edinburgh’s Award, the Prince’s Trust, the Invictus Games, and the Duchess of Cambridge’s focus on early-years development, prove that the Royals succeed when they restrict their social justice to narrower, achievable goals. The Monarchy should never be a pulpit from which to lecture on changing the world.

The joylessness grates too. My favourite childhood memories were of the Royals. There were the glossy-magazine shots of Princess Diana, post-separation, all tanned legs, eyeliner, and perfectly coiffed hair. But another royal stands out: The Queen Mother, ever smiling, wearing a bright bucket hat, like a merry chrysanthemum. A relative who

worked for her told us that she loved Marmite and *Fawlty Towers*. As a family of Marmite-loving *Fawlty Towers* watchers, it spoke to us. The Queen Mother was also a big spender, racking up vast debts before her death, and, say many who worked with her, often tipsy. But she had something jolly and carnivalesque about her.

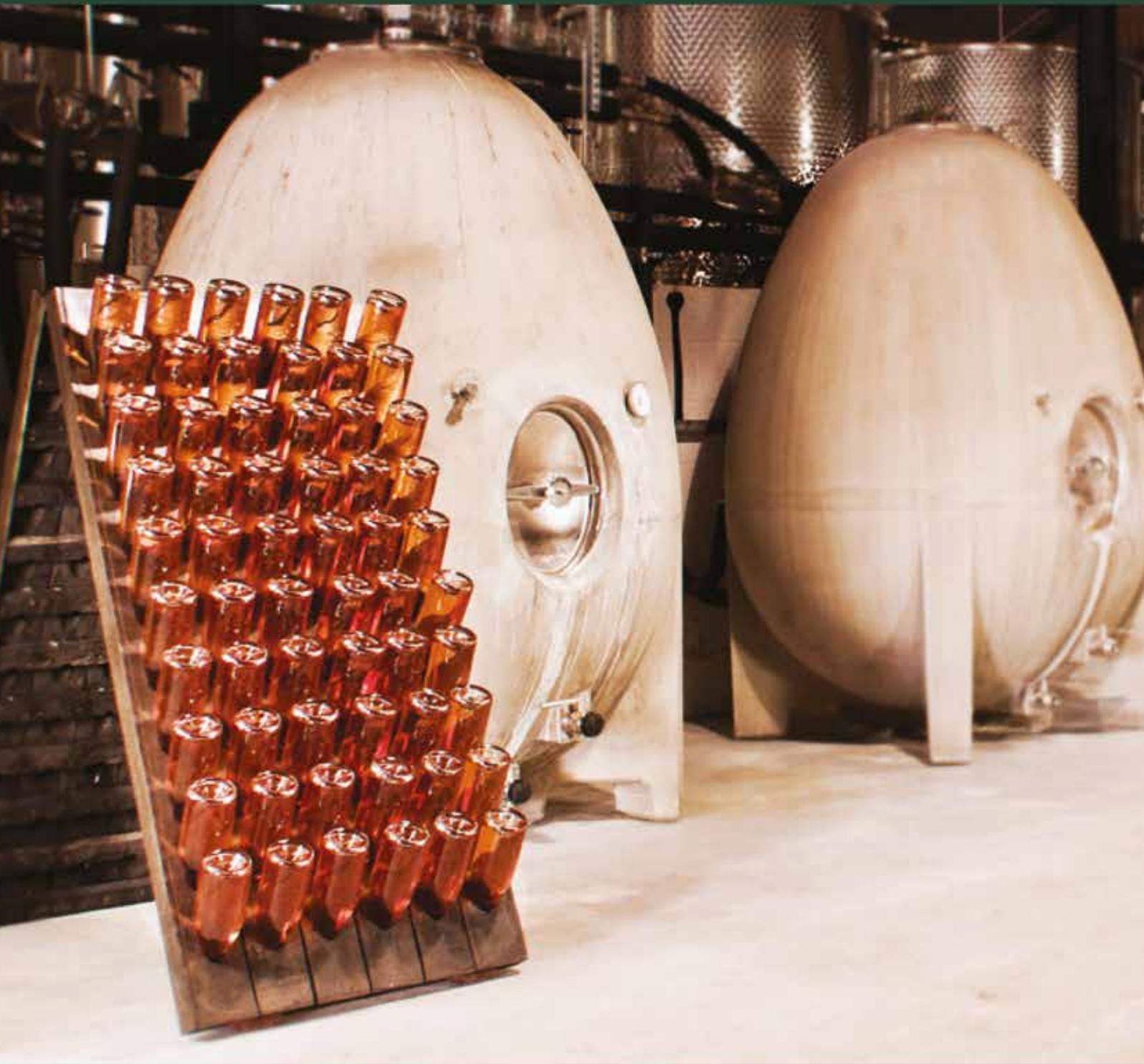
Since then, our culture has changed. Princess Diana’s death prompted a flood of lachrymosity that revealed how much had changed since citizens lined Winston Churchill’s funeral procession with dry-eyed respect three decades earlier. Many would argue that the Royals’ current focus on mental health fits these changing times. But the Royals cannot quiet the nation’s anxious minds, nor meet the Net Zero carbon target by preaching. Their input is unlikely to make a difference. These are political questions, and problematic ones.

Today’s royals face challenges, as the Sussexes’ failed attempt to combine their role with being celebrity influencers shows. They cannot lead by example, like Victoria and Albert, who extolled the virtues of monogamy, family life, and bourgeois decency, because society is less deferential. Where once it guided morals, the Royal Family today is more likely to influence fashion at best; to reflect contemporary mores at worst. They should instead look to royals who fill their schedules with unglamorous causes. Take Princess Anne, whose unshowy work ethic has won great public respect. Even minor royals can contribute greatly to the gaiety of nations. The Duke of Gloucester is the patron of the Richard III Society (to which I belong) – an eccentric collection of amateur historians and conspiracy theorists, intent on revising the reputation of this much-maligned king. When the Duke attends the AGM it means the world to us.

Such royal involvement brings great joy. Rather than big ideas, perhaps the House of Windsor should sweat the small stuff.

COATES & SEELY

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On the day of the US election, President Trump told reporters in Arlington, Virginia that he had not even thought about drafting a concession speech. “Winning is easy,” he said, but “losing is never easy. Not for me it’s not.” Weeks later, his words have proven to be an understatement. As we go to press, Trump is still refusing to formally concede, although his team has begun the transition.

This hasn’t stopped other major figures in the Republican party from acknowledging the transition of power that’s to come: Former President George W Bush congratulated Biden and his Vice President-elect Kamala Harris on their win. 2012 presidential candidate Mitt Romney did the same. Both men paid lip service to the President’s legal right to take his election complaints to court – a tactic that Trump’s team actively pursued. But even this legal path of last resort quickly lost steam: With limited evidence of voter fraud, Trump’s lawsuits were tossed out one by one.

The President’s inner circle reportedly encouraged him to throw in the towel. But just like the rest of his presidency, Trump does not take his plays from the normal handbook. He looks set to argue in the coming months, possibly years, that it was a ‘rigged’ election. He will leave the Oval Office on the 20th of January 2021, whether he likes it or not – the US Constitution is robust on this – but not before stirring up more tension and mistrust in a nation already bitterly divided.

America is not a place where one worries about a democratic vote resulting in violent backlash. Yet that is what business owners prepared for in the days leading up to the election, boarding up shops and restaurants across the country in fear of riots triggered by the result. The major concern was a Trump victory; far-left groups using election day as an opportunity to set cars and shops alight. To the credit of Trump

America

THE SORE LOSER

After the helter-skelter years endured by the US – and the rest of the world – during his presidency, Trump’s lasting legacy is a nation bitterly divided



KATE ANDREWS

Economics
Correspondent
for *The Spectator*

voters, their disappointment over the election has not led to civil unrest. But the prospect of any group reacting violently to an election is as alien to the United States today as the President’s refusal to concede. Both indicate a fraying national fabric, in desperate need of restoration.

If Joe Biden is serious about his commitment to bring unity to the country – the theme of his first speech after being declared President-elect – he has his work cut out. According to pre-election research by the Washington-based think-tank, the Pew Research Centre, political differences have taken a turn for the personal, as only one in five Biden and Trump voters believe they share “core American values and goals” with the other side. Biden’s pledge to be a “President for all Americans” indicates some level of moderate decision-making, though some of his party won’t take kindly to this approach. While he successfully fought off the socialist candidates in the Democratic primaries,



comfortably winning his party’s nomination, Biden’s lack of public policy vision has created an ideological vacuum in his administration. All factions of the left will try to fill it.

And while Biden won more votes than any Presidential candidate in US history, the election was far too close for comfort for his party. The Democrats may have won back the Oval Office, but they underperformed at every other level of government. The Republicans increased their vote share with minority groups, including black, Hispanic and LGBTQ voters. They gained seats in the House of Representatives – bringing in a wave of right-wing female candidates – and stand a strong chance of keeping the Senate. On the local level, Republicans retained control in the majority of state legislatures, even flipping New Hampshire.

This is perhaps the greatest irony of Trump’s refusal to accept the election result: In denying Biden’s success at the top of the ticket, the country’s vast support for the Republican party, and some elements of Trumpism, are being overlooked. Various exit polls on election day indicated that the economy was the most important issue for voters, with one poll showing that economic concerns were double those about Covid-19. Trump’s deregulation agenda, tax cuts, and business-friendly climate have proved very popular with the electorate – and were remembered by tens of millions of citizens who voted for Trump, despite the devastating recession earlier in the year.

Looking past the presidency at the broader election outcome, the ideological path the US wishes to take is undecided. Biden’s promise to be a “transition candidate” may gift the country with a calmer, quieter four years than what we’ve just experienced, but whether that leads to an era of Democratic leadership or a return to Republican control remains heavily in play.



Vignettes

FLOWERS OF SCOTLAND

In his new book of collected essays, the author remembers when Scottish cuisine was anything but



BRUCE ANDERSON

Columnist and former political editor at *The Spectator*

Back in the Sixties, there was a more than usually sanguinary murder in Glasgow. While the killer was awaiting trial, the Scottish *Daily Express* decided to buy up his family. This must have been after the days when such a case would end with a good hanging; Alan Cochrane insists that he is not that old. But the newspaper thought that the low-lifers' tales of the dark and bloody alleyways of the Gorbals would titillate its readers. Alan, then a young reporter, was told to hide the family from rival bidders until judgment day, in some discreet

hotel up on Lomond-side. That did not sound a hard posting, until he met the MacTumshies.

At the first meal, they sat awkwardly on their chairs and gazed suspiciously at the menus – even the ones who were holding them the right way up. Alan tried to accelerate proceedings. “What about starting with smoked salmon?” “Ah’ve no had that,” said Dad: “Ah’ll gie it a go.” It arrived, and the suspicions returned: “Whaur’s the chips?” Then the lawyers panicked. *The Express* was in danger of committing contempt of court. Alan was told to drive the MacTumshies back to the Gorbals, give them 50 quid, and lose them. If they were questioned, there would be little danger of their remembering the name of the paper that had tried to suborn them. Alan insists to this day that he could not have borne another 12 hours in their company.

Those are tales of yesteryear. In this century, even if the Union is under threat, “Scottish cuisine” is no longer an oxymoron. Gone are the days when “green vegetable” was only used as an insult to the Catholic Irish: when a Glasgow salad meant a plate of chips. But there is still a deplorable reluctance to exploit Scottish produce. Every week, refrigerated lorries leave the Highlands, bound for Spain. Their cargo – lobsters, crabs, langoustines, scallops – going to those who appreciate them. Shame on the Scots who fail to.

Even when the best ingredients are available, there are frustrations. I once spent a night in an old-fashioned hotel on Islay. Dinner: first course, soup; disgusting. It tasted as if it had come out of a packet, probably of wartime vintage. It may have been made from left-over Woolton pie. Main course: 12 langoustines. They tasted as if they had been alive half an hour earlier. Cooked lightly and succulently, dressed with garlic butter, they would have graced any restaurant in the world. So: what’s for pudding?

Answer, mousetrap cheese and/or ice cream. Provenance of the ice-cream? Wall’s.

Throughout the Highlands, there are hairy English dropouts who vote SNP. They supplement the dole by weaving plaids from their beard clippings and often keep a goat or two. Persuade one of them to turn his hand to Islay *chèvre*. Induce a neighbouring housewife to make some soup: a Cullen skink or a Scotch broth. Find a girl who could run up a decent crumble. Let ambition vault; fish does not really do as a main course, so what about some venison, or a grouse? Grouse freezes well, as I was pleasantly reminded over dinner on Easter Sunday. When all the game has been scoffed until the new season, there would be local beef: grass-fed, well-hung. Gourmets would cross oceans for such a repast.

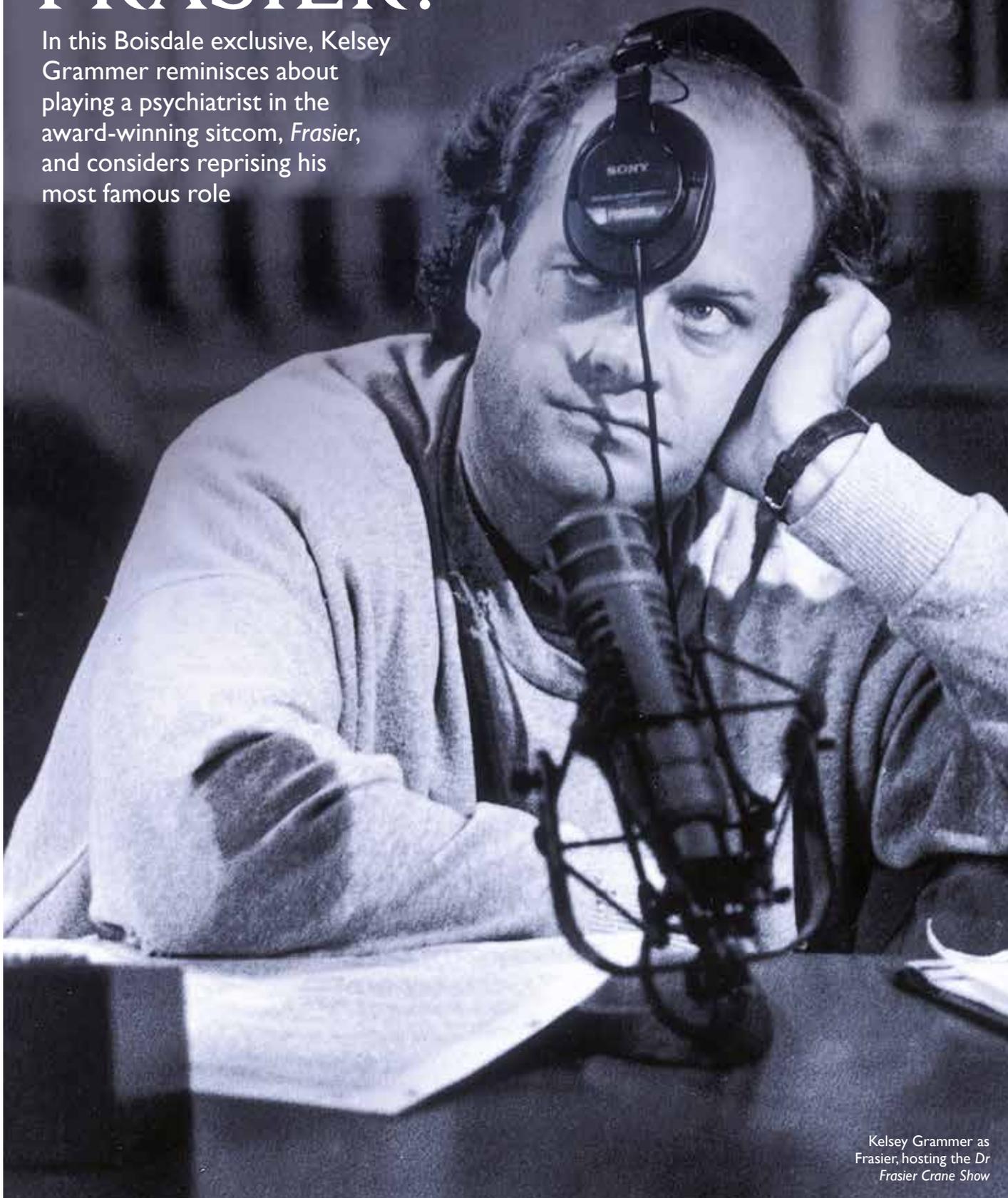
But even before our culinary revolution, Islay is *vaut le voyage*. There is plenty to kill; there is also the whisky coast. Seven miles from the principal town, Port Ellen, is Kildalton Church. Humble, beautiful, solemn and numinous, Kildalton has known prayer for at least 1,200 years. A place for contemplation as twilight falls, it evokes the perilous guard-duty of the Celtic Church, protecting the flickering Christian flame out on the far edge of the known world, menaced by Norse raiders from the sea.

The approach march is more secular, taking you past three distilleries: Laphroaig, Lagavulin, Ardbeg. Even after a long evening comparing and contrasting great whisky, one has to agree that the Scottish Enlightenment is North Britain’s greatest contribution to world history. But the Scottish endramment is not far behind. I shall return to that theme, when less distracted by sociology, religion or food.

From ‘Drink!’ by Bruce Anderson, with illustrations by Lachy Campbell (Quiller Publishing, quillerpublishing.com)

TO BE OR NOT TO BE FRASIER?

In this Boisdale exclusive, Kelsey Grammer reminisces about playing a psychiatrist in the award-winning sitcom, *Frasier*, and considers reprising his most famous role



Kelsey Grammer as
Frasier, hosting the *Dr
Frasier Crane Show*

To be or not to be... Frasier? That is the question. Perhaps it is a silly one. After all, I *am* Frasier. I played him for 20 years. Perhaps the question is, "To be or not to be Frasier, again?"

Let's go back in time. When the sitcom, *Cheers*, ended, I was adamant that Frasier disappear along with Sam, Diane, and the rest – he could ride into a Boston sunset with Lilith and their son and live on in the audience's imagination. Paramount Pictures had positioned me to do my own show once *Cheers* finished and I was occupied by that. It was a suggestion from Dan Fauci, Paramount's development executive, that led me to the Grub Street Productions writing team: David Angell, Peter Casey, and David Lee. They were writing and producing the sitcom *Wings* at the time. We agreed to work together, and leave the Frasier character behind.

It was at dinner at one of those classic Italian restaurants, all red leather booths and dark lighting, that John Pike, then President of Paramount, told me he had read our script. After a pregnant pause he said, "I think a comedy should be funny." An axiom, for sure. That dinner and a subsequent meeting with the writing team laid the ground for a *Frasier* spin-off. I had a few conditions – no kids and no wife. I ended up with a dad and a dog. A tyrannical professor father who died sometime in the middle of *Cheers* was brought back to life as an ex-cop who suffered an injury on duty that forced him to retire early. Frasier moved to Seattle, where he was born and raised, to leave Boston as far behind as possible and start afresh back home. A splendid apartment that clearly cost more than his psychiatrist salary could afford would be the launchpad for a new life of fulfillment and, perhaps, love. Then his father moved in. What followed was *Frasier*, which won 37 Emmys during its 11 seasons and 264 episodes. It was such a rewarding adventure.

I digress for an inside story. We had just finished shooting the pilot episode to a raucous standing ovation on Paramount's Stage 25 – the very stage where *Cheers* and *Happy Days* were filmed. It had a rich history of success. David Hyde Pierce turned to me as the crowd cheered and whispered, "What does this mean?" I replied, "It means you're going to buy a very nice house." "What does it mean for you?" he then asked. "It means I'll buy two." I believe that David bought homes on both coasts of the US and has since lived a very nice life. The show brought us all blessings.

It also brought a share of what only actors would call "curses": For the rest of our lives we were all identified by the character we played. Success in TV is a well-paid phenomenon that comes with a host of benefits, but that one successful role can hinder an actor's ability to play

anything else – ever! So it was for the *Frasier* cast. I would always be Frasier; David, Niles; Peri, Roz; Jane, Daphne; and John, Martin. Oddly enough, the dog would always be Eddie but never lose any work because of it. He went on to do all sorts of commercials and films without once being called Eddie again. However, each of us has enjoyed a life after *Frasier*. David has starred in and directed several successful Broadway productions. Jane and Peri have made several very well received film and TV shows. John, before he died in 2018, returned to Chicago and his beloved Steppenwolf Theatre, where he did several shows and travelled the world performing in plays. Success in TV allows an actor to write his own ticket in theatre world. TV gives an actor "draw" – a theatre can count on ticket sales and the actor can count on a starring role that challenges them as never before; a role they have dreamed of and may never have played had they not become famous on TV. That is every actor's dream. So the deal is not so bad.

For me, life after *Frasier* has been very good indeed! There have been shows on Broadway – *La Cage aux Folles*, from which came a Tony nomination; and *Finding Neverland*, a musical version of the film. I played the lead in *Big Fish* in London and then *Man of La Mancha* at the Coliseum. I'd known Richard Kiley, who first created the role on Broadway, and he inspired me: It was his character as a man, the ease and nobility with which he carried a "famous role", that drew me to

Below: Niles (David Hyde Pierce) and Frasier at the Café Nervosa. Grammer recalls, "David Hyde Pierce turned to me as the [studio] crowd cheered and whispered, "What does this mean?" I replied, "It means you're going to buy a very nice house." "What does it mean for you", he then asked. "It means I'll buy two."



I had a few conditions – no kids and no wife. I ended up with a dad and a dog

it, as well as the challenge of playing the role itself. He was forever identified with that performance and his grace in embracing its importance impressed me. Perhaps it was his grace that helped me embrace the importance of *Frasier*.

To play Tom Kane, mayor of Chicago, in *Boss* has been the greatest role of my life so far. It may surprise people that I would say that, given the success of *Frasier*. But while *Frasier* was a singular pleasure to play, he did not have the depth of Tom Kane. Kane had a level of pathos and villainy that made him a joy to act and *Frasier* a bit of a Cub Scout. Nonetheless, *Frasier* has been the definitive role of my career. Since he bade farewell two decades ago, there have been many entertaining and challenging roles. A new TV show is around the corner. In October I finished shooting a film about football. There is also a Christmas movie in the can and another about a crime-solving partnership in Yorkshire. Then there was *The Last Tycoon* on Amazon; a hapless banker in *Breaking the Bank*; a detective in *Grand Isle*, a washed-out rock star in *The Space Between*; a doomed research scientist in *The God Committee*; and the congressman in *Charming the Hearts of Men*, who was responsible for inserting the word “sex” to Title VII of the 1964 Civil Rights Act. That is what an actor strives for; to leave behind a catalogue of diverse characters who embody an expression of universal truth to uplift and entertain: Art.

In our final episode, ‘Goodnight Seattle’, *Frasier* quoted the poem ‘Ulysses’ by Tennyson – “to strive, to seek, to find and not to yield...” The 11th season concluded with him flying to Chicago to pursue his true love and a new life. Implicit in quoting the poem was the notion

Top: The principal cast of *Frasier* in Season 7 (1999) – Jane Leeves as Daphne Moon; David Hyde Pierce as Dr Niles Crane; Kelsey Grammer as Dr Frasier Crane; Moose as Eddie; John Mahoney as Martin Crane; and Peri Gilpin as Roz Doyle.
Centre: At the 50th Primetime Emmy Awards in 1998, *Frasier* scored a record fifth consecutive Best Comedy Award, and Kelsey Grammer and David Hyde Pierce were named Best Actor and Supporting Actor in a Comedy Series.
Right: Kelsey Grammer in his Tony-nominated role on Broadway in 2010 as Georges, the nightclub owner in *La Cage aux Folles*



CHRIS HASTON / NBC UNIVERSAL / GETTY

that *Frasier* had a future, albeit one we would not see. I have decided it is time to find out what that future was and explore where it brought him today. Yes, I want another run at *Frasier*!

About four years ago, several TV shows returned to primetime. The trend caught my attention and a plan was hatched. The writers of the original show, Peter Casey and David Lee, decided not to participate but gave us their blessing for a new show. We did not want to pick up where we'd left off, as was done with the sitcom *Will and Grace*. We contacted NBC, which was not interested unless the original creators were involved, so that dinghy left the dock. I felt that the old *Frasier* must be respected and left alone. *Frasier* would only return in a new world with characters from the old show but several new ones, too. Any new show would have to be a third act for him, his friends and family. I hope it will include David, Jane, and Peri returning as Niles, Daphne, and Roz. For all of them, a new show would be a third act, as well.

I will shift focus here a moment, to honour David Angel and John Mahoney. David was one of *Frasier's* creators; a wonderful man and very talented writer. We would speak offset on *Frasier*, usually in the prop room, about any number of topics, invariably drifting to politics. We did not agree on much but that made it more fun. Those days are clearly behind us in Hollywood and around the world. Amiable disagreement has devolved into pettiness and hatred. Just imagine the carnage a return of the guillotine would enjoy! David and his wife, Lynn, were killed on American Airlines 11, which crashed into the World Trade Centre in 2001. I had spoken to him just two nights before. He had left a message saying he could not attend a party at my place in LA, so I called him to ask that he change his flight by one day. He politely explained they wanted to stay in Boston a bit longer and I told him they would be missed – and so they are.

I will always describe John Mahoney in superlatives. Few measure up to him as a man or as an actor. Irreplaceable, incandescent, incredible – he was the emotional foundation of *Frasier*. John was The Father. We were always asked, “How did those two boys come from that father?” It was obvious, I argued. Niles and Frasier have a heightened sense of right and wrong, they are devoted to the idea of service, and though they pose and preen; are lost in superficial labels of success and social recognition; and have deep sibling rivalry, they are still the sons of Martin Crane: When it comes to their professions and the way they conduct themselves, they are devoted to doing good and serving their communities, and slavishly loyal to their family – just like Dad. I came to love the three Crane Boys as this reality dawned on me. These were good men, trying to do some good in the world. They were flawed and self-important, but scratch the comedic surface and a deep compassion for mankind and commitment to good was revealed. This is what John brought to the show, because this is who John was.



Above: Kelsey Grammer in *Boss*, which he describes as “possibly the best show I have ever done. It was certainly the best drama. Tom Kane, Mayor of Chicago, was the greatest role of my life to date.”

A final reflection on John's death: I regret ‘tweeting’ a week or so after he died. My publicist rang to say that social media was blowing up because I had not posted anything about him. It would be best, he advised, to do something. People were reacting negatively. So, I succumbed to the pressure to post something to prove I cared. I am sickened by it to this day. My grief is my business and I wish I had held to that then. I long for the days when the loss of a friend was mourned in the company of friends, away from public scrutiny or shame. I appreciate the reader's brief indulgence for confession. Now, let us conclude the story of *Frasier, Act III* without getting too lost in the weeds.

Almost four years ago, we had a lively meeting with CBS, which owns *Frasier*, about the story we had in mind. Three months later, no response. My friend and business partner, Tom Russo, called our agents and there was a similar silence. So, my wife, friends, and cohorts decided to do it ourselves. The next two years saw many meetings with many writers, tasked with a rough outline about the character's next chapter. Jordan McMahon, a young executive at my company, worked with several writers who were invited to join the original writing teams who had worked on the show. They all had different and delightful suggestions about what might work, but one had the distinction to seal the deal; a situation where *Frasier* would carry the style and wit of the original series while placing the characters on a new path in a new world, with new friends and associates.

Three years later, we pitched the new show to CBS; they liked it and suggested we proceed with writing a pilot. Another few months and a few note sessions later, our first pilot script was ready. CBS read the script and enjoyed it. Many more things still need to be done before there is another *Frasier*. All that I am at liberty to say is that we may be close.

The question remains: To be or not to be *Frasier*? Well, it's a silly question. I am *Frasier*. **B**

SOUL BROTHERS OF FUNK

THE BRAND NEW HEAVIES HAVE JUST RELEASED THEIR FINEST ALBUM SINCE THEIR EARLY-NINETIES HEYDAY. **JONATHAN WINGATE** MEETS THE IRREPRESSIBLE BAND TO DISCOVER THE SECRETS BEHIND THEIR UNIQUE SOUND





Left: The Brand New Heavies play Boisdale of Canary Wharf in February 2020.

Opposite: Simon Bartholomew (on the back of the sofa) and Andrew Levy at Annabel's for the cover shoot of the group's eleventh album, *TBNH* (Acid Jazz Records, 2019)

Simon Bartholomew, The Brand New Heavies' guitarist, clearly doesn't believe that you should never judge a book by its cover. The sleeve of *TBNH*, the band's latest LP, shows Bartholomew and the band's co-founder, bassist Andrew Levy, in the suitably glamorous surroundings of Annabel's in Berkeley Square, Mayfair. "The cover really sums up the album perfectly," Bartholomew explains with a boyish grin. "It's a little bit clubby and sleazy, but it's also luxurious and street."

From the moment they first burst into the spotlight with their potent fusion of funk, soul, and jazz, The Brand New Heavies looked and sounded utterly unlike anyone else. Matching their flamboyant superfly style with hard-hitting dancefloor grooves and infectious tunes, they spearheaded the burgeoning Acid Jazz movement, blurring the lines between Chic and The JB's. Their influences may have been quintessentially American, yet they emerged from the not-so-mean streets of Ealing before going on to chalk up 16 Top 40 singles and three million album sales.

"We wanted to be Herbie Hancock & the Headhunters, but we didn't really see it as a career," Levy recalls. "My dream was to be a sculptor, but we got offered a record deal instead. We were young kids from West London who went to the States with our flared trousers, but they really took to us immediately.

"I vividly remember the first time I went to New York. We went to an event in honour of Ray Charles at the Apollo in Harlem, and Stevie Wonder came over to us and started singing 'Never Stop', which was our first hit record over there. At the time, you don't pause to really take it all in and realise just how incredible moments like that are."

"We certainly didn't invent the wheel, but we took our passion for funk back to the people in America who'd created it in the first place," Bartholomew continues, taking a sip of champagne. "There's a lot of

love, passion, and positivity within us as people, and we try very hard to reflect that in our music. For us, it's always been about our love of funk, dancing, and having a good time."

February 2020: It's a couple of hours before the band are due to take to the stage for their Boisdale of Canary Wharf debut, and there's a palpable fizz of excitement in the air for what will be their most intimate hometown show in years. Their last few albums may have struggled to make much of an impression outside their fiercely loyal fanbase, yet the band's popularity as a live draw has never waned.

Having recently released their best album since their 1990 debut, The Brand New Heavies sound like they have been given a new lease of life following the departure of drummer, Jan Kincaid, who originally formed the band with Bartholomew and Levy when they were still at school.

"When Jan left it really galvanised us, because we've been released from the shackles of someone who was never happy in the band," Levy explains. "It was getting darker and darker. We went on tour to Brazil and I literally didn't have one conversation with him. He emailed to inform us that he was quitting two weeks before we went on tour, and we knew that we'd be financially ruined if we cancelled, but we stood strong. People often underestimate us because we're seen as the rock-star playboys who dance around and wear silly clothes, but we're very serious about the band.

"Our music is actually very hard to play. It's repetitive, and people think that repetition is easy, but to lock into a groove like ours is a lot harder than you realise. When we first started, we'd often play a groove for hours on end just to get all of the details right. We worked very much in the same way as James Brown – just jamming with a groove until you find the sweet spot. You have to have grown up dancing to this kind of music to try to emulate it. If a song doesn't make me move, then I know it isn't right."



Left: Angela Ricci, centre, has been with the Heavies since 2018. Above: Clockwise from top, Simon Bartholomew, Jan Kincaid, Andrew Levy, and N'Dea Davenport on tour in Chicago, 1991

Fittingly, *TBNH* kicks off with 'Beautiful', a triumphant call to arms featuring the unmistakable voice of Beverley Knight belting out the lines: "We're winners / We're back to take it all". Alongside their current lead singer, Angela Ricci, the album also features a glittering array of guests including former Heavies vocalists N'Dea Davenport and Siedah Garrett; soul queen Angie Stone; and Mark Ronson, the most in-demand record producer in the world.

"It all happened organically," Levy remembers. "We just thought, 'Who do we know? We'll email them and send them a track.' If I'm honest, there was a little bit of desperation. It's terrible to admit it, but there was a childish, competitive element to prove that we could make a damn good record without Jan. It's a comeback album, and we wanted people to really take notice. We knew they'd take notice if you've got people like Beverley Knight and Mark Ronson on it."

"Mark asked us to play at his 40th birthday party five years ago, because he's a massive fan of the band," Bartholomew explains. "He told us we'd changed his life, because he was originally into rock and pop, and then he got into hip-hop and funk after he saw us play. We spent two years recording *TBNH*, and it's a proper album, like a bowl of fruit rather than a pile of nuts and bolts. We're really chomping at the bit right now, because we've still got so much that we want to achieve. Life is short."

It may be 30 years since their debut album, but they appear to be more passionate about music than ever before: "Andrew and I have been best friends since nursery school, so we even have His'n'Hers bass and

"There's a lot of love, passion, and positivity within us as people, and we try very hard to reflect that in our music"

guitar towels. We might've been around for a long time, but in our minds, it feels really fresh and exciting now."

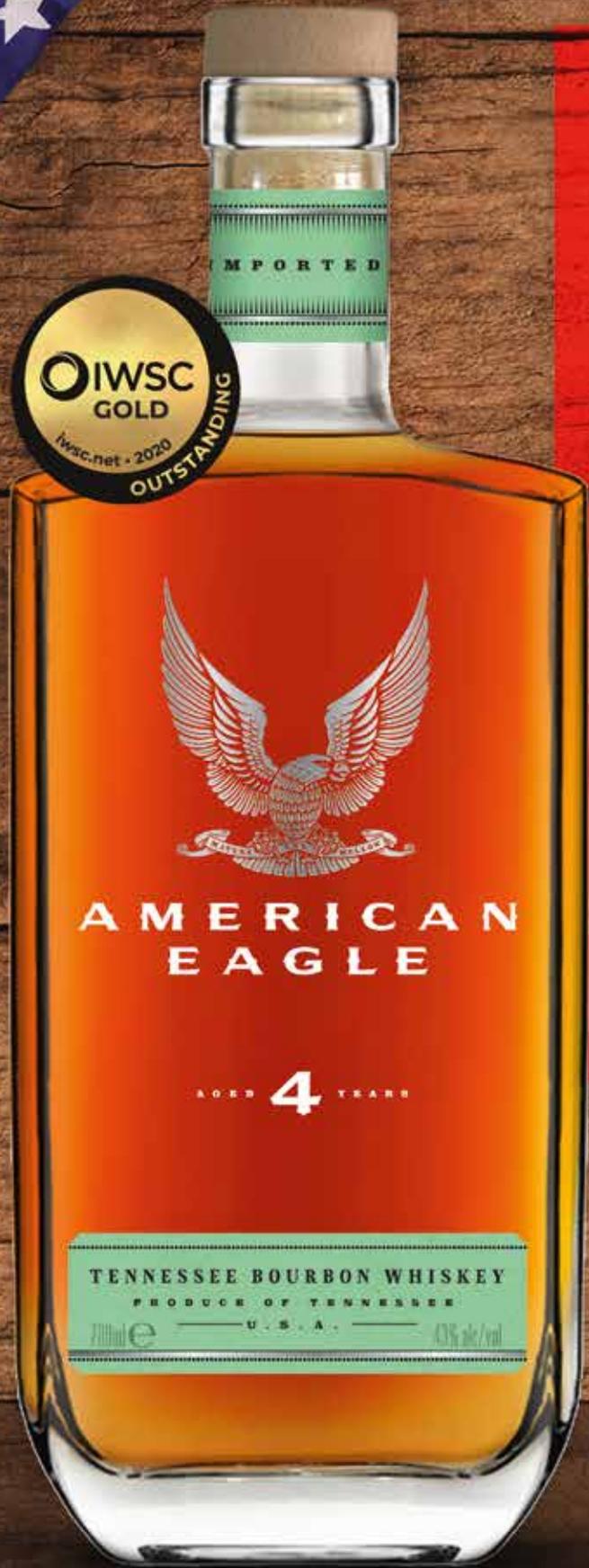
While their musical influences may not have changed since they first started, they are acutely aware that the music business they emerged from is now a long way off in the rear-view mirror. "The days of selling

millions of records are long gone for most artists," Levy explains. "You used to make your money from record sales, whereas now you make an album so that you can tour." Bartholomew adds, "I'm ashamed to admit it, but we really took our success for

granted. At one point, we had a studio that was costing £1,000 a day. We were turning up at 1pm, we'd go for lunch, maybe get a massage, and then go to the cinema and come back and do some recording. If you had that opportunity now, you'd turn up half an hour before you were due to start. I don't think we ever got too carried away with fame and the rock'n'roll lifestyle, mainly because we were always so busy. We did fewer drugs than most guys working in an office. We're still down-to-earth Ealing boys at heart."

The Brand New Heavies' infectious brand of dance escapism is exactly what the world needs right now. "We make music with a positive, upbeat message," Andrew Levy says, polishing off his mojito. "When you're on the dancefloor, you don't think about Greta Thunberg, Trump, or Brexit. You escape from reality." ■

'TBNH' is out now on Acid Jazz Records. The Brand New Heavies play Boisdale of Canary Wharf on 18 & 19 December 2020 and 8 & 9 January 2021 – book your seats at boisdaletickets.co.uk. For UK tour dates, visit seetickets.com/tour/the-brand-new-heavies.



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CHECK MATES

The eternal allure of Scotland's rebel thread,
by Rebecca Pearson

A flame-haired, broad-chested man blows his bagpipes, the wind whipping tantalisingly at the hem of his tartan kilt. Judging by countless covers of romantic novels and boxes of porridge, this is a commonly held image of everything 'Scottish'; a symbol that evokes rebellious counter-culture and aristocratic respectability at the same time. But the complex story of tartan reveals how ready we are to be seduced by fable rather than fact, although the truth is as vibrant as the colours in the Clan Buchanan tartan.

So what is tartan? In technical terms, it's a woven fabric with a check pattern in which bands of colour are repeated in equal proportion: lengthways (the warp) and crossways (the weft). To kit yourself out in the best, head to Scotland's oldest tailors, Stewart Christie & Co, founded in 1720. Its owner, Vixy Rae, even wrote a book on the subject (*The Secret Life of Tartan*). I ask her what signifies a 'deluxe' tartan. "Look back at the history of tartan, and the more colours within the make up of the 'sett' design, the more affluent you were," she says. "So the Rob Roy tartan is pretty simple, with its two colours, while the Ogilvie of Airlie tartan has six colour changes. That is a very complex sett design and would have been considered for the higher echelons of Scottish society."

Tartan can be woven in a very fine yarn, or come in silk and cashmere for a luxurious sheen and texture. "One of the most impressive qualities of tartan I have seen was in the Stewart Christie archive and was a pure cashmere woven by Johnstons of Elgin, from around 1952," Rae remembers. "Johnstons still weave some wonderful cashmeres, but this one was bright and vivid and particularly thick. Strangely, it was for tartan trews, which would have been really cosy, but not especially durable."

Though tartan is synonymous with Scottish heritage, its roots have been traced to the Iron Age and such far-flung lands as Egypt, the Alps, the Himalayas, Japan, and China, not all of which had trade routes with one another. The Cherchen Man, a 3,000-year-old mummy found in the Taklaman Desert in Xingian in northwest China, happened to be wearing a natty pair of tartan-like leggings. This suggests that wherever that weaving was developed, it came from a drive to create with vibrant colour and pattern.

Queen Victoria was a particularly enthusiastic fan of tartan, and of Scotland in general: "I think the Highlanders



are the finest race in the world," she declared. Much of the romanticism surrounding tartan aesthetics can be traced back to Prince Albert's and her passion for her 'Dear Paradise', the Balmoral estate. Yet it was the British Government that had banned the wearing of Highland garb such as trews, kilts, shoulder belts and tartan with The Dress Act of 1746. Though generally believed to be a way of bringing warrior clans under control after the Jacobite Uprisings, this argument does not stand up to closer scrutiny. Plenty of clans had supported the British Monarchy, or kept out of the conflict. So why did the Sassenachs, as the Scots called the English, ban it?

Professor Hugh Cheape is the expert on this subject: author of *Tartan: The Highland Habit*, he co-curated a seminal tartan exhibition at the Fashion Institute of Technology in New York and in 2017 was awarded an MBE for services to Scottish cultural education and traditional music. He notes that most literature on tartans has had 'Anglocentric' sources; put those aside and what emerges about Highland culture between 1400-1800 is the sense of an independent people with their own lively trade routes through Ireland, France, Spain, the Middle East, and beyond. The tartan of *Boisdale Life's* Editor & Chief, who hails from Clan Ranald, with a chieftanship passed

Linda Evangelista models top-to-toe tartan for the Vivienne Westwood 'Anglomaniac' collection, Autumn/Winter 1993. Above: John Brown, personal attendant to Queen Victoria, c.1850



From top: Designer Alexander McQueen with Sarah Jessica Parker at the Met Gala in 2006; shoes from Vivienne Westwood's 1993 'Anglomania' collection; tartan weaving in Lochcarron, Wester Ross

through the Boisdale Clan, is apparently from Barcelona!

Rather than following clan guidelines, tartan weaving was about creating the brightest and the best. Vibrant reds were desirable as they were tricky and expensive to make: Analysis of an 18th-century length of tartan from Glencoe reveals cochineal dye from Mexico, not native Highland plants. Tartan culture was diverse, flamboyant, in your face, and fun. The Dress Act set out to break spirits rather than clanships and, alas, as that generation of weavers died, they took much of their knowledge with them.

The irrepressible fabric rebounded in the early 19th century, with a pageant organised by Sir Walter Scott. In 1822, King George came to the Scottish capital – the first British monarch to visit in 172 years. Scott decided that a gathering of clan chieftans in the more flamboyant, traditional 'belted plaids' (swathes of tartan held in place with a belt, rather than kilts) would display unity and look spectacular at the Highland Ball that closed the pageant. A frenzied scrabbling for individual clan tartans ensued. Countless letters of enquiry were sent to the William Wilson & Son mill because it had continued to operate through the ban, and so had the most reliable archive. "If you can't find ours, make it up," was the general gist of these letters.

Sir Walter Scott had pulled off a PR coup, ensuring tartan's future: The public wanted to wear it, decorate with



it, and learn about it, and The Highland Society of London was happy to oblige, for in 1815 it had collected sample tartans from clans all over the Highlands, sealed with the signature of their chief. The very act of classifying the patterns made them covetable,

The public wanted tartan – to wear it, decorate with it, and learn about it

helping revive the Highland economy, which had suffered dreadfully since the wars and clearances.

This heritage lives on in brands such as Burberry, which incorporated tartan into the lining of its trench coats in the late 1910s. But tartan is also punk, grunge, and sex. Vivienne Westwood is synonymous with this aesthetic – her boutique, *Seditionaries* (1976-1980), kitted out The Sex Pistols in fetishwear and clashing tartans, while her 'Anglomania' collections of the 1990s saw the supermodels of the day striding down the catwalk in kilts, knee-high

socks, vertiginous platforms, and plush, tartan silks that married Victorian with burlesque silhouettes. Far cleaner-looking than Johnny Rotten, but still with a rebellious edge.

Tartan mystique was celebrated by Alexander McQueen, too, whose 'Highland Rape' collection (1995) featured the red and black McQueen tartan, with models staggering down the runway as if brutalised, glassy-eyed, with breasts exposed through slashes in the fabric. It was a divisive moment in fashion: McQueen was lambasted for objectifying women and trivialising rape, but he had been exploring his Scottish roots and was portraying the rape of Scotland by England. Watching films of the show still stirs a visceral sense of unease, the slashed clothing and models' demeanour channelling the designer's anger about an era of history often forgotten or glossed over.

Today, tartan is a delightfully mixed bag. Whether referencing Bonnie Prince Charlie, Kurt Cobain, or Cher from *Clueless*, there are no rules (unless you want to wear Balmoral tartan, restricted to royalty). You can even design your own tartan online. Rae suggests starting with a tried and tested family sett and playing with the colours, while Cheape suggests choosing what looks best rather than trying to reflect your Gaelic roots. Indecisive ladies could buy a kilt from Le Kilt, which mixes different patterns together in one.

Ignore the rules: A fabric that has always been about expression, rebellion, and fun, tartan can never be tamed. **B**

EVAN AGOSTINI / GETTY

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SMOKIN'!

Mike Edwards isn't just a trophy-winning athlete, he's also one of Britain's most creative entrepreneurs, with a new line of cigars filling fumidors around the world. **By Dominic Midgley**

When Mike Edwards won the high-jump event at the British Indoor Athletics Championship in Birmingham in 2018, he took to the podium with a bottle of champagne and a cigar. Not the usual accessories of a top-class athlete, you might think, but then, Edwards, 30, has an unusual backstory.

He started following the champagne-and-cigar tradition when he won an athletics scholarship to study marketing at the University of Alabama. The Alabama athletes take their rivalry with nextdoor Tennessee so seriously that, whenever they emerge victorious, they celebrate with bubbly and a stogie.

Since then, this son of a Jamaican father and Nigerian mother has taken his love of the King of Smokes to a new level with the creation of what he calls the UK's first black-owned cigar line. And the good news is that Boisdale's Randal Macdonald has arranged for Edwards' Aireyys brand to go on sale at all Boisdale restaurants from 10 December.

"Randal is world-renowned for his unique restaurants and quirky style and, as we're both mavericks, I think together we can definitely bring some new flair to the market," Edwards says.

While the 6ft 6in Edwards is currently in training for the Tokyo Olympics (whenever the pandemic lets them take place), if anyone can combine life as an Olympian with running a business, it's him.

"Athletics is cut-throat, and there aren't many of us who are contracted to Adidas or Nike," he says. "As a student, I worked three part-time jobs, and still managed to train twice a day."

These days he's combining sports training with marketing his range of cigars and adapting to his new role as a father: Edwards and his wife, Perri Shakes-Drayton, a gold-medal winning 400m runner, recently had a son. But Mike Edwards has always been an entrepreneur at heart and conscious that an athlete's time at the top is strictly limited. So, three years ago he resolved to make the boutique cigar business his second career.

He reflects, "I started out very humble. I picked up a few online courses for beginner cigar rollers and started playing around with different wrappers, binders and fillers. I was very inquisitive, so I called a few factories in New York in late 2016 and after visiting one in Manhattan I started mixing and blending and came up with my very own cigar, called 'Black Label'."

In the early days, he made all his cigars himself, marketing his product on social media. "I posted live videos of me rolling cigars and my supporters enjoyed the vibe so much they would share my posts and it just grew naturally from there," he says. Then I started getting booked for weddings and small gatherings and before I knew it I was touring the US visiting cigar lounges, talking about my experiences and giving cigar etiquette lessons.

"It was a rollercoaster. One thing led to another and I was soon appearing in magazines like *Tobacco Business* for being the first black-owned cigar line."

Edwards began manufacturing in New York using tobacco from the Dominican Republic. Within two years, he had won the endorsement of leading cigar connoisseurs, such as Steve Harvey, the US TV host who has twice appeared on the cover of *Cigar Aficionado*. As Edwards says, "When he gives you the nod that your cigar is a great cigar, it really speaks volumes."

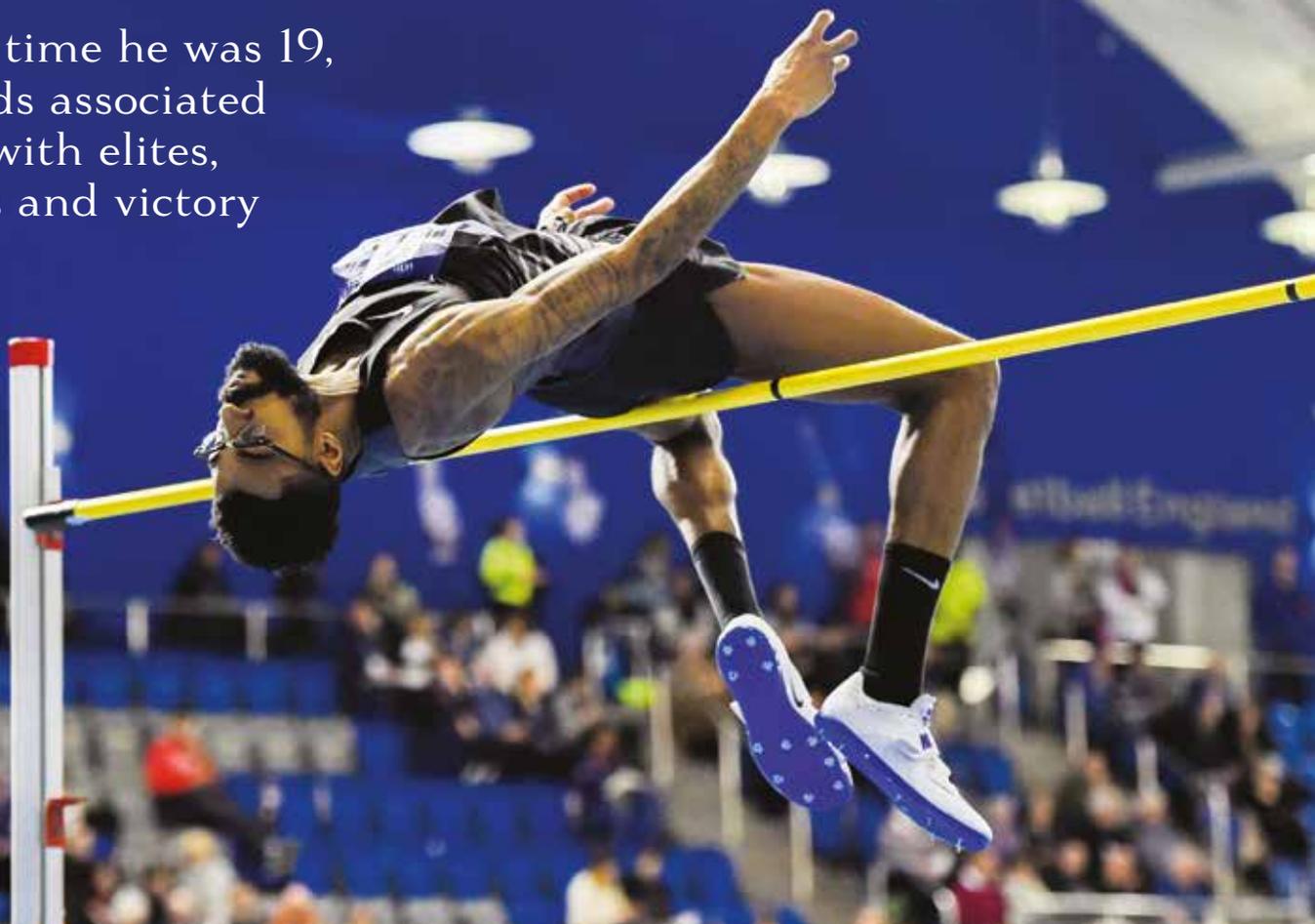
Things took off for him in the UK thanks to that memorable appearance in Birmingham. "When I won the British Championship and went on to the podium with my 'Victory' cigar, and posed for the press, I received some positive and – it has to be said – some negative coverage, but there's no such thing as bad publicity, right?"

The 'Victory' brand is his signature line. A 60-ring gauge number, it is the fattest cigar in his range and comes in a bright red box that borrows its aesthetic

Opposite and below: Mike Edwards enjoys a cigar from his own brand, Aireyys, at the Dome Hotel in Abuja, Nigeria



By the time he was 19, Edwards associated cigars with elites, success and victory



from the packaging of trainer brands like Nike. Edwards notes that leading black sportsmen such as Michael Jordan, LeBron James and Usain Bolt are all cigar enthusiasts. A single cigar costs £23; 11 are £230; and 20 are £401.

While Edwards honed his cigar expertise as an adult, his fondness for cigars dates back to his childhood. His father maintained a modest collection of cigars and would regularly light up when his mates came round.

By the time he was 19, the boy from the inner-city Manchester district of Moss Side, whose family moved to Florida when he was 10, associated cigars with elites, success and victory.

Like all the best relationships, his link to Boisdale was forged over a boozy dinner just before the first lockdown. After being introduced by a mutual friend, Edwards sent samples to Ranald Macdonald, who enjoyed them so much he invited him to dinner.



This page: Edwards in the Men's High Jump Final at the 2018 British Athletics Indoor Championships; bubbly and a cigar for his Men's Triple Jump win

"Boisdale is going to be our first big promoter," Edwards says. "Our first event will be in February 2020. I sell mainly to an online customer presence and we typically deliver within five to seven days worldwide. Our presence is felt more in the US, where the cigar culture is more inviting. There are more lounges there and so the pool of cigar smokers is much larger. Here the laws on smoking indoors mean that fewer people smoke outside the home."

Apart from growing his cigar brand, Edwards is looking forward to a trip to his beloved Jamaica next year. Like his father, Edwards' wife Perri has Jamaican roots, and they are planning a big family reunion in the cultural capital of the Caribbean, a country they both love for its beautiful beaches and vibrant food scene.

Meanwhile, he has his cigars to enjoy. "I would say that if you can find the time, there's no better way to unwind than to enjoy a cigar, clear your mind and recharge." **B**

The Aireyys Cigar Dinners, hosted by Mike Edwards and Ranald Macdonald, feature a sumptuous three-course menu with cocktails, fine wine, a premium spirits masterclass and two stunning Aireyys cigars. All-inclusive tickets are £149 per person. At Boisdale of Belgravia, 17 February; Boisdale of Canary Wharf, 24 February. For details, see boisdale.co.uk. To try Aireyys cigars at home, visit aireyyscigars.com.

ON THE MENU

FOOD / DRINK / PRODUCERS / RESTAURANTS / RACONTEURS

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Damien McCrystal campaigns for the return of long, leisurely dining from noon till night-time

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Valentine Warner says searching for honest, locally sourced food improves wellbeing

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GETTY



cuvée 20

brut rosé

2019
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WORLD WINE AWARDS
96
POINTS

2019
Decanter
WORLD WINE AWARDS
91
POINTS

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Eat well

WITH SITWELL



TRUE GRIT

With the world in turmoil, let's learn from our food and drink entrepreneurs, whose determination results in products that bring joy to all our lives

A theme emerges from these food pages: Determination. There is determination in the number of pages themselves – more than ever before covering food and drink – the fruits of determined lobbying by our most esteemed proprietor, Ranald – a most benign dictator, I must say. If you're a News UK underling, when Rupert Murdoch summons your presence, you're probably in for a thrashing. When Ranald asks to see you, you're in for a lunch.

And so these pages grow, with stealth and eagerness. Like the tendrils of potatoes, sprouting in secret underground, spotted only by a passing mole. As I write, the winter veg bulges gently through the soil. Once dug up and cleaned, there are few sights as joyous on a miserable day as that of

a pan of roasted veg. Think of carrots sprinkled with crushed garlic, ground coriander seeds, and black pepper, salt and olive oil. Now is not the time to delicately julienne. We need wholesome roasts, big veg, and very, very fat glasses of red wine... Riojas and Italian Nero d'Avola. The veg are determined, the wines can help make us so.

With equal determination, in South Africa, members of the Old Vine Project are preserving the Cape's heritage vines (page 60) for future generations, while in Scotland, ingenious and determined distillers are creating jobs for their communities with innovative and exquisite gins (page 64).

On page 54 you'll meet a wonderful selection of food entrepreneurs who share the wisdom of their experience. Anyone contemplating entering the culinary landscape with a good idea up their sleeve could save a fortune if they cut out this story and stick it on the fridge. "We are still on a knife edge," says Alessandro Savelli, who sends pasta and sauces through the post. His honesty is refreshing. Each of these entrepreneurs has had to battle naysayers, from banks and lenders to retailers and customers.

There's another determination that I adore. The fevered, exhausting, relentless, almost crazy lust that Valentine Warner brings to his food quests (page 52). As he describes in the most evocative and lyrical way, it's worth making your hunger an adventure. Like all of us, his life is filled with worry, yet he finds catharsis in simple joys experienced in remote towns and villages across Europe. He works for such moments. His drive to find culture and depth in food, is a lesson for us all to try harder preparing food for the table.

We must also salute the determination of a more unlikely hero: Joanna Bell (page 48). Val may risk his own safety as he arrives in unknown towns with the mad gleam of hunger in his eyes, but Joanna risks her own reputation among her contemporaries as she does that most outrageous of things: eats meat. But good luck to the girl as she tramples her way across the delicate feelings of her millennial vegan chums.

For the ultimate in determination, Damien McCrystal lunches where so many fear to tread (page 50). His lifelong campaign to preserve the liquid lunch should be taught in schools. While I try to turn Dry January into "Dry Generally", determined not to falter, I've been summoned to lunch with Ranald. I can't wait to fall off the wagon, hooting with joy. *'The Restaurant: A History of Eating Out'* by William Sitwell is out now. Shop williamshousewines.com for top tipples.



GETTY, DREAMSTIME



A MEATY ISSUE

After a brief spell as a vegetarian, **Joanna Bell** is now out and proud as a committed carnivore

Back in the pre-Corona glory days, a friend joined me for dinner at my favourite French bistro. Our custom is to order a selection of starters and side dishes. “Let’s split the boudin noir, pork filet mignon, and the foie gras,” was my simple suggestion. Then came her shocking response: “Oh, haven’t I mentioned? I’m vegan now.”

These words make me despair. It’s not the first time I’ve been saddled with a fellow millennial who’s dropped that bombshell. Sinking your teeth into the creamy brains of a calf is a lot less enjoyable under the watchful eye of a Greta Thunberg-worshipping, woke food faddist. As time wears on, more of my friends – once steadfast in their love of flesh – are turning into the crusaders we used to mock. Now I find myself stranded, as on a desert island, while veganism takes hold and seeps into the very bones of our society.

It would be no surprise to me if in the not-too-distant future carnivores are told to eat our meat outside, just as smokers were banished in 2008. Well, at least my friend could enjoy a glass of champagne with me, albeit accompanied by a lonely-looking salad. Then she asked the waitress, “Is the champagne vegan?” I thought she was joking, but the speed at which the sommelier came over suggested they’d been asked this question many times before. “May I suggest, Madame, a very nice vegan Chardonnay?” You know that society is remoulding itself into a politically correct dystopia when people expect to be served vegan fare at a French restaurant.

I have never considered myself to be a meat purist. Indeed I suffered a brief stint as a vegetarian after my auntie was attacked by a Limousin cow and died from her injuries. It

wasn’t a conscious decision, but soon after I was served medium-rare, roast beef at a restaurant in Maidenhead. The bloody mass made me recoil. You might think I would have devoured the lot as a sort of revenge. Instead, the very idea of eating cows appalled me, so I gave up beef and then all other red meat and poultry (in spite of no relatives having died after an assault from a chicken).

I desperately tried to fill the meat-shaped hole in my diet with joyless portions of soya ragu, vacuum-packed tofu, and vegetable stir-fry. I remained a stalwart vegetarian until one restaurant presented me with ‘a substitute for scallops’. The proud waitress served

I chew on soft pink flesh, relish sweet melting fat, and slurp the marrow

oyster mushrooms in teriyaki sauce, with kimchi on the side. It was desperate, tragic even, for there really is no substitute for the salty texture of pan-seared scallops.

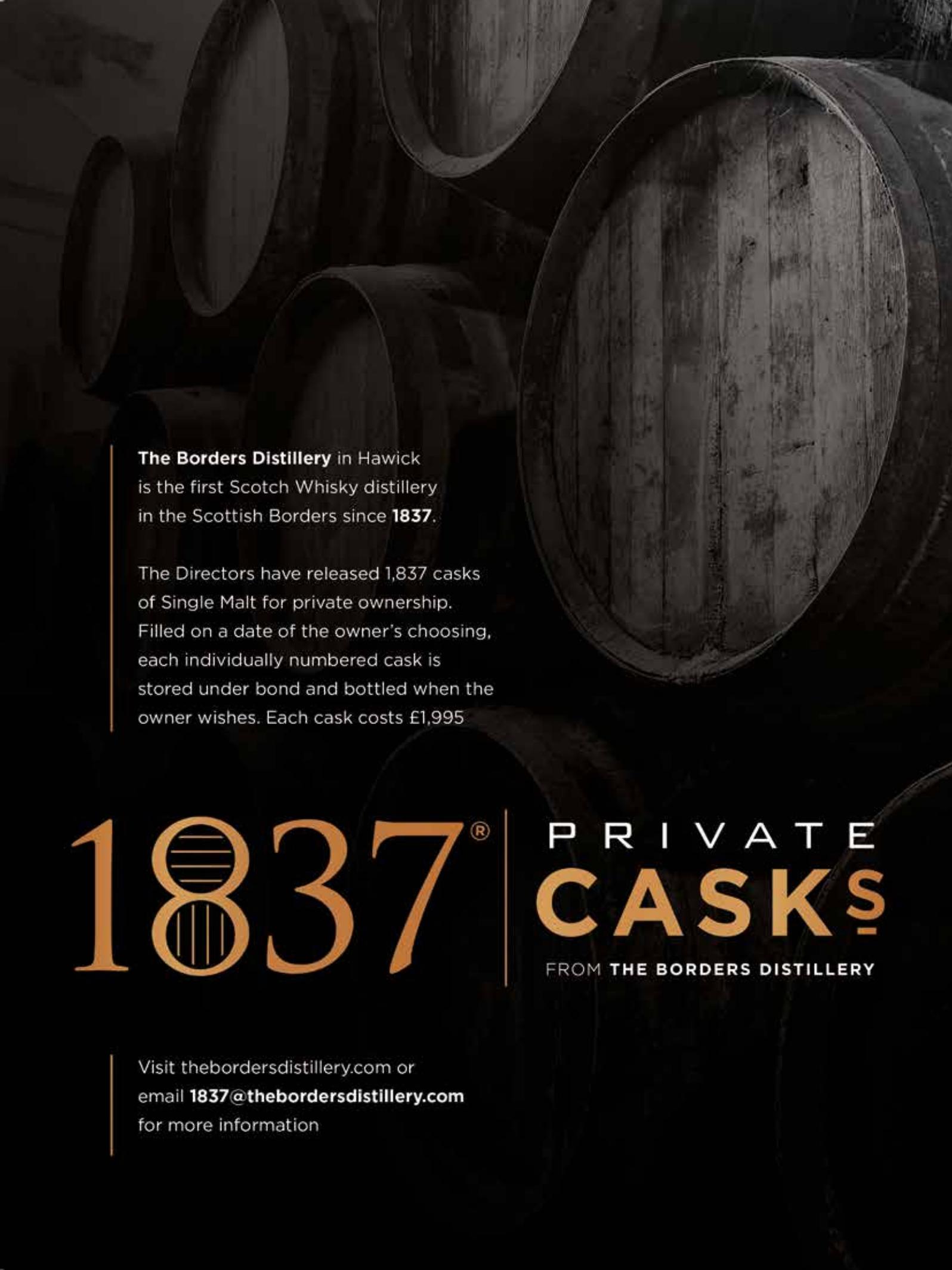
I became a vehement pescatarian. And so I gorged on shellfish; I necked Carlingford Bay oysters; and guzzled mussels and scallops. It’s a mystery to me that vegans consider shellfish culinary sacrilege. Those little blighters have no brains, and while they have a nervous system, they don’t feel pain. How can this sustainable food be unethical? It doesn’t violate any code and even pregnant women and children can eat cooked mussels and scallops for their nutrients and low mercury count.

Soon I slipped, joyfully, and started eating meat, but my new mantra was quality. Now I seek out great cuts. I ask waiters about the provenance. As a result, I enjoy well-reared beef and good poultry more than ever.

As to my new vegan friends, I tell them – as I chew on soft pink flesh, relish the sweet melting fat, and slurp the last bit of marrow from my ossobuco – that I’m happy to embrace any future role reversal and be a committed if marginalised carnivore. 

JAMIE LAU





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LOVE IN THE AFTERNOON

Nothing tops a long lunch for truly getting to know your companion, **Damien McCrystal** declares, so this hallowed, endangered institution must be preserved

Lunch. A beautiful word that promises so much. I've spent a lifetime investing time, energy, and money into it, constantly worried that those of us who lunch seriously – meaning several hours and rather more bottles – are a vanishing breed.

Twenty years ago, I decided to make an official stand to revive it. I was restaurant reviewer for the *Sunday Business* (sadly now defunct) and felt it was time to attempt a world record for lunching. At the time – and I spent a lot of time dedicated to both lunch and dinner – the former occasionally merged into the latter, and I didn't seem to need too much sleep in those days.

Herbie Skeete, then a Reuters bigwig, said his firm would sponsor it, and Marco Pierre White offered to host it at one of his restaurants. So I rang *Guinness World Records* and asked if they'd accept it as a record attempt.

The plan was to aim for 72 hours, not leaving the table except for lavatory breaks and leg stretches, and helped by teams of friends joining me in shifts. I also stipulated that fine wine was vital; I've always found that quality keeps me conscious.

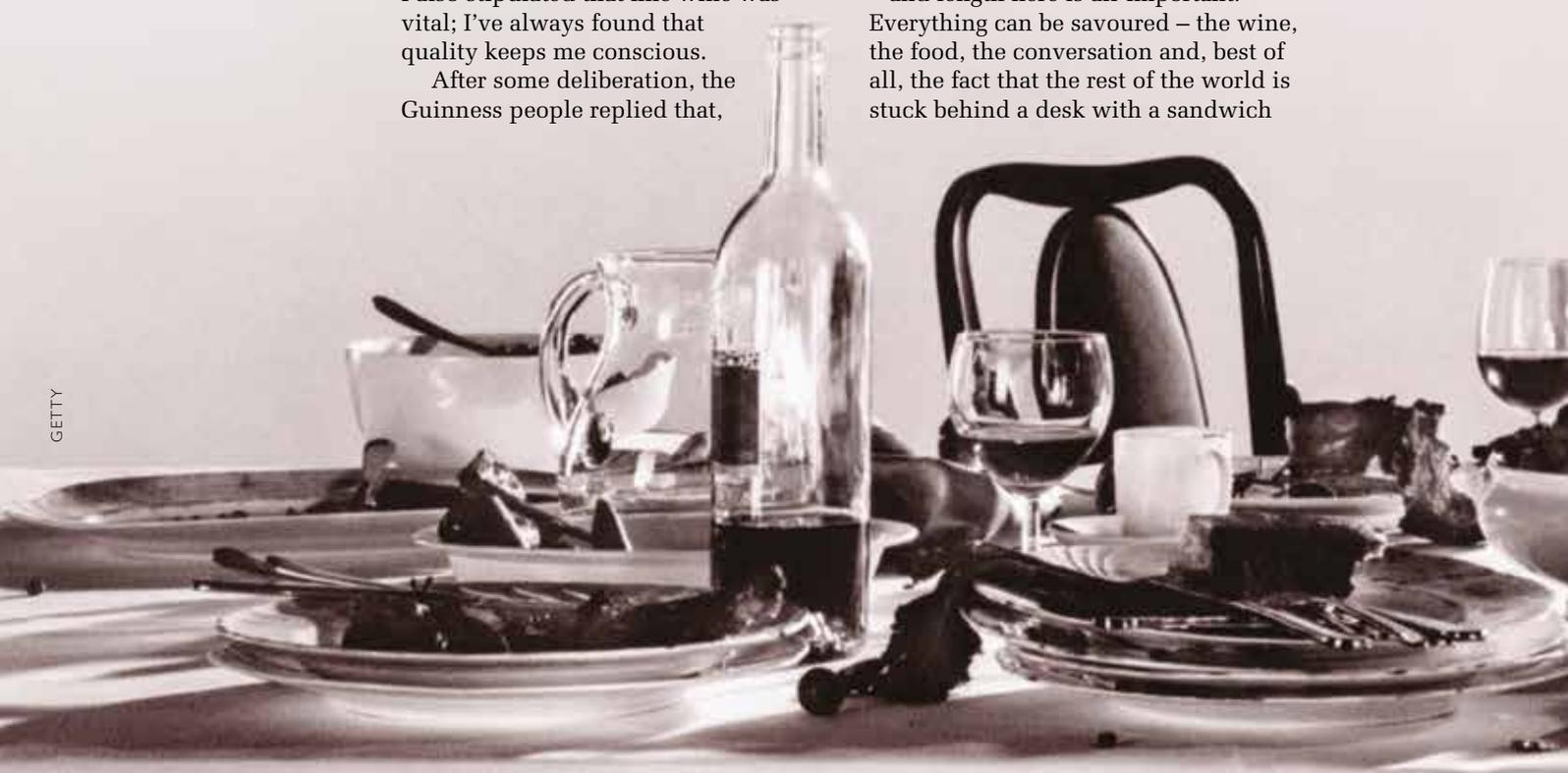
After some deliberation, the Guinness people replied that,

regretfully, they could not participate as they had recently decided not to have anything to do with record attempts that were life-threatening.

How depressing. Yet another victory for the puritans in their war against lunch – a war that had been growing in intensity since the mid-1980s, when the American banks bought so much of the City. Their work culture spread to other companies, perhaps encouraged by the evil cult of Human Resources, which seeks to outlaw fun from the workplace.

But there are establishments where you can still witness old-school lunching in action. Boisdale is a major player in this limited field, with four branches around town in which to practice. Most of the alternatives appear to be in Mayfair, notably Le Boudin Blanc in Shepherd's Market, Bellamy's off Berkeley Square, Langan's Brasserie off Piccadilly, and Mews of Mayfair near Bond Street.

They are all popular with property-industry folk and hedge funders. They order expensive wine in quantity and seem untroubled by the passing of time – and length here is all-important. Everything can be savoured – the wine, the food, the conversation and, best of all, the fact that the rest of the world is stuck behind a desk with a sandwich



GETTY

from Pret. It heightens the enjoyment if it is dark by the time lunch is over.

In my days of restaurant reviewing, 15-hour lunches were quite commonplace – probably two per week – and 18-hour lunches were not a rarity. On one occasion, Bruce Anderson – the enormous journalist (in media stature and frame) – and I were having lunch at the Savoy Grill (before it was sold to a succession of owners). We started with gin at the bar, moving into the dining room for lunch, with a drop of Chablis and a magnum of claret, before going upstairs to the American Bar for port, of which we shared 50 glasses. The bill was £550 (about £800 today), which seemed very reasonable, all things considered. It would have been more but I had a party to get to.

The evening ended in minor disgrace, which brings me to another observation: It is not the drink that tips one over the edge, but the taxi ride between venues. Trust me. If you stay in one place you'll be fine; if you take the session elsewhere, it will end badly.

Let me illustrate the truth of these words with an example of what happened to me after one lunch at Le Gavroche. As I was leaving at about 4pm, a group of men recognised me

from the photograph that accompanied my restaurant column. They invited me to join them for a drink. Flattered, I accepted and when we were asked to leave at about 6pm they suggested a taxi to their gambling club. We gambled for a while, then I had the appalling idea of returning their generosity by inviting them to my club for drinks.

It was not the sort of club where raucous swearing – my new friends' chief method of communication – was encouraged. After a while the club chairman emerged and suggested we might be happier elsewhere. The group insisted I experience “a different sort of club, in our manor”, which was in the East End. It was a strip club and a pretty extreme one at that. We were immediately booked into a private room where a few strippers displayed their wares. It's really not my sort of thing, and, as the strippers merged their job titles into, er, escorts, I made my excuses and left.

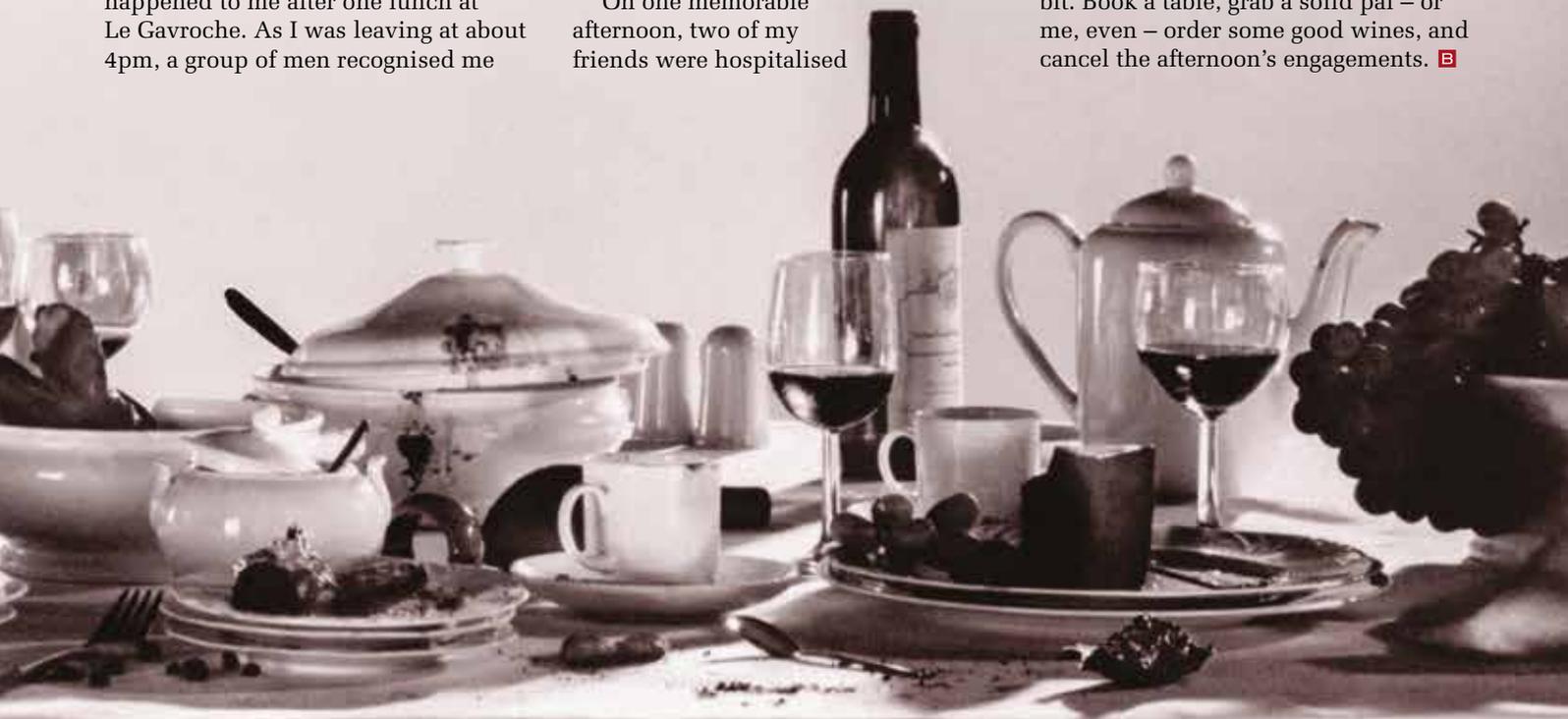
You have to be careful who you are lunching with to be sure nothing too unsavoury happens, and be confident they can maintain a strong pace without placing themselves in excessive danger.

On one memorable afternoon, two of my friends were hospitalised

after we had all been drinking flaming sambucas at Mirabelle, Marco Pierre White's place in Mayfair. We had to carry one victim to his car and into the arms of his appalled chauffeur. Minutes later, the other fell sideways off his chair and, as I tried to get him a taxi, he vomited on top of my head. (Like a great many people, he is considerably taller than me.) Outside, he fell again, his head bouncing off the pavement in Curzon Street. I cancelled the cab and ordered an ambulance, accompanying him to hospital.

When he was given the all-clear, I went home to discover that the first to collapse was in some sort of coma in a different hospital. (He was fully recovered by the next day.) My wife was furious about the hospitalisations and also about the vomit on top of my head, which had now matted in my hair.

But while I continue to plough an increasingly lonely furrow I do notice others, particularly East European ambassadors to the Court of St James, indulging in massive luncheons. Yet membership of the long-lunch club is shrinking. We are close to achieving endangered-species status. So do your bit. Book a table, grab a solid pal – or me, even – order some good wines, and cancel the afternoon's engagements. **B**



MEALS ON FEELS

The deliciousness on your plate creates sense memories that last a lifetime and feed heart and soul, says **Valentine Warner**



Fred, my father, once got lost with a group of friends on a walking holiday in the French Pyrenees. They were, he told me, “lost in mists as thick as theatre curtains, with likely a long fall but a feet away”. “Listen, all of you,” he said boldly to the group, “sit tight and I’ll soon be back.” And he disappeared into the swirling fog.

A few hours later he returned. He looked at his huddled band of weary septuagenarians and said, “Follow me.”

Thirty minutes later they arrived at a small farm where they were greeted by an elderly woman. “A little, aproned Mrs Tiggy-Winkle, hunched like a croissant,” as Fred put it.

She led the bedraggled party to her barn. Set within was a long table laden with cutlery, bottles of wine, boards of cheese, cured meats, pots of beans, and large bowls of *garbure* – a local dish of soup made from cabbage and duck.

Mrs Tiggy-Winkle was surprised to find herself nourishing this group of anoraked Brits. And doubtless similarly startled a few hours previously when my dad had emerged from the mist and knocked on her wooden door to explain the situation. But his French was always impeccable. And how clever he was to root out such comfort for him and his friends – the warm embrace of hospitality from a stranger; rescued from misadventure and shivering cold.

I truly cherish experiences like this, and perhaps I’ve inherited Fred’s talent to find or at least relish such moments – and the cuisine of international grandmothers. With it comes that sense of place. I would always wish to be dining in a barn in the forest of the Pyrenees rather than enveloped in rich fabric in a restaurant that shimmers beneath the glimmer of Michelin stars.

Such lofty food, memorable for its painstaking fiddling, might be tasty, edible art, but it is so often joyless. Ponder instead the aftermath of a lunch in a town square in France; a paper tablecloth stained by a lunch of delicious, gutsy simplicity. Under the shade of plane trees, the warm breeze carries those curious scents of a French town; of Pernod, tobacco, cooking, and

dust. And that lunch: There was fish soup, egg mayonnaise, pâtés and cornichons, fresh goat's cheese rolled in ash, and quails roasted with garlic and Armagnac. Then there's the unceremonious delivery; that plonking down of dishes onto the table that only amplifies the deliciousness. The delivery is casual because of the confidence in how good the food is. And the curing therapy of such an experience is that each mouthful in pushes one worry out.

I eat, I drape my arms across the back of my chair, and the waiter pours me another glass of wine. This is "*à la ficelle*" – you pay for what you drink. Perfect for when you're on your own and might want more than a small carafe but less than a bottle.

In Greece I've gobbled crude sausage with beet tops cured in vinegar; in Mexico, by the sea, simple crab tacos with a crate of beer. In Norway I ate waffles with fresh cloudberries.

As for talking to chefs – those smart London restaurants where the waiter ushers in a privileged few for an audience with the genius at the pass... Give me broken conversation with a Greek widow about her octopus and chickpeas or an unkempt fat guy in a dirty T-shirt in Assam gesticulating wildly about his fiery curry in a language I don't understand.

In fact, let me question a cook rather than chef any day. Perhaps it's because I'm also a cook, not a chef. And I'm old-fashioned European in my shopping habits. I shop every day to cook every day. The very gathering or purchasing from shops or my wild surrounds means I need to understand my countryside, my geography, and my moods. My life is a cookbook. I look back through the chapters where every bite is a moment; some happy, some sad, but all vivid in my mind because they are enveloped by food. I hear the clatter and scraping of chairs, the smell of charcoal, the noise of cafés and trattorias, the bustle of food stalls and road-side stop-offs.

In Europe I seek out remoter places; towns, villages, or tiny hamlets where

there is still a strong sense of one's community and roots. And there I find a deep joy of food and cooking. Eat locally with locals and, as you look for ingredients, you gather an integral understanding of the flora and fauna.

Where there is economy by necessity there is depth. Dishes that are born of poverty become an affirmation of life; their gathering, cooking, and their care make a meal so much more meaningful. When life is tough, good taste is almost a spiritual experience. Especially when people eat together, often in a series of celebrations; a whole village sharing particular treats of a season.

And so the happy chapters of my cookbook are filled with paper plates of cep omelettes or chestnut pancakes. Or a bowl filled with Garonne lampreys that were cooked in an old bath. Then, Ah!, for those moments when I'm cooking in new surroundings, in the vicinity of a market where I've set eyes on piles of beans and artichokes,

In this mad, violent world of instant everything, food is my medicine

mountains of crevettes, and then raced home with baskets of oysters, red mullets, and sausage. And then cooking where I'm lost in a fizz of excitement. Second nature kicks in and, at last, I'm as happy as I can possibly be.

Congrats to the chef proffering the "sincerity of a celeriac" in a single teaspoon, but give me a pile of sea urchins and some scissors. I'm thrilled he's tweezering tiny edible flowers onto some fish-skin crackling, but pass me the donkey and walnut salami.

Recently I was a few hours north of Barcelona, where my children live with their mother, growing up to the sound of goat bells. So I can be close but independent on my visits, I have a tiny rental with thick granite walls and postage stamp-sized windows. It's furnished with locally-bought carpets



Chef Valentine Warner believes sourcing seasonal ingredients enhances your experience of cooking

and lamps. And there's a restaurant next door. I've spent the day with my darling children and now I'm alone. I sit down and drink a Mahou beer from Madrid, and then another. I'm in a small square with a fountain, and some local kids are racing around it. It's February but it's warm. A plate of cardoons cooked with salt cod in a white sauce arrives with a basket of bread; very basic and very delicious. Then comes a sharp little salad with walnuts and poached quince, and a board of meat cured by the proprietress. Almost undone by all this, I still accept a small platter of roast rabbit and chips with aioli. The meal ends with coffee.

Deadlines, maintenance, mortgage, a dying car, ambition: I couldn't care less about any of it. My lonely lunch has been a joy, the food generous and delicious. I'm simply happy. My life without such occasions would mean losing untold companionship, fun, surprise, adventure, and misadventure.

Yes, in food lies all my interest and consuming joy. In this mad, violent world of instant everything, it is my medicine. To sit at a simple table and be handed a small dish of tiny lilac olives with a bowl of rustic ribollita soup by an old, arthritic hand, my faith in humanity is restored. My mind calmed. My life saved. ■

Valentine Warner's latest book, *'The Consolation of Food'*, is out now (Pavilion Books, £20)

PUTTING **MONEY WHERE YOUR MOUTH IS**

Four UK entrepreneurs share their adventures in Foodland with Ed Cumming



LAURIE TIMPSON

SAVERNAKE KNIVES (est. 2017)

Your mission? “To make knives that can be infinitely tailored to the individual without costing the earth.”

Your opportunity? “The absence of knives for the market between the tattooed Japanese-knife wielder and the prosaic Wüsthof workhorse user.”

Your failure? “Persevering with a bad website for too long when we’re an e-commerce business!”

Your triumph? “Our blades were rated in the top 2.5% of all knives tested by CATRA (the Cutlery & Allied Trades Research Association), the industry standards body for ISO EN 8442-2 [Table Cutlery/Flatware Testing].”

Your great surprise? “Working with GF Smith papers to make amazing handles, aesthetically and functionally.”

Your great anxiety? “Finding and retaining top-class people when we’re based in the middle of rural Wiltshire.”

Your advice to budding entrepreneurs? “Identify a market with a need that you can fulfil rather than create something amazing but wonder how to market it!”

ALEX SAVELLI PASTA EVANGELISTS (est. 2016)

Your mission? “To create a new, premium artisanal fresh pasta brand.”

Your opportunity? “Pasta had seen little to no disruption for 20 years!”

Your failure? “We have gone from 30 portions a week in 2016 to more than 10,000 now, but we need to recalibrate the business to be more profitable.”

Your triumph? “Going from 30 portions a week in 2016 to more than 10,000 now!”

Your great surprise? “That although it has been amazing to be able to create a brand in just two years, we are still on a knife edge.”

Your great anxiety about the future? “Making e-commerce work is difficult, because the costs of marketing are high. We need to become a more balanced business.”

Your advice to budding entrepreneurs? “The time is now, and you might as well get cracking.”





CLAIRE BLAMPIED SACLA UK
(est. 1939, ITALY; 1991, UK)

Your mission? “To make life taste better by being more authentically Italian.”

Your opportunity? “The gap in the market was really for pasta sauce. At the time, olive oil was for your ears and you bought it in a chemist.”

Your failure? “The biggest challenge to a new business is being ahead of the times and trying something the market isn’t ready for.”

Your triumph? “When we started out in the UK, customers didn’t know they wanted pesto. Now we have a 50% share of a £45 million market.”

Your great surprise? “Our ‘free-from’ pesto was a surprise bestseller, thanks to the vegan movement.”

Your great anxiety? “Changing consumer and shopping habits.”

Your advice to budding entrepreneurs? “You need to be curious and hopeful and dream big.”

RAISSA & JOYCE DE HAAS

DOUBLE DUTCH MIXERS (est. 2015)

Your mission? “To never drink dull. We founded Double Dutch after realising drinks could and should taste better.”

Your opportunity? “My sister and I were frustrated with the limited selection of high-end mixers, so at university we started experimenting with making our own syrups and soda.”

Your failure? “Starting a business is about trial and error. We’ve had so many ups and downs, but we’ve learned a lot from picking ourselves up and trying again.”

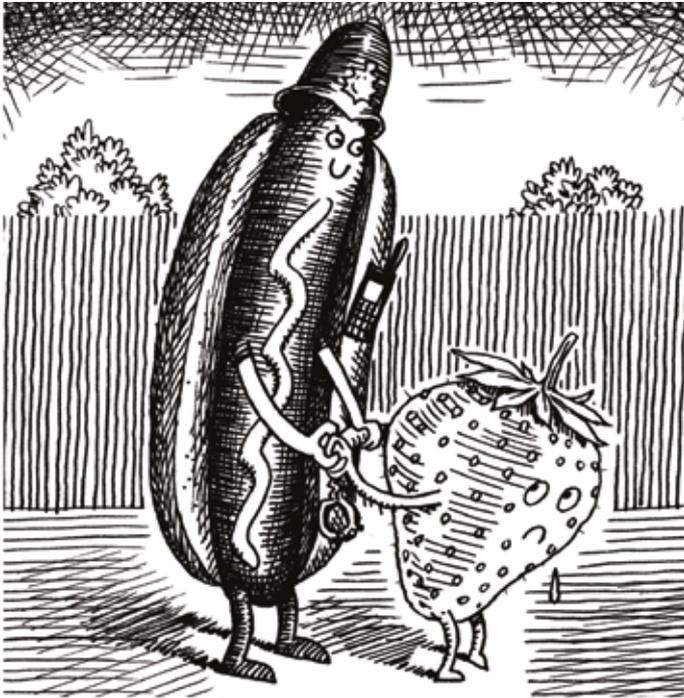
Your triumph? “Selling our ten-millionth bottle was satisfying, but so is raising investment and being recognised by people we look up to, such as Sir Richard Branson.”

Your great surprise? “We’ve discovered plenty of unexpected flavour pairings, but we could never have predicted how open people have been to sharing their experiences.”

Your great anxiety? “As producers of low-sugar, all-natural soft drinks mixers, we are in a good place to meet current trends, and we can help venues meet today’s no/low revolution.”

Your advice to budding entrepreneurs? “If you have found something that you love and you can’t imagine life without trying, then do it.”





OVER EATER

Hospitality-industry insider **Joe Warwick** lifts the lid on the ‘poison pan letters’ written by the food police on the international restaurant-review site, Eater

July 2017: A warehouse venue called The Store, just off the Strand. The usual collection of London food-media types and liggers who never miss the opening of a champagne bottle has gathered to guzzle and snack, gratis. They’re here for the launch of the London chapter of Eater, the first site outside North America for the online media brand that covers the restaurant scene across the US and Canada. Despite throwing money at proceedings (the never knowingly affordable Freuds are doing the PR), it’s a rum old do, with very few chefs of note in attendance and an atmosphere as flat as a failed soufflé.

The speech from the New York-based boss doesn’t win many friends in the room, saying that London’s thriving restaurant scene does not yet have the media it deserves. A strange approach to take when surrounded by London journalists who make their living covering said restaurant scene, and who are basically being told that they and the publications they write for are a bit crap. But Eater has arrived to save us all! Everyone’s gifted a branded umbrella on the way out, presumably because, God bless you, Mary Poppins, it never stops raining in foggy old London Town.

Founded in July 2005, Eater started life as a lively blog about New York’s dining scene, later embracing Los Angeles and San Francisco and going national in 2009. It was bought by the digital-focussed Vox Media as part of a \$30 million deal in November 2013. In the early days it had an irreverent charm, with features such as ‘Deathwatch’, winning clicks

while baiting chefs and restaurateurs. But by the time it arrived in London, the parent site, like much of the American food media, was in the grip of the ‘woke’, focussing on identity politics and the industry’s #metoo moments.

No one would dispute that bad behaviour in the restaurant world deserves to be called out and that there’s a place for more serious issues alongside easily digestible news and gossip, but somewhere along the way Eater began taking itself too seriously, the cheekiness replaced by self-righteousness.

The London chapter of Eater has its own team of local contributors. It’s edited by Adam Coghlan, whose prior media experience comes as Director of Content and Communication for the low-key London Restaurant Festival. Yet despite the use of British rather than US grammar, there are jarring Americanisms. Restaurants don’t ‘close’, they are ‘shuttered’; pop-ups become ‘bricks ’n’ mortar’; critics ‘slam’ new openings; and restaurants are objectified in terms of their ‘hotness’. In the main it follows the Eater clickbait template of ‘listicles’ of random length seemingly based on nothing but the (un)qualified opinions of its supposedly diverse contributors, most of whom seem to live just East of Hackney and all hang out together in the same natural wine bars and fourth-wave coffee shops to berate the right-wing press that brought down Jeremy Corbyn. Yet despite dining out on its championing of writers from diverse backgrounds, there’s a decent amount of Oxbridge-educated, white male privilege among its senior contributors.

None of which would matter if it was fun to read, with a genuine wit as opposed to tired yet painfully self-important ‘churnalism’. Does anyone really want to read about ‘15 Excellent Restaurants to Try in Ealing’; ‘13 Great Places to Eat in Victoria and Pimlico’; or ‘11 Passable Places to Grab a Kebab in Chingford’? (I invented the last headline and, potentially, it’s the least dull of the three.)

When it’s not being preachy and worthy, or thinking it invented the concept of ‘discovering’ obscure outlets in and around the M25, an approach pioneered by the great trencherman Charles Campion back in the early Nineties, it’s delivering politically correct snark in a cack-handed fashion.

Take the row it started in April last year over the opening in Mayfair of Gordon Ramsay’s Lucky Cat, billed as an ‘Asian Eating House’. Cue charges of inauthenticity and cultural appropriation when the real crime, as anyone that’s eaten there will tell you, is that it’s just not very good; a clumsy apeing of the similarly silly pan-Asian restaurant, Sexy Fish.

Confecting controversy to garner clicks and ad revenue is the Eater modus operandi, but as a business model it’s much more palatable when served sans indignation.

When Eater arrived, London restaurant-industry insiders worried about the future of Hot Dinners – a less lavishly funded, homegrown site run almost single-handedly by the Hanly siblings – but it’s still where everyone goes to keep up with the latest openings minus the side order of Millennial angst. Restaurant watchers also read *The Infatuation*, which, despite starting Stateside and having a similar list-focused approach, has a sense of humour and conveys a love of eating out – something the divisive Eater often forgets. Perhaps post-Coronavirus, when restaurants need cheerleaders, not sneerleaders, it will finally change its tune. **E**

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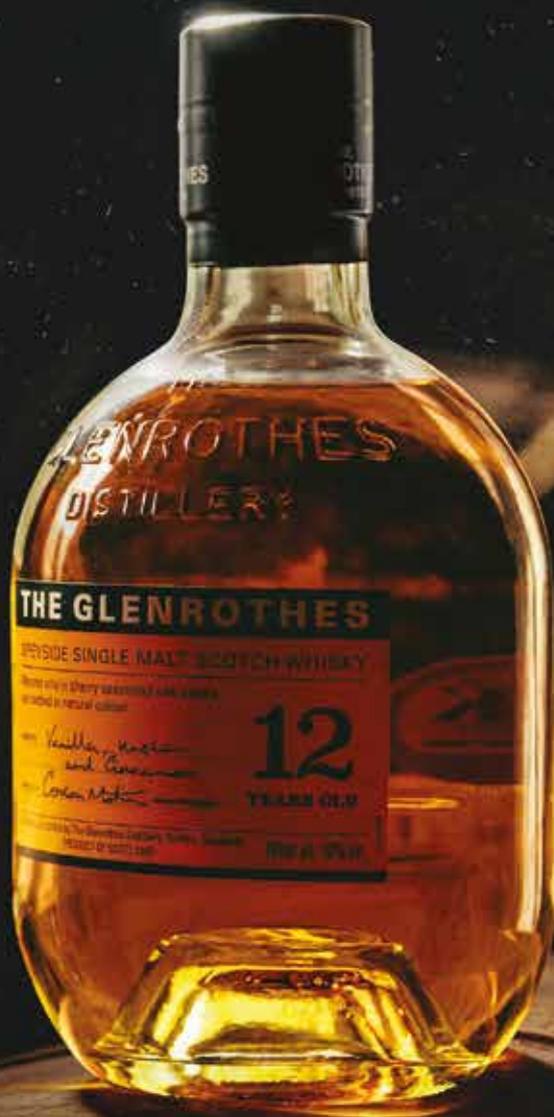
THE
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SPEYSIDE SINGLE MALT
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Introducing
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12 years old.



Matured only in our finest sherry seasoned casks.

At 12 years old, this fruity and sweet single malt is classic The Glenrothes. With vanilla at its heart, it offers up both sweet and spicy notes with melon alongside cinnamon. A whisky that perfectly expresses the style and character inherent to The Glenrothes tradition.

MAKE YOUR MARQUE

At Borders Distillery in Scotland, you can co-create your very own cask of whisky, a delighted Henry Jeffreys discovers

Every whisky lover dreams of having his very own cask of single malt. That way you can visit it at night, help yourself to a dram and whisper, "You'll never leave me, my precious." Well, I have good news and bad. The good news is that buying your very own cask of whisky has never been easier. The bad news is that you can't take it home and keep it in the shed.

One such cask offer is 1837 from The Borders Distillery in the, um, Borders region of Scotland, famed centre for tweed and cashmere. Many new distilleries offer cask schemes to raise money – there's an element of risk, so look for who's behind it. Borders was founded by John Fordyce, Tim Carton, Tony Roberts, and George Tait, who all worked at William Grant & Sons, the behemoth behind Glenfiddich. Distillery manager, Andrew Nairn, is ex-Glenkinchie. A good pedigree.

The distillery is housed in a Victorian building in Hawick, a 40-minute drive from the border with England. The region has no great whisky heritage; the last distillery closed in 1837, hence the scheme's name. But it is great barley country, with excellent water for fine Single Malt Scotch Whisky. They only use grain from nearby farms to have "more control over the raw materials," Carton says. No peat is used in the malting process. "We're not making a smoky whisky," he insists. Their wort to wash enjoys a long fermentation of around 84 hours to create lots of flavour before being double-distilled in bespoke copper pot stills built by Forsyths of Rothes. "The aim is to create a fruity floral new make," Carton explains.

This is the basis of your whisky, but there's a choice of casks: refill; ex-bourbon; ex-rye; ex-rum; all-American oak; or a European oak cask seasoned with Douro wine. Each holds around 200 litres of whisky. This costs £1,995 including up to 10 years of storage, bottling and labelling. Depending on maturation time, evaporation, those pesky angels who want their share, and bottling strength, at the end you have some 300 bottles of single malt. As no two casks are the same, it is a unique whisky. You have to pay VAT and duty on top of that (the taxman has to have his share, too), but Carton reckons you save about 50% of the cost by buying in advance.

He is explicit that this is not an investment scheme. Today the industry is booming, whisky is in great demand, and some companies project returns of 8% a year but, Carton says, "We never position as an investment. We have shareholders who are long-term visionary people." The plan is to release a single malt after six years. Carton is pleased with progress: "I was bowled over by how the two-year-old tasted; much more evolved than one might have expected." He hinted that Borders may release some limited-edition whiskies before the main event. But back to your special cask. The package includes distillery tours so you can visit your cask and whisper to it, and an app to follow its progress from the comfort of your sofa. Nearly as good as having it in the shed.

For more details visit thebordersdistillery.com or email tim.carton@thethreestillscompany.com 



COCKTAILS WITH ALICE LASCELLES

BITTERS AND TWISTED

Non-alcoholic cocktails need no longer be plain or laden with sugar. A new generation of aromatics and botanicals is taking “dry days” up a notch



A column about non-alcoholic cocktails for *Boisdale Life*? A publication I’ve always associated with red-blooded, whisky-fuelled hedonism? Well, times, as you’re no doubt grimly aware, are a-changing. Around one-fifth of the UK population profess to be teetotal. And even those of us who enjoy a dram or two are coming round to the idea that the odd bout of temperance isn’t such a bad thing.

It was once assumed that anyone who didn’t drink must have the taste of an eight-year-old. Non-alcoholic options were confined to sweet fizzy drinks, cordials, and juices. Bad for teeth, worse for morale. There are only so many pints of lime and soda a grown-up can drink.

But in the last few years the outlook has improved and the market is full of drinks for the adult palate. The choice of beers is particularly good: My favourites include Big Drop, Lucky Saint, Clausthaler Dry Hopped Lager, and anything from Athletic Brewing in the US.

For cocktails, the key is bitterness. A little bite gives a drink the structure and complexity often missing in zero-ABV recipes. Products that deliver really well are Aecorn Bitter – a Campari-like aperitif flavoured with grapefruit, orange, and bay – and Everleaf, a botanical cordial with vetiver, orange blossom, and gentian, for drinking with tonic or soda.

For this issue’s cocktail I’m using Aecorn Bitter – and the vermouth-like Aecorn Aromatic – to create a twist on one of my favourite aperitivos, the bitter-sweet Negroni Sbagliato. Literally a “bungled Negroni”, it was invented at Bar Basso in Milan, when a bartender mixed a Negroni with prosecco instead of gin. It’s a drink born of a cock-up, so why not substitute a bit more? In place of the prosecco, I’ve used sparkling cold-pressed Jasmine tea from Saicho, who also make sparkling Darjeeling and Hojicha teas with all the provenance of fine wine.

You might also like to mix 50ml of Everleaf with 100ml Saicho Darjeeling. Serve over ice, with a slice.

For a Negroni Sbagliato proper, just mix 25ml Campari and 25ml Rosso Vermouth, over ice, top with 100ml prosecco, stir, and garnish with a slice of citrus. 

SIN-FREE NEGRONI SBAGLIATO

INGREDIENTS

- 25ml Aecorn Bitter
- 25ml Aecorn Aromatic
- 100ml chilled Saicho Sparkling Jasmine Tea
- slice of orange or pink grapefruit to garnish

METHOD

Mix and serve in a large wine or rocks glass, over lots of ice.



OLD SOULS



A committed team of winemakers is preserving South Africa's heritage vines, saving them from destruction and showcasing their subtle sophistication to appreciative connoisseurs, **Graham Boynton** reports

South African wines have suddenly come of age. Despite the fact that wines have been produced in the Cape since the 17th century – long before New World rivals California and Australia – it is only over the past decade or so that they have become more accepted, and indeed critically acclaimed, in the modern world.

The reasons for this renaissance are complex, but the basic truth is that since the end of Apartheid, which had consigned the industry to half a century of isolation, the Cape's winemakers have had free access to the international wine world. Thus trends, practices, and technological advances that are swirling through vineyards from Bordeaux to Napa to Mornington Peninsula have become part of Cape viticulture. In the bad old days, the industry was so tightly and centrally regulated that winemakers had to smuggle vines into the country in their babies' nappies or down their trousers. Now everything is permissible.

I remember taking the wine writer Oz Clarke to the Cape in the late 1980s and everyone was somewhat taken aback at how unimpressed he was. The legacy of leaf roll virus, endemic in South Africa, was evident in many of the wines we tasted and Clarke left the Cape mightily underwhelmed. How things have changed. Today, respected international critics such as Jancis Robinson and Tim Atkin have recognised and rightly fêted these wines, with Robinson recently declaring that, "One of the great mysteries of the world of wine is why South African wine is not even more celebrated – the best examples offer wine lovers some of the finest value in the world today."

Many of the great historic estates – Meerlust, Kanonkop, Muratie, and more – have simply upped their game. However, there have been dramatic innovations as well as on-point marketing nous from the industry's post-Apartheid generation, led by the Swartland Revolution gang (Eben Sadie, Adi Badenhorst, David and Nadia Sadie, and Chris and Andrea Mullineux) and more recently by an initiative called the Old Vine Project (OVP), which is a not-for-profit, public benefit organisation, whose objective is to protect the Cape's historic vineyards.

First, let me explain the geography. The Cape winelands are the most visually dramatic in the world. Soaring mountain ranges and sweeping valleys, all dotted with the white-washed, gabled Cape Dutch architecture that gives the region a sense of style and historic relevance, leave Napa, Barossa and the rest trailing. This region is



Bringing in the grape harvest in South Africa. Top: Vintage bottles of Kanonkop



The dramatic backdrop to the fertile vineyards of Stellenbosch in the Western Cape province

steeped in the turbulent history of the old trading routes, the expansion of the European empires, and the colonisation of Africa. (Napoleon's favourite wine was Vin de Constance, a superb Cape sweet wine that is still being made today.)

The university town Stellenbosch is at the epicentre of the industry, but the vineyards spread far beyond, from the now-fashionable dry land region to the north called the Swartland (literally 'black land') to the cool-climate Hemel en Aarde (Heaven and Earth) Valley to the east. It is a fertile and spectacular wine region within easy driving distance of Cape Town.

The Old Vine Project was launched in 2016, with seed funding from the South African billionaire and wine-estate owner, Johann Rupert. Its purpose is to protect old vineyards and catalogue those gnarly, elderly vines (more than 35 years old) that, when correctly handled, produce small quantities of outstanding wines of character. According to the OVP's André Morgenthal, more than 45 of the Cape's wine estates that produce old vine wines have signed up. There are now more than 2,600 hectares (6,000 acres) that are this age in the Cape, but only 7% have been identified and used in existing wine brands. The rest are under threat of being dug up and replaced by younger, more productive wines or – heaven forbid! – by fruit trees.

Although Rupert was the brains behind the OVP, it was Rosa Kruger, a celebrated Cape viticulturalist and descendant of President Paul Kruger, who has been the driving force. Having catalogued most of the old vineyards and acted as a broker between the growers and the winemakers, Kruger and the OVP are hoping to push the price of grapes up from the present laughably low figure of US \$180 a tonne to \$900 a tonne. This compares with \$7,000 a tonne in California and explains to some extent why South Africa's wines are so inexpensive compared to Australia's, New Zealand's and the USA's, and also why 60% of Cape wine businesses are either losing money or financially on the margins.

However, enthusiasts argue that our relationship to wine is one of passion rather than consumption, and the romance of the old vines is utterly compelling. As former



Winemakers had to smuggle vines into the country in nappies or down their trousers »

foreign correspondent-turned-winemaker John Platter (of *Platter's South African Wine Guide*) says, "Who doesn't like the idea of sipping from the struggles of forlorn old vines, the more twisted and gnarly the better, stuck in a far-flung vineyard, that's defied everything nature and man has thrown at it for a half-century or more?"

I recently visited several OVP vineyards and would highly recommend any reader to follow suit. The first two – DeMorgenzon and Waterford – are among the most beautiful, visitor-friendly estates in the Cape. They charge around £4 for tastings and you can swirl and sip their wines while gazing at the Cape's wonderful mountains. And among the many reds and whites they're producing are old-vine Chenins Blancs that are beyond reproach.

Carl van der Merwe, DeMorgenzon's CEO and cellarmaster, tells me that The Divas – the special cuvée old-vine Chenin – came about almost by accident, after the *Wine Spectator's* then-correspondent Matt Kramer declared the first vintage (2013) one of the most brilliant white wines he had ever tasted, and urged van der Merwe to provide samples for the New York Wine Experience. He did and it won rave reviews. He has since produced a 2017 vintage, the current release, which is *Platter's Guide's* Chenin Blanc of the Year. They've only made 2,000 bottles and 800 magnums of the 2017 Divas vintage, so it is worth visiting the DeMorgenzon Estate for a bottle or two.

Across the valley at Kevin Arnold's Waterford Estate, I join a wine tasting with 30 other visitors, led by Arnold himself. This is probably one of the Cape's most sophisticated wine tourism destinations, with lunches and tastings held in the elegant courtyard of the Italianate winery and four-wheel drive 'safaris' offered to guests in the mountain vineyards.

Arnold established his reputation as a winemaker at Delheim and Rust en Vrede before he and Jeremy Ord launched Waterford in 1998. He is now one of the Old Vine Project's most outspoken advocates: "I hate the description 'good value South African wines' because it sounds like bargain basement," he says. "The OVP is an initiative that has taken the position of upselling our wines. We have a product and a destination that is world class, and the OVP is realising its true worth."



DeMorgenzon vineyard's CEO and cellarmaster, Carl van der Merwe

The Anthonij Rupert estate, Franschhoek Valley, acquired by the Rupert family in 1969



My final stop is in the Swartland. You need to book a tasting appointment at The Sadie Family Wines, for Sadie is arguably the country's most brilliant winemaker. His old vine series covers a range of varietals (Chenin, Cinsault, Grenache, Tinta Barocca, Semillon, Palomino et al), which Sadie, a laid-back surfer, describes in neat turns of phrase: "Cinsault is like your brother in jail... you can talk about it in the privacy of your home but not at parties." However, his humorous exterior masks a serious winemaker whose selection of single vineyard wines from old vine parcels rescued from extinction justifies the very existence of the Old Vine Project and proves that these South African wines are top class. **B**

SIX OF THE BEST

**DEMORGENZON THE DIVAS
CHENIN BLANC 2017**

One of the finest Chenins in the Cape, if you can find it. Next vintage 2020.

**WATERFORD OLD VINE
CHENIN BLANC 2018**

Elegant, creamy, beautifully balanced. From 65-year-old vines.

SADIE FAMILY WINES SOLDAAT 2018

Grenache noir from Piekenierskloof – arguably the top South Africa Grenache terroir.

DAVID AND NADIA ELPIDIOS 2017

Swartland-sourced, five-varietal Rhône-style red blend led by Carignan and Shiraz.

LEEU PASSANT DRY RED 2017

A collector's wine from Chris and Andrea Mullineux.

NAUDÉ OLD VINE CINSAULT 2015

A stunning wine that Ian Naudé rightly describes as "Young at heart with an old soul".



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ARGENTINA

LIKE ALL GREAT EXPLORERS,
OUR WINES KNOW NOTHING
ABOUT BORDERS.

2019
NEW WORLD WINERY
OF THE YEAR
WINE ENTHUSIAST



FORGING THE PATH OF ARGENTINE WINEMAKING SINCE 1883



Diving for sugar kelp off the Isle of Harris. Below: The island's Social Distillery, where seven distillers make whisky and gin, welcoming 30,000 visitors a year; Isle of Harris gin has a "dry, maritime note"

SPIRITED AWAY

Whisky may be the tartan tippie, but innovative Scottish distillers are challenging that supremacy with an explosion of new gin brands that stand out at the bar, a merry **Khalil Khairallah** reports

There's a new term for the cheeky state of G&T drinkers: sartonic. And there's a lot of them. Gin has enjoyed a meteoric rise in recent years, with UK sales tripling in the past decade – and it's not just big players like Gordon's and Hendrick's riding the crest. Craft distilleries have been spreading like thistledown, taking their cue from the successful Sipsmith, established in 2009, and the premium tonics elevating G&T to an art form. But the hundreds of new gins on the market can only survive by differentiating themselves in a crowded field.

Canny Scots, who get the jitters when too far away from a copper still or its contents, have taken up the challenge with vigour – and



humour. So along with intriguing new flavours, colour-changing gins, and bizarre bottle shapes, who could resist the almost eponymous El:gin or even (clears throat) Glaswegin?

The Scottish Gin Society was established in 2016 to build a community of gin lovers in the belief that Scottish gin would thrive and ultimately challenge the country's other national drink. In 2019 alone, it recorded almost 40 new gin brands and an incredible 25 new distilleries, which have been added to its gin map.

"While there is always the threat that the gin bubble will suddenly burst, it's unlikely that this will happen any time soon," the Society's Alison Higgins says. "What is clear is that gin producers will have to continue to evolve and innovate to grab the public's attention if they are to grow and survive."

The challenge is being met from backyard distilling operations to whole-island efforts.

Perhaps the most extraordinary gin story is one that has involved an entire community in a social enterprise. The Isle of Harris in the Outer Hebrides is an ancient and elemental place, exposed to wind and waves, with high hills, open moorland, beautiful golden sands, and rugged shores. Its tweed may be famous, but like most remote places in Scotland it has suffered from depopulation as traditional industries have declined.

The Isle of Harris Distillery was opened in 2015 in the small harbour village of Tarbert and was the vision of Anderson "Burr" Bakewell, who wanted to create employment for generations to come and support the fragile local economy. Five local distillers and two young apprentice distillers make a single malt whisky as well as a gin, and the Social Distillery, as it is called locally, opens to the public for gatherings, book readings, and other cultural events, a large peat fire always burning in its main public space. It now has 40 staff and last year some 30,000 international visitors came to the distillery.

Burr Bakewell wanted to capture the spirit of Harris in a bottle, so along with juniper, coriander, and liquorice, he added seaweed, specifically sugar kelp, which is sustainably harvested by a local diver and adds what is described as a "dry, maritime note".

When helicopter pilot Nick Smalley, who flies offshore workers between Aberdeen and North Sea oil rigs, was worried that the downturn in the oil industry could lead to redundancy, entrepreneurial instincts led him to explore gin production as back-up income. He and his wife Emma had made homemade sloe gin as wedding favours and decided to go on a residential course to learn everything about craft distilling. Their idea was to create a new gin that reflected the area's historic connections with the tea trade; it was a local, James Taylor, who had planted the first tea plantation in Ceylon in 1867. "We found to our surprise that when you distil tea it doesn't taste

In 2019, The Scottish Gin Society recorded almost 40 new gin brands and 25 new distilleries

anything like brewed tea. The orange pekoe we used was floral and citrusy with a minty sweetness. So we distilled it on its own first to get the taste profile right and used botanicals to complement this."

Their Teasmith gin has won numerous awards and they now even create single-estate gins with tea grown in, yes, Scotland. The first comes from Broich, in Perthshire, limited to just a thousand bottles since Scotland's tea production is still very small. "It has very strong honey notes," Nick says, "and we're planning further Grower's Editions from other Scottish estates."

It is not always the case that a new gin starts with a distillery first, and botanicals later. In 2012 Hamish Martin, a wine merchant, bought a derelict plot of land on the outskirts of Edinburgh. Having studied as



From above: Helicopter pilot, Nick Smalley and his wife, Emma, founded Teasmith gin; award-winning Teasmith in production

Right: Master distiller Kirstie Black and zymologist Graeme Walker, of Arbiekie, which produces Nàdar gin using peas



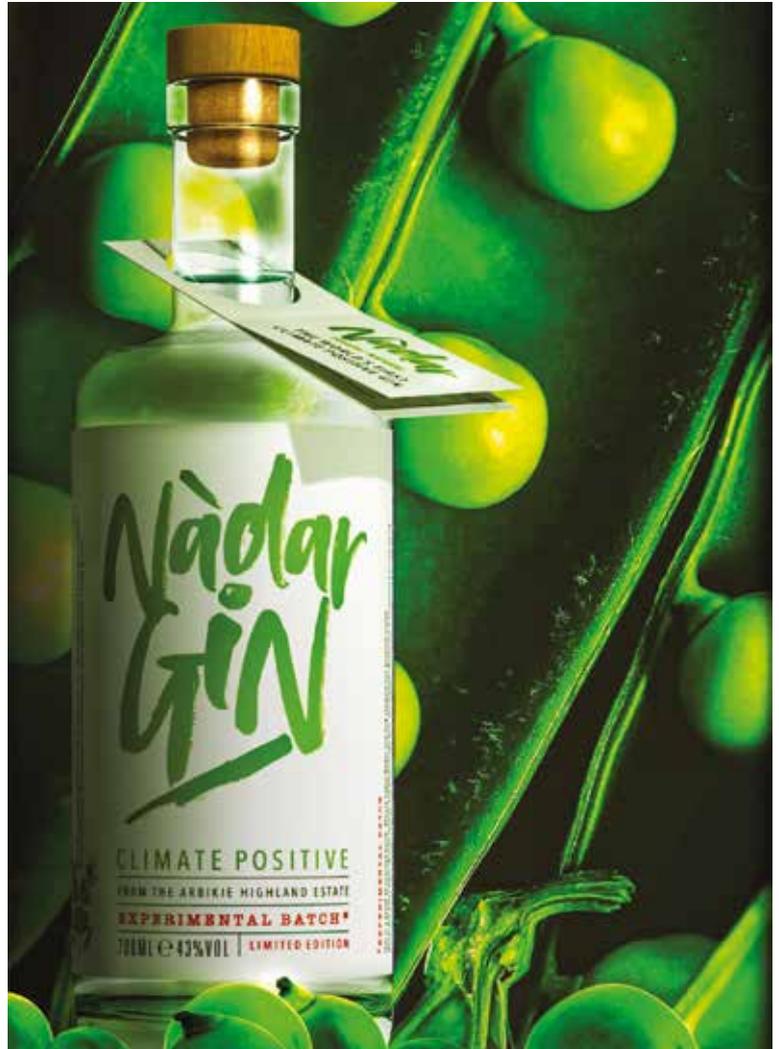
a herbologist, he established The Secret Herb Garden, growing more than 600 varieties of herbs to supply the restaurant trade and make natural products. With his botanical background, a few years later Hamish began experimenting with creating new gins from the garden's produce and founded The Old Curiosity Distillery in 2017.

Beginning with apothecary rose, an ancient ingredient in tinctures and tonics, everything about his gin was as artisan as could be – all handmade in small batches, no machinery, and free from any chemicals or flavour compounds. The different gins also have a unique and charming characteristic that is completely natural – they change colour to pink when mixed with tonic water. With creations such as Lavender and Echinacea, Geranium and Mallow, and Lemon Verbena, although Hamish steers clear of making any medicinal claims, they could almost be inspired by Nicholas Culpeper's writings. With production at 100,000 litres a year, Old Curiosity is now sold in such upmarket haunts as Harvey Nichols and even produces an own-label gin for Marks & Spencer.

The Stirling family had been farming since 1660, growing potatoes, wheat, and barley on the 2,000-acre Arbiekie estate, near Arbroath in Angus, when six years ago they decided to add value to their crops. The distillery they created is a genuinely farm-to-bottle operation. "We believe in drinking the way we eat," Iain Stirling explains. "Goodness from the ground up." And so they distil their own base spirit and have full control over the provenance of almost every ingredient, grown and harvested within a bowshot of their distillery, which produces vodka and whisky as well. "We only buy in the juniper at the moment, but over the past three years we've planted 30 acres with juniper shrubs and will soon be harvesting our own berries."

But it is their latest collaboration with Dundee's Abertay University that has the gin world buzzing: the world's first "climate-positive" gin. Named Nàdar ("nature" in Gaelic), each bottle carries a carbon footprint of -1.54 kg CO₂e per 700ml bottle – yes, that *is* a negative amount.

It's all down to the most innovative and surprising ingredient: the humble pea. Most gins are made from



spirit distilled from cereals, but growing peas means no nitrogen fertiliser is needed and the negative environmental impact on waterways, air, and soils is avoided. Iain describes this as "regenerative farming" since growing fields of peas supports pollinating insects and soil quality and any residue left over from the distilling process can be used as protein-rich animal feed. Rest assured this is non-alcoholic and there are no tipsy livestock! The pea base-spirit has no pea flavour but is slightly sweet with a crisp finish. As an example of a ground-up environmental approach to distilling, Arbiekie may well be setting the course for the industry as a whole.

Whether or not the gin market continues to grow at home and in the post-Brexit trading sphere, it is safe to say that Scottish distillers are simply in-gin-ious. **E**

Visit thescottishginsociety.com for events, reviews, and an interactive map of more than 90 distilleries, many of which can be visited. Travelling to Scotland? Boisdale Life's favourite gin bars are 56 North in Edinburgh (fiftysixnorth.co.uk) and Gin 71 in Glasgow (www.gin71.com).

MAKING A SPLASH

Prefer your whisky diluted rather than neat? Henry Jeffreys reports from the Boisdale versus Larkfire Wild Water challenge

Do true Scots put water in their whisky? It's one of the great imponderables, and you get a different reply from whoever you ask. It's a bit like the Irish question from *1066 and All That* – every time the English came close to answering it, the Irish changed the question.

But if you do add water, which should you use? My grandmother would splash Schweppes soda water into her Famous Grouse, but for single malts you should probably use something a bit more subtle. Tap water, depending on where you live, often has a chlorine tang, but some bottled waters are no better, with a pronounced taste from the minerals that they pick up from rock. One brand, however, claims to be the answer: Larkfire Wild Water, from the Isle of Lewis in the Outer Hebrides. The local rock is called Lewisian Gneiss, which sounds like a strange animal from *Alice in Wonderland* but is actually an incredibly hard and insoluble substance, so that the water trickling through it doesn't pick up any minerals. Hard rock, soft water; very easy to remember.

So confident is the Larkfire team, it held a taste test at Boisdale of Belgravia, pitting Lewis's purest against the Borough of Westminster's finest tap water. The Big Country versus the Big Smoke! A team of tasters was assembled, including broadcaster Nick Ferrari and the cream of the British drinks writing community: Joe Fattorini from ITV's *The Wine Show*, Tom Harrow of the *FT*, Bill Knott from *The Oldie*, and, representing *The Spectator* and *Boisdale Life*, Bruce Anderson. If a bomb had fallen on Belgravia that day, there would be a bottle-sized hole in newspapers and magazines up and down the land. Nobody would know what to drink, leading to panic in the wine aisles of Waitrose.

Crack team assembled, we sat down in front of eight glasses – two each of four whiskies provided by Moët Hennessy UK. There were two peaty offerings from Ardbeg – the classic bourbon cask-aged 10-Year-Old and the fearsome 57% ABV Corryvreckan – and at the other end of the scale, two from Glenmorangie – the fruity Original 10-Year-Old and the richer sherry cask, Lasanta. There were two glass water jugs on the table,

one containing Larkfire Wild Water and the other containing bog-standard tap water. But which was which?

The serious business of the tasting began. We put a little of each water into the appropriate glass and our highly-trained noses went in. There was much sniffing and swirling, slurping and discussing. At first, it was difficult to tell the difference, but gradually, to me at least, the whiskies seemed slightly more expressive with one of the waters – the one labelled with a blue dot. I plumped for blue, and downed my glass while enjoying Bruce Anderson's contribution to the great transgender debate. With either

water, the whiskies tasted superb, especially the Glenmorangie 10-Year-Old – an often overlooked dram because of its ubiquity.

Then the glasses were cleared away and we settled in for a classic Boisdale meal of smoked salmon, haggis and neeps, and venison – all washed down with a very nice lunchtime claret, Château des Antonins 2016. Then it was time for the big reveal: There were 14 votes for Larkfire Wild Water; 7 votes for Belgravia tap. Larkfire was the clear winner. And how did I do? Not very well, I hate to say. I preferred the tap water, which must mean my palate's become a true Londoner. **B**



TIK TOK FOR GROWN-UPS

The very best timepieces for the elegant and discerning

From left: the Leroy Osmior
Tourbillon Automatic Regulator
(from £98,200); the Perrelet Turbine
Pilot A1095/4 (from £4,438);
the Parmigiani Fleurier Tonda GT
Steel Silver (from £11,129); and the
Garrick S2 (from £14,985)



This is an age when our phone tells the time, so the watch has to earn its place on our wrist. The good news is that there has never been a better moment for us to express our personality through a timepiece. Dressy or sporty, blingy, or complex (but never digital), fine watchmakers are once again enjoying a sense of newfound expression; there is a renaissance of form over function, and for those who don't want to be defined by the obvious, who crave a timepiece that is off the radar of all but the most discerning, there is plenty from which to choose. *Boisdale Life* has selected four watchmakers whose creations are unique, beautiful and rare.

We begin in Switzerland. Where else? **Parmigiani Fleurier** is a relative newcomer that has made a huge impact in less than a quarter-century. Founded in 1996, it would be tempting to call Parmigiani a gate-crasher in an industry in which many of the aristocratic names were founded centuries ago, but Parmigiani watches are so deliciously exquisite and made in such limited numbers that it is hard to ignore the undeniable quality and luxury they exude. The latest addition to the design-icon Tonda line is the GT, a limited-edition range of sportier

incarnations, including a chronograph, which comes in steel and rose-gold with a *guilloché* French-blue dial and rubber strap.

Garrick Watchmakers, across the Channel, is the English watchmaker whose striking creations are all handmade-to-order – a policy that limits production to 50 pieces a year and which places Garrick in the small herd of unicorns that roam the watch world. Garrick's cachet, apart from the rarity, is its range of complications with in-house movements, often with semi-skeleton dials. Our choice is the S2, with its *guilloché* dial, applied chapter ring, faceted lancine hands, and central-sweep seconds display as well as a generous exhibition caseback – all painstakingly crafted at the company's workshop in Norfolk. Waiting time is around 8-12 weeks per order, which isn't too bad when you consider how long one has to wait for some mass-produced watches.

To France, where **Maison Leroy** was founded in 1785. It has become one of the great names of French watchmaking and, 235 years later, once again sits proudly among the aristocracy of watches, with a range of timepieces that encapsulate what Leroy calls "avant-garde techniques, boasting timeless designs". We love the "sporty" Marine chrono and chronometer as well as the marginally

more restrained but magnificently opulent Osmior – a single-button chronograph with a hobnail central dial and *guilloché* subdials at 12 and 6 o'clock. Both models come in pink or white gold. The company also makes limited-edition, made-to-order pieces, with beautiful and elaborate complications defined by tourbillons, skeleton dials and diamonds.

Finally, back to Switzerland, where Abraham-Louis Perrelet invented the first automatic watch in 1777. Horology has come a long way since then, but the Perrelet name has remained at the leading edge of innovation while staying decidedly low-key, letting their watches do the talking. We like the Turbine Pilot Yellow, the latest incarnation of the Turbine range launched in 2009, with a sporty, yet almost industrial feel with its eponymous design conceit in the shape of a ten-blade titanium wheel within the dial architecture. The Turbine comes in many incarnations and is in many ways Perrelet's flagship model. There are also specialty versions with suitably intriguing themes, such as Poker, Toxic, Paranoia and the wonderfully fun Camo.

What exquisite agony it is to limit oneself to choosing just one of these beauties. **B**
For more information, visit parmigiani.com; garrick.co.uk; montres-leroy.com; perrelet.com

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travel

AN OVERNIGHT SUCCESS

The refurbished Caledonian Sleeper to Inverness delivers all the storied, windswept romance of train travel, as a delighted **Rob Crossan** discovers

“Trains, like time and tide, stop for no one,” wrote Jules Verne in *Around the World in Eighty Days*, his joyous adventure novel of 1872. I’m inclined to agree with Verne as I hurtle through undulating hills, brooding forests, and squat crofter’s cottages tucked into the corners of olive-green and tobacco-brown fields. Trains, at least the very best ones, feel as much part of the landscape as the amber hues of sunlight bleaching Scotland’s early-morning winter sky.

It’s 8am and we’re running at least an hour late on Britain’s longest train: 16 carriages that contain things seen nowhere else on the UK rail network – such as single malt whiskies, comfortable sofas, double beds, and Eggs Royale on fresh muffins. These have all been drunk, sat in, slept on, and consumed since I left Euston at just past 9pm yesterday.

But the rarest sighting of all is the expression on the faces of my well-heeled fellow passengers. Abandoning motorways and budget flights to be here, all along the train are people who look positively happy.

The Caledonian Sleeper has had a rough time over the last year, though nowhere near as rough as it’s sometimes been for fanatical fans of sleeper trains such as myself, who put up with what was on offer before.



Out of sheer, blind loyalty to the romance of sleeping on a train – fuelled by a teenage adoration of novels by James Buchan and Paul Theroux – when I became a professional travel journalist, the very first idea I pitched (and was commissioned to write) was for a story on the Caledonian – then, as now, one of just a tiny handful of sleeper trains left in the UK.

When I embarked upon a disastrous, short-lived marriage to a concert promoter from Alabama in my early thirties, it was the Caledonian Sleeper that I chose for my stag night. And as often as I possibly could in the decade between divorce and the present day, I have ridden the Caledonian.

I've illicitly smoked cigarettes, had sex, thrown up, devoured haggis, sipped single malts, cried relationship break-up tears into my pillow, and tripped up Michael Palin in these



carriages over the years. It's fair to say I contributed to those 40-year-old carriages looking every bit their age by the middle of the last decade. By that time, hand basins in the cabins were clearly doubling up as urinals, sofas in the club car carried a Jackson Pollock-esque splatter of stains, and the staff's hospitality skills were inspired by a Begbie-from-*Trainspotting* school of etiquette.

Such memories were swept away with last year's revamp, which delivered the UK's first-ever sleeper cabin with double beds, brand new lounge cars, food cooked in ovens rather than microwaves, and an atmosphere more redolent of a modish brasserie in Lothian than a greasy spoon in Lerwick.

The rollout was, to put it mildly, chaotic. Stories of leaking cabins, no



The Caledonian Sleeper navigates the Glenfinnon Viaduct. Above: A 1915 route map for the Caledonian Railway

I've smoked, had sex, thrown up, devoured haggis, and sipped single malts on this train

drinking water, trains overshooting platforms, mutinous staff, and epic delays were a heather-and-tartan-strewn field day for the press, and genuinely heartbreaking to sleeper lovers who, like anxious parents at Sports Day, were willing their beloved to succeed.

But this carriage-based Culloden of bad PR is finally abating – partly because the Caledonian Sleeper is, to its admirers, an intoxicating and ebullient lover whose beauty and poise is such that it's impossible to stay angry with her for long.

There is simply no better travel experience on the planet than being woken up in a bunk-bed cabin at dawn with a comfortingly appalling coffee, a bacon roll, and a copy of *The Scotsman*, and then rolling up the blind to see the Highlands rushing past your window.

Conversations the night before in the club car are always joyous experiences. Everyone on board has a fealty to the train, so the badinage has the same nods, ticks, and reference points that, I imagine, endear the gentry to one another at White's or the Turf Club.

Stories of grouse-shooting disasters, enfeebled aunts in Dornoch, ski trips to Aviemore, romantic trysts on Loch Ness – nobody who travels the sleeper is in a hurry to get anywhere, and the barman keeps serving until the last passenger stumbles back to their cabin. The nights of impromptu bunk-bed passions that have followed a dram in the bar would sate the sexual appetites of an army of lusty Jacobites!

But, despite the improved food and drink, if you spot me on the Caledonian Sleeper, I'll almost certainly be staring out of the window, particularly on an early morn as we curve through the edges of the Cairngorms.

I see brick- and buff-coloured heather, golden grass, and woods where rustling movement turns out to be pheasants among the leaves. I see smoke coil from chimneys of whisky



From top: £150 million of sparkling new rolling stock, launched in 2019; the comfortable double-bed cabins; the revamped menu includes haggis, neeps, tatties and whiskies

distilleries, miasmas of mist hanging above a green quilt of glens, spruce forests, and fields dabbled with Tipp-Ex-white smudges of sheep. We trundle past narrow, forgotten stations: Dunkeld and Birnam, Blair Atholl, Kingussie, Newtonmore – names to make you pinch yourself, such are their essences of rough tweed, oatmeal, and venison.

It's after 10am when we arrive in Inverness, a town of stout granite buildings that hunch up against the wide curve of the River Ness. Passersby seem oblivious to the bleary-eyed passengers who emerge from the station.

For a moment, I admire the statue of a soldier that stands on the station forecourt. Made of Portland stone, it was erected in 1893 to mark the centenary of the Cameron Highlanders and later became a war memorial for campaigns in Egypt and Sudan. The statue is an appropriate full stop to mark the end of a train journey that, despite innumerable attempts to cancel it by successive governments that bemoaned its maintenance costs, remains ever popular.

"Anything is possible in a train," wrote Paul Theroux in *The Tao of Travel*. "A great meal, a binge, a visit from card players, an intrigue, a good night's sleep, and strangers' monologues framed like Russian short stories." But when it comes to the peculiarly Scottish hush of the Caledonian Sleeper, one finds something more reassuring. Something that, in an age of budget flights, frayed tempers, overcrowded departure lounges, and jammed



motorways, puts one in an unusual mind-set – travelling for the journey as much as the destination.

High-speed train lines continue to sprout across Europe as the need for speed, to compete against the airlines, increases. Yet, somewhere, amid the bird's nest of tracks that weave around Scotland, the Caledonian Sleeper rolls serenely by, its whistle echoing into the fields, valleys, and mountains beyond. **B**

The Caledonian Sleeper runs every night but Saturday, north and south between Aberdeen, Edinburgh, Fort William, Glasgow, Inverness and London Euston. Comfort Seats start from £45; Classic Rooms from £140 solo or £170 shared; Club Rooms from £205 solo and £250 shared; and Caledonian Doubles from £335 solo and £400 shared. Visit sleeper.scot to book your tickets and check for any restrictions.

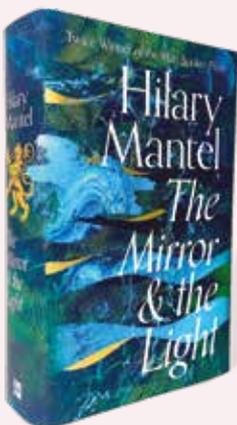
Books

SHELF IMPROVEMENT

Boisdale Life's new literary correspondent, **Alexander Larman**, recommends the most mind-massaging reads of 2020

This year, several excellent titles were released without the fanfare that they deserve, let alone the usual glamorous launch parties. But, as the time comes when we can once again venture to the bookshop, here are four of the best new publications that merit a second chance now that lockdowns – finally – are gradually being put behind us.

THE MIRROR AND THE LIGHT Hilary Mantel (Fourth Estate, £25)



Dame Hilary Mantel's conclusion to her *Wolf Hall* saga, focusing on the downfall and execution of Henry VIII's leading courtier, Thomas Cromwell, is surely the most highly anticipated book of 2020. It has been heralded by a popular BBC adaptation of the earlier books (*Wolf Hall* and *Bring Up The Bodies*), an RSC play, and endless column inches discussing anything from Tudor fashion to Mantel's views on the Harry and Meghan saga. (Racism "is more deeply embedded in people's consciousness than any of us are willing to admit," she says. "I hesitate to call her a victim but ... there has been an element of racism in the invective against her.")

Peter Kemp in *The Sunday Times* is a rare negative voice when he writes that it is "more a phenomenon of amassed information and tireless enthusiasm than triumphant creativity". More typical is the critic Stephanie Merritt's judgment that "*The Mirror and the Light* is a masterpiece", and she goes on to praise the trilogy as "the greatest English novels of this century". The events Mantel depicts are well-known, but the flair and brilliance of her writing make this finale more *Bourne Ultimatum* than *Return of the Jedi*.

ONE TWO THREE FOUR Craig Brown (Fourth Estate, £20)

Anyone who has ever enjoyed Craig Brown's pitch-perfect satirical writing for *Private Eye* will know how incredibly gifted he is at imitating (and ridiculing) specific voices and characters, but his 2017 book *Ma'am Darling* did something altogether more challenging and successful. Brown produced an anti-biography of sorts about Princess Margaret, using everything from interviews to fantasy to produce a kaleidoscopic life of a complex character. It won the James Tait Prize and fans were itching for this follow-up.

Brown's subject is that most beloved of all British bands, The Beatles. He uses a similar style to *Ma'am Darling* to tell their near-unbelievable story, in which four young boys from Liverpool could first perfect and then reinvent an entire musical form, before separating and drifting apart before their youngest members were even 30. We discover that Wallis Simpson adored them, that Noel Coward loathed them, and that the Queen said, "Think what we would have missed if we had never heard The Beatles." Brown is a perfect guide, and this is the equal to *Ma'am Darling*.



DEAD FAMOUS

Greg Jenner
(Weidenfeld &
Nicolson, £18.99)

Greg Jenner, the so-called "celebrity historian", returns with another intriguing account of what fame has meant over the past centuries.

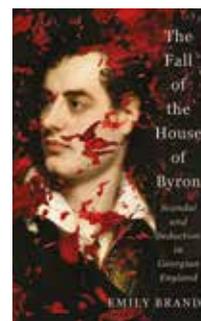


In an era when the death of Caroline Flack has led to many questioning whether the relationship between the press and those that they first build up, then destroy, is anything other than toxic, Jenner looks at 125 cases, ranging from the Bronze Age to the halcyon days of Hollywood, of those who achieved their own success and fame and often regretted it. Some, such as Byron, have become immortal in their very own afterlife, and others, such as the actor Edmund Kean, are nearly forgotten. Jenner brings all these figures back to life once more, in this witty and incredibly readable book.

THE FALL OF THE HOUSE OF BYRON

Emily Brand
(John Murray, £25)

Everyone with any interest in the Romantic poets knows the story of the rock star amongst them, Lord Byron. Famously dismissed (and praised) by his lover, Lady Caroline Lamb, as "mad, bad and dangerous to know", his witty satires and heartfelt love poetry are only second in reputation to the dashing, wicked lifestyle that he led. Yet Emily Brand's fascinating and well-researched work of biography is not another account of Bad Boy Byron. Instead, she revisits his forebears, such as the heroic sea captain "Foul-Weather Jack"; the so-called "Wicked Lord" George Byron, who killed another landowner in an argument; and Byron's own near-satanic father, Captain Jack, who abandoned his wife and son and died young. These figures are sometimes awful, and sometimes admirable, but Brand's book brings them all to vivid and often surprising life.





Above: Entrepreneur, music industry executive, Chrysalis Records co-founder, and racehorse breeder, Chris Wright. **Right:** Richard Quinn rides Wright's filly, Culture Vulture, to victory at the Prix Marcel Boussac, Longchamp, in October 1991



Starters Orders

RECORD WINS

After founding Chrysalis Records, whose galaxy of stars included Jethro Tull and Blondie, music executive Chris Wright devoted himself to breeding equine talents. **Colin Cameron** examines these transferable skills

“One way or another, I’m gonna find ya / I’m gonna get ya, get ya, get ya, get ya...” This could be the chant of a determined racehorse owner at the autumn’s yearling sales, certain that the next champion is circling the ring.

Chris Wright has been that man. Successful purchases include Culture Vulture, the first English-trained filly to win France’s 1,000 Guineas, the Poule d’Essai des Pouliches; Dark Angel, a champion two-year-old in 2007 at the Middle Park Stakes and now at stud; and Crime of Passion, a filly who, after success at the races, became the foundation broodmare to Wright’s equine dynasty at his Stratford Place Stud in the Cotswolds.

It was Wright who signed Blondie, the band that made these lyrics so familiar. (Years before, millennials please note, One Direction’s own stab at the song.) Wright’s label, Chrysalis, had Debbie Harry, Procol Harum, Jethro Tull, Ultravox, Billy Idol, and Pat Benatar, as well as The Specials – under the Two-Tone Chrysalis offshoot – on its roster during a halcyon age of pop.

Over lunch at Boisdale Belgravia, Wright groans at the coincidental pun of Blondie’s hit album of 1979, *Eat to the Beat*. His career has been more than just horses and music, he says, and has extended to rugby, as the owner of Wasps, for whom he is Honorary Life President; and football, with his investment in Queen’s Park Rangers and in the US, Philadelphia Fury, as part of America’s first efforts at a national league in the Seventies. In addition, Chrysalis bought a stake in the Sheffield

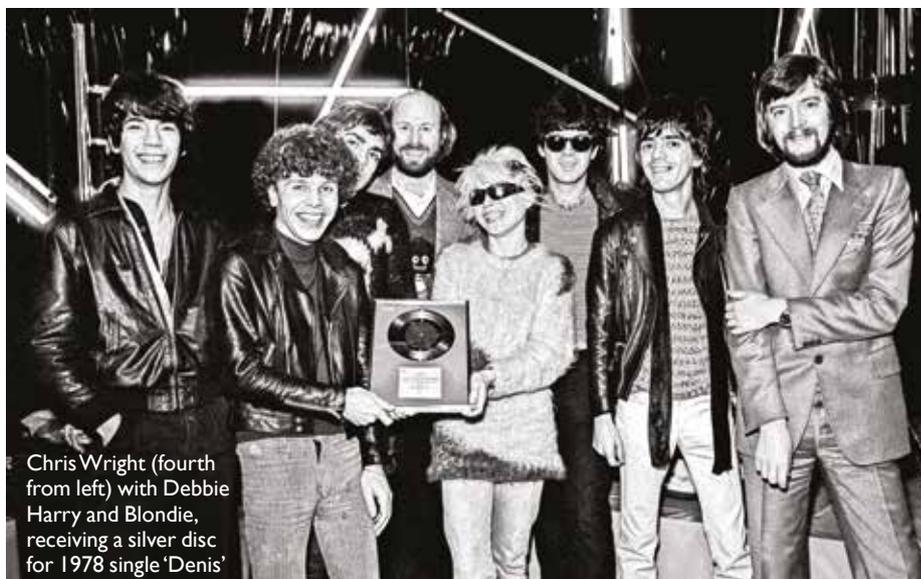
Sharks basketball team. Then there is Wright's passion for wine.

Racing is in the lead, however. He has 20 mares at stud and the same number in training. "I had an uncle who caught moles at Market Rasen," Wright laughs, reflecting on his lack of racing pedigree. "I also remember going racing for the first time – a point-to-point near Ludlow, where the traffic had to stop so they could race." He smiles wryly at the ups and downs (and outgoings) of the sport. "Getting involved certainly seemed a good idea at the time."

The prequel to his racing career was a joint property investment in a stable with Tony Stratton-Smith, founder of Charisma Records (Genesis' label); Dave Robinson, who created Stiff Records; Island Records' Chris Blackwell (see our Summer 2019 issue); and the pop svengalis Chris O'Donnell and Billy Gaff, who looked after Thin Lizzy and Rod Stewart respectively. When this didn't work out, Robinson and Stratton-Smith encouraged Wright to visit the yearling sales at Newmarket, where he bought a filly for 12,000 guineas. *Crime of Passion* – inspired by the title of Pat Benatar's album – then ran for Wright and his Chrysalis partner, Terry Ellis. She came second at Royal Ascot but, inexplicably, Ellis' name was left off the race cards, which, after some agitation over where she might run next, prompted Ellis to invite Wright to buy him out. Wright wisely did and *Crime of Passion* went on to even greater heights than finishing runner-up in front of the Queen.

The purchase of Stratford Place in the Eighties came next. For this, Wright, who grew up on a farm, blames his old neighbour, Sir Richard Branson. Separating them was some land. Wright heard that Branson was after the added acreage, which would mean an altogether cosier presence. Wright moved swiftly to maintain the buffer by buying the land himself. Since then, he credits John Mall, Stud Manager, with making it one of the best equine nurseries around. (Aided by Crispin de Moubay, who has advised Wright on his bloodstock holdings for several years.)

Perhaps key to Wright's love of racing is his passion for history. A



Chris Wright (fourth from left) with Debbie Harry and Blondie, receiving a silver disc for 1978 single 'Denis'

graduate in Politics and Modern History from Manchester University, Wright reads extensively about racing, which in Britain dates back to Charles II, and recommends Frederico Tesio's *Breeding the Racehorse* as a seminal text.

He is comparatively ambivalent about betting. Despite the success of *Culture Vulture*, who followed and was even better than *Crime of Passion*, for Wright, betting is rarely the exciting experience it is for the rest of us. "I don't send the bookmakers any cheques and they don't

Key to Wright's love of racing is his passion for history, for racing in Britain dates back to Charles II

send any to me, so on that basis I am not losing," Wright suggests. The entrepreneur in him laments that the racing industry in the UK has become so dependent on betting.

He is not alone at the races, as far as the music business is concerned, however. Wright says "Rod" (that's Mr Stewart to the rest of us) likes racing, as does Eric Clapton. "And Andy McDonald, who founded the Independiente label," he adds.

Racing is also a retreat from the modern world. The Sixties and Seventies were, for Wright, the golden age of pop. "It's different today," he explains. "In the past, we were trying to make albums. Today, the game is more about making a single track. We would agonise over the running order of an album; two sides, with the end of one compelling you to turn over and listen to the other side.

"When CDs came you could have 74 minutes of continuous music, which is different," he says. "With vinyl, anything more than 25 minutes or so on one side would mean the grooves would be too close to maintain the quality of sound."

Wright sighs, recalling how, by the Eighties, the best artists would spend years between albums, striving for the right sound. "We were not in the business of just making three-minute pop songs," he says. Perhaps he is revealing how fulfilling racing has become as the music business has evolved almost beyond recognition.

Back at Yeomanstown Stud in Ireland, the stallion Dark Angel goes about his business creating the next generation of racehorses. Wright says that at the start of what has been a steady climb up the stallion billboard, he wasn't especially sure that his colt would prevail in the breeding shed. He smiles with no little pride. As for horses he has bred that trace their lineage back to *Crime of Passion*, Wright couldn't be prouder. "They're like family." 

Hypercars

FEEL MY POWER

Adam Hay-Nicholls drives the McLaren Senna to East Anglia in search of something equally light, prestigious and expensive



The McLaren Senna was designed to set lap records. I know this because I've previously thrashed it around Portugal's Estoril Circuit, the track at which its namesake, Ayrton Senna, won his first Grand Prix. The aero-aided braking was so severe, my eyeballs spat tears onto the inside of my glasses. But as well as generating 789 horsepower and 800kg-worth of downforce, it has a number plate. So, driving to North Essex and the Suffolk coast, I would experience

this moveable feast of carbon-fibre in a very different way – traffic, cruise control, traction set to sensible.

Picture the scene: The weather is reminiscent of Ayrton's epic triumph in '85. It is lashing down and the windows have steamed up. I'm stuck in motorway traffic. At 1,000 rpm, half of the cylinders shut down, so the McLaren is quiet and economical. There is glass at knee-level designed for corner apex visibility, but on the M25, surrounded by trucks, it leaves one feeling exposed. This car is pre-production. A plaque reads "No. 000 of 500". The software for the stereo is built-in, but you pay extra for speakers in both money and weight. At 1,300kg, this car is stripped out. The only music is the twin-turbo V8.

I pull off the M11 at junction 9a, taking the B184 to Saffron Walden. This market town, in the 1500s, was the epicentre of the world's saffron cultivation. By the 17th century, every field, churchyard, garden and window box would have been filled with crocuses. Production petered out when cheaper imports from Iran and Kashmir arrived, but English saffron is still considered the finest, thanks to our soil.

Like the McLaren Senna, saffron is very light and very expensive. By weight, it's more valuable than gold. I've come to meet David Smale, a scientist by trade, who has single-handedly resurrected saffron growth in this area. He has 100,000 bulbs and sells to Fortnum & Mason. It is labour-intensive: 200 flowers need to be handpicked to produce just one gram of saffron. David opens the boot of his car and produces a bag full of dark orange flecks. Saffron is worth £40 a gram and £40,000 a kilo. To an onlooker, this has all the hallmarks of a drug deal. There's thousands of pounds-worth of merchandise here.

As well as enlivening rice and a myriad of dishes, saffron has been a status symbol since long before the hypercar. History reveals that Cleopatra bathed in saffron and ass's milk. Henry VIII dyed his tights with it, while Anne Boleyn



There's almost zero soundproofing – hit a cat's eye and it sounds like a blacksmith hammering an anvil

used it for her hair. It was a sign of wealth, designed to evoke splendour. It was also considered the Viagra of its day. Shakespeare makes reference to it in *A Winter's Tale*, and the Bard is also said to have stayed at my Suffolk B&B.

Dating back to the 13th century, Darsham Old Hall was once owned by Anne Boleyn's uncle. A little later, Anne Bedingfield lived here. She was the first woman in England to own a theatre, which is how she met Mr Shakespeare and invited him up to Darsham. In the 1800s Sir Henry Rous, the father of modern horse racing, turned it into a stud farm and now, under the ownership of Paul and Jude Rylott, prize-winning pedigree alpacas are bred on its land.

From Saffron Walden, I take the A11 towards Newmarket and then the A14 past Bury St Edmunds. Darsham lies at the end of the A1120 just before you hit the coast at Dunwich.

Due to the gaping aero holes in every piece of the Senna's bodywork, which are designed to help its tyres grip at gargantuan cornering speeds, the Senna makes an unnerving racket on unswept roads. When I arrive at Darsham Old Hall, after negotiating its gravel approach, half the driveway falls out of the dihedral doors.

Like the Senna, alpacas are strange beasts to see in the Suffolk countryside and, while I'm finding the car to be very compliant and not scary at all, alpacas are terribly difficult to control. "Manitou" and "Incan Fortune" pull violently on the reins Paul and Jude offer me. I had no idea what big business alpaca baby-making is. Manitou's cousin sold in the US for \$750k. That's basically as much as the Senna. Incidentally, one of the Rylott's herd gave birth the day after my visit. The newborn was named "Ayrton".

I drive up the A12 to the idyllically secluded Walberswick, at the mouth of the River Blyth, and dine on dressed Dunwich crab with saffron mayo at



From top: Author Adam Hay-Nicholls with prize-winning alpacas; Senna with his McLaren Honda at the Spanish Grand Prix, 1990. Below and inset: The McLaren Senna's racing credentials

The Anchor. An inordinate number of celebs have homes in this tiny village on the coast. The Freud family have long had a base here. The director of the *Bourne* series, Paul Greengrass, keeps a cottage here, too, and presumably, with his penchant for shaky cinematography and thrilling tension, he'd appreciate the McLaren.

One wouldn't be wise to push the Senna hard on public roads, but even a mild squirt of the throttle and brakes demands that you recalibrate your brain to the speed. And while I'd happily drive one every day if I could (if you intend to bring anything bar what you're wearing, you can't, there's no boot), it does have a firm ride and almost zero soundproofing. Hit a cat's eye and it makes a sound like a blacksmith hammering an anvil.

With any hypercar one must be wary of the rozzers, but the only police car I meet is an old Wartburg. Its owners are on a rally, visiting Cold War sites around East Anglia. There is something rather Cold War about the Senna too, in terms of its shape and thrust. The engine start/stop button is on the cockpit's roof. It recalls the US Air Force's SR-71 Blackbird.

There's a loop you can take out of Darsham, past Sibton Park to Dennington, then Stradbroke on the B1118 and on to Laxfield on the B1117, past Heveningham Hall – home to Foxton's founder and car collector Jon Hunt. The McLaren clings on around the tight and twisty lanes. Diverting up the A144, I stop at Fen Farm dairy, home to Montbéliarde cows and the UK's first raw milk vending machine. Pop in £1 and fill a litre bottle of delicious, creamy, unpasteurised milk.

"Raw" describes the Senna. For me, this is the spiritual successor to the Ferrari F40, in both philosophy and looks. It's the most focused McLaren road car ever, and the truest to the racing team's DNA. Like Fen Farm's produce, it's untreated. Just about complying with motoring regulations, it's right on the edge. And it's sensational. **B**



DIARY

HIGHLIGHTS AT BOISDALE

FOR TICKETS AND FULL NIGHTLY LISTINGS, VISIT BOISDALE.CO.UK



JOOLS HOLLAND AN INTIMATE EVENING WITH JOOLS

5, 6, 7, 11, 12, 20, 21 January
Boisdale of Belgravia

Jools talks us through his lifelong love affair with the piano while playing his favourite styles and answering questions from the audience. Vocalists Ruby Turner and Louise Marshall then join him on stage.

BOOGIE WOOGIE WITH JOOLS HOLLAND **30 March**

Boisdale of Canary Wharf

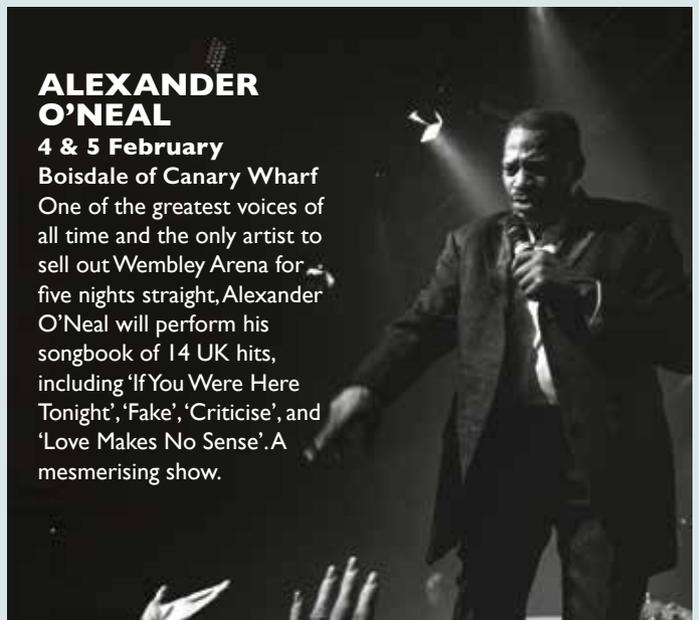
Jools hosts a piano-pounding extravaganza with some of the world's greatest boogie woogie masters, including Neville Dickie, Axel Zwingenberger and Tom Seals. Backed by the rhythm section of the Jools Holland Rhythm and Blues Orchestra, the finale features all the pianists in a boogie woogie battle that has to be seen to be believed.



THE DEFINITIVE RAT PACK

7-31 December at Boisdale of Belgravia

The original cast of West End hit show, *The Rat Pack* – Stephen Triffitt, Mark Adams and George Daniel-Long – play Frank Sinatra, Dean Martin and Sammy Davis Jr. "Stephen Triffitt is the greatest... He captures the soul of my father." Frank Sinatra Jr



ALEXANDER O'NEAL

4 & 5 February

Boisdale of Canary Wharf

One of the greatest voices of all time and the only artist to sell out Wembley Arena for five nights straight, Alexander O'Neal will perform his songbook of 14 UK hits, including 'If You Were Here Tonight', 'Fake', 'Criticise', and 'Love Makes No Sense'. A mesmerising show.



T'PAU

25 & 26 February

Boisdale of Canary Wharf

Carol Decker and T'Pau topped the charts with 'China in Your Hand' from their quadruple-platinum album, *Bridge of Spies*, and their magic lives on.

TOPLOADER

19 February

Boisdale of Canary Wharf

With more than two million album sales, four Brit Award nominations, and multiple hit singles, Toploader is a cracking band, with vocals by Joseph Washbourn as strong and vibrant as ever.



THE BRAND NEW HEAVIES

8 & 9 January

Boisdale of Canary Wharf

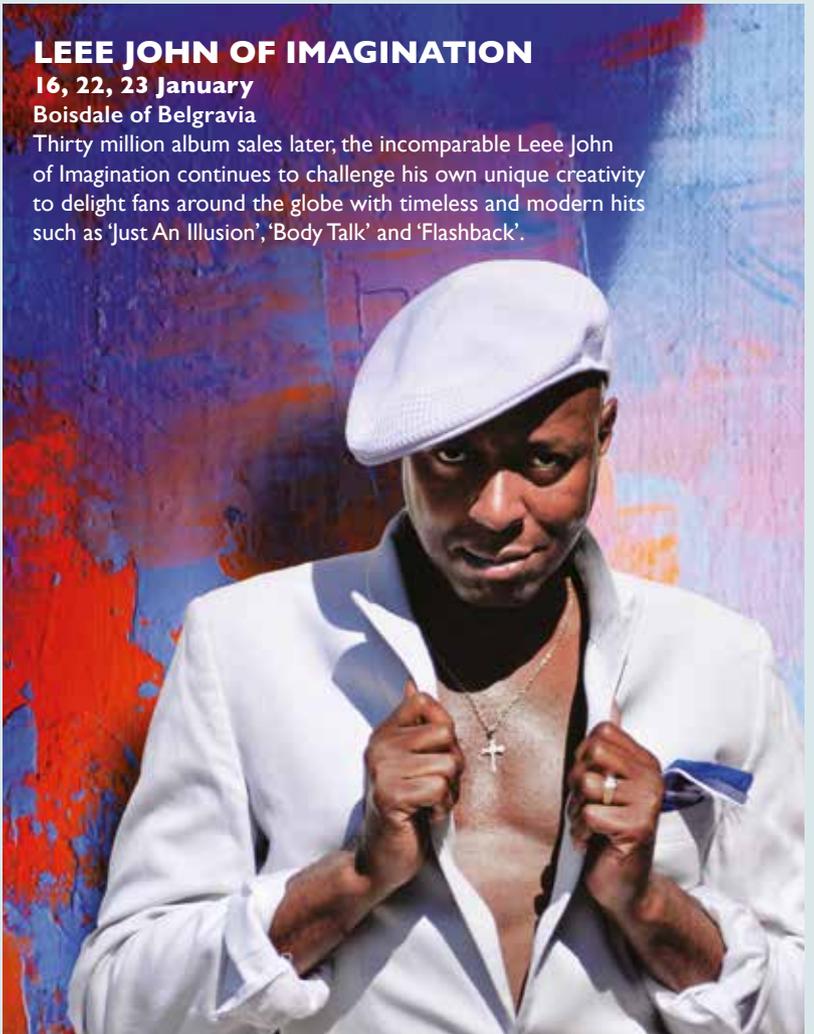
Titans of the London Acid Jazz scene with 16 top 40 singles, including 'Dream On Dreamer', 'Never Stop', and 'Midnight at the Oasis'. Unmissable.

LEE JOHN OF IMAGINATION

16, 22, 23 January

Boisdale of Belgravia

Thirty million album sales later, the incomparable Lee John of Imagination continues to challenge his own unique creativity to delight fans around the globe with timeless and modern hits such as 'Just An Illusion', 'Body Talk' and 'Flashback'.



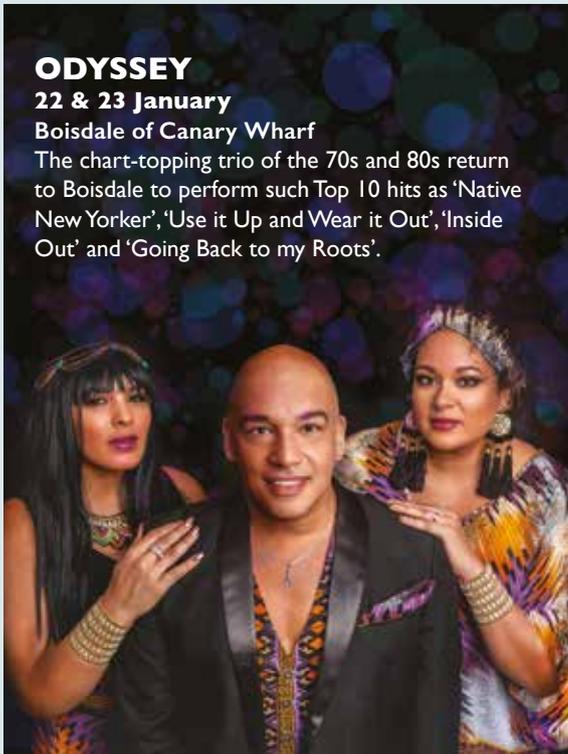
FOR TICKETS AND FULL NIGHTLY LISTINGS, VISIT BOISDALE.CO.UK

ODYSSEY

22 & 23 January

Boisdale of Canary Wharf

The chart-topping trio of the 70s and 80s return to Boisdale to perform such Top 10 hits as 'Native New Yorker', 'Use it Up and Wear it Out', 'Inside Out' and 'Going Back to my Roots'.



THE REAL THING

6, 7, 8 May

Boisdale of Canary Wharf

Britain's top soul group of the 1970s sold more than three million albums with hits including 'You To Me Are

Everything', 'Can't Get By Without You' and 'Feel The Force'. Original vocalists Chris Amoo and Dave Smith take to the stage with a fantastic five-piece band to perform their classic hits and many more.



VINA CARMEN CIGAR AWARDS

26 April

Boisdale of Canary Wharf

Hosted by Tom Parker Bowles, the world's most prestigious Cigar Awards event outside Havana brings together cigar aficionados and celebrity cigar smokers from across the globe to celebrate cigars, producers, writers and smokers. Previous winners, nominees, and guests have included Simon Le Bon, Arnold Schwarzenegger, Baroness Trumpington, the late Burt Reynolds, Jonathan Ross, Kelsey Grammer, Andrew Neil, Charlie Sheen, James Cosmo, Chris Noth, Jeremy Irons and Dolph Lundgren. Join us to discover who will win The Cigar Smoker of the Year.

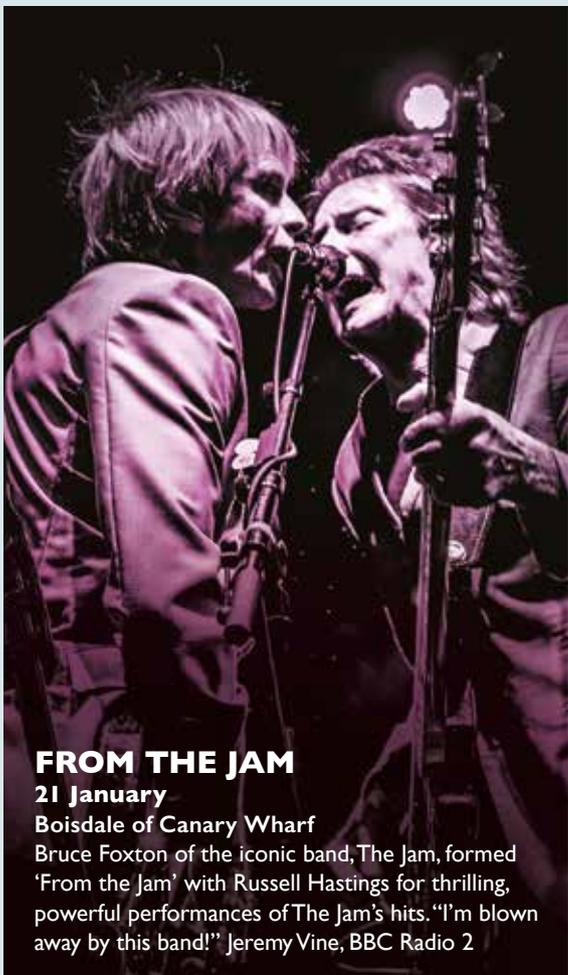


FROM THE JAM

21 January

Boisdale of Canary Wharf

Bruce Foxtan of the iconic band, The Jam, formed 'From the Jam' with Russell Hastings for thrilling, powerful performances of The Jam's hits. "I'm blown away by this band!" Jeremy Vine, BBC Radio 2



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THE LOWDOWN

ALEXANDRA BURKE

The award-winning British singer, songwriter, model and actress came to fame by winning *The X Factor*. As well as making albums of her music, she stars in West End shows and helps develop young talent. She performs a solo show at Boisdale of Canary Wharf from 10-13 March 2021



The multi-talented singing sensation, Alexandra Burke

How did it feel when you won *The X Factor*?

It's one of the hardest things I ever did. On *The X Factor*, you're out of your comfort zone, surrounded by so many amazing talents. You have to be better every single week. But the experience was amazing; Simon Cowell was a tremendous support, as was Cheryl. The only way for me to start my career was doing a show like that. The door had been closed to me so many times in the past.

Did you worry your career might not outlast the initial buzz?

No. I'm a very spiritual person and feel that worry just brings on stress. Everyone has something special about them, so there is space for every single person. It's about believing in yourself, being unique. Be true to who you are, because that shows in your music. In everything you do, be passionate – that's what makes you special.

You grew up in a musical family. How did they encourage your love of music and performing?

My mum was in Soul II Soul – one of the biggest bands in the UK. I remember seeing her on *Top of the Pops* and thinking, "That's what I want to do." My family has been amazing. I'm not around as much as I used to be, but they know it's all for a great reason. The fact that I'm working consistently is such a blessing, so I have their undivided support. My mum gave so much to our family and made sacrifices to help her children, so my biggest reward has been being able to look after my family. If they ever need anything, I can do my best to help.

You're committed to nurturing young talent. How do you do that?

I've just started the Melissa Bell Foundation, in honour of my mother. Mum believed in nurturing children and helping them with their confidence. I'm trying to continue that. We've teamed up with Sylvia Young Theatre School – Mum always wanted to send me there but we couldn't afford it. We put children through a summer scholarship and hope Sylvia will pick one for a full-time scholarship. Already one kid has been picked because of our foundation. I think Mum would be proud.

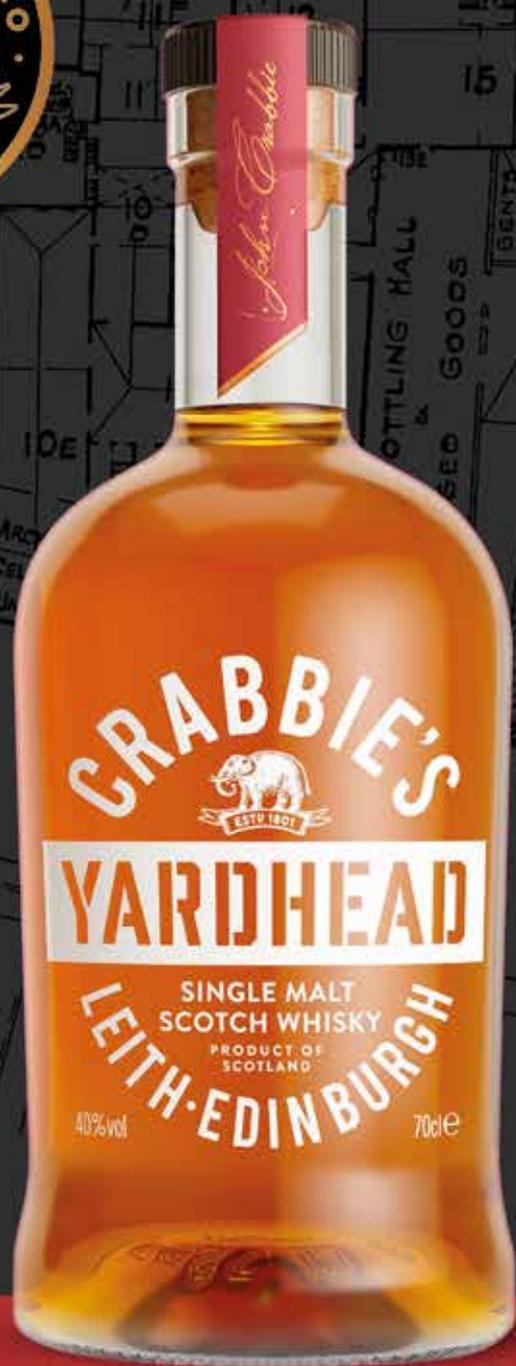
Which vocalist would be your dream duet partner?

Whitney Houston, because Mum did her backing vocals. I'm probably her biggest fan, and then did *The Bodyguard* for such a long time. That was my first-ever theatre role, and holds a special place in my heart. I've actually duetted with Whitney's auntie, Dionne Warwick, and done a few live shows with her. She's amazing – I'm a massive fan of hers, too.

What personality traits are required for a long showbiz career?

Having good people to keep you grounded, and having thick skin. I've struggled with that in the past, but keeping my feet firmly on the ground has kept me sane and strong to this day. It's about not believing the hype – that's really important. Also, being lovely to everyone you meet doesn't cost much. Being kind is the way forward!

Alexandra Burke stars in the premiere of 'My Best Friend's Wedding', opening in September 2021 (for details, visit bestfriendsweddingmusical.com). Follow Alexandra on Instagram, @alexandraburke, and visit melissabellfoundation.com.



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