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Editor's Letter

As I write, the vast, invisible mammoth in the room completely dominates our lives. So I am delighted that this is a Coronavirus-free publication, and 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, eating out in restaurants would indeed be history, albeit temporarily. Jam-packed with inciteful wit and scholarly erudition, this is a fun-filled, must-read book that entertains as it explains how civilisation evolved through vinous culinary-tinted lenses.

In this, our 19th issue, I would like to particularly welcome three convivial new contributors to William's racy On the Menu section. Valentine Warner, the dashing messianic gourmet, confides to us how food saved his life, while danger man Damien McCrystal reminisces with whimsical affection about his one true love, the long lunch, which might have easily cost him his. Finally, the mighty Joe Warwick, himself no stranger to lunch, fails to hold back the punches as he lampoons the new self-appointed food police of London's restaurant scene. And we're thrilled to welcome back the gorgeous millennial, Joanna Bell, who feels she is living in the wrong century, as she still adores red meat and booze!

We are all dreaming of dining out and travelling again, and even if flying is restricted for a while, we will soon be allowed to explore our own glorious country. I can think of no better journey 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 while having breakfast. Join the intrepid Rob Crossan on his inaugural trip to Boisdale's ancestral lands, and en route learn more about Scotland's national fabric in an illuminating short study of the history of tartan by Rebecca Pearson. 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 consume the world's most aspirational spirit. The word whisky has evolved from the Gaelic *uisge-beatha*, meaning 'the water of life'. Read Henry's article to discover its relevance.

The Clanranald motto in Gaelic, *Dhandedon Co Heiragha* (on the Boisdale logo), translates as 'Who dares wins' and is also the motto of Britain's elite fighting force – the SAS. British military excellence is beyond question, but our capability and global role post-Brexit do require serious appraisal. I am delighted to welcome back General Sir Peter Wall and *The Telegraph's* Defence Editor, Con Coughlin, who present the somewhat contentious case for more investment into our Armed Forces to ensure we are able to fulfil our responsibilities. One might imagine, according to a possibly outdated stereotype, that more women than men would *not* support increased military spending. But would they vote differently as a group sex (so to speak)? Olivia Utley considers why a far lower proportion of women voted Conservative in our last election, while Madeline Grant is clear that if any of the Royals have an opinion on these issues, they should keep it to themselves. Auntie (the BBC) treads very carefully with her



Randal Macdonald (left)
with Paddy Renouf (centre)
and David Hasselhoff

own views too! It may be almost impossible not to have some level of bias in coverage of our current affairs by a self-selecting BBC. I believe most people respect and love the Beeb, although its funding is hard to reconcile. Paul Robinson, former Mr Big at Radios 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5 Live, deftly explains the dilemma and possible solutions. And, just when you thought you were free of further contention, LBC's Nick Ferrari suggests that Greta should calm down!

I hope we present many opportunities to take a breezy stroll in someone else's shoes. If they're uncomfortable, you can always take them off!

RANALD MACDONALD
Editor & Chief and founder of Boisdale
Restaurants and Bars

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FEATURED CONTRIBUTORS

FLORENCE WALKER

A journalist for the *London Evening Standard*, *GQ*, and *Spectator*, Florence is also an epidemiology PhD student with a specialism in tuberculosis. She writes about dancing as an effective mating ritual on page 29.



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 GROSCHOP

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.



GENERAL SIR PETER WALL

Prior to co-founding the leadership consultancy, Amicus, Sir Peter was Chief of the General Staff (the head of the British Army). In a long and storied Army career, he caused controversy with a call to lift the ban on women serving in combat units, as they do in many other countries. He considers Britain's future role on the world stage on page 30.



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 Our house mascot, Penelope, takes the Caledonian Sleeper train. By Rui Ricardo at Folio Art

BOISDALE
Life



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LIFE & TIMES

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LIFE & TIMES

WHAT WINTER LOOKED LIKE AT BOISDALE

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



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, of 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 Sun



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Madeline Grant says Royal relevance is in thinking local

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Kate Andrews on the darn cheek of being told off by the EU

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Florence Walker says we should dust off our dance shoes



Society

WOMEN AND THE ART OF AMBITION

Is the female workforce obliged to “lift as they climb” and benefit those around them to achieve their goals?



VIV GROSOP

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.

Activism

THE TEEN COMMANDMENTS

Saving the planet needs pragmatism, not posturing, from every side



NICK FERRARI

Journalist, TV presenter and host of LBC radio's breakfast show

Who's up for the toughest challenge in the battle to save the planet? No, it's not going undercover behind the Bamboo Curtain to scuttle China's plans to build a coal-power station every other day. Nor to rescue polar bears from the sea as the ice caps melt. Or even to picket the British Grand Prix and persuade the teams to switch to electric cars. Rather, it is to confront the planet's most recalcitrant teen.

Admittedly she's driven by an admirable passion that she maintains in pretty grim circumstances – including an Atlantic crossing with a plastic bucket for a loo – but some brave soul needs to tell climate campaigner Greta Thunberg that it's time to get real.

The accomplishments of this 17-year-old Swede are truly extraordinary, but her demands and utter intransigence have become obstacles to her goals.

In the eyes of liberals, lefties, eco-activists, and environmentalists, this schoolgirl can do no wrong. They see her as the unlikely lovechild of Mother Teresa and Sir David Attenborough. As she travels the globe by boat, train and, presumably, pony and trap, the list of those who fall under her spell grows. The Pope, prime ministers, presidents, and even the heir to our throne all clamour to laud her. However, they fail to appreciate that her unbridled enthusiasm needs to have a dash of practicality mixed in, as her hectoring speech at this January's World Economic Forum at Davos in Switzerland proved. Committed and credible as she might be,

too often Thunberg becomes an angry, irrational teen in her speeches. Remember when she accused us of robbing her of her future? Seriously? While I love putting pedal to the metal – hammering along the highways to Fleetwood Mac's 'The Chain', pretending I'm on the last lap of the Monaco Grand Prix, taking La Rascasse with the champagne on ice and scores of adoring young women screaming me on – I'm not intending to leave future generations an existence like that in *Night of the Living Dead*.

On the slopes at Davos, where WEF members pony up between 60,000 to 600,000 Swiss Francs to attend (that's £47,000 to £471,000 – the more you pay, the more access you have), Grumpy Greta declared that all the necessary action to address carbon emissions and climate control should not be enforced by 2050, 2030, or even 2021, but "now". As delegates swooned and crusties around the world cheered, her giddy lack of understanding as to how this crisis can be addressed was exposed.

Regrettably, our own government has bought into this eco quackery. In February, it boldly announced that sales of petrol, diesel, and hybrid cars would cease by 2035. That's just 15 years away. As the value of our cars plummets to a level at which even Del Boy would turn up his nose, our popinjay, virtue-signalling politicians clutch their reusable coffee cups and treat plastic like the plague. They're in it only for "the optics" – how it makes them look.

Here's a cold, harsh truth: By the time the Hinkley Point nuclear plant is completed, it will have taken 15 years! We'll need perhaps another half-dozen similar plants to provide the juice for all these electric vehicles to power us into the future.

If you're planning a short drive or taking a bus to the shops later today, you're in for a nasty shock. To achieve La Thunberg's goals, they'll have to be phased out immediately. Planning a winter holiday? Forget it. Unless your family can jog there, or go by bicycle or skateboard, your holiday dreams are over. As to using your car, or van, in the future... No chance. The World According to Greta has banned all of those. Rickshaw sales will soar, though.

Change is only achieved when ambitions are realistic. That is why Greta's Great Expectations are impossible to deliver. Just as President Trump is too dismissive of climate change, activists lose support with their looming deadlines. When Trump, at Davos, highlighted the "foolish fortune tellers" of the past who incorrectly predicted apocalypses such as mass starvation and unmanageable overpopulation, he was using extremes to prove his point. The same tactics are used by the climate-change side. Saying "the world is on fire" and the countdown to eternal damnation has begun is exaggeration; so is pretending the very real crisis the planet faces is a cyclical blip.

It's time for facts. Calm minds and cool heads will tackle the issue of climate change, not tantrums from a seemingly uncompromising teenager.



SHUTTERSTOCK



Television

SCREEN SAVERS

The BBC is rapidly rethinking its funding options if the licence fee is cancelled. Can it compete with its online rivals for our affections – and wallets?

The BBC has long been haunted by the prospect of frail old grannies being dragged off to prison for not paying their TV licence. After some sabre rattling following the unexpectedly large majority secured by Boris Johnson in December's general election, the UK Culture Secretary, Oliver Dowden, announced a public consultation on the universal tax – £157.50 from 1 April 2020 – payable whether or not you watch BBC content. Decriminalisation would mean that non-payment would be a civil offence, just as it is with traffic offences, council tax, and utility bills.

The BBC realised long ago that incarcerating otherwise law-abiding citizens was a bad look, and while it is the public body responsible, it attempts 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, it fears that downgrading the penalties for non-payment could lead to a loss of income. So, it recently plugged a loophole: When it



PAUL ROBINSON

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

was created, the BBC envisaged the iPlayer as a TV catch-up device only. It is worth noting that the BBC was a pioneer here: When iPlayer launched in 2008, Netflix was still posting DVDs to its customers. It still does. However, iPlayer's success has surprised even 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 directly for the service.

Formerly, the licence fee was only payable by households watching broadcast TV, so viewers confining themselves to on-demand or catch-up services over an Internet-connected device were exempt from payment. Now a licence fee is payable if *anyone* in the household watches iPlayer, although 100% of the net revenue collected from the TV licence goes to the BBC. All the other media players in the UK – including ITV, Channel 4, Sky, Channel 5, Virgin Media, Netflix, and Amazon – are funded by advertising and 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 US corporate behemoths that are taking an ever-larger slice of 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 delivery of filmed programming possible across the globe. Furthermore, the business model of creating new original programming with most or all of the rights held by the media company enables identical programming, with the addition of a local language soundtrack, to be sold around the world, generating huge revenues very cost efficiently. Recent data from Ofcom indicates that the UK's young audience is now spending more hours per week watching "on demand" films and shows from Netflix, Amazon, and Now TV than scheduled linear TV channels such as BBC 1 and ITV. This includes the pay-TV channels such as Sky Sports and Sky Movies.

The BBC likes the funding from the licence fee and historically it has worked well. But now there are signs, particularly among younger households, that it is 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 than in the previous year.

The problem is that to justify itself, the BBC must deliver something for everyone, because that is how the licence fee is levied. But in reality, if certain audiences don't watch BBC TV or iPlayer, or listen to BBC radio, then their relationship with the BBC will wither or die. The BBC's future is not really about what governments do regarding enforcement, but the willingness of UK citizens to pay for it. Research shows that if they feel they are getting »

value from the BBC, people will happily pay. The risk is that the principle of universality is weakening. Wind back just 20 years, and nearly everyone in the UK watched BBC1. All the other services were effectively a value-add or tailored to particular needs or communities. It is unsurprising, then, that in the most recent BBC report a great deal is made of the need to reflect and serve the diverse communities across the whole UK. The successful implementation of this strategy is therefore critical to the BBC's goal of retaining the licence fee.

There is a mid-point review of the BBC's current charter in 2022, and the licence fee is safe until 2027 when the charter expires. So, what are the BBC's funding options? One is direct from the Exchequer. This is the model in Canada, Australia, and many other countries, and gives the government of the day the power to decide how much money the public broadcaster receives. The BBC is not in favour, because this will reduce its impartiality. The licence fee ensures balance in news coverage, but government control of the purse strings makes critical reporting challenging.

Another route is advertising. ITV and Channels 4 and 5 hate this, because it would re-direct revenue to the BBC, particularly when on-line and digital are competing for the money spent on TV. But the BBC says this risks reducing its ability to serve diverse groups, making it market rather than citizen driven.

The BBC's commercial division, BBC Studios, was formed by merging the distribution and studio lines of the former BBC Worldwide. 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, a margin of 21% but representing just 5% of total BBC income. So, the option of the BBC whipping BBC Studios to replace licence fee income seems remote.

The last option is the Netflix model of monthly subscription. Netflix has been hugely successful, with 167 million paying subscribers worldwide, achieved through smart marketing and a library of stunning films, series, and documentaries. And it has the benefit of scale. Netflix is now the world's largest investor in original film and TV programmes, exceeding even the Hollywood studios. The BBC could move to a subscription model, and it undoubtedly makes wonderful content, but the numbers are against it. First, it would struggle to charge more per month than Netflix. And without a compulsory licence fee, it's unlikely that each of the UK's 27 million households would pay for it. Even if 50% of households paid (which is better than Netflix in the UK), and were charged the most expensive Netflix plan cost, that's a total annual income of around £1.9 billion (at £11.95 per month) – not even half of the BBC's current income.

The BBC's challenge is to convince the public and the government of the day, that a well-funded BBC is something for which we are all willing to pay.



Politics

RING THE BELLES

Young Conservative women are so rare, the media is bending backwards to hear what they have to say



**OLIVIA
UTLEY**

Deputy Leader
Writer at
The Sun

Late last year, I received an unexpected call from viral video maker, Lad Bible. Would I be interested, the exceptionally young producer asked, in coming to Manchester to feature in an episode of their new series, *Agree to Disagree*. I would be paired with a female journalist with a worldview directly opposing mine, and we would thrash out our differences on camera, over a drink. Never one to shy away from a good argument (or free booze), I said yes.

And so it was that on a drizzly November afternoon, I found myself in a studio dressed up as a pub, waiting to have a drink with a stranger predisposed to hate me.

You can watch the result on YouTube. But suffice to say, my mainstream Conservative views were met with genuine shock. When I suggested that David

Cameron – the man who pulled Britain out of recession by its bootstraps – was, on balance, a good Prime Minister, my new friend’s jaw dropped to the floor. She’d never met anyone like me, she explained. To give her her due, she readily admitted that she lived in an echo chamber. But it turns out, that’s probably not the only reason: She’d never met anyone like me, because there are so few people like me around.

In the 2019 general election, just 15% of women age 18-24 voted Conservative, compared with 28% of men of the same age. It was the worst performance ever of a winning party in any particular sub-group, and revealed the biggest gender-voting disparity this country has ever seen.

As a young Conservative woman, I found the idea that the vast majority of young women loathe the Conservatives slightly disarming. So I took it upon myself to work out why.

The first and most obvious reason is social media. British newspapers are predominantly right-leaning, but newspapers are far more popular among men than women – more than 60% of the readership of *The Telegraph*, *The Times* and *The Sun* are male. If women, especially young women, don’t buy these papers, it would be fair to suppose they’re happy trusting Facebook, Instagram, and Snapchat as news sources. And because virtue-signalling content is most shared by millennials trying to curate a cuddly image, aggressively left-leaning views on news stories are the ones that perform best and influence the most users on social media.

Fear of ostracisation also plays its part. Girls can be vicious with each other, and more willing to “cancel” or “block” those with differing opinions on social media. In cliquy girls’ schools, that means that once left-wing opinions take root, they are contagious: It would be a committed young Conservative indeed who risked expulsion from the “It” gang for expressing a view that water companies shouldn’t be owned by the state.

But I think there’s a bigger and more alarming reason to consider. After years of debate about #MeToo and the gender pay gap, swathes of young women have internalised the idea that we are all victims. In fact, I don’t think it would be going too far to say that much of feminism, in today’s clothes, is all about women’s weakness, helplessness, and what we cannot possibly do for ourselves.

Our brave ancestors proved we could and deserved to stand on our own two feet, equal to one, equal to all, but too many of their descendants seem set on fighting for the opposite.

For the Labour Party, which now specialises in victimhood, that’s great news. All Momentum types have to do is flap their arms, screeching that “X is unfair”, and young women will swoon. For the Conservatives, who have rather more nuanced ideas, this makes recruitment tricky. Offering people a ladder to climb isn’t much use if would-be recruits

A hiring manager, whatever their politics, would surely sit up a little straighter when a young woman with something entirely different to say walked into the interview

would rather sit on the ground and cry. The irony is that the more young women indulge in the narrative of victimhood, the more they find that doors close around them. *The Guardian* might believe that a good company is one that stuffs every post with women – a wonderfully non-ironic recent column praised the diversity of the *Victoria Derbyshire* show, which boasts “a female deputy editor, editor, director and presenter, and all-female management at the top” – most employers are realising that it’s cognitive diversity that counts.

In my field, comment journalism, this manifests itself in particularly obvious ways. Because young Conservative women are scarce, and commissioning editors and presenters want to show all sides of the debate, the handful of us willing to express opinions in the press or broadcast media find that great opportunities come flooding in.

I wouldn’t be surprised if something similar was happening in other creative industries. After listening to 20 young women speak about their life experiences through a Corbynista lens, a hiring manager, whatever his or her politics, would surely sit up a little straighter when a young woman with something entirely different to say walked into the interview room. And if that manager had a bit of imagination, they might well decide that a new perspective on the world might help the flow of fresh ideas at their company.

Of course, if your daughter is a die-hard Corbynista, I wouldn’t recommend suggesting she fakes right-wing beliefs in the hope of getting a job – and I don’t suppose she’d listen if you did. But if, deep down, you think there’s a shy Conservative itching to break free from her left-wing body, then my advice would be to coax it into the open.

Yes, a few of her more small-minded friends, the type to overlay their Facebook profile pictures with the slogan, “Never Kissed a Tory”, might disown her. But I have a hunch that over the years – especially if you keep taking her to Boisdale – she’ll find some new ones who are more worth her while.

And you never know, if she plays her cards right, she might even get the chance to share a drink in a fake pub, on the wrong side of the country, with someone who dislikes her – and appear in a Lad Bible video for the privilege.

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 drama, *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



MADELINE 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.



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Brexit is done, but the transition period has just begun. The January 31st landmark, celebrated with Union Jack party hats, popped champagne corks, and one-too-many nightcaps, provided a necessary hiatus from the doom-and-gloom narrative that has dominated years of our public debate around Brexit. But the party was short-lived. The new bogeyman is the transition period, during which the UK and EU negotiate their free-trade deal – and the doomsayers are back.

Threats of no-deal have resurfaced, as have plots to dither and delay. France's Europe Minister has suggested the British Government would use "blackmail" to get a deal over the line, spoiling good faith on both sides. French President Emmanuel Macron recently cast doubt on the ability to secure a free trade agreement by the end of the year, reminding audiences both at home and abroad that the negotiations would be "tense".

But is this renewed hostility between the allies a necessary characteristic of negotiations, or is this how the EU wants to frame the talks over the next eight months? After all, the more we focus on the UK's future after Brexit, the less we focus on the EU's domestic affairs – which are on the brink of chaos.

The UK has been an easy target for European leaders these past few years. The world watched, fascinated, as it looked like the UK might be the first member state to step away from the European project. No doubt some healthy, respectful criticism levied our way was deserved. Under Theresa May, we endured endless debates, ruthless plots, and failed votes, as neither the Government nor Parliament could indicate to Brussels how they wanted Brexit to proceed. But all the attention was on the UK's supposed failings, and the EU didn't pull a single punch. Brussels' elite pointed their fingers at Britain in disgust,

Economics

DEAL OR NO DEAL

As the UK negotiates the terms of its withdrawal from the EU, don't let the pessimists at home and abroad spoil that Brexit breakthrough



KATE ANDREWS

Economics
Correspondent
for *The Spectator*

labelling the Brexit negotiations a "nightmare", with a "special place in hell" for "those who promoted Brexit without even a sketch of a plan of how to carry it out safely". The attacks got nasty, the accusations severe.

This conveniently distracted us all from the problems brewing in Europe. But now the UK has got its act together, and the EU's dirty laundry is on display. It appears far worse than the UK's back-and-forth over Brexit.

The pillars of the eurozone, Germany and France, are struggling internally, and their plights destabilise everyone around them. Germany teeters on the brink of a recession. Jobs are being cut across industries, but the industrial and mechanical sectors are feeling extreme pain. The country grew at an abysmal 0.6 per cent in 2019, and the auto industry has hit a 23-year low. With many of the EU's smaller partners dependent on German exports, this downward economic trajectory isn't just bad news for

Germany, but will have a serious impact on the bloc as a whole.

Meanwhile, the EU's other heavyweight, France, is dealing with a different set of struggles. Many of President Macron's relatively pro-market reforms appear to be working, but have no public support.

Macron's changes to the labour market – including looser rules around hiring and changes to France's benefits scheme to make sure work pays – have proven good incentive schemes to get people into work. His push for apprenticeships has led to a record high of nearly 500,000 placements, which has helped to improve employment figures. France's pro-market signalling has amounted to real changes in its attitude towards business and enterprise, creating a friendlier, more competitive culture.

But the French have not signed up to his reforms, as noted by Macron's approval ratings, now dangling at around 30 per cent. Tensions in society have bubbled over and are on full display. From arson to smashed windows and vandalism, the *gilets jaunes* (yellow vests) movement continues to tear up France's social contract, and French police have been exposed for being aggressive and sometimes violent with protestors.

While the transition period may be the top item on Britain's political agenda, Europe has other serious problems it must reckon with. This is not to say that the EU doesn't want a deal. It has always been in both the UK and EU's interest to secure a comprehensive trade deal post-Brexit, and no amount of tough talk on either side changes that economic reality. But the EU's grandstanding towards Britain is a bit rich, considering its own turmoil. Its member states' economic and social problems aren't going away overnight. Rather than continuing to point the finger at Britain, the EU would do better to start tackling problems at home.





Get jiggy

BIRDS DO IT

As the sap rises and the season turns, it's time to follow our avian friends and dust off our dance moves to prepare for peak romance



FLORENCE WALKER

Reporter for the
Evening Standard

Spring has sprung. As the buds pucker up in anticipation of a kiss from soft rays of sun, there's only one thing on Mother Nature's mind: sex.

Granted, it's never very far away from her prefrontal cortex. But right now, she's gagging for it and will ramp up her enthusiasm as the months progress, while warmer weather will have male and female eyes of all species a-wandering before you can say "heatwave".

But in the animal kingdom, that glad eye can come to nought without the help of another courting ritual: dancing. To encourage a mate, birds display some very elaborate moves to show that they're a catch.

Because it is generally the females that invest time and energy into developing their gametes (or "eggs" to us lay people), it's the males that put on a show. Peacocks are a prime example, although there are plenty more birds of paradise with exotic plumage. By displaying clean, healthy feathers they are signalling to potential love-interests, "I'm parasite free, you dig? Baby, let's make the next generation together."

Birds with fancy footwork have a serious advantage, however. Just observe the bowerbird and his extraordinarily hypnotic dance, which involves alternately dilating his eyes and a particularly sexy, slow waving of his wing followed by a quick shudder – enough to set any female bird aflutter.

Male and female birds perform courtship displays that are synchronised. This is especially important in monogamous pairings where the cooperation between the mother and father is essential for their offspring's wellbeing. These rituals, which can either be dancing or singing (karaoke, anyone?), facilitate pair

bonding, strengthening the ties between the parents and ensuring a happy nest.

So what of us flightless bi-peds? George Bernard Shaw perhaps expressed it best when he said that dancing is "the vertical expression of a horizontal desire legalised by music". Peter Lovatt, also known as Dr Dance, would agree. In one experiment, dance psychologist Dr Lovatt investigated the connection between movement and sexual attraction by filming dancers in a nightclub. His findings were unsurprising – good dancers make good bedfellows.

His first discovery was that the varying levels of testosterone in men make them dance differently, and that women preferred the dancing of men with higher levels of testosterone. But do higher levels of testosterone make you better in bed? Well, women report having more orgasms with men who have more testosterone. Are there really any other measures of a man's sexual prowess? No, I couldn't think of any either.

But it isn't just women who respond to dancing. Men do too, and in their case, those hips don't lie. Using eye detection monitors, Lovatt found that men who are attracted to women tend to focus their gaze on women's swaying hips – and these women were, incidentally, at the most fertile point in their menstrual cycle. There appeared to be a direct correlation between a woman being at peak fertility in her cycle, and the sway of her hips. Shakira, Shakira! Additionally, along with increased hip movement, the ratio between waist and hip size is a tell-tale sign of fertility. The higher the ratio, the more fertile the female.

No wonder strip clubs – for men and women – are doing such a roaring trade. Swinging around a pole or prancing in your smalls not your style? Then book a class at Dance Attic, Seen on Screen, or Caramelo Latin Dance to add some new moves to your mating and relating repertoire.

STAYING POWER

Post-Brexit, this is the moment to rebuild Britain to take a central place on the world stage by **Con Coughlin** and **Sir Peter Wall**

Boris Johnson's announcement that the Government is to undertake a wide-ranging review of Britain's global role post-Brexit provides the country with a once-in-a-generation opportunity to consider how it will approach the many opportunities and challenges our nation will face in the years to come.

Not since the end of the Cold War, when all the talk was about claiming the so-called 'peace dividend' following the Soviet Union's demise, has Britain had the chance to have a serious rethink about both its place in the world, and the best means of defending its interests.

Looking back at the 1990s, the reality, of course, was that although the dividend was taken, the peace never actually materialised. Within a year of the final collapse of the Iron Curtain in 1991, Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein had invaded Kuwait, thereby prompting the largest Western military mobilisation since the Vietnam War. A 500,000-strong combined force of American, British and many other coalition partners was assembled to liberate Kuwait from Iraqi control, thereby launching a new era of military interventions in the Balkans, the Middle East, North Africa and Afghanistan that have more or less continued up to the present day.

Moreover, while the challenge presented by Islamist terrorist organisations such as Al-Qaeda, the Taliban and, more recently, Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (Isil), has determined the direction of Britain's defence and security strategy for most of the past two decades, our defence and security establishment must now contend with the very different threats posed by rogue states such as Russia, Iran, and North Korea, as well as the emergence of China as one of the world's dominant powers. When dealing with the likes of Moscow and Beijing, it is unlikely that we are going to encounter the type of conventional state-on-state conflict that defined Western strategic thinking during the Cold War.

These days, sophisticated actors such as the Russians and Chinese are more likely to resort to non-conventional, deniable capabilities – subterfuge, cyber attacks, and proxy forces – as well as the exploitation of social media platforms to disseminate fake news designed to undermine the political stability of the Western democracies.



That is not to say that we will not need to rely on the traditional military deterrent structures that have served us so well in the past. While the large-scale military interventions of the previous decade in Iraq and Afghanistan have ended, we still have British combat troops deployed at an array of key hotspots, from Afghanistan to northern Europe. RAF fighters and drones played a central role in the defeat of Isil in Iraq and Syria, while the Royal Navy is leading the multinational naval coalition in the Gulf to protect shipping in the Strait of Hormuz from attack by Iranian gunboats.

But while we still require our Armed Forces to provide the backbone of the nation's defence requirements, it is also important that the wide-ranging review that is now being undertaken by the Government gives serious consideration to the changing face of modern warfare, for we live in an age of change – one in which the global threat environment is developing at an alarming rate, as are the methods being used by rival states to threaten our wellbeing. We need to understand these evolving threats and invest to harness technology to ensure that we have the advantage in a new era of persistent competition and confrontation. We need to change not only the way we fight, but the way we acquire winning capabilities. For traditional defence procurement, constrained as it is by antediluvian government rules, is far too ponderous to keep us ahead of our adversaries.

Consequently, in terms of Britain's future leadership role, the country now finds itself facing a true moment of destiny. We can either choose to go down a more isolationist path, an approach



Consequently, in terms of Britain's future leadership role, the country now finds itself facing a true moment of destiny

that has been espoused by some of the more xenophobic supporters of Brexit, which would simply result in Britain becoming an insular and marginalised nation. Or we can stand up and be counted in world affairs, and assume the added responsibility that goes with being a truly independent P5 power [one of the UN Security Council's five permanent members], one that is prepared not only to speak its mind on the key issues of the day, but to act in defence of causes it believes to be just and right, such as our democratic values and the rule of law, whenever these are challenged.

The nation therefore faces a critical choice, one that will define our place for the rest of the 21st century, which is why Mr Johnson needs to be applauded for undertaking his wide-ranging review of all the assets at our disposal in terms of both projecting and defending our national interests on the global stage.

As well as being clear on our national appetite for playing a more responsible role, and the political will to see that through in a crisis, it is important that our Armed Forces have the equipment and funding in place to provide the traditional hard power options that are necessary for defeating our foes.

Yet at a time when the threats we face are increasing both in terms of sophistication and variety, it is equally important that we give serious consideration to the soft power options at our disposal that will complement, and may on occasion replace, the traditional hard power options of deploying our military assets. These are most notably the expertise of the Foreign Office and the Department for International Development, where the skilful use of diplomacy and judicious investment in



From top: British forces prepare for operations in Iraq, February 2003; soldiers from the 1st (UK) Division relaxing in their gas masks; Boris Johnson with The Queen's Royal Hussars at the Tapa Army Base in Estonia, December 2019



foreign aid can help to mitigate the emergence of potential conflict.

Nor should we ignore the vital contribution our intelligence and security services have to offer. Intelligence gathering, whether it is the vital work carried out at GCHQ's Cheltenham listening post in intercepting the communication networks of our enemies, or understanding the intentions of rival state actors, is invaluable both to limiting the threats we face, as well as thwarting attacks against Britain and its allies.

This is why it is so important that every facet of our defence, national security and foreign policy apparatus are being included in this so-called Integrated Review, the outcome of which should help to define precisely how Britain intends to position itself on the world stage post-Brexit.

It could also be argued that, in the wake of Mr Johnson's victory in last year's general election, where his leadership was game-changing and generated the largest Conservative majority since 1987, the Government has the best opportunity to reshape Britain's global status since the Thatcher era, in which the Iron Lady definitively made her mark.

There is certainly a pressing need to revive our flagging presence on the world stage. The past decade, during which we ended our large-scale military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, has seen a dramatic decline in Britain's status as a world power. Partly this is due to the painful reductions that have taken place to the strength and resilience of our Armed Forces. There is also reluctance by our political class to take a leading role on the big issues of the day, whether it is tackling the Syria crisis, confronting Russia over its constant meddling in Eastern Europe, or standing up to Iran's mendacity in the Gulf, where it has hijacked UK-flagged shipping with impunity. This is why it is essential that the Government seizes the opportunity to make Britain's voice heard again.

Throughout the course of the long-running Brexit debate, Mr Johnson and other prominent Leave campaigners made constant reference to the concept of 'Global Britain' – the idea that the country, freed from the shackles of the European Union, was about to enter a brave new dawn where it would be able to embrace an array of exciting new



From top: F35B Lightning jet taking off from HMS Queen Elizabeth; The Queen passes a guard of honour, RAF base Marham, 3 February, 2020; Bombardier Louise Banton with a Desert Hawk 3 Unmanned Aerial System control centre, RAF Waddington, Lincolnshire, 2013





Boris Johnson with Donald Trump, UN General Assembly, September 2019

This was taken in the face of fierce opposition from Washington, and this controversial call may yet prove problematic for the Five Eyes relationship.

The bonds between the US and UK on defence, diplomacy and intelligence-sharing are deep and long-standing

challenges, from forging new trade deals to building alliances, both diplomatic and military.

To date, about the only indication we have given about how the Government sees our future relationship with the outside world is the inscription on the 50p coin specially minted for the occasion: "Peace, prosperity and friendship with all nations".

This worthy but improbable statement, which had Mr Johnson's personal backing, summed up the desire to heal the bitter divisions arising in the UK and Europe during the three-and-a-half years since the British people took the decision to end their country's then-44-year membership of the EU.

While there is much to applaud in the Prime Minister's vision of rebuilding Britain's global standing following our departure from the EU, work still needs to be done on how Britain intends to fulfil this key ambition. One vital element of our post-Brexit positioning must be to ensure that the transatlantic alliance remains the key pillar of our global outlook.


The bonds between the US and UK on defence, diplomacy, and intelligence-sharing are deep and long-standing, and are robust enough to withstand even the most difficult political differences, such as the recent row over the PM's decision to allow Huawei access to Britain's new 5G telecoms network.

More importantly from America's perspective is that Britain has the resources at its disposal to make it a credible player on the world stage and hence a worthwhile ally, and in this context the Government needs to decide whether the current level of defence spending, which is around 2% of GDP, is sufficient. It is all very well, for example, splashing out on two new 65,000-tonne Queen Elizabeth-class aircraft carriers, but they will lack credibility if they do not have sufficient numbers of combat aircraft and support vessels to make them operationally effective. Some US commentators still argue that, as a vanity project, they have already skewed the UK's conventional defence effort to a damaging degree.

There is certainly a compelling argument in favour of defence and security spending being raised to around 3% of GDP if all three services and their supporting agencies are to be properly supplied with the equipment and manpower they will need to be able to confront the many threats we are likely to face for the rest of this century and beyond. This is a tall order set against an ambitious domestic agenda: Global could well become rather more local if these arguments don't carry.

Another area that needs to be given serious consideration is the nature of our future global alliances. While the transatlantic alliance and NATO will undoubtedly form the bedrock of our world view, there are also opportunities to expand our horizons.

Australia, Japan, India, and the Gulf states are just some of the regions where there is an appetite for existing alliances to be strengthened and deepened. This strategy would enable Britain to expand its network of global alliances beyond the historic contours of the transatlantic relationship to pursue a more global influence.

There are exciting opportunities and responsibilities that lie before us as we seek to shape our post-Brexit destiny. It is now for our Prime Minister to decide how we can best employ them. These will be tough decisions with far-reaching consequences. 

Con Coughlin is the Daily Telegraph's Defence and Foreign Affairs Editor and General Sir Peter Wall is a former Chief of the General Staff

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 four 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 The Brand New Heavies 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 guitar towels. We might have 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."

Given the fractious and fearful times we are living in, The Brand New Heavies are convinced that their infectious brand of dancefloor escapism is exactly what the world needs right now. "We make music with a positive, upbeat message," Andrew Levy says with a smile as he polishes off the last of his mojito. "When you're on the dancefloor, you don't want to think about Greta Thunberg, Donald Trump, or Brexit. You want to escape from reality." **B**

TBNH is out now on Acid Jazz Records. For UK tour dates, visit seetickets.com/tour/the-brand-new-heavies

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

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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 Charchen 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 'Anglomaniya' 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 'Anglomaniya' 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.

In 2020, 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. ■

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BLINKY'S

TIME TO **SHINE**

IN ONE OF THE GREAT
MUSICAL MISCARRIAGES
OF JUSTICE, THE
WONDERFUL MOTOWN
SINGER, BLINKY, MISSED
OUT ON STARDOM.

NOW HER MOMENT
HAS COME, AND NOT A
MINUTE TO SOON, SAYS
CHARLES DONOVAN



Think of Motown, and Marvin Gaye, Stevie Wonder, The Supremes, and The Temptations spring to mind. But for every act the Detroit label launched into the showbiz stratosphere, an equally talented one remained earthbound. Syreeta (ex-Mrs Stevie Wonder) made two exceptional albums in the early 1970s that came and went with precious little notice. Fiery-throated Bettye Lavette recorded the tremendous *Tell Me A Lie* in 1980, which sat like lead in the record shops.

But no Motown star-in-the-wings was as unjustly overlooked as Blinky, a preternaturally gifted, young Californian with a gospel background who came to the label in the late 1960s. Motown was meant to be her fresh start in secular music (she'd already made a solo album for Atlantic Records, under her birth-name, Sondra Williams) and a chance to enter the mainstream. It's not as if she lacked the talent. While the company's reigning queen, Diana Ross, sang in a feathery, coquettish style, Blinky was more in the Candi Staton mould, with a grainy, emotional voice emanating from the solar plexus. She was an accomplished pianist, too. Yet, proving that talent and success are rarely commensurate, Blinky's Motown days kept her in stasis, damaging her confidence and career.

She recorded over five albums-worth of material in five years, but only a small fraction reached the public – through under-promoted, flop singles; a brief, brilliant turn on 1972's *Lady Sings The Blues* soundtrack; and a duets album with Edwin Starr. Only now, 50 years later, has her best Motown work emerged on luxury anthology, *Heart Full Of Soul* (Second Disc Records/Real Gone Music).

Blinky, so-called because she blinks a lot, grew up in Oakland and then Los Angeles, one of three children born in the 1940s to a pastor and his wife. All were musical. "My brother blew sax," she says. "I played violin, clarinet and piano, and my sister sang opera. My father blew trumpet and sax and my mother played piano and flute." Although it was a religiously observant household, no music was banned. "I listened to rock 'n' roll, Sam Cooke, Nancy Wilson, Mahalia Jackson, Nat King Cole, and every gospel song and artist."

Before her childhood was over, Blinky was a polished choir leader. Family friends included CL Franklin, whose daughters, most notably Aretha, would make entertainment history. Although one label tried to sign Blinky while she was in high school, "I wanted to be a missionary," she explains,

"to go into countries and help people. I didn't want to sing." But by the time she reached Motown in 1968, Blinky had recorded as part of gospel group, The Cogics, which featured Gloria Jones, Billy Preston, and Edna Wright. "We were all preachers' kids," she says. "It was my time with The Cogics that let me know I really wanted to be a singer." She arrived at Motown with an impressive CV; a cool look; and a voice that captured a song's emotion.

Blinky's first visit to Motown's Detroit headquarters, to sign contracts, was not an unqualified success. "I went to the sixth floor and in a big room were Berry Gordy, Smokey Robinson, Marvin Gaye, Ashford & Simpson, everybody big that you could think of. I'm looking like I'm going to a church meeting – I have a purse, gloves, and a little pillbox hat. I freeze. I don't know any of the people I'm looking at. I find out I've just interrupted Product Evaluation, the biggest meeting that's ever held, where records are judged." A shaken Blinky fled to the nearest bathroom but was brought back to audition for Gordy. Then, another hitch: Gordy asked her to sing a Motown song. She had to admit she didn't know any. "What saved me was Smokey saying, 'You play piano, don't you?' So I sat at the piano and sang 'Our Day Will Come' and 'God Bless The Child' four times. Norman Whitfield and Ashford & Simpson came in and Mr Gordy said, 'This is our new artist. She's from the Hollywood office and she's gonna be a big star'."

Three Blinky albums were assigned catalogue numbers before being cancelled. *Sunny & Warm* (1970) was completed and appears in its entirety on the anthology, while *Blinky* (1972) and *Softly* (1973) were only partially recorded. Blinky faced an array of problems. Motown's Quality Control department decided which singles and albums were released and may have favoured established names. The company was part-way through a chaotic relocation to Los Angeles. And, by the late 1960s, many Motown acts were huge stars and there was less energy for breaking new singers.

Blinky's manager at the time, Shelly Berger, says, "When Motown started doing television specials, getting involved in movies, Berry Gordy divorced himself from the record side of things. Blinky therefore lost a major champion". Berger also feels that her lack of Detroit roots cost Blinky, perhaps in terms of unconscious bias in Quality Control.

On its own, each of these problems might not have blocked her, but combined, they formed a



bricolage no talent, no ambition, no sheer force of will could overcome. Or, maybe Motown's approach to recording Blinky was at fault; she endured two-week-long studio 'blackouts', singing grab-bag assortments of ditties by all the key Motown writers, such as Ashford & Simpson ('I Wouldn't Change The Man He Is') and Stevie Wonder ('Don't Leave Your Baby').

The only songwriter who composed specifically for Blinky, building his songs around her character and style, was Clay McMurray, writer/producer of Gladys Knight & The Pips' first hit, 'If I Were Your Woman'. Who knows what might have been, had Blinky recorded an album written entirely by him, with one authorial voice and a strong producer's vision? Or if Motown had taken advantage of Blinky's talents as a pianist and composer, and pushed her as a self-contained auteur?

The emergence of her suppressed Motown recordings and the consequent vindication of her talents prompts mixed emotions in Blinky. Her eyes well up and she asks to pause the conversation. *Heart Full Of Soul* is the fruition of years of work by John Fraser, whose 'Free Blinky From The Vaults!' campaign got the ball rolling; Motown historian, Andy Skurow; and producer Joe Marchese. "I was totally amazed," Blinky tells me, her tears subdued. "I cried for a while. Then I got angry. Then, depressed. I listened to one song and then didn't listen to any more of it for weeks. Memories came back... being in the studio day and night with producers I didn't even know. My first thought was, 'How can these songs and this material mean anything now, 900 years later, if it didn't mean anything then?' Why would you put it out now?"

Eventually, Blinky's friend, Cornelius Grant, former musical director for The Temptations, changed her mind. "He said, 'You came to Motown at a bad time. Diana needed a hit, the Supremes were breaking up, Martha [Reeves] wanted to go by her first name, a couple of people had died, we were moving from Woodward to L.A. There was so

Blinky performs at the Harlem Cultural Festival in July 1969.

Inset: The new Motown anthology.

Previous page: A Motown publicity shot, c.1969



"I was totally amazed. I cried for a while. Then I got angry. And then, depressed"

much going on and you got caught in the shuffle'." The truth is that Blinky's recordings *were* good enough then.

Blinky's pop career expired and she returned to gospel. "I really felt like I couldn't sing. I thought, 'Maybe you're not a good enough singer for Motown'. But recently, after listening to all that material, I feel that I was one of the better singers there. Me and Brenda Holloway, I think we were the great singers at Motown."

What kept Blinky in constant work after Motown was her stature as a live performer, her reputation in gospel, and her international renown as a choir director. Her feelings about Motown are

now thawing. Although she states bluntly that "I learned nothing creatively at Motown," she has started to include songs from the anthology in her live set and she's quick to credit some of the stars she was paired with on tour, especially Sammy Davis Jr, for their guidance and support. She can now listen to the collection without such hurt. And in February, there came a rapprochement with none other than Berry Gordy, who came to her Los Angeles gig. They embraced and Gordy joined her on stage, accompanying her on guitar. "He said, 'An apology is owed you'," Blinky says, and there's closure in her voice. Disappointment and frustration fall away. Blinky, living embodiment of the old adage, 'talent will out', is at last getting some of the recognition that should have been hers half a century ago. **B**

'Heart Full Of Soul: The Motown Anthology' is out now on Second Disc Records/Real Gone Music

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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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 this issue's 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, with the sun casting its warming light, grow eagerly, like the fresh young shoots of asparagus. As I write, the shoots are busily making their way to the surface. (They say that on a quiet day, if you listen carefully, you might actually here them pop as the purple spears break

through the soil and take their first breath of air.) Asparagus is a great example of determination in the plant world, as is the vine. Its roots dig deep, curling round obstructions, until they reach water. With equal determination, in South Africa, members of the Old Vine Project are preserving the Cape's heritage vines (page 60) for future generations. Meanwhile in Scotland, ingenious and determined distillers are creating jobs and supporting their communities with innovative and exquisite gin-making (page 64).

On page 54 you'll meet a wonderful selection of food entrepreneurs who share the wisdom they have acquired on their individual journeys. 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 against naysayers, has had to pitch, endlessly, their ideas to everyone from banks or lenders to retailers and customers.

There's another determination in this section 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, Valentine's life is filled with angst and worry, yet he finds catharsis in simple experiences discovered in remote towns and villages across Europe. But he works for those moments. His determination to look for culture, for 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.

Then there's the ultimate in determination: Damien McCrystal (page 50), lunching where so many fear to tread. His lifelong campaign to preserve the liquid lunch should be taught in schools. Meanwhile, I am entering month four of not drinking. I call it "Dry Generally". I am determined; I will not falter. Well, not yet. I've been summoned to lunch with Ranald. I can't wait to be dragged, kicking and screaming with joy, off the wagon.



SHUTTERSTOCK



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'll end badly.

A profound example of this phenomenon 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.

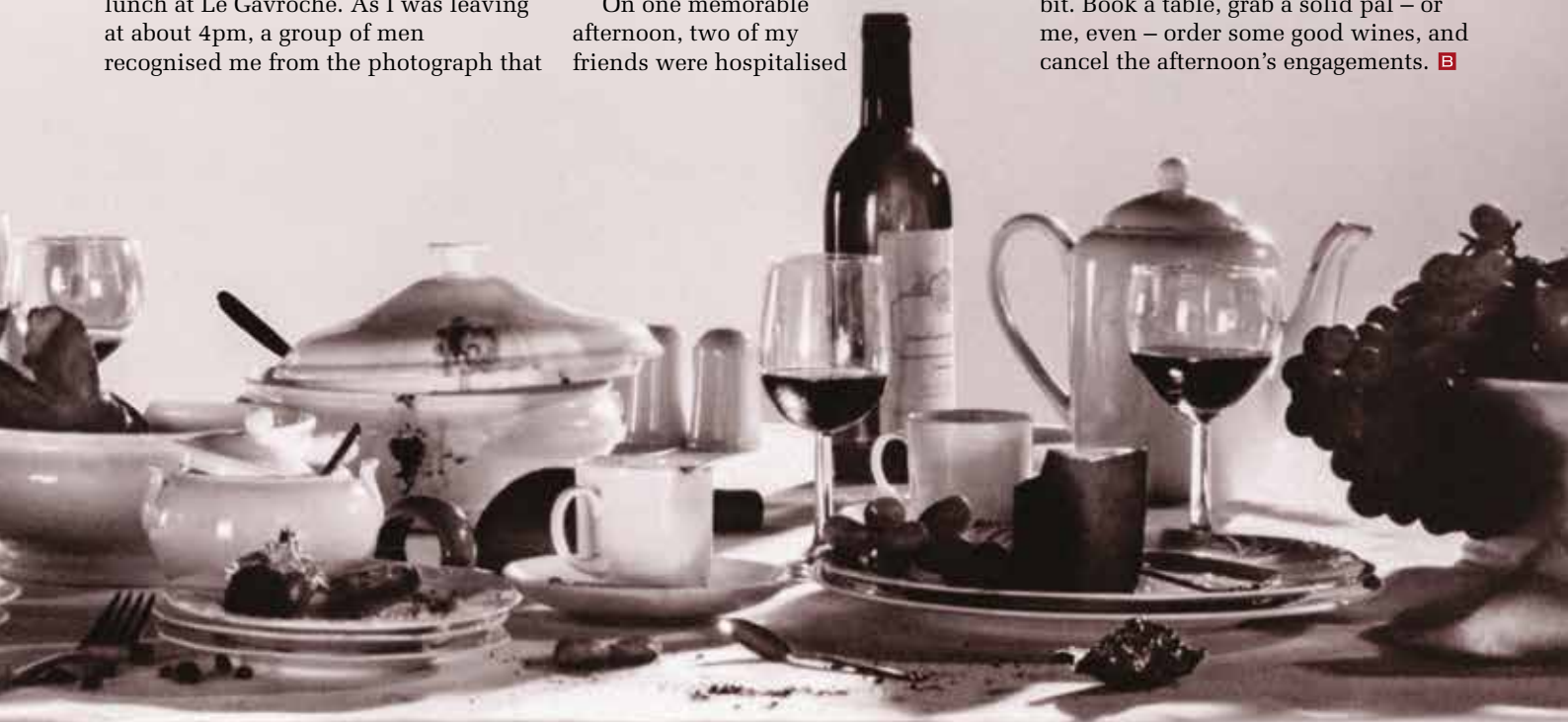
You have to be careful who you are lunching with to be sure nothing too unsavoury happens, and be confident they can maintain a strong pace without placing themselves in excessive danger.

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.”

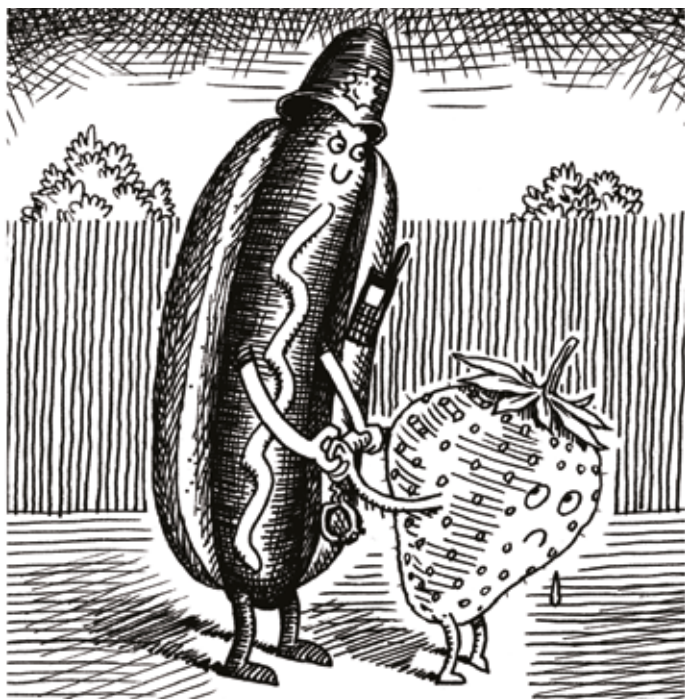
Your triumph? “Selling our ten-millionth bottle was satisfying, but so is raising investment and being recognised by people we look up to, such as Sir Richard Branson.”

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.

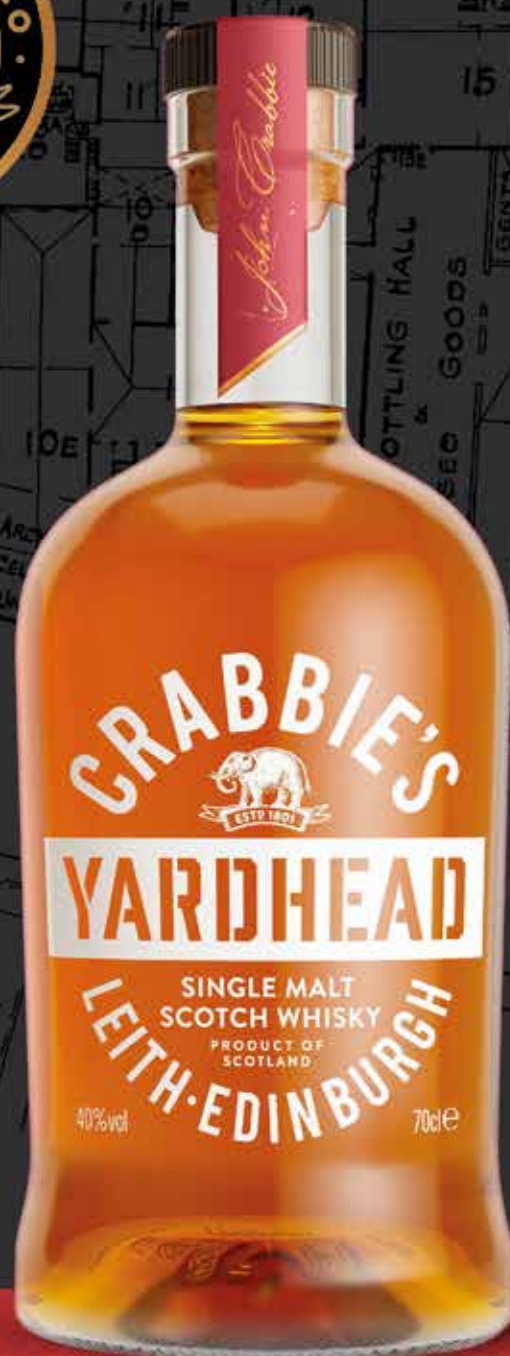
None of which would matter if it was fun to read, with a genuine wit as opposed to tired yet painfully self-important 'churnalism'. Does anyone really want to read about '15 Excellent Restaurants to Try in Ealing'; '13 Great Places to Eat in Victoria and Pimlico'; or '11 Passable Places to Grab a Kebab 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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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?"

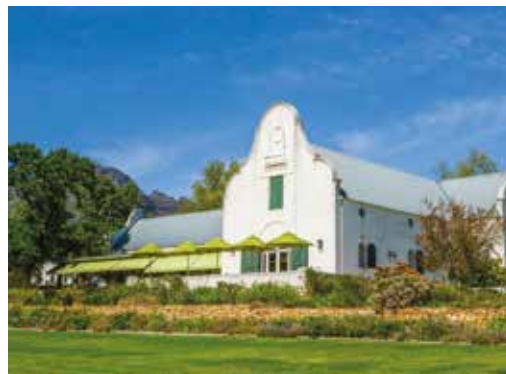
I recently visited several OVP vineyards and would highly recommend any reader to follow suit. The first two – DeMorgenzon and Waterford – are among the most beautiful, visitor-friendly estates in the Cape. They charge around £4 for tastings and you can swirl and sip their wines while gazing at the Cape's 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."

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".



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

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.





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 tipple, 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 Arbikie, which produces Nàdar gin using peas



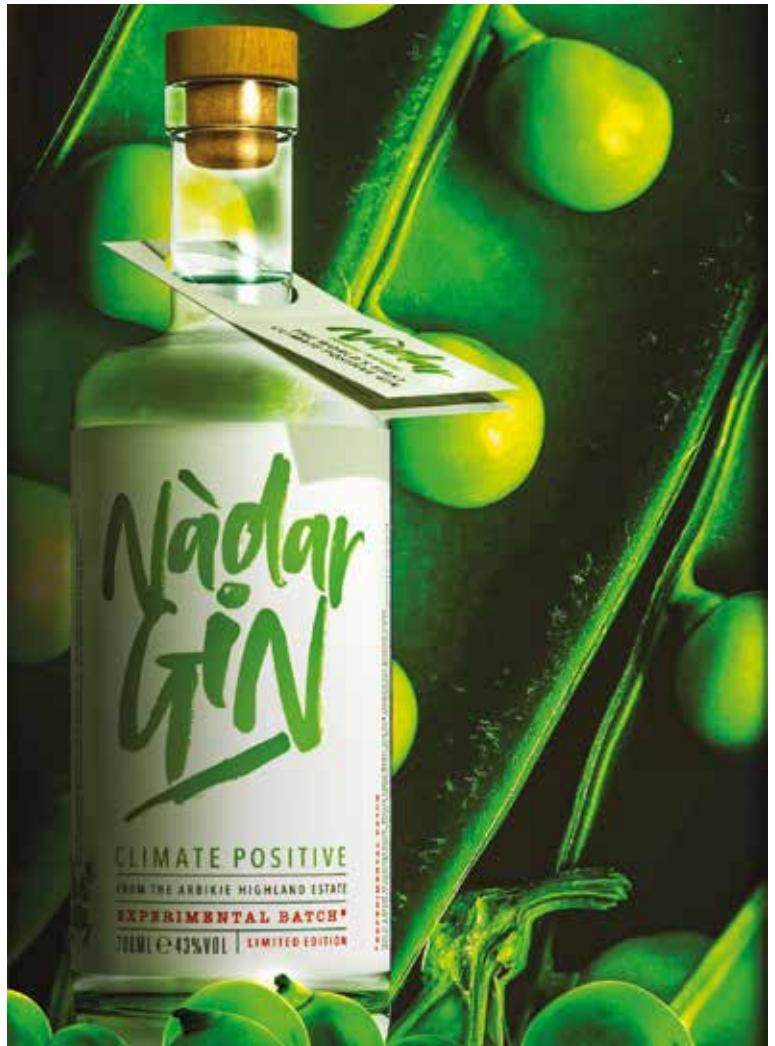
a herbologist, he established The Secret Herb Garden, growing more than 600 varieties of herbs to supply the restaurant trade and make natural products. With his botanical background, a few years later Hamish began experimenting with creating new gins from the garden's produce and founded The Old Curiosity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

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BUILT TO LAST

Crockett & Jones, one of the most lauded shoemakers in the UK, is celebrating its 140th anniversary with a new collection drawn from its peerless archive of perfectly-made footwear



From above: A Crockett & Jones craftsman stitches the uppers of a pair of shoes in readiness for the soles; the meticulous work of a pattern cutter; The Turner, from the 140 Collection, in Tan Antique Calf and Tan Willowgrain



It has been 140 years since Charles Jones and Sir James Crockett joined forces to create what is now regarded as one of the finest shoemakers in the world: Crockett & Jones. Jones was the shoemaker and Crockett the businessman, and together they formed a shoe manufacturing firm that has remained in the careful hands of the Jones family ever since, and become a benchmark of quality.

The Crockett & Jones Northampton factory – built in 1890 – hums with the work of skilled craftsmen and women. From clickers and stitchers to leather buyers and master pattern cutters, it is a hive of rare traditional skills, in which every pair of shoes is crafted with dedication and finesse. In honour of the firm's heritage, the new 140th Collection takes

inspiration from Crockett & Jones' fascinating and extensive archives.

A specially developed last for the collection, Last 140, features a hollowed-out neck, narrow waist, soft outside wall, and an elegantly English round toe-profile. It took months of model making, sampling, and test fitting to create a form fit for the collection.

Each style features an elevated Hand Grade specification with British racing green linings, black sole finishing, hand polished uppers, and a gold embossed 140th Collection logo – a nod to the very early days of branded production. The shoes are presented with a pair of lasted shoe trees that are handmade by the very same last maker of the 140 Last.

There are three styles. The Perry, inspired by a 1920s design, is a pin-punch cap-toe English Oxford with exquisite swan-neck facing details, made from black calf with a hint of black willow grain.

The Magee is a Cambridge Gusset Casual, a design thought to originate on Jermyn Street in London, home to Crockett & Jones' flagship store. This very 'London' style combines antique calf uppers with expertly stitched willow grain gusset sides and quarter inserts.

Then there is the Turner, the dandy of the three – a demi-boot with a pin-punched short-wing cap, often found on early-19th-century spectators. It is also available in antique calf and willow grain, with just the strap and 'fishtail' back strap in the grain, for a slight contrast to the hand-polished calf. **B**

Discover more about the skills intrinsic to Crockett & Jones' shoemaking at crockettandjones.com/the-article



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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

“**T**rains, 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. Prices for 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.

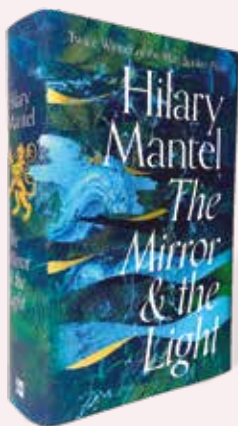
Books

SHELF IMPROVEMENT

Boisdale Life's new literary correspondent, **Alexander Larman**, recommends this season's most mind-massaging reads

Spring was once a quiet time for new books as publishers preferred to focus on the lucrative Christmas market, but that has now changed. Today, many publishers are releasing some of their most interesting, dynamic titles in spring. Here are some of the most eagerly awaited books of 2020, which may inform the nation's cultural debate for years to come.

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.

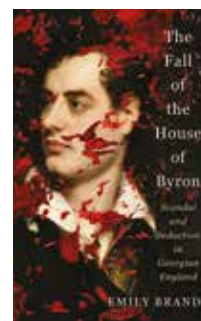
In an era when the death of Caroline Flack has led to many questioning whether the relationship between the press and those that they first build up, then destroy, is anything other than toxic, Jenner looks at 125 cases, ranging from the Bronze Age to the halcyon days of Hollywood, of those who achieved 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 Moubray, 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 sound-proofing – 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.

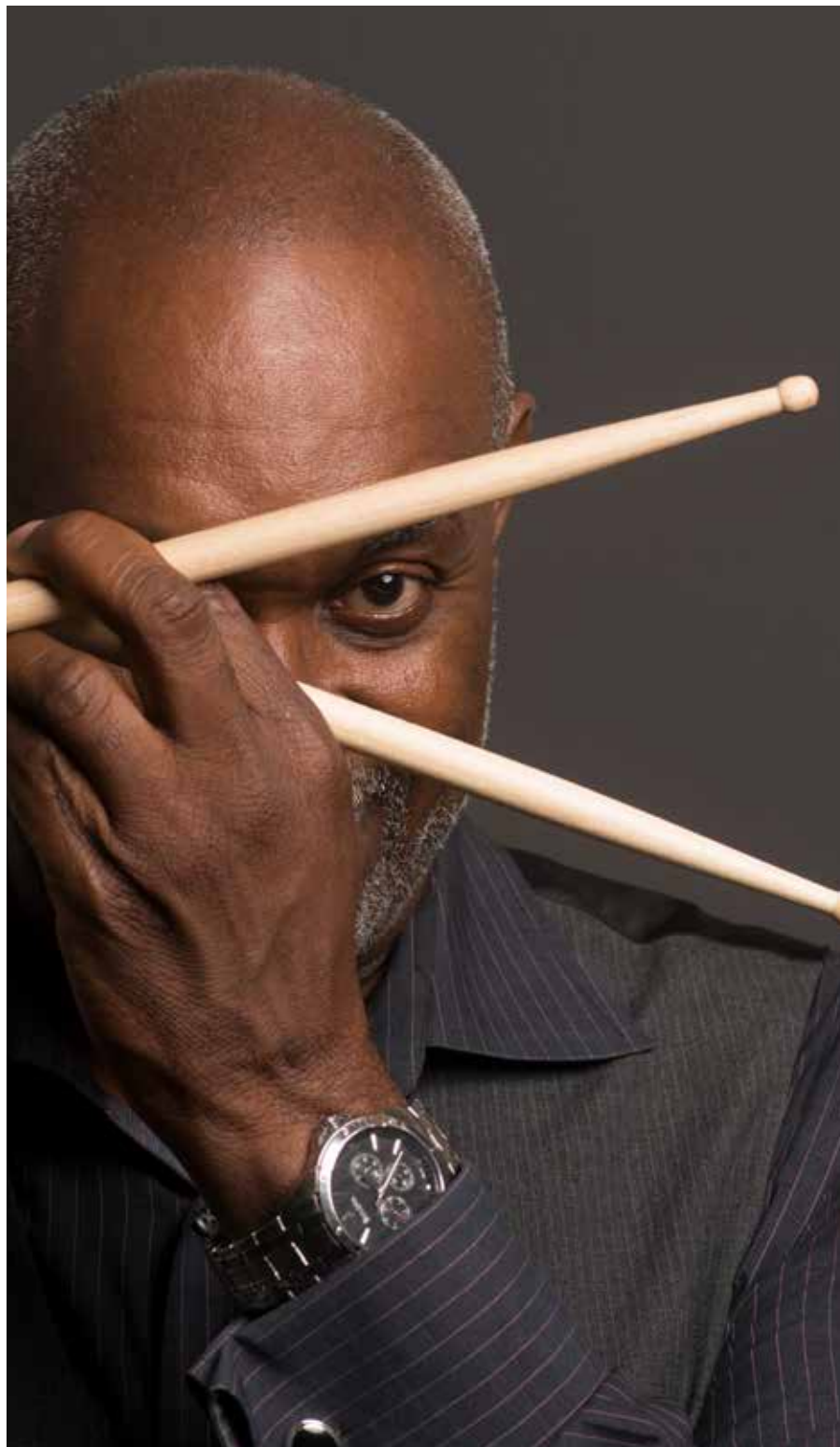
"Raw" describes the Senna. For me, this is the spiritual successor to the Ferrari F40, in both philosophy and looks. It's the most focused McLaren road car ever, and the truest to the racing team's DNA. Like Fen Farm's produce, it's untreated. Just about complying with motoring regulations, it's right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



DIARY

HIGHLIGHTS AT BOISDALE

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



THE BLACKBYRDS

8-12 SEPTEMBER

Boisdale of Canary Wharf
TICKETS FROM £35

Donald Byrd was a towering figure of the American jazz scene; a musician known for great crossover masterpieces and sublime solos. He was also a pioneering educator, bringing jazz studies to the fore at Howard University in Washington, where his students included the Mizell Brothers, who produced his 70s albums, and the group he co-founded and signed to Fantasy Records in 1972: The Blackbyrds. Kevin Toney (keys), Keith Killgo (vocals, drums), Joe Hall (bass), Alan Barnes (saxophone, clarinet), Barney Perry (guitar), and later Orville Saunders (guitar) and Jay Jones (flute, saxophone), were talented musicians who loved R&B. Over a decade-long career they made six studio albums with a string of dancefloor hits, including the Grammy-nominated



'Walking In Rhythm' and masterpiece of groove, 'Do It Fluid'. This is the sound of black America in the mid-70s: sophisticated soulful music with a touch of jazz.

The Blackbyrds have influenced an entire generation of hip hop legends, sampled by Gang Starr, Da Lench Mob, and Full Force, while 'Rock Creek Park' from the *City Life* album (1975) has been sampled by N.W.A. (above), MF Doom, De La Soul, Big Daddy Kane, and Massive Attack, among many more.

GETTY

THE MANFREDS**8-9 JULY****BOISDALE OF CANARY WHARF
TICKETS FROM £25**

Manfred Mann is one of the finest, most respected bands of the 60s. Their numerous hits were based in R&B with an undercurrent of jazz – a very unusual but winning combination of both style and substance. The Manfreds, with original frontman Paul Jones, will be performing many of their hits, including 'Do Wah Diddy Diddy', one of the most popular and instantly recognisable songs of the 60s, along with tracks from their individual solo albums.

THE REAL THING**15-17 JULY****BOISDALE OF CANARY WHARF
TICKETS FROM £35**

Britain's top soul and R&B group had three million-selling hit singles in the 70s, including 'You To Me Are Everything', 'Can't Get By Without You' and 'Feel The Force'. Thanks to their huge loyal following, the 80s was the decade that these songs were remixed and became huge hits again.

ALEXANDRA BURKE**22-25 JULY****BOISDALE OF CANARY WHARF
TICKETS FROM £35**

Exclusive London residency! Alexandra Burke rose to fame after winning the fifth series of *The X Factor* in 2008 and currently stands as one of the most successful winners of the show after selling well over four million records in the UK alone. Expect to hear Alexandra's original songs, 'Hallelujah', 'Bad Boys', 'All Night Long' and 'Start Without You' alongside the hits of Whitney Houston and Aretha Franklin.

ODYSSEY**30-31 JULY****BOISDALE OF CANARY WHARF
TICKETS FROM £25**

The 70s and 80s chart-topping trio who brought you the Top Ten hits, 'Native New Yorker', 'Use It Up And Wear It Out', 'Looking For A Way Out', 'Don't Tell Me, Tell

Her', 'Inside Out', and 'Going Back To My Roots'. This is old school meets new school meets old school again as the journey continues in 2020.

**THE DEFINITIVE
RAT PACK****3-13 AUGUST****BOISDALE OF CANARY WHARF
TICKETS FROM £44.50**

Let The Definitive Rat Pack transport you to the Sands Hotel in the 60s, when the Kings of Swing were at the very peak of their fame. Hear the guys sing classic songs such as 'Fly Me To The Moon', 'New York, New York', 'Chicago', 'One For My Baby', 'The Lady Is A Tramp', 'That's Amore', 'Volare', 'Ain't That A Kick In The Head', 'King Of The Road', 'Everybody Loves Somebody', 'Mr Bojangles', 'Bye Bye Blackbird', 'Leroy Brown', 'Mack the Knife', 'What Kind Of Fool', and 'Me and My Shadow'.

**BOOGIE WOOGIE
WITH JOOLS
HOLLAND****2 SEPTEMBER****BOISDALE OF CANARY WHARF
TICKETS FROM £99.50**

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

BONEY M**3 SEPTEMBER****BOISDALE OF CANARY WHARF
TICKETS FROM £65**

Everyone knows the name, and with 150 million records sold, knows at least one of their songs. We welcome back Boney M for this exclusive show where you can expect to hear all their hits, including 'Daddy Cool', 'Ma Baker', 'Sunny', 'Rasputin', 'Mary's Boy Child / Oh My Lord', and 'Rivers of Babylon'. An unmissable event.

**HORACE ANDY****18 JUNE****BOISDALE OF CANARY WHARF
TICKETS FROM £25**

Horace Andy is a Jamaican singer-songwriter known for having the sweetest voice in reggae music and for his long association with British trip-hop band, Massive Attack. He has become an enduring voice on the Jamaican music scene, with his signature early-70s hit, 'Skylarking' defining his ability to deliver songs of black determination and social commentary.

**MICA PARIS****1-2 JULY****BOISDALE OF CANARY WHARF
TICKETS FROM £25**

After her sell-out shows at Boisdale, Mica returns to Canary Wharf with hits including 'My One Temptation', 'Breathe Life Into Me', and 'Where Is The Love?'. The Queen of Soul boasts a career full of Top Ten hit singles and a platinum-selling album, and has collaborated with such musical legends as Prince and the irrepressible Jools Holland.

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BOISDALE MUSIC AWARDS

13 OCTOBER

**BOISDALE OF CANARY WHARF
TICKETS FROM £149.50**

The Music Awards is a celebration of some of the greatest entertainers in the world of jazz, blues, soul and reggae. Hosted by one of the most influential broadcasters in music, Jools Holland, and celebrating artists that have performed at Boisdale of Canary Wharf, this is a truly unique and unpredictable occasion that honours extraordinary talent and sees a cross section of genre defining performances for one night only at London's leading live music restaurant. Previous winners and performers include Soweto Kinch, Courtney Pine, Rebecca Ferguson, Melanie C, Lulu, The British Collective, Horace Andy, Luciano, Fleur East, Alexander O'Neal, Mica Paris, Floacist, The Zombies, Shola Ama, Tallia Storm, Raye, Dawn Penn, The Sharmoofers, and Judi Jackson.

TIGNANELLO DINNER

5 OCTOBER

**BOISDALE OF CANARY WHARF
TICKETS FROM £150**

The Antinori family have been making wines for 635 years, with Tignanello as their flagship vineyard and one of the world's most coveted wines. Allegra Antinori joins us for a once-in-a-lifetime dinner to celebrate her family's legacy and savour these magnificent single-estate wines.

FRANK AND DEAN'S VEGAS SHOW

**23 NOVEMBER –
30 DECEMBER**

**BOISDALE OF CANARY WHARF
TICKETS FROM £29.50**

Back for its ninth fabulous year, Frank and Dean's Vegas Show is the best party in town. Steve Pert and Iain Mackenzie sing Rat Pack classics and finale with a tribute to Vegas superstars such as Tom Jones, Elvis, and Andy Williams. Join us for a cool Yule at London's most beautiful supper club.

VINA CARMEN CIGAR AWARDS

30 NOVEMBER

BOISDALE OF CANARY WHARF

TICKETS FROM £195

Hosted by Tom Parker Bowles and bringing together cigar aficionados and celebrity cigar smokers from around the globe, Boisdale's is the most prestigious cigar awards event outside Havana, celebrating iconic cigars; producers; writers; terraces; 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 2020.



BOISDALE

LONDON'S GREATEST LIVE MUSIC RESTAURANTS AND BARS

PRESENT

The Definitive

RAT PACK



MARK ADAMS
IS DEAN MARTIN

STEPHEN TRIFFITT
IS FRANK SINATRA

GEORGE DANIEL LONG
IS SAMMY DAVIS JUNIOR

3, 4, 5, 6, 10, 11, 12, 13 AUGUST

THE ORIGINAL STARS OF THE FASTEST SELLING WEST END SHOW OF ALL TIME

FLY ME TO THE MOON, NEW YORK NEW YORK, CHICAGO, THAT'S AMORE, VOLARE, LADY IS A TRAMP, ONE FOR MY BABY



Singing was irresistible *The Independent*



Seen by more than 10 million people worldwide *Harpers Bazaar*

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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 appears at Boisdale of Canary Wharf from 22-25 July



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 'My Best Friend's Wedding', opening in September (bestfriendsweddingmusical.com). Follow Alexandra on Instagram, @alexandraburke, and visit melissabellfoundation.com.



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