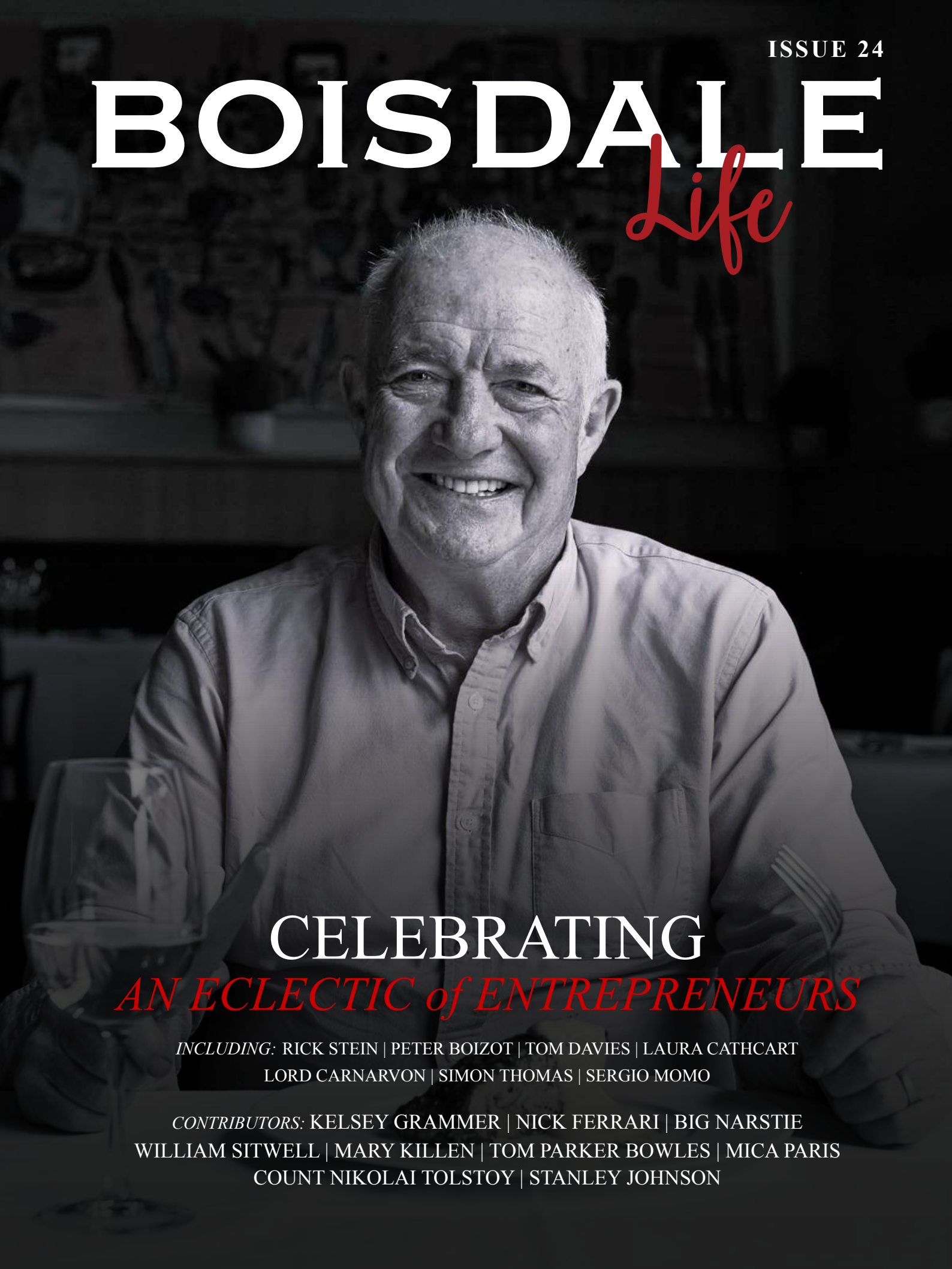
ISSUE 24

BOISDALE Life



CELEBRATING
AN ECLECTIC of ENTREPRENEURS

INCLUDING: RICK STEIN | PETER BOIZOT | TOM DAVIES | LAURA CATHCART
LORD CARNARVON | SIMON THOMAS | SERGIO MOMO

CONTRIBUTORS: KELSEY GRAMMER | NICK FERRARI | BIG NARSTIE
WILLIAM SITWELL | MARY KILLEN | TOM PARKER BOWLES | MICA PARIS
COUNT NIKOLAI TOLSTOY | STANLEY JOHNSON

XERJOFF

blends

XERJOFF

IOMMI

DEIFIED

DEIFIED

feat.

TONY IOMMI

TORINO - MILANO - PARIS - MONTE CARLO - LISBOA - BARCELONA - FRANKFURT
LONDON - DUBAI - KUALA LUMPUR - MYKONOS - JAKARTA

XERJOFF.COM

XERJOFF

ITALIAN LUXURY PERFUME

TORINO - MILANO - PARIS - MONTE CARLO - LISBOA - BARCELONA - FRANKFURT
LONDON - DUBAI - KUALA LUMPUR - MYKONOS - JAKARTA

XERJOFF.COM

Ranald Macdonald; Founder, Editor & Chief of Boisdale

CHOICE IS THE CURSE OF THE 21ST CENTURY

I first coined this phrase about a decade ago (I suppose others may also claim credit for it), and it has never felt truer. Over the past 30 years, the world has changed beyond measure: never have we had so much choice of products, travel, and entertainment. Endless, exhausting, soul-sapping choice.

Once upon a time, we had three TV channels. If all three were dreadful, we did something else. Today, we have 7 000 streaming options and still end up sighing, "There's nothing to watch." Binge-worthy TV has officially become the number-one dinner-party topic of the chattering classes. Enter Tom Parker Bowles, our new film critic, whose first article explores the deliciously ghastly world of horror.

Music has changed even more dramatically. In the 1970s, an album cost around £3, or roughly £50 today; now, for £10 a month, you can gain access to virtually all the music ever recorded. So the business model is now completely different: one million streams now earn about £3 000; back then, a million-selling single would have netted the artist around £300 000 in today's money.

For many of us, that's a staggering reminder of how the digital age has shifted value and rewards. No one surfed the vinyl era quite like Elvis. Don Reedman recalls his lifelong love and career with Elvis – the first song he produced for Elvis, *Burning Love,* was on the first Elvis album I bought in 1974, and which I remember cost me £2.99, almost a year's pocket money then. Mica Paris, meanwhile, shares memories of her 1988 platinum album *So Good*, riding the last wave of vinyl success before CDs took over.

The profit has also been sucked out of the restaurant trade. We all know why. But the onus of choice still hangs like a curse over the thirsty grazing public. "What shall we have for lunch?" is now a culinary personality test: will it be Italian, Japanese, Thai, Lebanese, Peruvian, French, vegan, a fusion of all of the above... or Scottish? (I must say Boisdale remains a safe bet for proper lunch!) For a journey into Lebanese cuisine, please read Michael Karam's delicious memoirs of Beirut; for a wider perspective, William Sitwell, *The Telegraph*'s restaurant critic, remembers 25 years of Britain's evolving dining scene.

Sadly, insurmountable choice does not appear to extend to economic opportunities for the young. Whilst AI promises almost infinite possibilities, but paradoxically fewer jobs, it is harder to start a business now than ever. We need to celebrate entrepreneurial spirit at every level of society to help us navigate our way forward, as well as drive the economy.

In this issue, we celebrate the entrepreneur in all shapes and sizes (no multiple offences intended!). While I was assembling our selection of inspirational entrepreneurs, I discovered that there is no established collective noun for a group of entrepreneurs.

Given that this is what we are presenting to you in this magazine, our new editor Bill Knott and I have come up with a couple of suggestions for you to consider. So, without telling you whose is which, the choice is either an eclectic or a hazard of entrepreneurs. The former suits our feature better, but please let me know your thoughts. The best argument for either, or indeed a better suggestion, will win a bottle of Boisdale Vintage 2006 Grand Cru Champagne.

The world has changed beyond recognition; humans, not so much. Our brains are still running on the same hardware as cavemen, and we still do exactly the same things. We form tribes, distrust other tribes, and insist loudly that the next group of leaders will fix everything.

Meanwhile, our technology has evolved faster than our abilities, often at the cost of our common sense: in both real and human terms we have ended up poorer. Pocket supercomputers containing the sum of all human knowledge are mostly used to vaingloriously photograph lunch or an aspirational holiday. For perspective, our Time to Remember section takes you 80 years back to the end of World War II with Nikolai Tolstoy and General Sir Peter Wall, and to 1925 with Bruce Anderson for an examination of Churchill's return to the Gold Standard, before black gold reshaped everything. General Sir Simon Mayall outlines the origins of the modern Middle East, giving insightful context to a part of the world that seems increasingly incomprehensible.

The truth is simple: the world is faster, louder, and more subscription-driven than ever. Humans remain the same, our instincts unchanged. The future is just the past on fast-forward. We are now a species with infinite information and zero wisdom, unlimited connectivity, and no idea how to answer the phone when it rings. Thank God for *Boisdale Life*!

RANALD MACDONALD

BOISDALE Life

Twitter @boisdale
Instagram @boisdale_restaurants
Web boisdale.co.uk

Founder & Chief Ranald Macdonald
Editor Bill Knott
Art Editor Matt Leppenwell
Cigar Editor Ricardo Carioni

Marketing Director Palvi Bodani
Music Director Tom Bull
Operations Director Andy Rose
Financial Director Vishal Khimasia

Boisdale Life ISSN 2058-499 BPA. Audited Circulation of 20.000 © 2025 Published by Boisdale Limited, 15 Eccleston Street, London SW1W 9LX.

Boisdale of Canary Wharf

Boisdale is not just a magazine. Boisdale has been bringing Scottish cuisine and traditions to London since 1989. The original restaurant in Belgravia is warm, rich, and unmistakably Scottish and Canary Wharf which opened in 2011 is our very own Batcave in Gotham City where the whisky flows and the music never stops. We serve the finest ingredients from across the British Isles, with a nod to the Highlands and Hebrides. Every night brings live music, menus showcase craftsmanship, and every glass tells a story, from world-class spirits and cocktails to our award-winning wine list. Cigar lovers? Our humidor is one of Britain's finest.

NEW
CENTURY

Your Reputation.

Promoted. Defended. Enhanced.

Contact

Holly Harvey
Director of Corporate & Reputation Management
+44 (0)20 7930 8033
hollyharvey@newcenturymedia.co.uk

FINANCIAL | CORPORATE | POLITICAL | REPUTATION

85 BUCKINGHAM GATE | WESTMINSTER | LONDON | SW1E 6PD

NEWCENTURYMEDIA.CO.UK

CONTENTS

16

28

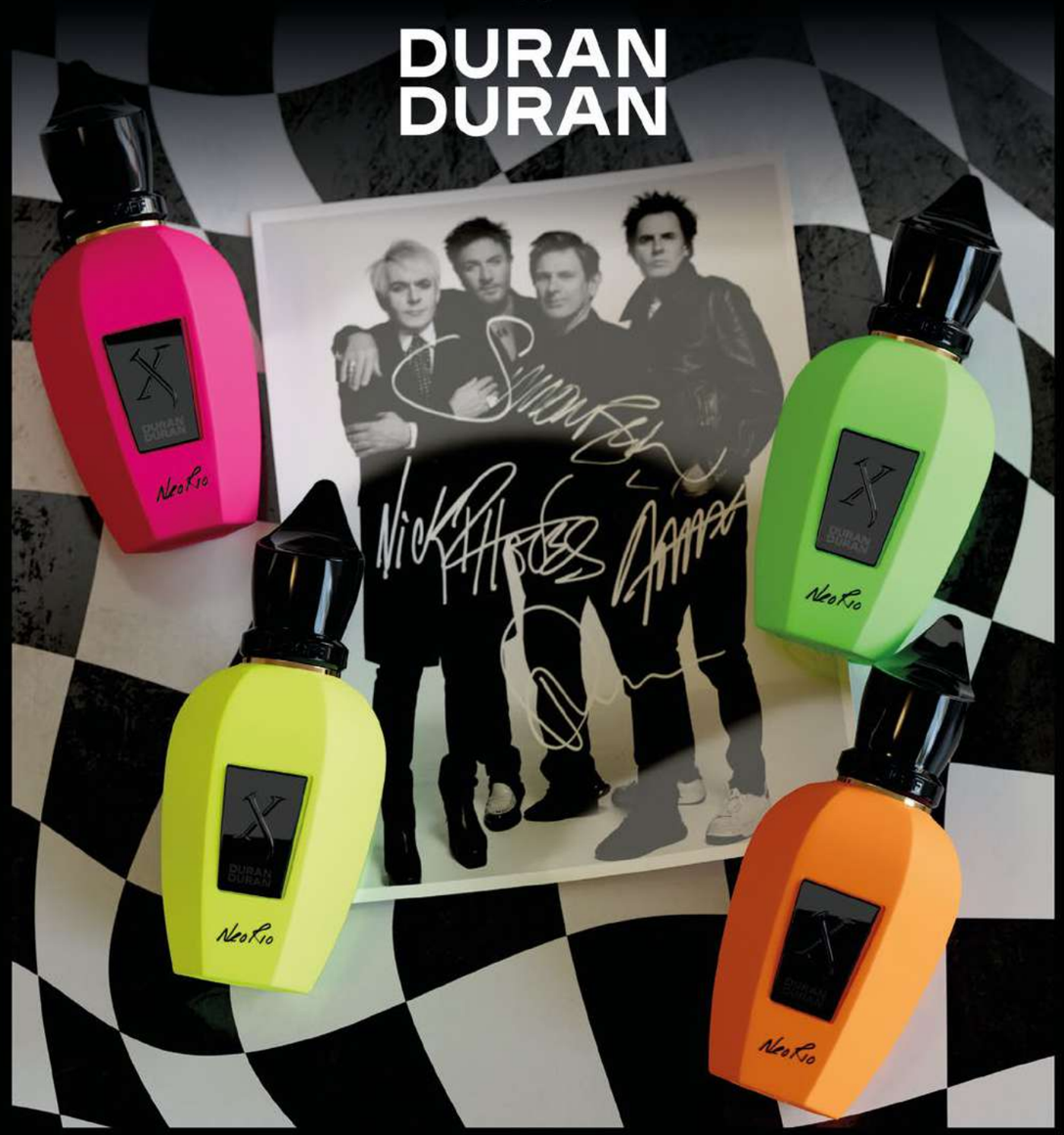
64

76

XERJOFF

X

DURAN
DURAN



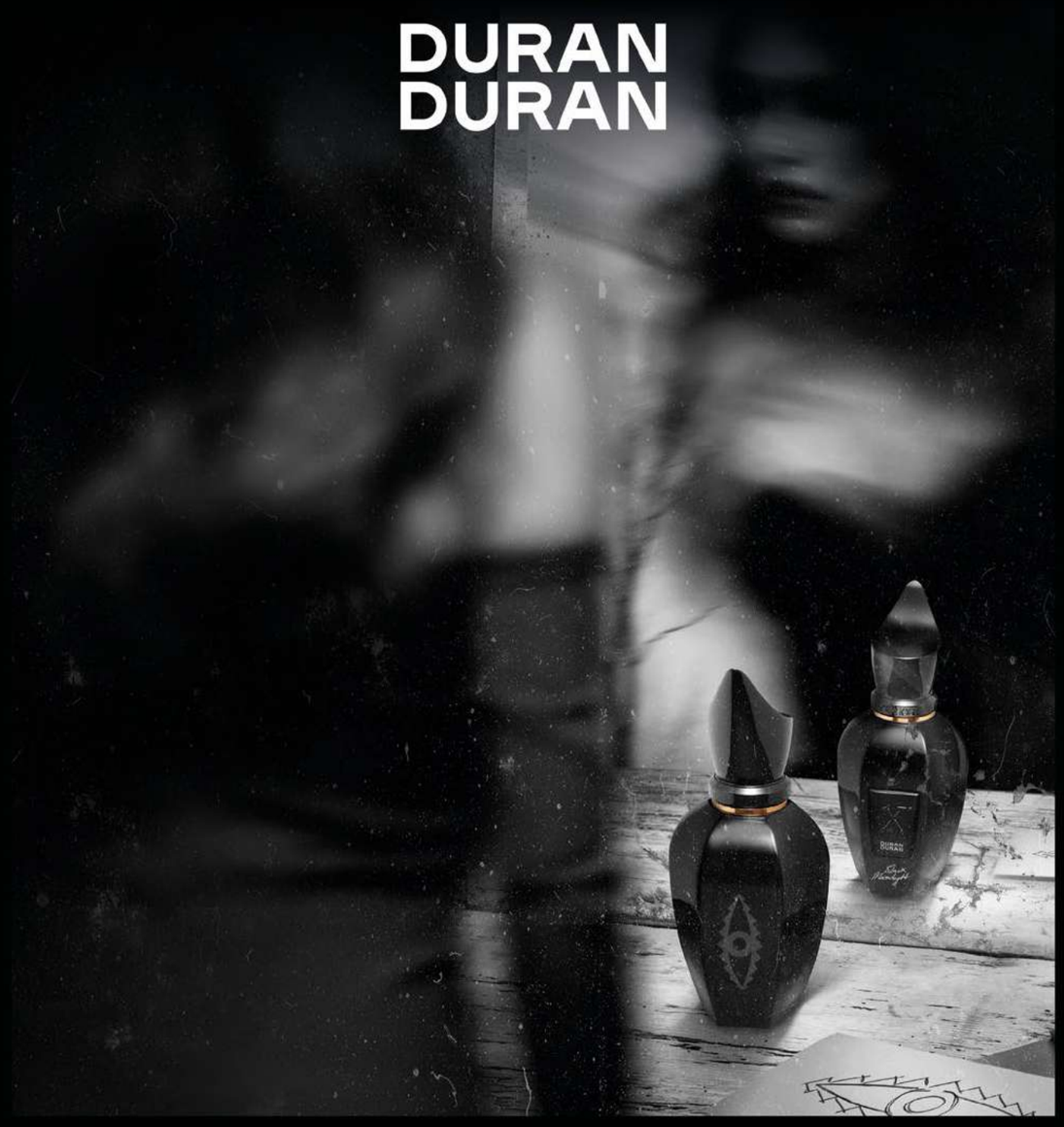
TORINO - MILANO - PARIS - MONTE CARLO - LISBOA - BARCELONA - FRANKFURT
LONDON - DUBAI - KUALA LUMPUR - MYKONOS - JAKARTA

XERJOFF.COM

XERJOFF

X

DURAN
DURAN



TORINO - MILANO - PARIS - MONTE CARLO - LISBOA - BARCELONA - FRANKFURT
LONDON - DUBAI - KUALA LUMPUR - MYKONOS - JAKARTA

XERJOFF.COM

LIFE & TIMES

THE XERJOFF BOISDALE MUSIC AWARDS 2025

The night ended with a vibrant spontaneous finale when Boisdale British Icon Award winner Joss Stone jumped up onto the stage to join Boisdale Show Artist of The Year Fil Straughan. Rebecca Ferguson and Vanessa Haynes were soon to follow and many others came up to join them all, reaffirming Boisdale as one of London's greatest homes of live music.

The 13th *Boisdale Xerjoff Music Awards 2025*, hosted by Jools Holland and Rebecca Ferguson. Canary Wharf lit up London with a celebration of musical brilliance.

Joss Stone was crowned *Boisdale British Icon*, Guy Chambers received the *Legacy Award for Musical Excellence* alongside a heartfelt video tribute from Robbie Williams, and Nitin Sawhney was honoured for his *Boisdale Outstanding Contribution to British Music* Award.

Other outstanding award winners on the night, not in photos opposite, included *Best Band*: Vintage Explosion; *Blues Artist of The Year*: Jack Broadbent; *Reggae Artist of the Year*: Janet Kay; *Female Artist of the Year*: Miraa May; and *Emerging Artist of the Year*: Teshay Mekeda.

It was a glorious, and exquisitely fragrant evening thanks to Xerjoff.

Don Reedman, Jools Holland, Guy Chambers and Rebecca Ferguson

Janet Kay, Reggae Artist of the Year with (left) her husband, actor Victor Romero Evans, and (right) Leee John

Eternal *bandmates Christel Lakhdar, Easther Bennett and Vernie Bennett*

Vanessa Haynes with Maxi Priest

Boy Wonder, Music Lifetime Award Winner with Ranald Macdonald

Junior Giscombe, Soul Artist of the Year

Omar Lye Fook MBE with Spoony, DJ of the Year, and friend

Jools Holland, Simon Bartholomew, Ollie Wride (winner of Male Artist of the Year) and Rebecca Ferguson

Santa Rita

Colección de Origen

Desde 1880

Discover the collection, explore the origin

CHILE | @santaritawines | www.colecciondeorigen.com

Casa Real

Santa Rita · Since 1880

Casa Real, the ultimate expression of Santa Rita´s historic Alto Maipo

This 100% Cabernet Sauvignon comes from our best 45 year old vines grown on gravel terraces on the South bank of the Maipo river.

Distributed through La Place de Bordeaux, Casa Real has a growing reputation as one of the most collectable South American wines in the world.

Santa Rita

www.santarita.com/casa-real

THE SANTA RITA BOISDALE CIGAR SMOKER OF THE YEAR AWARDS 2024

Towards the end of a magnificent evening with Tamer Hassan, Cigar Smoker of The Year 2017; Ray Winstone, Cigar Smoker of the Year 2023; and Piers Morgan, Cigar Smoker of the Year 2024.

Jack Churchill lights up a Davidoff Grand Cru Robusto

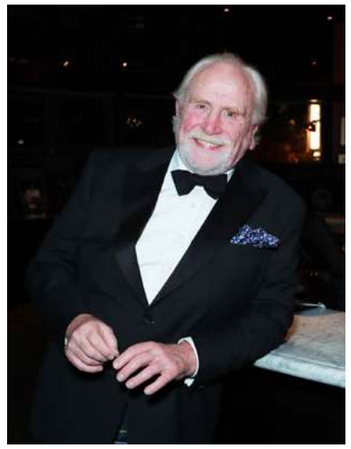
The 13th *Boisdale Xerjoff Cigar Smoker of the Year & Awards* was, as always, consummately hosted by Tom Parker Bowles at Boisdale of Canary Wharf.

Notable awards not mentioned in the gallery include: Jordan Hillman, who collected the *Cigar Spirit of the Year* for the *Tomintoul Cigar Malt; Cigar of the Year*, presented to Ken Silverio for the E.P. *Carrillo Encore Majestic; Churchill Cigar of the Year* to Sean Croley of Hunters & Frankau for the *Romeo y Julieta Wide Churchill; Best Cigar Newcomer of the Year* to Lewis Seymore for the *Casa 1910 Revolutionary Cuchillo Parada*; and finally, but not least, Blue Curran of The Emory, who won *Cigar Sommelier of the Year.*

Other previous winners attending included James Cosmo and Kelsey Grammer. Friendship, fine cigars, and exquisite wines from *Santa Rita* were enjoyed throughout the evening, mingling beautifully with the sensational scents of *Xerjoff.*

Cigar Chef of the Year Niall Keating with Roy Sommer of Davidoff

DJ legend Paul Oakenfold, with Cigar Musician of the Year, Omar Lye Fook



Scottish national treasure, James Cosmo

Anna Lopez of Hunters & Frankau was crowned Cigar Communicator of the Year

Mitchell Orchant received the coveted Cigar Lifetime Achievement Award

Rodrigo Medina of Plasencia, Cigar Producer of the Year, thanked by Tom Parker Bowles and Ranald Macdonald

Scott Vines and Tom Parker Bowles with Piers Morgan, the Cigar Smoker of the Year 2024, wearing the world's first cigar sunglasses made out of a Romeo y Julieta cigar by Tom Davies

THE BOISDALE LIFE EDITOR'S LUNCH & AWARDS 2024 IN PARTNERSHIP WITH XERJOFF

William Sitwell, Big Narstie, Ranald Macdonald show collegial support for Dad's Army

The Boisdale Xerjoff Editors Lunch & Awards 2025 was a glamorous, high-octane affair hosted impeccably by Natasha Hamilton of Atomic Kitten and William Sitwell. Xerjoff provided samplers of exquisite perfume which enhanced the atmosphere with heavenly scent. For the reception, we enjoyed Glenmorangie, Ardbeg, Highclere Castle Gin cocktails and Chapel Down sparkling wine.

For lunch, langoustines & Dunkeld smoked salmon with Chapel Down Chardonnay, then salt marsh lamb with Santa Rita Carmenère Reserva 2019, and Tomintoul Cigar Malt with British cheeses. Other notable awards not included in the gallery include Eliza Ross-Smith of LVMH presenting Rose Prince with Boisdale Life Food Writer of the Year; Caroline Park of Santa Rita presenting the *Boisdale Life Wine Writer of the Year* to Jane Anson; Elizabeth Fox of Visit Jamaica awarding Bill Knott as *Boisdale Life Writer of the Year*, and finally, but perhaps most importantly, Roy Sommer of Davidoff presented *Boisdale Life Bon Viveur of the Year* to the bullfighting hero Alexander Fiske-Harrison.

Simon Bartholomew of The Brand New Heavies *was presented Boisdale Life Music Writer of the Year 2024 by Stephen Davies of Yamaha.*

Sergio Momo of Xerjoff, Natasha Hamilton, Nick Ferrari, the Boisdale Life Legend of the Year & William Sitwell

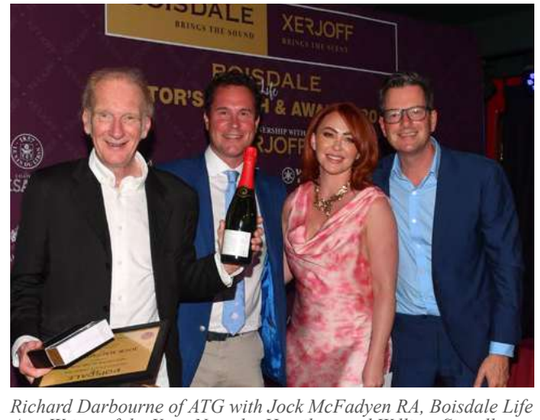
Lord Carnarvon won the Boisdale Life Gin Producer of the Year for Highclere Castle Gin

Natasha Hamilton

Mary Killen was presented Boisdale Life Feature Writer of the Year by David Burnside of New Century Media

Janelle Raeburn

David Burnside, Big Narstie, Natasha Hamilton, General Sir Peter Wall, who won Boisdale Life Best of British Writer of the Year, and William Sitwell



Richard Darbourne of ATG with Jock McFadyen RA, Boisdale Life Arts Writer of the Year, Natasha Hamilton and William Sitwell

JOOLS HOLLAND'S BOOGIE-WOOGIE SPECTACULAR 2025, IN PARTNERSHIP WITH XERJOFF

Jools Holland tinkling the ivories

Boisdale's Patron of Music Jools Holland has a lifelong passion for boogie-woogie, a style born in the juke joints and barrel houses of the American South, where blues pianists made the piano dance like a train on the tracks.

This unique annual event is now in its 14th year. It is unique to Jools, unique to Boisdale and we believe unique to London (and maybe the world). Two Yamaha Concert Grand pianos on stage, five world-class boogie-woogie virtuosos, and 50 amazingly talented fingers...it was an intoxicating evening of irresistible music, made even headier by the enthralling scent of Xerjoff perfume that many guests had taken from their Xerjoff sampler gift packs and tried on for size.

Jools was joined on the pianos by Ladyva, Neville Dickie, Joe Webb, and Angus Macdonald, accompanied by Ed Richardson on drums, Dave Swift on bass and the charismatic David Hermlin on vocals. The Boisdale Xerjoff Boogie-Woogie Spectacular 2026 is on Wednesday 15th April 2026.

THE BOISDALE SHOOTING CHEFS LUNCH 2025

The 11th annual edition of Shooting Chefs at Holland & Holland, picturesquely positioned in lovely countryside 40 minutes from central London, was tremendous fun, as always.

Their shooting grounds for simulated game are second to none. We had a wonderful morning with bright blue skies: this year, it was Restaurateurs versus Chefs, with 20 of each from the best restaurants across the land, including Nieves Barragán Mohacho, James Knappett, Neil Rankin, Soren Jessen, Martin Williams, and Henry Harris. The inaugural post-shoot Haggis Boules Tournament was accompanied by Highclere Castle Gin, Balvenie and Belvedere cocktails and Davidoff cigars.

We then boarded our double decker bus – loaded with Veuve Clicquot NV and Chateau Minuty rosé – and travelled merrily to Boisdale of Belgravia for a monumental, game-focused lunch with delicious and fascinating wines from Davys Wine Merchants. A big thankyou to our sponsors: Quadranet, DNA Payments and The Rare Breed Meat Company. Oh, and the Restaurateurs lifted the cup!

Shooting Chefs 2025, dining at Boisdale of Belgravia

BOISDALE

London's home of award-winning dining and world-class music

BOISDALE

RESTAURANTS | BARS
LIVE MUSIC | CIGARS
HEATED TERRACES
DJ NIGHTS

BOISDALE.CO.UK
@BOISDALE_RESTAURANTS

Boisdale of Canary Wharf continues to define one of the capital's most distinctive live-music settings, uniting exceptional dining with performances from acclaimed original artists and outstanding productions across soul, jazz, reggae, funk and iconic popular music.

2025 ORIGINAL ARTISTS

Fun Lovin' Criminals | The Sugarhill Gang & The Furious 5 | The Brand New Heavies
Maxi Priest | Leee John | Arrested Development | Jools Holland | Brit Funk Association
Mica Paris | Paul Jones & Mike D'Abo of Manfred Mann | Odyssey | Heatwave
Janet Kay & Carroll Thompson | Tony Christie | Hue & Cry | Aswad | Artful Dodger
Tippa Irie | Osibisa | Omar | The British Collective | Sonique | Hil St Soul
The Real Thing | Geno Washington | Albert Lee

2025 WORLD-CLASS SHOWS

Prince | Elvis | Steely Dan | John Lennon | The Rat Pack | Tina Turner | Bob Marley
Whitney Houston | Amy Winehouse | Nina Simone | Luther Vandross | John Holt &
Dennis Brown

Mi-Soul DAB+ RADIO

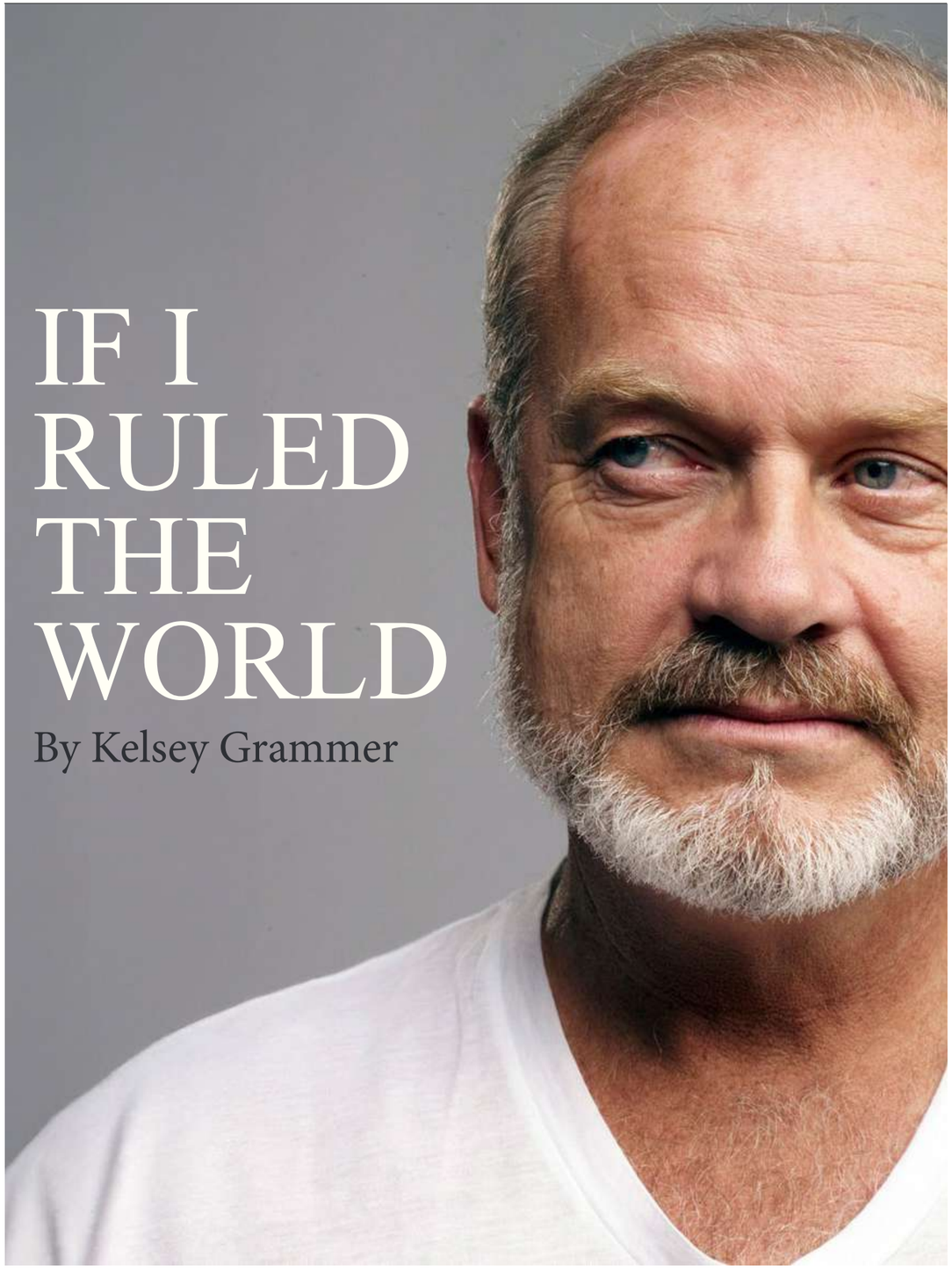
Devoted to Soulful Music Lovers Worldwide.

BROADCASTING 24/7 ON
DAB+, ONLINE, AND WORLDWIDE
VIA THE MI-SOUL APP.

SCAN HERE

VISIT: MI-SOUL.COM

@MISOULRADIO



IF I RULED THE WORLD

By Kelsey Grammer

By Kelsey Grammer

Known around the world for his multi-award-winning portrayal of Dr. Frasier Crane in both Cheers *and* Frasier*, Kelsey Grammer has also starred in numerous Broadway hits. Here, he issues a heartfelt plea for political and religious freedom.*

I was very pleased when Ranald asked me to write an article for Boisdale that would be titled in this manner. It immediately reminded me of a question I was asked some time ago at a beer pouring event for Faith American Brewing Company, a sideline I hope to be more than a sideline one day. But the question was simple: if I were the President of the United States of America, what would I do?

I gave it some thought. I would re-instate good manners: simple. That's it: kindness, civility, respect, for others and for ourselves. Success in life begins with us, but also depends on self-reliant, purposeful exchange with others. To that end, I recommend we personally dress each day in behaviour that honours our fellow man. And woman. "Please" and "Thank-you" imperative in all interaction.

One step further I would advocate may seem to come out of leftfield (a baseball reference, for you Brits). The Boy Scout Oath (now simply called the Scout Oath). I believe it to be an oath worthy of all citizens: boys, girls or otherwise.

"On my honour, I will do my best to do my duty to God and my country and to obey the Scout Law; to help other people at all times; to keep myself physically strong, mentally awake and morally straight."

I want to give credit where credit is due. The idea that the Scout Oath and Law may be among the finest documents in history was suggested by a great friend of mine when we were making a film about the Civil Rights Act of 1964. I played the man who insisted the word "sex" be inserted into the law, thus guaranteeing that discrimination against anyone based upon race, colour, or sex would no longer stand in America...the other document she recommends is The Declaration of Independence. Kinda speaks for itself.

"The beauty of politics is its ability to shift and evolve. The human voice is as dedicated to freedom as is freedom itself."

For your edification though, here is the Scout Law. "A Scout is trustworthy, loyal, helpful, friendly, courteous, kind, obedient, cheerful, thrifty, brave, clean and reverent." Sufficient each unto themselves, goals worthy of us all; and there are subsets of virtues included with each of them. The subset I find most intriguing, however, is the one attached to REVERENT. It reads, "Be reverent toward God. Be faithful in your religious duties. Respect the beliefs of others."

This last has all but vanished from Great Britain. It is enjoying a gasping revival of sorts here in my beloved America. But because this is meant for British publication, I am frightened on an intellectual level to include any mention of Jesus here or of my Christian faith, for fear poor Ranald may pay a dreadful price for including it in his magazine and I might actually be arrested on my next visit to the UK for the mere mention of the King of Kings. ***[As far as I am concerned, you can mention Elvis as often as you like – Ranald]***

When I am in charge, I will always guarantee your right to worship as *you* choose. That does not include the right to worship as *you* choose, while forbidding others to worship as *they* choose. It is a commandment of accord between the Faiths, and respect for all. The call to prayer from every minaret would be encouraged, just as church bells ringing out their invitation to worship would be applauded. One faith never cancelling another, till the crack of doom, as the saying goes.

I always liked the idea of the three pillars of faith in the Jewish tradition: Prayer, Study and Good Works. Makes sense to me. So, I would encourage all. Even the lesser-known offshoots of the major faiths would be encouraged and set free in every neighbourhood.

Let's not overlook Buddhism. Hinduism. Even atheism would be embraced, just not celebrated. And I think that's how the atheist would like it, yes? They are not interested in worship themselves, but their common decency would never condemn others *for* it, nor prevent others *from* it. But this is if I ruled the world: I know that is not how it is. I'm not so foolish as to think it will change anytime soon, but I can dream, can't I?

Which brings me to the American Dream. For my money, the American Dream is a gift from cradle to the grave. It is not, however, the government's burden to bestow or define, to expand or limit, as it sees fit. It is a gift that comes from God, and every man, woman and child has the right to shape the one that works best for them.

I know, I must be careful here. God. Oops. Wait a minute: I am in charge, so I have every right to say it as I see it. That is rule number one: Freedom of Speech. And the freedom to dream as you see fit. As long as your dream is not set against another's. Here in Grammerland, that's how we do it.

The beauty of politics is its ability to shift and evolve. The human voice is as dedicated to freedom as is freedom itself. They are synonymous. Also, the right to disagree is enshrined and encouraged. Here is where we run into trouble in the USA.We forget that speech we dislike is as important as our own. And as protected as our own.

"I am what I am because I'm Popeye the sailor man."

No matter how much we may hate Donald Trump, he is entitled to say what he wants to say. Others are entitled to disagree but not imprison him for it. I have spoken to many on the left who are slowly realizing that they are responsible for Donald Trump's return to office. How did this happen? Hatred. And you also have a right to Hatred. But...beware how Hatred paves the way to one's own destruction! So, in my world, Hatred is not encouraged but it is also not forbidden. It is discouraged, but left up to you. After all, we can try to save our fellow man, but sadly once lost in Hatred, even our loved ones vanish in its thrall.

Specifically, though, it seems I will have to deal with the phenomenon of President Donald J. Trump. I support him. Some of you may know that. Some may find it a surprise. Many of my Democrat friends in the past have bemoaned my conservative position, saying "How can you be so intelligent and yet be a Conservative?"

Well, I don't measure my intellect or intelligence by how popular my thinking is or how many people agree with me. Years ago, I coined this phrase: "Judgment without knowledge it the greatest of all crimes, but if you'd like your daily dose, just read the New York Times."

So it remains with me. I think what I think because I am paying attention. I am what I am because I'm Popeye the sailor man. I still read The New York Times once in a great while. Just to remind myself how narrow thinking can become so self-righteous, and how very narrow the self-righteous can be. Almost delightfully narrow. Provincial, even.

I'd like to circle back for a second to this idea of the American Dream...it is granted to you, and even to the world, at birth. It is as easy as imagination itself. The thing is, it requires work to be realized. Hard work. It also requires Freedom. Freedom has become a dirty word to the far left in my country. It remains the pivotal concept of existence, however, in Grammerland.

I also think in America it was a mistake when President Obama was in office to say people could no longer enjoy the American Dream. The only promise he was willing to make was ensuring that another's American Dream would be a little smaller.

You can't get there anymore, and we can't help you, he suggested; but a vote for him would at least assure you no one else could either. If I ruled the world, that kind of crap would close out of town. Unfortunately, it's just about to open a four-year-run on Broadway.

I may be running astray here. I have developed a truly keen sense of the political run-around. Suspicion. My favorite poet, W.H. Auden, once coined a phrase "the balancing subterfuge". I qualified it to embrace politics by adding, "political double-speak."

Yes, put together, we get the "balancing subterfuge of political double-speak." Most of our politicians excel at it. The consequence is that a gifted practitioner can speak for hours and hours and still manage to say nothing. Political double-speak. I have a very quaint notion that there should be honesty in our politics.

Honestly, though, when I find the most glaring examples of it, I tend to balk. One of our representatives in America once said famously that to know what was in a bill, they had to pass it first and then read it. A shocking moment of a candour amid a nightmarish truth. She was admitting they had no idea what they were doing. But she was also acknowledging that whatever they did, they would be there for a long time to come. Job security, by virtue of a job not done at all.

Because I am not an atheist, this idea of ruling the world is unsatisfying in many ways. I know there is a God above me who has this thing covered. But should I be in charge, as t'were, many of the things I have discussed would not exist in my world. In the world I rule I would seek fairness, kindliness, tolerance and joy.

In truth, I would abdicate my rule in deference to the people. I would ask them to send one, or several from among them, to spend time exchanging thoughts about how to better the lives of all.

For the time appointed them, I would expect debate and discord with compromise and discourse. They would conclude a bargain that assured all people were considered in their dealings.

This would mean an even-handedness based on nothing but the presumption that all men are equal and are entitled to the same rights without entitlement to the same outcomes. If we are all equal, the only equality we can defend or guarantee is the abiding right to choose for ourselves.

Those choices will be different; the results will be different. Each path will have a different outcome. Each path would lead to its own station, and success would be limited only by the imagination and the desire to keep at it. Each of us would have "enough" while understanding that our version of "enough" might be different than someone else's.

while understanding that our version of "enough" might be different from someone else's.

"The Constitution of the United States of America does not need to be re-written. It needs to be re-read!"

There would be contentment without complacency. Forever striving to improve ourselves and our lives for the sake of leaving the world a better place than when we found it. There would be desire without greed, there would be passion for life and love and even lust between consenting adults.

I'm not sure I can guarantee any of this or how to go about it...but wouldn't it be nice?

You know, I took a minute to review here and realize there is already a pretty good blueprint. I mentioned it before but realize to my dawning satisfaction that there are no greater documents describing how I might like to rule the world than the two I grew up with.

It begins with the Declaration of Independence, where it speaks of a government that is derived from the consent of the governed. Yeah, I would do that. And then there is the Constitution of the United States of America. I will not include either of them here. Take my word for it, I could not improve upon them in my wildest dreams.

I will close with an observation that was shared with me recently. Yes, it is a conservative viewpoint. It goes something like this—the Constitution of the United States of America does not need to be re-written. It needs to be re-read!

Thanks for indulging me here and thank you for your time. It means a lot to me.

The cast of Frasier: *Dan Butler; Peri Gilpin; John Mahoney; Kelsey Grammer; David Hyde Pierce and Jane Leeves*

ARE THE BRITISH OBSESSED WITH CLASS?

By Mary Killen

Mary Killen is a Northern Irish etiquette expert who writes an agony column for The Spectator. She is also the author of several books, including The Diary of Two Nobodies, co-written with her husband, the artist Giles Wood.

In 1984, when I began my journalistic career by working on *Tatler* magazine, I would have said yes, the British certainly were – if not exactly obsessed by class distinctions and class snobbery – certainly very interested in these issues. They were either anxious about questions of etiquette and status or, if they were confident in their own grandeur, amused by the etiquette and status concerns of less secure others.

The early 1980s had seen a resumption of interest in class. The breaking down of class barriers in the 1960s had been so exciting and positive, but the whole flower-power/free love vibe had given way to a seedier 1970s, with women being used as human spittoons by opportunistic men accusing them of being frigid if they wouldn't comply. All this tawdriness (and the depressingly grungy fashion) was soul numbing. Then there was the death in 1980 of John Lennon: the ultimate irresponsible role model.

Suddenly, in 1981, a beautiful, ladylike virgin hove into view to marry a prince, and we were all in the mood for that much more chaste and romantic story. The advent of Princess Diana reignited our obsession with class. *The Sloane Ranger Handbook*, published in 1982, with Di on the cover, topped the best seller list for two years, selling more than a million copies.

The Sloane Ranger Handbook

It is a very witty and observant book, but the fact that even otherwise book-free households had a copy reflected how dormant snobbery had been reawakened by Princess Di. Everyone was now interested in historic houses and social interconnectedness, napkins and dovecotes (pronounced "ducuts").

Tatler, in 1980 an almost defunct magazine with a small circulation, featuring black-and-white photos of sporting events attended by grandees with weather-ruined complexions, was suddenly being edited by Tina Brown. She "re-birthed" the upper classes and began to celebrate them, although in a mocking, not reverential way. "The magazine that bites the hand that feeds it," said the strapline.

***"I compiled an openly snobbish and sexist line up of rich, eligible and heterosexual singleton males over the age of 70, which I called* Dowager Dateline."**

Other writers were also drawn to Vogue House, Hanover Square, from where Condé Nast produced Tatler, financing all our lunches, drinks and dinners as long as we were "researching" an article. Before this, there had been no such concept as "social currency".

Mark Boxer took over from Brown as editor, and mid-1980s Tatler was *the* place to work. Stephen Fry and Edward St Aubyn had their first pieces published there; Craig Brown, Jonathan Meades, Michael Roberts, Isabella Blow, Alexandra Shulman, Dafydd Jones and Michael Roberts were on the staff with me; and there was Peter Townend, who ran the deb (debutante) season.

And, while we mocked the upper classes as well as glamorising them, the mockery was affectionate (and sometimes lustful, if Mark Shand or Lucian Freud were our subjects.)

We revelled in quaint aspects of the aristocracy. Who, except the very well connected, was aware that the obscure Scrope (pronounced "Scroop") family was one of England's grandest? "It bears the most famous coat of arms in English heraldry and descends in the direct male line from medieval lords who feature in the plays of Shakespeare" wrote the genealogist Hugh Massingberd.

We profiled the then obscure Devon landowner Francis Fulford (later the subject of a reality TV series, *The F***ing Fulfords*).

Snobbery peaked around the mid-1990s. I was then working on Harpers & Queen, another class-obsessed publication. It had long been home to Jennifer's Diary, written by Betty Kenward, a social column whose annual output was 140,000 words, 80,000 of which were names, and in which every private party-giver longed to appear.

Mrs Kenward – along with Peter Townend of Tatler, Hugh Massingberd (obituaries editor of the Daily Telegraph), Charles Kidd of Debrett's, the ladies involved in the Court

*Francis Fulford and his family starred on Channel 4's The F***ing Fulfords*

Only Massingberd knew that "in the English landed aristocracy, between ten and twenty families have the distinction of being descended in the male line from a medieval ancestor who took his surname from lands which they held and still hold. Therefore not "Lord Alderney" but "Alderney of Alderney:, "Wolselely of Wolseley" and "Fulford of Fulford". I found it enchanting that Francis Fulford's postal address was "The Fulford of Fulford, Fulford, Fulford."

I compiled an openly snobbish and sexist line up of rich, eligible and heterosexual singleton males over the age of 70, which I called *Dowager Dateline.*

Circulars of the Telegraph and The Times, and the people at the College of Arms – was one of a dying breed: these were the only people who could write titles correctly. Today, Lord Sugar calls himself Lord Alan Sugar, and even Earl Spencer mispronounces the name of Althorp, his own house.

One day, the staff of Harpers was called to a marketing meeting to be told that class was "over", that it was a dead concept. Nobody was interested in seeing names of people who had done nothing in their own right but were just children of titled people. From now on, we would write about the House Beautiful and the Green Lifestyle.

And aristocrats, perhaps led by the royals, began marrying into the lower classes. It was not just because snobbery was dead again and the class system irrelevant, it was partly a hybrid-vigour thing, and partly a new-money, old-name thing. Our own Royal Family is the most downwardly mobile in the world (and the Royals, ironically, the least snobbish or racist of any group) but in England we have always welcomed new blood.

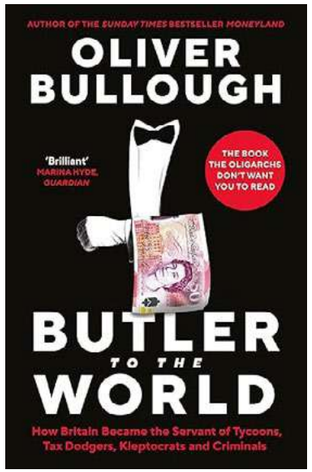
This is unlike the French system, in which the aristocrats became so feeble by intermarriage that a defective, interbred stock resulted. Look today at the Duke of Rutland and the Earl of Carnarvon, both married to capable, middle-class women who are keeping their shows on the road.

"Why else do you think they employ English aristocrats as glorified servants? They want to buy into that endangered commodity: class."

But are we still obsessed by class? Well yes, but we keep quiet about it now, even though we all fall on Nicky Haslam's tea towels at Christmas because we can pretend we are just laughing at what Nicky finds "common". In fact, the tea towels can still trigger social anxiety.

The big houses and big families may have had to sell up, but we are still snobs about the looks, manners, styles and codes of honour of the people that centuries of selective breeding have produced. And an international group of oligarchs are just as snobbish and obsessed by class.

Why else do you think they employ English aristocrats as glorified servants in the form of lawyers, art dealers, party planners, estate agents, decorators and financial portfolio managers? They want to buy into that endangered commodity: class. *Read Butler to the World* by Oliver Bullough if you want to immerse yourself in the embarrassing truth.



Yet like recusant Catholicism, snobbery still exists, but behind closed doors. It is the truth that dare not speak its name.

Recently, my husband and I went to stay at Foxhill Manor in the Cotswolds, a country house hotel of the sort that would have, forty years ago, posed as a mini-Downton with butlers and maids. This one is all-inclusive, so you don't need to flash money or tip anyone.

Mary Killen collecting her Feature Writer of the Year 2024 Award

At Foxhill, with its eight double bedrooms, everything seemed to be signalling that the class system was over, and you too could stay in this beautiful, stone-built house with open log fires crackling (dogs welcome) and pretend you were at a Cotswolds house party.

There was no butler, no housekeeper; in their place, two staff called Rebecca and Ed, who wore clean trainers and jeans and – without a trace of obsequiousness – would get you anything you wanted: as long as you could pay, of course. £1,195 a night for two. And no snobbery evident anywhere. Fortunately, the aristocracy still retains a few such houses in which some lucky folk can stay for free.

Foxhill House

Nick Ferrari hosting his radio show on LBC

THE GOOD, *THE BAD* AND THE UGLY

By Nick Ferrari

The multi-award-winning political journalist and LBC presenter relives some of his most memorable interviews.

Interviewing is a lot like dating: I speak as a veteran of conducting them on my morning radio show on LBC for more than 20 years (interviews that is, not dates). Virtually all of them, for better or worse, have been with politicians.

But, as an interviewer, I have plenty of form, as they say in criminal and horseracing circles. Before that, as the showbusiness reporter on The Sun, I interviewed everyone from Boy George and David Bowie to Dean Martin and Sophia Loren.

Just like going on a date, you often have no idea things are going well for you until that vital moment: they suddenly come up with the goods, or crash down with obfuscation, burbling nonsense, attempted deceit, utterly incompetent ignorance, or a nasty case of the sweats (of the kind unknown to Prince Andrew).

As we move into an age where 24-hour media, podcasts and even "citizen journalism" are all the rage, it occurred to me that I might take a brief trip down memory lane and serve up "Six of the Best" interviews I've conducted.

And (cue the haunting strains of Ennio Morricone) I will let you, the reader, decide what constitutes The Good, The Bad and The Ugly.

1) Boris Johnson

Time to suspend your particular views of Bojo and what his skillset might (or might not) be, because he can be an interviewer's dream.

I've done phone-ins with him since he was just a candidate to be Mayor of London, long before he became Prime Minister, and nothing has changed over the years. His grasp of detail is still akin to that of a three-month old with a dummy, but somehow, with his unique bumbling bombast, he carries it off.

For example, after he was elected as Mayor of London, I challenged him about rising fares on public transport. The question was simple.

Nick Ferrari interviewing Boris Johnson, LBC

"Mr. Mayor. Suppose you've left your Oyster card in a suit that's gone to the dry cleaners. You have to get from your home near Regent's Park to your office at City Hall. How much will the fare be?"

After much hesitation and harrumphing, the man ultimately in control of Transport for London had to concede: *"All right Nick, sitting there like some big Buddha of wisdom, I don't know. What is it?"*

When I told him he'd get little change from three quid he was appalled, and immediately asked me "*Dear God – who sets these prices?*"

"Mr. Mayor," I replied, "that would be you."

2) Nigel Farage

The Guardian's skilled sketch writer John Crace once declared "never let it be said that a half-hour phone-in with Nigel Farage on Nick Ferrari's morning show is anything but educational." John was, as usual, spot on.

Listeners love him because he is unlike almost every other politician on the planet. Ask him a question, and you will get an answer. I know, it's a unique concept! But that can also get him into trouble.

After US President Donald Trump stunned the world with his assertion that migrants were "eating the dogs, the people that came in, they're eating the cats" in Springfield, Ohio, I had a £10 bet with Mr. Farage that the claim would turn out to be utterly bogus.

After a suitable time (twelve months) I decided to call in the bet and ask Nigel for my tenner.

What happened next dominated the the headlines, and had reporters dispatched to parks and lakes up and down the land. Why? Because his response was to say that it wasn't such a bizarre claim.

"If I said to you that swans were being eaten in Royal Parks in this country, that carp were being taken out of ponds and eaten in this country by people who come from different cultures…what would you say?" asked Mr. Farage.

Cue reporters from many broadcast and print organisations fanning out to launch investigations in parks and around lakes. The debate still rages on social media to this day, with claims of swans being eaten in Lancashire and carp being cooked in East London, but what is the truth? Who knows. But next time you see Nigel, ask him for my tenner.

3) Sir Keir Starmer

From a man who, if the polls are right, could be our next Prime Minister to a man who actually is... currently, at least. While in opposition, Sir Keir faced many accusations of "going woke" amid decisions such as taking the knee in his office and supporting many liberal causes and campaigns.

And after he'd said that "99.9 per cent of women can't have a penis," I decided to challenge him. Here's what happened next.

"So if it's 99.9 per cent, that means one in one thousand women can have a penis. Seriously, Sir Keir?"

"Look, I want to tackle this head on. For the vast, vast majority of women, they obviously cannot have a penis, but …"

I was incredulous. "But one in a thousand can?"

"*Look…I'm not…I don't think we can discuss this…er...*"

Nick Ferrari interviewing Sir Keir Starmer

I apologised if I had embarrassed him in some way.

He was flailing. *"No, no, no, no, it's just ..."*

I restated my question. "Well, it's just... can a woman have a penis?"

There never was an answer and instead he took us into the area of biology and something about women "smashing glass ceilings", but I will let you know if he gets back to me.

4) Natalie Bennett

Here, we revisit the 2015 General Election, and the launch of the Green Party's manifesto. That morning, party leader Natalie Bennett came on the show to herald her party's good work. After some meaningless waffle about electoral priorities, it was time to get down to specifics. I started by asking her about her party's housing policies.

"We want to ensure everyone has a secure, affordable place to live and we will build 500,000 new social homes," she told me.

More incredulity on my behalf. "Good Lord! Where will you get the money for that?"

"We'll abolish mortgage relief for private landlords."

"And how much will that be worth?"

"Well…it's a part of our total costings."

I had to press her on that. "Ok, but can I get the precise cost of 500,000 homes?"

A long pause and much paper-shuffling ensued. *"Erm, er, well, it'll be spelt out later."*

"You don't know, do you, Ms. Bennett?"

"We're looking at a total spend of £2.7 billion."

I did a rough calculation in my head. "What! 500,000 homes for £2.7 billion? What are they made of? Plywood?"

She tried to stick to her guns. *"We're looking at a cost of £60,000 per home."*

I was unconvinced, to put it mildly. "Obviously that can't include the land, and £60,000 is not much more than a large conservatory with bifold doors!"

Unfortunately, Ms. (now Baroness) Bennett started coughing continuously, and the interview (which she subsequently labelled "excruciatingly awful") pretty much ended. The Greens returned just one MP at that election, and their total number of votes amounted to less than a third of UKIP's.

5) Michael Gove

Undoubtedly one of the most skilled communicators in recent governments, you immediately knew it was a tough day for the government during the Coronavirus pandemic five years ago if "The Govester" was wheeled out for a round of interviews.

One such day resulted from utter confusion (but was there ever anything else?) about exactly what constituted a proper meal and would therefore allow you to go to a restaurant or pub to meet with friends.

To this day, I don't know where the idea of a scotch egg came from, but I decided to test this particular dish on Mr. Gove and ask him whether that constituted a meal. His reply was he *"would definitely scoff two scotch eggs as a starter, but it's not a main course."*

This appeared to be totally contrary to government policy. So, within an hour, and after having scotch eggs waved at him by Piers Morgan on TV, Mr. Gove had decreed scotch eggs to be a "substantial meal".

The following day's newspaper cartoon showing Mr. Gove with two scotch eggs in place of his eyes still hangs in my hallway.

minutes – I will focus on the part that is recycled endlessly on TV clip shows.

As Shadow Home Secretary, Ms. Abbott was on to say a Labour government, if elected, would recruit an additional 10,000 police officers. Squeamish readers, look away.

I started by asking her how much 10,000 police officers would cost.

"Well, umm, err, if we recruit them over a four-year period, we believe it will be about £300,000."

This clearly needed challenging. "£300,000 for 10,000 officers! What are you paying them?"

"No, I'm sorry, I mean, umm, er…"

I repeated the question. She was floundering.

"They will cost, they will cost, umm, er…it will cost about £80 million."

"'About!' But £80 million divided by 10,000 is £8,000. Is that what these officers are going to be paid?"

"No. We will be paying them…er, it was you who said £80 million."

time for the jugular.

"I can assure you it wasn't, as I wrote it down as you told me. Has this been adequately thought through?"

As the interview careened further off course, the number of officers to be hired ranged from 250,000 to 2,250 before mercifully, for everyone's sakes, it reached its conclusion.

Ms. Abbott never did get to be Home Secretary, so that unknown number of officers with variable salaries was never recruited.

Readers of a certain vintage might remember a TV show from some years back called *Kids Say The Funniest Things*. Anyone up for a re-boot? Only this time it'll be called *Politicians Say The Stupidest Things*.

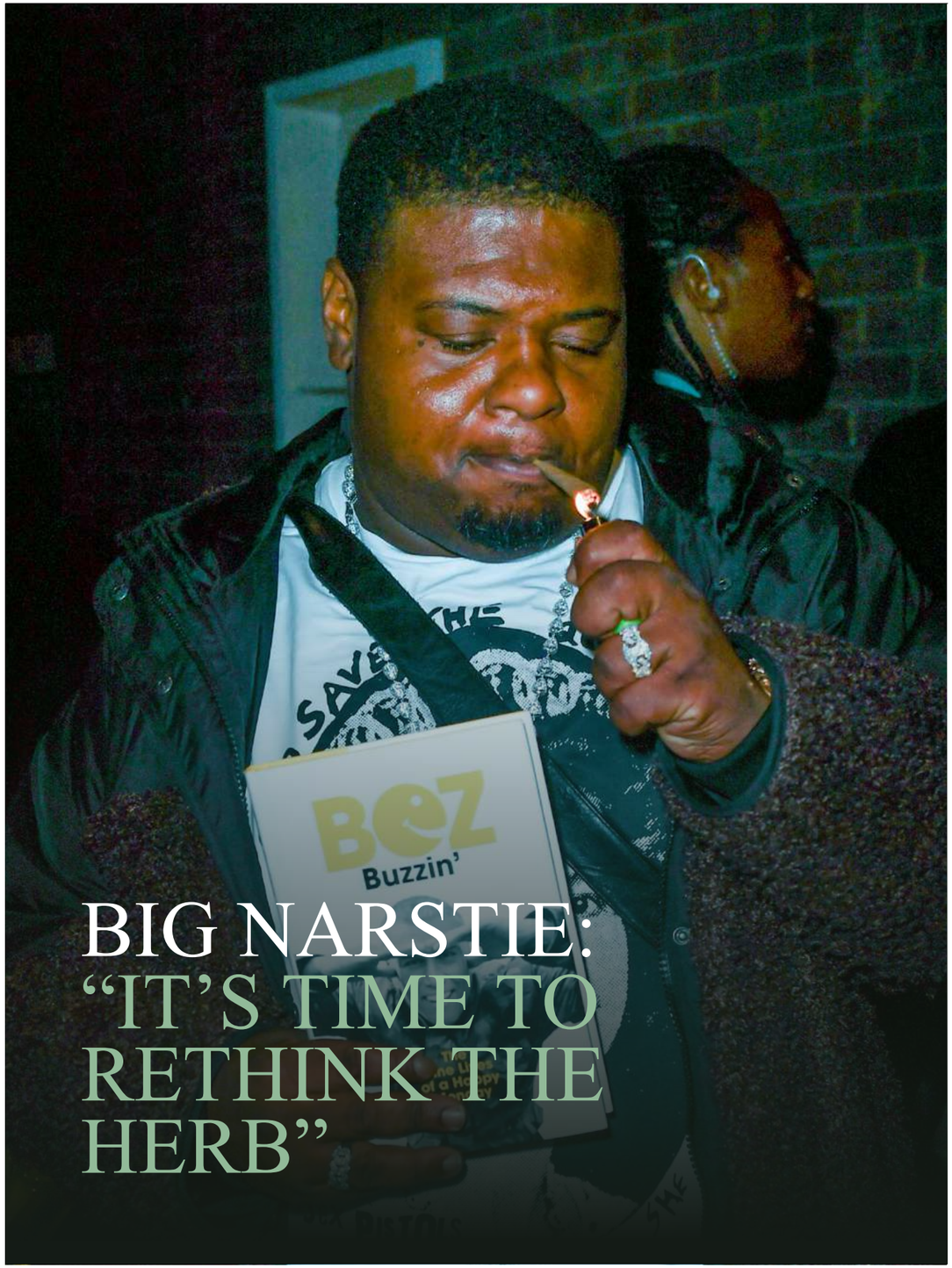
'Michael Gove Grilled on UK Lockdown' an interview with Nick Ferrari

6) Diane Abbott

I have saved the best (or maybe the worst) interview until last, and it is the one I am reminded about most often.

We go back to the 2017 General Election and – as this painful exchange went on for around four

LBC's Headline image: 'Diane Abbott's Agonising Interview'



BIG NARSTIE: “IT’S TIME TO RETHINK THE HERB”

Big Narstie at BBC Studios, Shepherds Bush London for The Big Narstie Show

By Big Narstie

British MC, author, rapper, singer, songwriter, BAFTA Award-winning comedian and television presenter.

As the world marks 100 years since the Brussels Treaty first banned cannabis, British rapper, entrepreneur and cultural figure Big Narstie opens up about his personal journey with health, balance and understanding.

A defining voice in UK grime and modern British culture, Big Narstie has built a career grounded in authenticity, from his music roots to television success with The Big Narstie Show, the BAFTA-winning Channel 4 series praised for its humour, honesty and originality.

In this thoughtful and educational feature, he discusses how living with chronic pain led him to start Big Narstie Medical, working closely with Integro Clinic to help patients access prescribed cannabis safely and legally in the UK.

Narstie’s message is clear: this isn’t about controversy. It’s about compassion, education and common sense. With humour, heart and wisdom, he reminds us that true wellbeing begins with knowledge.

It’s Medicine, Not Mayhem

Cannabis isn’t new. It’s been used for thousands of years, from Africa and Asia to the Caribbean, to help ease pain, calm the mind, improve sleep and restore balance. Modern science is finally catching up, proving what our elders already knew.

When prescribed by qualified doctors, cannabis can help people manage conditions like chronic pain, anxiety and epilepsy.

In the UK, medical cannabis has been legal since 2018, but access is still limited. That’s why I started Big Narstie Medical (bignarstiemedical.com). We’re not a clinic. We work closely with Integro Clinic to ensure the process is simple, safe and fully legitimate, helping people get professional guidance and the right treatment.

My own journey made this personal. I was prescribed medical cannabis for neuropathic pain. Before that, I was on strong prescription painkillers that left me tired, foggy and disconnected. Under proper medical supervision, cannabis helped me manage the pain while keeping my energy and focus.

For me, it’s not about hype or image. It’s about wellbeing, responsibility and giving people real options that work.

“This isn’t about breaking rules. It’s about updating them. It’s about compassion, research and common sense.”

A Smarter Approach

All over the world, countries are modernising how they handle medical cannabis. In places like Canada and Germany, clear rules, strong regulation and medical oversight have created jobs, boosted research and improved safety.

The UK can do the same, carefully and responsibly. Instead of confusion, we could have clarity, trusted doctors, quality control and safe access. This isn’t about promoting use. It’s about building understanding, protecting patients and supporting research.

Community and Common Sense

You can’t talk about cannabis without talking about culture. It’s been part of music, art and spirituality for generations, a symbol of creativity, reflection and peace.

But the subject’s been misunderstood for too long. Many people don’t know the difference between medical use and misuse. What we need now is honest information that clears the air, education that helps people make the right choices for their own wellbeing.

When we know better, we do better.

Education and Responsibility

Some people still worry about the effects of cannabis, and that’s a fair concern. Any treatment needs to be handled properly. That’s why regulation matters.

When cannabis is prescribed legally, patients get proper advice on dosage, quality and safety. They’re supported by doctors and pharmacists who understand the science and monitors their progress. Knowledge makes the difference. It turns uncertainty into understanding.

A Hundred Years Is Long Enough

It's been a century since the Brussels Treaty. The world's changed completely, but the conversation around cannabis hasn't kept up.

This isn't about breaking rules. It's about updating them. It's about compassion, research and common sense. Reform doesn't mean chaos. It means structure, safety and responsibility.

After one hundred years, it's time to move from fear to facts and look at what this plant really offers when used properly.

Big Narstie and Ranald Macdonald at Boisdale of Canary Wharf

My Perspective

I've seen what happens when people don't have the right information, and I've also seen how much difference proper medical guidance can make.

I'm not saying medical cannabis is for everyone, but everyone deserves clear information and a fair chance to explore legal, doctor-led options if it's suitable for them. Nobody should be left struggling with pain or confusion because of outdated ideas.

My journey with nerve pain taught me one thing. When it's used responsibly and under medical supervision, cannabis can be part of a patient's recovery and peace of mind. It's not about breaking boundaries. It's about building balance.

What I'm Working On

Everything I do is about progress, creativity and education. That's what my projects stand for.

Shirububak, my martial-arts visual EP, mixes grime, film and philosophy. It's about discipline, focus and inner strength.

Big Narstie: Behind the Music, a documentary tracing my journey from pirate radio and N Double A to my BAFTA-winning television show, shows how music built the foundation for everything that followed.

And Big Narstie Medical, which continues to support people in the UK with unmet medical needs, and who want to access prescribed medicinal cannabis safely, compliantly and lawfully, working closely with Integro Clinic to make sure patients receive the right professional medical support.

Final Word

I'm not here to divide or debate. I'm here to inform. The world's changing fast, and the UK has a chance to lead with knowledge and compassion.

Cannabis isn't the problem. Confusion is. When used correctly, under proper medical care, it can make a real difference to people's lives. So let's replace fear with facts, and silence with understanding. Let's build systems that protect, educate and empower.

And as I always say, stay real, stay informed, and stay positive.

The future's bright, the future's balanced, and yeah, the future's green.

The cathedral of St. John the Baptist with Lyon's two rivers in the background, the Rhône and the Saône

THE BOISDALE POTTED GUIDE TO LYON

For the discerning gourmet, Lyon is not only France's most gastronomic city, but also one of the best cities on the planet. Its market stalls teem with fabulous cheeses and charcuterie; its classic, old-school bistros (the famous *bouchons lyonnais*) dish up local specialities (quenelles de brochet, cervelle de canut, tablier de sapeur) to an appreciative clientele of locals and visitors; and its formative role in the history of French gastronomy is assured by a bloodline stretching back to the doughty *les mères lyonnaises* (Eugénie Brazier among them, often called "the mother of modern French cooking"), via Fernand Point, Alain Chapel and the sainted Paul Bocuse, to the talented young chefs that cook in Lyon's best restaurants today.

As if that were not enough, Lyon lies between the celebrated wine regions of Beaujolais and Burgundy, to the north, and the vineyards of the Rhône, to the south. From a simple *pot* of Côtes-du-Rhône or Morgon in a bouchon to a grand old bottle of Condrieu or Hermitage in a Michelin-starred restaurant, Lyon loves to drink as much as it loves to eat, and – with its grand squares, beautiful Classical façades, eye-catching *trompe l'oeil* murals and hilltop panoramas – it is a very agreeable city in which to do both.

Not that Lyon is resting on its *lauriers*: far from it. The once-derelict district of La Confluence, where the Rhône meets the Saône, is now a brave new world of avant-garde architecture and urban renewal, with the stunning Musée des Confluences as its crowning glory, adding to Lyon's already distinguished roster of outstanding museums and galleries. Should you be laid low by cultural indigestion, however, there are plenty of suggestions below that are guaranteed to alleviate any discomfort.

LABEL OFFICIEL
LES BOUCHONS LYONNAIS

Where to Drink

La Cave Café Terroir

Lyon's obsession with wine is obvious in even the smallest, least pretentious café or bar, but there are a few places worth seeking out for a special bottle, without settling in for a three-course meal.

Just across the street from the excellent Café Terroir, near Place Bellecour, is their laid-back wine bar, La Cave, its cellar stocked with 1,200 or so different wines, the majority from small, artisanal *vignerons* from all over France. It is an oenophile's paradise: small, atmospheric, and offering terrific local produce to soak up the wine. Boards of charcuterie, cheeses and house-made pâté de campagne are all available, or perhaps a bowl of *cervelle de canut*, the Lyonnais speciality of soft, fresh cheese stirred with chopped herbs and shallots, dressed lightly with olive oil and vinegar.

Ô Vins d'Anges

The building that houses Ô Vins d'Anges in Croix-Rousse was once a silk factory: the fascinating Maison des Canuts, a museum dedicated to the history of Lyon's silk workers, is just around the corner.

These days, natural fibres have been supplanted by natural wines: the wine bar and shop's 800-strong list concentrates on low-intervention wines from France, Slovenia, Italy and Austria, all purchased directly from the winemakers, while the simple menu (cheeses, charcuterie, maybe an Italian artichoke or two) follows a similarly artisanal approach. If natural wines are your thing, Ô Vins d'Anges will hit the spot.

Hopstore

Should Lyon's stellar plethora of great vintages become just a little too much, and you have a hankering for a cleansing ale, then head to Hopstore, the city's best beer hall. Burgers, happy hours, loaded fries, industrial-chic décor... it's not very Lyon, but for beer fans, it's a joy. Choose from a dozen or so on tap, and dozens more in cans and bottles, from all over the world. And Hopstore is just short walk from the famous Fresque des Lyonnais: a trompe l'oeil mural featuring 30 of the city's most renowned sons and daughters.

Where to Eat

La Mère Brazier

Named after the most famous of the *mères de Lyon*, Eugénie Brazier, the rue Royale restaurant had lost some of the lustre from its stained-glass windows, until chef/owner Matthieu Viannay bought it in 2008, sensitively restoring it to its former glory... and beyond: it now boasts two Michelin stars and is among the best restaurants not just in Lyon but in France.

Such excellence, unsurprisingly, is not cheap (around 100€ for three courses à la carte at lunch, twice that for dinner) but the produce Viannay uses is the very best, and luxury ingredients abound: lobster, caviar, Bresse chicken, truffles, all prepared with a masterly hand, and exquisitely presented. Service is superb and the wine list (it is especially strong on Burgundy) is a delight.

The two-Michelin-starred La Mère Brazier

Daniel et Denise

The city boasts 23 bouchons certified by Les Bouchons Lyonnais (for the full list, helpfully divided by arrondissement, visit lesbouchonslyonnais.org), and all will serve you traditional Lyonnais cuisine at a fair price.

Daniel et Denise has three bouchons on the list, all overseen by chef (and Meilleur Ouvrier de France) Joseph Viola. The Croix-Rousse branch – the most recent to open – is a bouchon *par excellence*, with red-checked tablecloths, kitsch décor and a buzzy

Pâtés en croûte, found in restaurants, delicatessens and markets throughout the city

Pralines roses, *Lyon's famous candied almonds that crop up in many of the city's desserts*

There are classic dishes – quenelle de brochet, oeufs en meurette, a pâté en croûte with a world championship to its name – but also a few lighter dishes, including a vegetarian special. The set menus are especially good value, and the dessert list, on which the local speciality of *praline rose* (pink praline) looms large, is long and joyous.

Le Café Comptoir Abel

À deux pas from the right bank of the Saône, time seems to stand still at Abel, as does the menu, which nobody can remember ever changing. It is, apparently, the oldest bouchon still operating in the city.

There are no gastronomic twists to the menu, just a rollcall of classic dishes that have been cooked by a succession of chefs since 1928: chef Alain Vigneron spent 40 years rattling the pans here. The quenelle of pike is as light as a Montgolfier balloon, bathed not in the usual crayfish sauce, but in mushroom béchamel, while Abel's famous pilaf rice is used as a base for chicken, sweetbreads or beef with creamy morels, or for veal kidneys with madeira sauce.

The wine list is excellent and well-priced. Make sure you are seated in the lively locals' room to the right of the entrance (the one with the bar, which may account for the liveliness).

Maison Léa

Handily located just by the Saône and a stone's throw from the Place Bellecour, Maison Léa is named after one of the famous *mères de Lyon*: Léa Bidaut was once a familiar figure in the Saint-Antoine market and even taught Mère Brazier how to make macaroni gratin.

That gratin is still on the menu, served with seven-hour cooked lamb, as is the restaurant's signature pâté en croûte, plump with poultry and pistachios; tablier de sapeur, Lyon's favourite tripe dish, served with sauce gribiche; and the parfait glacé au Chartreuse, with which every meal should end. Maison Léa's light, airy dining room is home to some of Lyon's best traditional cuisine, while numerous photos of *mère Léa* adorn the walls, serving up an extra portion of nostalgia.

Saucisson lyonnais and cervelle de canut, a fresh and herby soft cheese

Where to Stay

Villa Maïa

The 34 rooms and suites at the 5* Villa Maïa, atop the Fourvière hill, are perhaps Lyon's most glorious: make sure you book one with views across the city.

Jacques Grange's quietly beautiful interiors match the tranquil setting on "the hill that prays", the spa boasts a jacuzzi, a sauna and a 20-metre indoor pool, while chef Christian Têtedoie's Michelin-starred restaurant offers a highly-refined, Bocuse-inspired interpretation of *cuisine lyonnaise*.

InterContinental Lyon Hôtel Dieu

A lavish redevelopment of one of Lyon's most historic riverside buildings, the 5* InterContinental Hôtel Dieu opened its doors in 2019. The former hospital, with its 375-metre façade on the left bank of the Rhône, has 21 wings and seven courtyards; aside from the hotel, there is a plethora of upmarket lifestyle boutiques, as well as L'Officine, a woody, clubby cocktail bar, one of the city's best.

The hotel has 144 luxury rooms and suites, some with river views, as well as a smart restaurant, Epona, with a lovely terrace, and its own bar, the architecturally-stunning Le Dôme.

Hôtel de l'Abbaye

Handily located in the heart of Presqu'île, near the Romanesque Basilique Saint-Martin-d'Ainay, the 4* Hôtel de l'Abbaye, which was once the presbytery of the basilica, has 21 individually-designed rooms and suites, many – despite the hotel's Florentine palazzo façade – with a playfully retro 1970s feel (check out the royal blue Pierre Paulin mushroom chairs). Centrally located, and perfect for shoppers: the pretty rue Auguste Comte with its antique dealers, food shops, galleries, design boutiques and *traboules* (Lyon's ancient passageways between streets) is just a short walk away.

The view over looking Lyon from the balcony at Villa Maïa

Hôtel-Dieu, Lyon. A former hospital, now a multi-use historic monument, that served as Lyon's main hospital for over 800 years

Castelo de São Jorge

THE BOISDALE POTTED GUIDE TO LISBON

Pasteis de nata, the world's finest custard tarts

Lisbon is one of the world's most beguiling cities: as far west as Europe gets, and built on hills best negotiated by rattling trams, or any of a clutch of funicular railways.

In the ancient Alfama district, below the imposing Castelo de São Jorge, expect the waft of sardines cooked on braziers during the day and the wistful strains of fado, the Portuguese blues, seeping out of doorways at night. Chiado is the smart, central place to stay, close to both the hedonistic Bairro Alto and the stately squares and chic restaurants towards the river.

Just west of the city, the beaches, boutiques and fish restaurants of Cascais make a great day out, as do the exuberant quintas and hilltop castles of Sintra; a little closer to the city, Belém offers world-class museums and galleries, as well as that quintessential Lisbon snack, the pastel de nata, unquestionably the world's finest custard tart.

Where to Drink

Grapes & Bites

R. do Norte 85,
open 12-12 every day.
grapesandbites.pt

A cracking place, not least for their extraordinary selection of more than 600 Portuguese wines, many available by the glass. They also serve great charcuterie and cheese: a must-try is *azeitão*, made using cardoon instead of rennet, and one the world's finest cheeses. Live music in the evening.

By The Wine

R. Das Flores 41-43,
6pm to midnight every day.
bythewine.pt

Barrel-vaulted wine bar and restaurant serving all of Portuguese wine giant Sograpе's 80 or so wines: there is plenty to choose from for 40€ and below, or you can splash out on a bottle of the legendary Barca Velha (900€ for the 2015). Snacks include terrific octopus, ceviches, sardines, acorn-fed ham and cheeses, and steaks are a speciality.

Sardines grilling on a charcoal brazier

Madame Bacchus

R. de São Mamede 30G,
5pm to 11.30 pm Tuesday to Saturday
madamebacchus.eatbu

On the western edge of Alfama, a bar à vins: literally, since the couple who own it, Gilles and Amandine, are from Paris. The wine list features 90 or so excellent wines from small producers all over Portugal, and the tapas-style menu has a distinctly Gallic twist: try the sardine rillettes.

A Brasileira

R. Garrett 122,
open 8am to midnight every day
lojascomhistoria.pt

An historic, high-ceilinged and ornately decorated café in the heart of Chiado, the perfect place for um bica (a small coffee) and a pastel de nata. Outside, on the mosaic terrace, is a bronze statue (Lisbon's most photographed) of Fernando Pessoa, Lisbon's pre-eminent man of letters and an habitué of A Brasileira; next door to the café is Casa Havaneza, the best place in Lisbon to buy cigars.

The ornate Art Nouveau interior of A Brasileira, one of the oldest and best known coffee houses in Lisbon

Where to Eat

Belcanto

R. Serpa Pinto 10A,
open 12.30-3 and 5-12, Tuesday to Saturday
belcanto.pt

Star chef José Avillez's two-Michelin-starred restaurant in Chiado offers both à la carte and tasting menus: his dishes fuse modern techniques with the finest Portuguese produce, while sommelier Nádia Desidério has 350 wines on her list, 80% of them Portuguese.

Statue of Fernando Pessoa sits outside the café Brasiliera in Chiado Lisbon Portugal

Alma

R. Anchieta 15,
open 12–3:30 pm, 7 pm–12 am Tuesday to Saturday
almalisboa.pt

Lisbon's other Michelin two-star is the fiefdom of Henrique Sá Pessoa: his menus combine faultless technique with painterly presentation and intense flavours, with seafood - as in his "Coast to Coast" menu - a speciality. The wine list has many Portuguese treasures, and more than 40 are available by the glass.

Taberna da Rua das Flores

R. das Flores 103,
open 12-3.30 and 6- 11.30, closed Sundays.
lisboacool.com

Small, atmospheric, old-style taberna with a few modern twists on an otherwise classic menu, busy in the evenings, and no bookings: you can put your name down and go for a drink somewhere if there's a queue. Cash only.

Where to Stay

The Lumiares,

R. do Diário de Notícias 142
thelumiares.com

A 5* boutique hotel, housed in a refurbished 18th century palace on the edge of the Bairro Alto, with stunning, panoramic views from its rooftop bar and restaurant, and from its penthouse suites. Décor is bright and modern: there is also a spa and a gym, and it is next door to the recently renovated Solar do Vinho do Porto, a cathedral for port lovers.

The Vintage

R. Rodrigo da Fonseca 2
thevintagelisbon.com

The sister hotel to The Lumiares, The Vintage is located just north of Bairro Alto in Principe Real, near the designer boutiques of Avenida da Liberdade. The hotel oozes mid-century glamour: each room even has a vintage bar cart, ready loaded with a Portuguese gin and tonic kit. Fix yourself a drink and take in the views from the rooftop bar.

Alma Lusa

Praça do Município 21
almalusahotels.com

Set in the neoclassical splendour of the Praça do Municipio, just south of Chiado and a short walk from the Tagus, the Alma Lusa boasts not just 28 rather lovely rooms and suites but a terrific restaurant, too: Delfina, which offers traditional but elegant Portuguese cuisine and a varied and great-value wine list.

Lisbon's famous no. 28 tram, climbing through the Alfama

Jason Henzell and his family on the steps of the family restaurant, Jakes, in Treasure Beach

MY FAMILY STORY IN TREASURE BEACH

By Jason Henzell

Chairman of Jakes Hotel in Treasure Beach, Jamaica, and a prominent social entrepreneur.

My family's story in Treasure Beach – this tiny, soulful fishing village on Jamaica's south coast – begins in the 1940s, when my grandparents, Joyce and Basil, built a seaside cottage for weekend escapes from Mandeville. Back then, the roads were sandy tracks, the houses had stone walls and fretwork trim, and my mother, Sally, was a fearless little girl who surfed the waves on a cotton tree board.

Sally grew up to marry my father, Perry Henzell, the producer, director, and co-writer of *The Harder They Come*, the film that introduced reggae to the world. With her artist's eye, Mum became the film's art director and wardrobe stylist, pouring creativity into every frame.

In 1993, she poured that same creative energy into Jakes, which began as a quirky seaside restaurant. When tipsy guests begged her to build rooms to stay the night, she obliged, one at a time. "Bit by bit, I built Jakes," she said. "It was like creating poems in cement." Her wild, whimsical architecture (think Jimi Hendrix meets Antoni Gaudí on a Jamaican beach) became the signature of Treasure Beach.

I joined Jakes full-time after leaving banking. With encouragement from Chris Blackwell of Island Records, we joined his Island Outpost collection in 1995, gaining global recognition and a steady stream of rock stars and creatives. Since then, Jakes has grown and it's now home to 28 one-of-a-kind rooms, six ocean-front bungalows, four private villas, and seven colourful cottages. Our property includes a private beach, Jack Sprat and Jakes restaurants, Dougie's Bar, Driftwood Spa, and the SeaWata gift shop, all infused with our signature style and local soul.

We've been featured in countless travel publications and regularly make "Best of Jamaica" lists. But what

makes us proudest is being a true community hotel, where guests and locals mingle freely. Treasure Beach is home to the Calabash International Literary Festival, co-founded by my sister Justine in 2001 and named *Best Book Festival in the World* by *National Geographic*.

Other local highlights include the Treasure Beach Food, Rum & Reggae Festival, the Jakes Off-Road Triathlon, and our full-moon farm-to-table dinners, where curry goat and jerk crab meet Red Stripe and rum punch under the stars.

Our parish, St. Elizabeth, is Jamaica's breadbasket: most folks are farmers or fisherfolk, famous for their warmth and deep connection to both land and sea. The spirit of Treasure Beach is laid-back, creative, and generous, full of colourful characters with hearts of gold.

In 1998, I co-founded the Breds Treasure Beach Foundation with Peace Corps volunteer Aaron Laufer. "Breds," short for *brethren*, supports education, sports, and environmental sustainability. Our projects include the Treasure Beach Health Centre, the Breds Sports Park, and the Galleon Fish Sanctuary, all focused on helping our community thrive.

Through hurricanes, setbacks, and triumphs, our people remain resilient. After Hurricane Beryl in 2024, neighbours rebuilt homes side by side. That's what makes Treasure Beach so special: it's a community powered by love and creativity.

Today, with my wife Laura and our children Max and Seya, I remain deeply proud to call this place home. I invite you to come experience our slice of paradise, a place where time slows down, strangers become friends, and the Caribbean beats to its own rhythm.

Jakes: 28 rooms, six ocean-front bungalows, four private villas, and seven colourful cottages

The view from inside Jake's Oceanfront Bungalow

Jakes Treasure Beach Pool

ENTREPRENEURS OF THE WORLD *UNITE!*

Roger Bootle celebrating 25 years of Capital Economics

By Roger Bootle

A leading City economist and Daily Telegraph *columnist, Roger Bootle is the founder of Capital Economics, one of the world's largest independent macroeconomics consultancies. His books include* Money For Nothing, *which anticipated the global financial crisis, and* "The AI Economy – Work, Wealth and Welfare in the Robot Age".

Some years ago, when President George W. Bush was trying to explain France's apparent lack of economic success, he said: "The trouble with the French is that they don't have a word for entrepreneur".

The great irony, of course, is that we British (and hence the Americans) don't have a word for entrepreneur. If you look up the English synonyms for this French word you get things like "businessperson, tycoon, founder, innovator, pioneer, industrialist, magnate, impresario or proprietor."

None of these words quite hits the spot the way that "entrepreneur" does. Isn't it funny that, although English seems to be easily a superior language to French, when it comes to so many important concepts, we rely on a French word without there being any adequate English alternative – *ambience, cuisine, decor*. The English equivalents lack that *je ne sais quoi*.

Mind you, this gap in English is not restricted to French. We don't rely on the Germans for many things linguistic, but we really haven't got an adequate word to replace the German *schadenfreude.*

On some of the characteristics of an entrepreneur we can readily agree. They should be the founder of a business and the majority, if not the entire, owner of it. Accordingly, the entrepreneur both puts money at risk and manages a business. So the ordinary manager of a corporate business does not qualify because he or she lacks the risk element. Equally, a trader in the financial markets doesn't really qualify either because, although they take risk all right, they typically don't manage a business as such.

Economics textbooks used to wax lyrical about a character called the entrepreneur, but few of us understood what they were talking about: in the first few decades after the Second World War, business seemed to be all about huge corporations run by managers.

Over the last few decades, however, this seems to have changed radically. The new industries of the tech, digital and AI world are dominated by entrepreneurs; that is to say, individuals who set up their businesses from scratch and continued to run them, often making fortunes in the process. Indeed, most of today's richest people are tech entrepreneurs.

In many ways, this represents not so much a completely new development as a return to the conditions of the past. The great, top-hatted businessmen of the Victorian age who owned all those dark, satanic mills and developed markets for British exports all around the world, were typically what we would describe as entrepreneurs.

I suppose we think that entrepreneurship has been most obvious in the Anglo-Saxon world, now principally in America.

You certainly don't think of today's Germany as the home of entrepreneurship. Mind you, German industry is dominated by family-owned, or part family-owned, businesses which at some stage or other must have been founded by someone that we would think of as an entrepreneur.

"In this country, we must make sure that we are not now offering bureaucratic rewards for entrepreneurial performance."

Yet entrepreneurship is largely absent from the current German business scene. Not so long ago, the German President was asked what would have happened if someone like Bill Gates had started a business like Microsoft in the garage of his house. The President replied that it would have been shut down by the health and safety inspectors.

We in Britain need far more entrepreneurs: from small acorns great oaks do grow. I have often wondered about the leap from being a sole trader to becoming an employer of others. This is a key decision point for a businessperson and a key development point for the economy. A government that wanted to boost business formation and development would concentrate on the barriers that stop someone moving on from being simply a sole trader.

Some of the barriers are psychological, and some are real. The need to register for VAT once you pass a certain turnover threshold is a psychological barrier; more important is the hassle surrounding the administration of payroll for employees, including the requirement to make pension contributions.

And hanging over all this is the risk that a vexatious employee might take their employer to an industrial tribunal, now made worse by the Government's Employment Rights Bill. For a small business this is potentially deadly. It is not just the amount of compensation that a business might be ordered to pay, but also the significant waste of management time in having to deal with such cases.

What drives entrepreneurs? I don't think that it is usually the prospect of making an enormous amount of money: at least, not in the short-term. Entrepreneurs are a strange mixture of dreamers and doers. But the prospect of eventually making quite a lot of money is an attraction. This is over and above the satisfaction of seeing an opportunity and having your foresight and effort rewarded by the market.

As such, it is probably difficult to stimulate entrepreneurship, but government can discourage it and hold it back. And, of course, they can drive entrepreneurs away from the country. This is a great danger for Britain today.

Naturally, saddling successful people with higher and higher tax rates, not only on income but also on capital gains and inheritance, is a disincentive to come to the UK and stay here. But a more negative factor is the welter of regulations and restrictions, as well as a climate in which rich people are somehow regarded as robbers who have gained their wealth at the expense of others.

Some years ago, the eminent journalist John Plender, who had been railing against extremely high executive pay, lamented the way that so many senior business executives pocketed huge sums for apparently taking no capital risk, unlike entrepreneurs. He said that they enjoyed "entrepreneurial rewards for bureaucratic performance". In this country, we must make sure that we are not now offering bureaucratic rewards for entrepreneurial performance.

Rick Stein. Photo credit: Sam Harris

RICK STEIN: THE ACCIDENTAL RESTAURATEUR

By Bill Knott

For the last 30 years, former chef Bill Knott, the Editor of Boisdale Life, has written about food, drink and travel for a host of publications worldwide, including the Daily Telegraph, Bloomberg and the Financial Times. He never skips lunch.

In 1974, the Great Western Club, a nightclub in the small fishing village of Padstow on the north Cornish coast, had its late-night licence revoked by the local magistrates. Its patrons, many from Padstow's rival fishing families, had indulged in one fight too many: "trawler brawlers", you might call them, prone to drinking too much Double Diamond and assaulting each other with anchor chains.

The club's co-owner was Rick Stein who, with his friend Johnny, had taken on the building as a permanent home for the mobile disco he had run at parties in London. "I was declared 'not a fit person to run a nightclub'. We still had bills to pay, so I needed to find a way of keeping our heads above water."

They had lost the late-night licence, but they still had a restaurant licence. Rick had no real interest in becoming a chef, but it seemed the only way out. He had worked for seven months as a commis chef in a London hotel "which wasn't especially grand, but they did have proper sections in the kitchen, so it taught me the ropes. And my parents were really good cooks, so I had come across the books of Elizabeth David and Julia Child."

"I would buy fish fresh from the quay every day: not for any reason other than it was there and it made sense."

His early menus were simple. "Grilled lobster... grilled anything, really! I had inherited a salamander grill from the previous owner; apart from that I just had a six-burner stove.

"And the simplicity of my menus back then wasn't based on some high-flown culinary philosophy: I didn't know how to cook complicated dishes, and anyway I didn't have the equipment. And I would buy fish fresh from the quay every day: again, not for any reason other than it was there and it made sense.

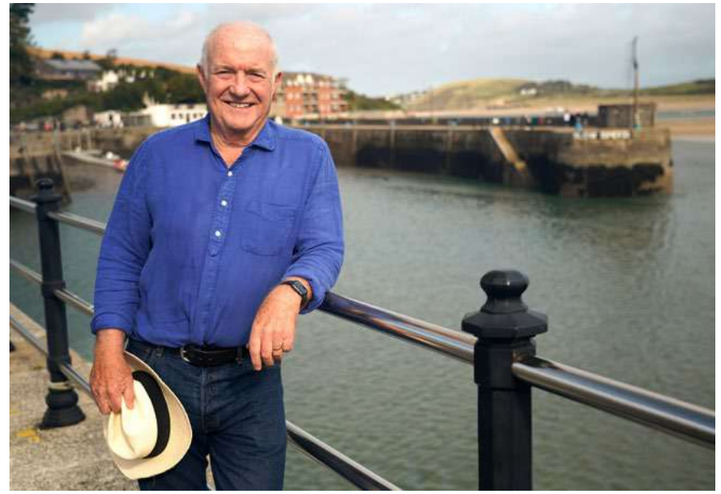
"But, in a way, that was the restaurant's great virtue: Padstow always got busy in the school holidays, and we were open, we were right on the front, and we were cheap."

Britain in the 1970s was not exactly a piscatorial paradise, unless you wanted your fish battered, deep-fried and served with chips.

Even the fishermen didn't eat much fish: Later, Rick recalls visiting Newlyn to film *Taste Of The Sea* with director (and long-time friend) David Pritchard: "David said 'why don't we film a piece in there?" pointing to the Fishermen's Café.

"So we went in, asked what fresh fish was on the menu and they said 'we don't sell fish! This is a fishermen's café.'"

He did find a few loyal diners in Padstow, though. "There was a guy called Herman Friedhoff, he was quite famous for being part of the Dutch Resistance during the war and even wrote a book about it *Requiem For The Resistance*, 1988. He and his wife had a house next door to the restaurant, and – because he was Dutch and really knew fish – they became regulars: I suppose they were our first discerning customers."



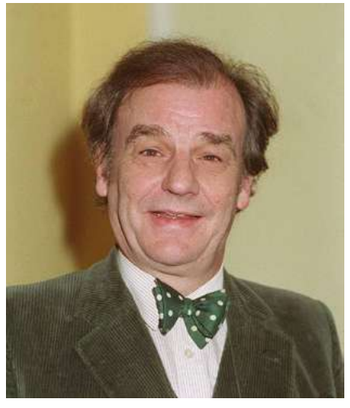
Rick Stein in Padstow

He and Jill, his first wife, ran the restaurant together: Rick in the kitchen, Jill front-of-house. By the 1980s, the long hours and hard work had eventually paid off, and both Rick and the restaurant were starting to attract attention from further afield.

Including the TV chef Keith Floyd, whose 1985 BBC show, *Floyd on Fish*, had launched his career. Floyd had been to The Seafood Restaurant several times and told his producer (David Pritchard again) that they should film in Padstow with Rick. Pritchard and Floyd set up a table-for-two on an old fishing boat at which Floyd, garrulous and bow-tied, and Rick, slightly nervous in his chef's whites, shared a bottle of Alsace white and a locally-caught sea bass that Rick had cooked in his kitchen.

The section they filmed in the restaurant kitchen was notable for Floyd calling Rick "Nick" throughout: "I like to think that he had just temporarily forgotten my name", recalls Rick, "but he could be quite mischievous, and he might well have been taking the piss."

His profile, and his status in the food world, was raised still further when his journalist friend Richard Barber turned up for dinner with an editor from Penguin Books, who asked whether he would like to write a seafood cookbook for them. "So I did, but I wasn't sure what anyone would make of it."



Keith Floyd, British chef and broadcaster

Rick's first book, *English Seafood Cookery*, was published in 1988. "Then the great cookery writer Jane Grigson, whose book Fish Cookery I loved, turned up at the restaurant, and I didn't realise it at the time, but she must have been scouting us out, because the book won the Glenfiddich Award for Cookbook of the Year in 1989."

"Rick has no ambitions to write a novel of his own – 'I'm no good at constructing a plot. Starters, main courses, puddings, that's me!'"

I first met Rick a few years later, in January 1997, at the bar of his recently-opened St Petroc's Hotel and Restaurant, a short stroll from The Seafood Restaurant. At midnight, just as we moved on to the second brandy, he turned 50.

I was interviewing him because, by then, he had become one of the brightest stars in the culinary firmament. His series *Taste of the Sea*, released a year and a half before, had been rapturously received, and won him another Glenfiddich Award.

David Pritchard, whose relationship with Keith Floyd had by that time broken down pretty much irreconcilably, was the director, although he initially had reservations about putting him on screen. As Rick told me that night, "the first time David saw me on camera he said, 'you're a bit like Forrest Gump, aren't you?'"

But it was Rick's thoughtful, diffident, natural style of presentation, skilfully captured by Pritchard, that shone through on *Taste of the Sea*, and a plethora of subsequent series, until Pritchard died in 2019, filmed all over the world.

Most chefs do not have what is sometimes called a "hinterland" – other interests and passions that round out their character – or even any real passion for food: some of them might just as well have taken an NVQ in spot welding. But Rick, and his old friends Simon Hopkinson, Rowley Leigh, Shaun Hill and the late Alastair Little, is different. Music was an early passion – hence the disco and the nightclub – and so is literature: he read English at Oxford. "I got a third. So did Evelyn Waugh!" His book choice on *Desert Island Discs* was Anna Karenina, he loves Graham Greene, and he is currently devouring Anthony Powell's magisterial *A Dance to the Music of Time*, all 12 volumes of it, "for the fourth time: I still find new things to enjoy in it."

He has no ambitions to write a novel of his own – "I'm no good at constructing a plot. Starters, main courses, puddings, that's me!" – but he has still managed to publish nearly 30 books since *English Seafood Cookery*, including *Under A Mackerel Sky*, his 2013 autobiography that candidly charts his chaotic younger life, including his father's bipolar disorder: he took his own life when Rick was 19.

His latest book, Rick Stein's Christmas, is an altogether happier read, liberally seasoned with quotations from Thomas Hardy, Maya Angelou, Jane Austen, Charles Dickens, James Joyce, Shakespeare (and The Pogues), and full of enticing seasonal recipes.

His advice to Christmas cooks? "Don't overcook the turkey! Portia, the home economist for the book and I cooked and re-cooked lots of turkeys, just to get the timings right, and we concluded that it's just a large chicken.

"Get it out of the fridge early – the night before, preferably – use a temperature probe, and don't let it get above 65˚C. And just prepare as much as you can in advance: Christmas dinner is all about choreography."

It is an October evening in Chiswick, and Rick and I are enjoying a pint or two of London Pride in a pub not far from the home he shares with Sas, his Australian wife, and his business partner in his two restaurants down under. (His first wife, Jill, still owns and runs his UK restaurants with him.)

Nearly three decades since we first met, and now aged 78, his curiosity about food and his love of restaurants remains undimmed, despite the economic headwinds that are severely

Rick Stein's The Seafood Restaurant, his original and still his flagship

afflicting the hospitality industry: "we're surviving, it's not desperate, but nor is it easy."

What keeps him going? After all, he could comfortably retire. "I suppose it's just that food still gets me really excited. I mean, I love literature and I love music, but I'm ashamed to say that I don't know enough about them. Food is what I really know about."

"I love travelling for food: it's such a universal language, such a passport to other cultures, that you don't need to explain why you're there. Everybody understands."

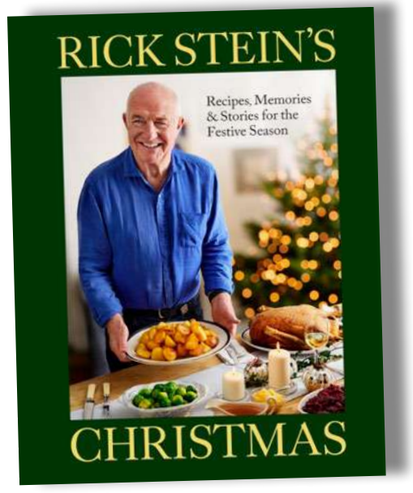
And do his still extensive travels keep him curious, keep him fizzing with ideas? "They do. I guess the one person I aspire to in my travels is Anthony Bourdain." Bourdain was an American chef, author of the best-selling *Kitchen Confidential*, and the presenter of the hugely successful *No Reservations* and A Cook's Tour TV shows. He took his own life in 2018.

Coincidentally, Rick was in the same small town in Alsace, Kaysersberg, the night Bourdain died: it must have rekindled memories of his father's suicide. He looks rueful. "I wish I'd gone out and had a beer with him, maybe I could have cheered him up."

Rick has no plans to stop cooking, writing, travelling, or running his restaurants any time soon, and he is already working on a new book – Rick Stein's Cookery Course – even as he waits for his Christmas book to be released. "And I love travelling for food: it's such a universal language, such a passport to other cultures, that you don't need to explain why you're there. Everybody understands.

"I remember once that David Pritchard and I were in Corleone, Sicily, with a film crew, setting up a shoot at a venerable old pasta factory. The big news that day was that some Mafia kingpin had just been arrested after years in hiding, and someone said to me 'oh, I suppose you're here to cover the arrest?'"

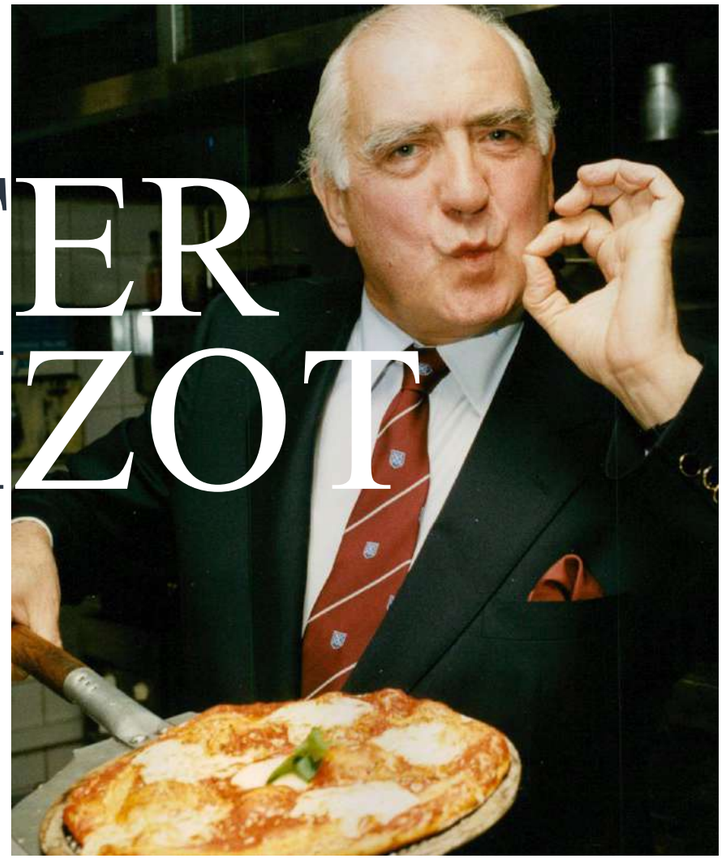
"'No', I replied. 'We're just here for the pasta.'"



RICK STEIN'S CHRISTMAS:
Recipes, Memories & Stories for the Festive Season

is published by BBC Books, £28

PETER BOIZOT



Pizza Express founder Peter Boizot, often referred to as Mr. Pizza

By Michael Gelardi

Impresario Michael Gelardi has worked with countless legends of the music business, from Sammy Davis Jr. and Bob Hope to Mica Paris and Take That. Here, to mark the 60th anniversary of Pizza Express, he remembers his old friend Peter Boizot.

"Mr Pizza and All That Jazz" is the light-hearted title of his autobiography, but somehow I never thought it entirely did justice to my dear friend Peter Boizot. Of course, he introduced pizza, as well as Italian beer, to the British people, and he did a lot for jazz music and musicians – but he also did a good deal more.

I was first introduced to Peter by a mutual good friend, Lord Charles Spencer Churchill. That was around 40 years ago when, looking as elegant as ever, Peter attended the opening gala night of a show I was presenting at the Grosvenor House Hotel in London, starring two of his favourite jazz artistes, Ella Fitzgerald and Oscar Peterson.

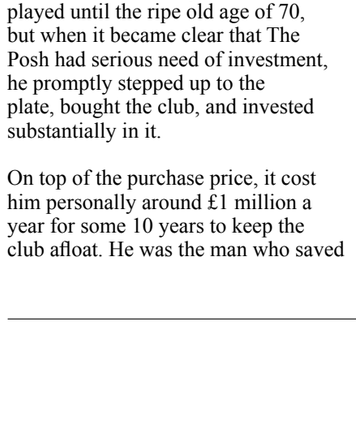
I remember that evening well, and from that night on, I am privileged to say that Peter and I remained firm friends for some four decades to come – largely, I have to say, through our mutual love of music, women, and Peter's favourite tipple, champagne.

Of course, Peter will forever be feted as the legendary founder of Pizza Express, which he proudly claimed was founded "without a business plan" in 1965, at a time when even such cognoscenti as the Chairman of the Royal Automobile Club had to ask him "What is a pizza?".

In 1993, he eventually (and very successfully) sold the company to city entrepreneur Luke Johnson, assisted in no small measure, it must be said, by his loyal and financially astute nephew, Matthew Allen: by his own admission, Peter was a visionary, but not a natural businessman.

Indeed, until his death in 2018 at the age of 89, Peter remained the revered president of the Pizza Express company. The present Chinese owners, who later bought in at a reported figure of some £900m, still insist that his portrait is displayed in every Pizza Express, of which there are now some 600 worldwide – but, in his remarkable life, Peter had many more strings to his bow.

When people ask me about Peter, I usually explain that he was a Cambridge graduate who created the first real quality pizza restaurant brand in the UK, developed it successfully, made a personal fortune of some £35 million, and then spent it all. But, I hasten to add, he spent hardly any of it on himself.



Where it all started in 1965, when founder Peter Boizot brought great pizza to London with a dough, a dream, and a chef from Sicily.

So these are just a few examples of Peter's generosity and commitment to his passions and beloved hometown, Peterborough, over the years that he and I were good friends:

I think perhaps a good start would be Peterborough United Football Club, familiarly known as The Posh. Peter was less interested in football than he was in hockey, which he played until the ripe old age of 70, but when it became clear that The Posh had serious need of investment, he promptly stepped up to the plate, bought the club, and invested substantially in it.

On top of the purchase price, it cost him personally around £1 million a year for some 10 years to keep the club afloat. He was the man who saved The Posh, and saw them on to bigger and better things, though I don't think that this was always fully appreciated.

"Peter played host to many great jazz artistes and musical celebrities from Jamie Cullum to Liza Minelli, and even to Mussolini's youngest son Romano"

Peter believed that Peterborough had need of a good modern theatre, and so he built one: a multi-purpose 1200 seat theatre. This project overran financially by quite a lot and apparently ended up setting him back around £11 million – a ludicrous amount for a provincial theatre, but no expense was spared to create a real "state-of-the art" offering for the good citizens of Peterborough.

He was a significant party donor and very active in local politics and, being a staunch supporter of the Liberal Party, he twice stood as the Liberal candidate for Peterborough, his slogan being "Peter Boizot – From Peterborough, For Peterborough".

For his "sins in life" Peter was also a staunch financial supporter of the magnificent Peterborough Cathedral, in which he was once a choirboy and where I had the privilege of giving his eulogy to some 1 000 people at Peter's memorial service, which was also covered by local TV.

But, while Peter did more than enough to be granted the Freedom of City of Peterborough, which he duly received, he did not confine his benevolence to his hometown. He went much further than that.

He founded and funded The Soho Jazz Festival to support and promote two of his other great passions: jazz music and the village of Soho, where in 1965 he opened his first Pizza Express, in Wardour Street, and reinvented the famous Soho landmark bar, Kettner's.

He gave London two of its best-known and best-loved music rooms, Pizza Express Dean Street and Pizza on the Park, which offered artistes and musicians from both sides of the Atlantic the opportunity to perform in two of very few intimate rooms in London, and played host to many great jazz artistes and musical celebrities from Jamie Cullum to Liza Minelli, and even to Mussolini's youngest son Romano, actually a fine jazz pianist!

The iconic Pizza Express logo

He sponsored our England hockey team, who went on to win Gold at the Olympic Games, and of course, he had the inspired idea of supporting the Venice in Peril Fund, another city he loved, by creating a special pizza, the Veneziana, and contributing a small sum for every Veneziana sold in Pizza Express throughout the country.

This eventually raised more than a million pounds for the fund, and Peter's well deserved reward for this unique donation was to receive Italy's civilian honour, the title of Cavaliere Ufficiale. It could not have gone to a better man.

CLOSE TO THE WIND

By Christian May

Christian May is the Editor-In-Chief of City AM, a Fellow of the Royal Society for Arts, Manufacturers and Commerce; a Fellow of the British American Project; and a member of the Advisory Council at the Institute of Economic Affairs.

Walking the fine line between truth and trouble — the editor's daily balancing act in a world where every word can tip the scales

Over the years, I have developed a robust sense of whether a threatening legal letter needs to be taken seriously. And some of them are very threatening indeed.

Larger media organisations have in-house lawyers, but at City AM we have an excellent lawyer on a retainer, and I have reason to talk to him most weeks. It is those conversations that have honed my sense of whether we are gearing up for a fight or, as is increasingly the case, the furious legal bluster is actually just a PR response on steroids. As editor-in-chief, legal responsibility for all our published stories lies with me, and me alone. If things go wrong, I can't blame a junior: this is not the Civil Service.

I think I can plot my trajectory as an editor through the various legal threats I have had to deal with: I may be a good judge of them now, but this wasn't always the case. The first such letter I received made my blood run cold, and I still remember exactly where I was when I read it on my phone.

I had just moved into a bachelor pad in the heart of the Square Mile, having taken up the role of editor a month earlier. Frankly, my head was still spinning from the appointment. One day I was a 27-year-old PR guy in Westminster, and the next I was being unveiled as the new editor of City AM.

The decision by the newspaper's owners to recruit someone as editor who had never worked as a journalist took plenty of people by surprise, none more than me. I'd spent a few years working in communications and lobbying for think-tanks, mostly of the free-market kind, and by the summer of 2015 I was Head of Communications and Campaigns at the Institute of Directors.

In that role, I often appeared in the media as a pundit and spokesperson but, while I had a Masters degree in journalism, I'd never really put it to use, other than by selling diary stories for beer money. So when City AM's proprietors asked to meet me, I went along to dinner in a state of mild curiosity. I left, somewhat drunkenly, as their new editor.

I had no idea what I'd signed up to. I didn't know what the editor's job was, and I was more than a little concerned that the newsroom would raise a collective eyebrow at my inexperience. This wasn't a case of imposter syndrome; it was a case of being an actual imposter.

Christian May, Editor-In-Chief of City AM

Some sniffy media coverage of my appointment only added to my nerves, but support came from some unexpected places. The brilliant journalist and author Iain Martin, whom I'd never met, wrote me an email based on the eight pieces of advice that an editorial grandee had sent him when he also found himself promoted to a top newspaper job at a young age. I think of that letter often, and the act of kindness that lay behind it. Iain's final piece of advice was: "Enjoy it, this will be the most fun you can have with your trousers on."

He was right, but as I stood in my new flat reading the email from one of London's most notorious law firms, I thought the fun (and my luck) had run out. The previous day we had run a story on a slump in the resale value of off-plan properties at the (then fledgling) Battersea Power Station development. Our irresistible headline was "Battersea Panic Stations".

Unfortunately, they didn't see the funny side. Their lawyers informed me that I would be held personally responsible for the multi-million-pound valuation hit. As I looked around my new City pad on a Friday evening, I thought, "well, it was good while it lasted." Imagine my relief when our lawyer, Paul Fox, sent me a message saying "Don't worry, it's bollocks, they're just angry. I'll reply on Monday."

That was more than a decade ago – since when, I'm pleased to say, Battersea has become a spectacularly successful showcase for redevelopment – and I went on to serve as editor for another five years, before hopping the fence for a career change in corporate communications.

The less said about that experiment the better, and I was delighted when City AM's new owners invited me to take up the editor's pen once again in the summer of 2024. Much had changed in my absence, largely thanks to Covid (again, the less said the better) but under new ownership and with a post-pandemic spring in its step, City AM had roared back to life and now, a year on, I think it's in the best shape it's ever been.

Paul Fox is still our lawyer, and we still have to talk to each other often. There was the murky world of whisky investments (Boisdale fans are surely too savvy to get roped in) and the increasingly threatening objections of the subject of our investigation.

There was the international banking executive who didn't like one of our stories. There was the well-known company whose six-page letter amounted to a scream of frustration. There was the multi-layered investigation into various shenanigans at a listed UK firm.

And these are all just from recent weeks. Often, we send stories to Paul for his approval, pre-publication, and while he might suggest a sharpening or a softening of tone, generally he replies with a thumbs-up.

Mindful as I am of tempting fate, I'd like to point out that, on my watch, we have never been taken to court or successfully challenged. What I have noticed is that many people and businesses bypass traditional PR or communications advisors and reach straight for the menacing lawyer.

This is a mistake. I can think of several occasions where I might very well have reacted reasonably to a polite phone call pointing out a client's perspective and asking for a modest clarification or shift in emphasis: I am a reasonable man. But I cannot give in to threats and fury. From the moment I read "we hereby demand the article is removed immediately" my sinews stiffen. There's always

a chance that we are in the wrong and, of course, mistakes do happen, but I will not accept threatening letters as a substitute for polite engagement.

My attitude towards legal threats is far from the only thing that has changed since I edited my first edition on Sunday 17th August 2015. The Square Mile has changed, for a start. A decade ago I couldn't even get a Starbucks coffee in the City on a Sunday (working on Monday's edition), whereas today the City's often busiest on the weekend.

Canary Wharf has evolved, too, as has our approach to publishing. Before the pandemic I used to say to the owners "I think we should have an app" and they'd reply, "why would we encourage people not to pick up the newspaper?"

Today, having launched our app just over a year ago, it has been downloaded more than 250,000 times. And we're still printing. Our focus is obviously a lot more digital, and we pump out videos from our own studio in the heart of the City.

The economics of news publishing has also shifted (it will never be static) and we now have to contend with a world going crazy for Artificial Intelligence which can, I regret to. say, often lead to artificial news clogging up other parts of the digital sphere

How do we retain trust? How do we earn the loyalty of readers? How do we monetise a product that, for 20 years, has been free to read? These are mighty questions with no easy answers, but City AM has some hard-won advantages as we navigate the new landscape. We're agile, we're entrepreneurial, we've got supportive and patient owners and, perhaps most importantly, we've got a personality and a reputation.

We strive to add value to the issues and stories we cover and add some fun to the world of business and financial journalism. We have to have faith that this approach will continue to resonate with our audience, even as we cut a path towards the future through the jungle of AI.

Elements of that technology are supremely useful to journalists (deep research and data analysis), and other elements are great for our consumers, such as personalising news feeds, or translating stories to audio or foreign languages. But one of my many jobs is to make sure that, amid this constant and necessary experimentation, we know where we're going and that we don't get distracted by noises off. Or, for that matter, by angry lawyers.

The sun rises on the Square Mile, casting light on a city — and a newsroom — that thrives on change. Forward, always

CITY AM

WHAT'S BLACK AND WHITE AND READ ALL OVER ?

OUR APP — NOW WITH OVER
250,000 USERS, AND COUNTING.
DOWNLOAD YOUR FREE APP TODAY

SCAN QR CODE

Download on the App Store

GET IT ON Google Play

PARTNERING WITH Investec

A CLEAR VISION

Tom Davies — visionary eyewear designer and founder of TD Tom Davies, redefining the art of bespoke glasses

By Tom Davies

Tom Davies is a British eyewear designer and the founder of the bespoke glasses brand TD Tom Davies. He is known for creating custom-made, high-quality eyewear for both private clients and Hollywood productions, including films like Wonka and Cruella, and celebrities such as Ed Sheeran.

I never planned a career designing eyewear. In fact, when I flew to Hong Kong in 1996 with £200 in my pocket, I'd no idea at all what I wanted to do. I'd just finished an art and design degree and was seeking an adventure before real life began. What I stumbled into was an adventure that somehow became real life.

A clockmaker looking to branch out into eyewear took me on as his designer. I knew absolutely nothing about glasses, so I improvised. I bought *Vogue*, drew frames over the models' faces, then asked people in the bar where I worked what they liked about their glasses – or hated. That's how I began to learn the craft.

Four years later I came home and set up my own brand, Tom Davies Bespoke Eyewear. I was young, broke, naive and fuelled by the slightly mad conviction that I could build the world's best bespoke glasses company. Now, more than two decades on, we've got a factory and stores in London, a team of incredible craftspeople and even hospital-grade dry eye clinics. But I still get the same thrill from making a single pair of frames as I did when I began.

My frames range from the affordable all the way up to an 18-carat gold pair that would set you back £10,000: what I like to call the "King Midas" version. As a society, we spend a fortune on handbags, watches or shoes, but glasses are the first item people see when they meet us.

So why not wear something that looks and feels fabulous? A client once asked why she should buy one of my most expensive frames. I said: "Happy Christmas to me?" She bought them on the spot. I even have a gold business card. When I gave one to Stephen Fry, he looked at it, sighed and said, "Damn it. I've just given up cocaine. It would have been very useful."

Carrie Fisher once led me to her bedroom and I said: "Carrie, I'm a married man." She shot back: "What the fuck's that got to do with it?"

My factory is like an adult playground. We've held Sega Rally competitions on the mezzanine and barbecues on the rooftop. I make glasses from pretty much any material. One day I bought a fragment that hit Mars 3,000 years ago, ground it into powder and turned it into sunglasses. We auctioned them for £3,000 for the fantastic eye charity Orbis. That's the thing about design: it's not really about product, it's about curiosity. What happens if I mix art, science and silliness together? Usually something wonderful.

My first (at that point unofficial) celebrity client was Richard Branson. I'd been chatting nervously to a Virgin check-in assistant about her badly fitting glasses and offered to make her a new pair. I wasn't fishing for an upgrade, though I did get promoted to Upper Class. To thank Richard, I thought I'd design him some frames. Since I didn't know him, I needed his measurements, so I climbed under the rope at Madame Tussauds and measured his waxwork.

Then came the call from a costume designer looking for glasses for Rowan Atkinson in the film *Keeping Mum*. I made him a pair and suddenly Hollywood started knocking. I'm proud to say Angelina Jolie in *The Tourist*, Henry Cavill in *Superman v Batman*, Brad Pitt in *Allied*, Tom Holland in *Spider-Man* are all wearing my creations. One day, driving up the M1, I got a call: "I'm on set with Angelina. She doesn't like the Ferragamo glasses. She wants yours. We need them in Venice in four days." I nearly spun the car around there and then.

Angelina Jolie in The Tourist *(2010), wearing bespoke sunglasses designed by Tom Davies*

There have been so many surreal moments. During *Cruella*, costume legend Jenny Beavan told me that Emma Thompson's assistant was described in the script as "the best-looking man in London" and needed the perfect glasses. "When's it filming?" I asked. "This afternoon." So I took of my own pair and gave them to him. Later I saw the stills and thought: "Damn. He looks better than me... in *my* glasses."

One of my favourite and most loyal customers was the late Carrie Fisher. My store manager called one day: "Tom, Carrie Fisher is in the shop." My manager knew I was a massive Star Wars fan. And I knew I had to drop everything and get to the store. Within five minutes of meeting Carrie, she declared me "Mr Fisher" – apparently an honour reserved for very few. We became close friends.

Though not as close as perhaps she wanted. She once led me to her bedroom and I said: "Carrie, I'm a married man." She shot back: "What the fuck's that got to do with it?" She became one of my most loyal clients: she bought 30 pairs a year, always insisted on paying, and even took me to the *Star Wars: The Force Awakens* premiere.

Loyal client and close friend, Carrie Fisher with Tom Davies

Heston Blumenthal is another long-term client and friend. I once swapped him a pair of sunglasses for one of his prototype microwaves after we'd both had rather a heavy night. I remember flagging down a taxi with a high-tech microwave under my arm.

Ed Sheeran, on the other hand, found me on Google. When I went to fit his first horn-rimmed frames, my assistant forgot my tools. So Ed's wife kindly leant me her hair straighteners, a

Heston Blumenthal in a pair of Tom Davies glasses, accompanied by the designer himself

hairdryer and some socks to adjust them. For another pair, I asked for cooking oil and a pair of Marigolds and ended up heating the frames in a saucepan. Before I left, Ed asked me to sign the wall in his studio. I spotted Damien Hirst's shark sketch next to his name, so I couldn't resist drawing a pair of glasses next to mine.

Despite the high-profile encounters, there are plenty of moments that aren't glamorous. Designing can be hard graft – hours spent tweaking a hinge, reshaping a bridge, fixing a tiny flaw that no one else might notice.

Running a factory means juggling creative chaos with relentless detail: production schedules, staff training, suppliers, machines that go wrong at the worst possible time. There are days when the pressure gets too much.

But then someone puts on a pair of glasses we've made. They look in the mirror and suddenly their posture changes, their confidence lifts – and I remember why I started.

A great pair of glasses isn't just about seeing better, it's about being seen differently. It's art that lives on your face. When I first began, I used to wear my own frames, even though I had 20:20 vision. My vision's changed so I now need them – and I'm hardly going to wear anyone else's designs.

Over the years I've been called a "mad professor" and the "Willy Wonka of eyewear", both of which I take as a huge compliment. I've had my share of lucky breaks and crazy moments, but I think the real secret of my success is caring about every pair as if it's the first. Whatever I'm doing and whoever it's for, I still feel like the same guy who once drew glasses on the cover of Vogue and hoped that someone, one day, might wear them.

Tom Davies and Ed Sheeran in Sloane Square

Lady Laura Cathcart's 2024 summer millinery collection

HATS ON!

By Laura Cathcart

Lady Laura Cathcart is a British couturier milliner known for her bespoke hats and headpieces for weddings, racing, and other special occasions. A leading society milliner, she also creates ready-to-wear collections and has collaborated with high-end fashion brands like Emilia Wickstead and Amanda Wakeley.

When people think of British entrepreneurs, they don't usually think of a couture milliner working in the depths of Shropshire, surrounded by wall-mounted hats, mannequins, Cecil Beaton sketches and a small black pug curled up in front of a fire.

Artisan fashion entrepreneurs are an endangered species. Survival in the current economic climate has become increasingly difficult, and many famous brands have failed. So how have I survived, when even Coco Chanel, whose career journey from milliner to fashion icon is an inspiration to me, eventually gave up on millinery?

I have never chosen the route of third-party funding. I believe that if you create a truly original and timeless brand, hand-crafted couture products that emotionally connect to your clients, then you have a chance of success.

Collaboration is a better path. I have recently worked with leading fashion designer Emilia Wickstead on several of her recent London Fashion Week shows: we host pre-Ascot parties in her beautiful Sloane Street flagship shop, and I make bespoke hats for some of her high-profile clientele.

My work with Emilia was serendipitous. My hat studio in Shropshire is set within a courtyard of cottages: one of these was let by a New Zealand businesswoman called Angela. When something went wrong with her internet, I offered her my studio to make a Zoom call.

It turned out the call was with her daughter, Emilia. "Mummy, where on earth are you?" she asked. "Why are you surrounded by beautiful hats, and who made them?"

I also make bespoke hats for clients from the worlds of racing, politics, showbusiness, high finance, for British royalty, and for more mothers-of-the-bride than you could fit into a beer tent at Cheltenham. And I make hats for period dramas: actress Charlotte Radford's upcoming World War I film *Can You Hear Me?*, partly filmed at my Elizabethan home of Upton Cressett, will feature my Edwardian hats.

I think a key secret to my success is that I don't really regard my work as a normal job. It's a creative passion. When, in May 2019, *Harper's Bazaar* listed my business as their top Royal Ascot milliner, I had to pinch myself.

So, what are the highs and lows of my 15-year journey? My mother, Vivien Greenock, is a well-known interior decorator, and my early life was spent being surrounded by beautiful wallpaper and textile samples, and I quickly developed an eye for beautiful fabrics.

But, although I trained for a while at Colefax & Fowler in Mayfair, and later at George Spencer in Chelsea, I soon realised that I had a creative obsession with designing hats, not decorating homes or designing dresses. So I enrolled at the London College of Fashion and sought out a millinery internship.

I only knew of one milliner, Gina Foster: her father, Tim Foster, had painted a portrait of our family in Norfolk. I went to see her at her shop off Kensington High Street only to be told that I'd missed the deadline for the millinery course at the Chelsea College of Arts and I'd have to wait a year. A month later, she rang to say her intern had left and could I start as soon as possible?

I opened my own boutique in 2011, and my first studio was a back storage room in my mother's office. I began making hats for friends, many of whom were going to dozens of weddings a year, and my first big break was being chosen as an official milliner for Royal Ascot as part of the Royal Ascot Millinery Collective. I suddenly found myself in the same company as Philip Treacy.

In June 2018, I got an unusual call for a memorial service hat from Princess Olga Romanoff, president of the Romanoff Family Association, who lives in a 13th century manor house in Kent. "My daughter Alexandra and I are heading to St Petersburg to attend the 100th anniversary memorial of the murder of the last Tsar, my great-uncle Nicholas II, and his Tsarina. Could I come and see you to discuss a suitable black hat?"

After the *Telegraph* article on the service included Princess Olga wearing my black pillbox hat, I suddenly found myself in demand as a milliner for big funerals. I went on to create a chic black pillbox for Samantha Cameron to wear at the state funeral of Queen Elizabeth II. I also created a pillbox for Akshata Murty, wife of prime minister Rishi Sunak, to wear at the Trooping of the Colour. Another hat that got media coverage was the 1950s-inspired extravagant "Strawberries and Cream" picnic hat that I created for singer Katherine Jenkins to wear on top of a double-decker bus at the Platinum Jubilee Pageant.

Liz Hurley wearing Laura's Pink Truffle

One of my favourite commissions was being asked by the owner of Charbonnel et Walker chocolates to create a line of special "My Fair Lady" hats – inspired by Cecil Beaton's film costumes – for their Royal Ascot Week shop window. The extravagant hats all came with their own boxes of chocolates made from silk and golden thread: my husband, after a glass of wine, helped himself to a violet cream, thinking it was real.

But things do not always go according to plan. Once, a friend volunteered to drive one of my summer hat collections back to Shropshire from London after they had featured in a Selfridge's fashion show. I then got a distraught call from her saying her car had been broken into, and the entire collection stolen.

Gabriella

The result was the police putting out a message to their underworld gangster contacts asking them to look out for a line of Laura Cathcart Royal Ascot hats being sold on the black market alongside stolen Rolexes.

I also enjoy my occasional role as a fashion "etiquette aunt". For example, should a girl inwardly sigh if a man fails to remove his top hat (one prays it is at least silk) once he ushers you inside a Grandstand lift at Royal Ascot?

I'm often asked about the etiquette of hat wearing: the truth is, most people think it's enough to know that the general rule is "hats off indoors" for men and "hats on indoors" for ladies.

But it is not as simple as that. I once discussed this with Downton Abbey creator Julian Fellowes, author of Snobs, and an authority on social etiquette.

He is clear on the subject. Any etiquette guide that says it is acceptable to take off one's hat inside, at any time, is simply wrong. "I can't speak for fashions in other countries, but an English lady never takes her hat off inside at any time, other than in her bedroom."

Kissing whilst wearing a hat is an especially tricky area of etiquette. I once found myself sitting next to former England captain David Gower at a charity cricket event. When he learnt I was a bespoke milliner, all he wanted to know was whether I could create a hat that allowed two people to politely exchange kisses on each cheek. "Can you make a hat that has extending lips that you can squeeze like an atomiser and is a feature of the hat?" he asked.

He had a good point. When a woman is wearing a large wide-brimmed hat, kissing someone on the cheek whilst keeping the hat in place would be almost impossible.

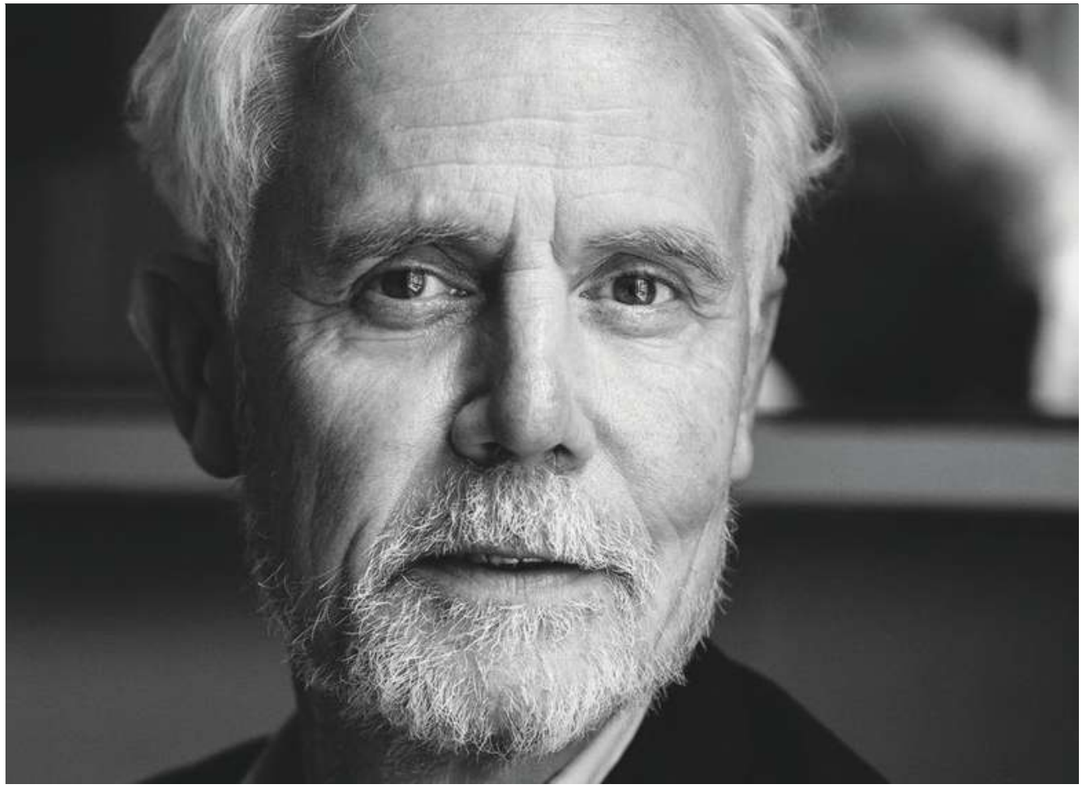
Francesca

Fashions change. Whilst most men know they should remove their top hats when talking to a lady (always hold the hat with the inside lining facing inwards), or just doff their hat if saying hello, the kissing etiquette for two acquaintances who encounter each other is more nuanced. In the Edwardian era, the setting for Cecil Beaton's famous *My Fair Lady* Royal Ascot scene, it would have been unthinkable for anybody in the Enclosure to try kissing in public: even a peck on the cheek was considered risqué.

My advice is that if you are wearing a wide-brimmed hat at Ascot (perhaps a variation on the pink silk organza hat with Belle Époque soft frills, as worn by Audrey Hepburn) is to cut out any public kissing, because it is just so physically tricky. Or, if you are determined to smooch whilst out racing, commission me to create the David Gower kissing hat.

Ode to Spring

Lady Laura Cathcart can be commissioned at:
www.lauracathcart.com



ENTREFLÂNEUR

By Paddy Renouf

The supremely well-connected Paddy Renouf is London's go-to man for visiting film stars, high-rollers, and anyone else who wants a unique experience in the capital. Also a talented landscape artist, writer and storyteller, he lives in an historic Soho house once occupied by a harpsichord maker for Mozart, Handel and Haydn.

"Renouf, the only reason anyone would follow you is out of curiosity! They'd like to see what decision you are going to make next."

That was the conclusion of the "Corporal of Horse" on my crucial "What Makes a Leader" course during basic military training at Sandhurst in the late 1970s.

And it's kind of true. It's now 20 years since I initiated a private guide business as a stop-gap between jobs, with a view to generating some ready cash. I had been in a corporate career as the sales director and ultimately the MD of a medical supplies company: among a range of products, we manufactured all types of thermometers, including the clinical thermometer for the NHS. My company had been supplying these under tender since the NHS was formed in 1948.

We had these medical thermometers manufactured in Kodaikanal, a hill station above Bangalore in the south of India, about 2,100 metres above sea level, which gives the place that famously pleasant, temperate climate: neither coastal nor sweltering, but rather cool. misty and pine scented. It was a good place to calibrate the human range of the thermometer.

It is now known as the "Silicon Valley of India": 20 years ago, that was only just starting.

Because we made 4,000 different thermometers, the job took me all over the world, negotiating with purchasing executives from different cultures and industry sectors, learning on the job, navigating how they think and feel, from boardrooms in Sydney to San Francisco, Penang and Marseille.

I loved it – the excitement of travel and the stimulation of the work – but what I remember most about these years was finding myself in a five-star hotel from Friday evening to Monday morning; despite the luxury and glamour, eight meals on your own can be a lonely experience. You could get merry on expenses on the first night, but that was only with a barman who, after all, is paid to be pleasant.

"When tastes are shared, the connection made is profound and can lead to some exhilarating opportunities. I have been out for dinner in Soho and ended up in Kenya."

I began to think about all the people who might find themselves in a similar position when visiting me in my home city of London, whether travelling for business or pleasure: all those lonely people sitting idly in Park Lane hotels over the weekend.

With a love for history and culture, and as an artist myself, I began to ruminate on how I could potentially assist people from all over the world and guide them through an unforgettable time in the UK.

At the time I had a 1978 Bentley T2, and it was with this, some encouragement from friends, and a vague idea of what I would be offering, that I set off to Luton Airport's private terminal and collected my first client, who had flown from Washington in a small

A 1978 Bentley T2

private jet with his 13yr old goth daughter in the spring of her rebellious phase. I'd never driven to meet a private flight before, so I was unaware of protocol as my car was escorted by outriders to the end of the runway to await my new client.

It was very formal and formulaic, and entirely new to me. Also, I had a chronic problem with the exhaust, and I found myself having to drive in a manner that stopped it from rattling and banging as we headed off.

I realised there and then that I had no prepared contingency program. As I left the airfield, directly onto the M1 via a private slip road and heading for London, I wondered what would happen if the exhaust fell off. When you've flown on a private jet from across the pond, you don't expect to find yourself on the back of an AA truck.

In the event, we had such an enjoyable first day that they asked me to clear my diary for the rest of the week. He turned out to be an industrialist who, many years before, had worked for Ken Livingstone and since then had become immensely successful. I did manage to find the old southeast London boozer he went to with Ken for a pint of Guinness.

I now deal with people from many cultures, and some of my clients are the most distinguished and influential people on the planet. Remember that this is a very special time for them: they have a few days with their families and, after all the sacrifices they might have made to get to that point in their lives, those days are precious. Being trusted with the responsibility of creating experiences for them is a great privilege.

My company is called Serendipity both because I love the word, and because it accurately describes the experience that my clients enjoy and now expect. It means "when you find something you want when you didn't know you were looking for it" and it comes from Horace Walpole, the youngest son of our first Prime Minister.

He wrote about three wise travellers who, by keeping open minds, were receptive to the wonderful opportunities that their open-mindedness provoked. The story is set in Sri Lanka, and the old Persian name for the island was Serendip! And this sentiment is central to the experience my clients enjoy in our company.

This openness and shared experience lead to very good connections and

having started with orientation tours getting to know and understand London, through good conversation clients sometimes expand the brief to other areas in their life, both personally and professionally.

We have advised on schools (even sending children to my old school: one of them grew up to become an intern for us); houses to buy or rent; procurement of specialist cars, including Rolls Royces and Bentleys; the very best sporting guns and shooting parties; painting and language tuition; holidays in manor houses and on country estates (all off-grid luxury, of course).

When tastes are shared, the connection made is profound and can lead to some exhilarating opportunities. I have been out for dinner in Soho and ended up in Kenya. I once met for a Manhattan in the American Bar at the Savoy and ended up in New York. Another time, I went for breakfast at the Rosewood in Holborn and ended up in Acapulco.

I originally met some of these clients 20 years ago: three-quarters of my clients are repeat business. I have been to their weddings in Ireland, Paris and Florence, after introducing them to dressmakers and tailors.

So you become a friend, a confidante, an advisor, turning instinct into enterprise; and it is proof, in a world full of algorithms, that intuition still opens the best doors, and that the most beautiful moments in life are never to be found on an itinerary.

In a way, this wide range of services is a result of the cultural connection we make, and it is based on a word that is at the very core of our ethos: "xenophilia". It means the love of strangers: not just to welcome them, but to celebrate them, to turn a cultural exchange into an art form. We do not take visitors out of their comfort zone, just expand it for them. As a result, they enjoy a new adventure, and maybe a new perspective on life.

Arnold Schwarzenegger, Kelsey Grammer, and Paddy Renouf at the Boisdale Cigar Smoker of the Year Awards 2014. Background: Tom Parker Bowles, Bill Knott and Rocco Buonvino

Many of my clients are entrepreneurs who embody curiosity, discipline and courage, qualities that turn ideas into empires. They spot opportunities others miss, and surround themselves with capable, trustworthy people. To them, setbacks are lessons, not failures. Remarkable people enjoying a new environment.

To create and curate an exceptional private tour for them you need equal measures of curiosity, cultural fluency and charm. A deep knowledge of history, of art and of nuance, paired with intuition; knowing what will delight each guest before they know it themselves.

Discretion, impeccable manners and reliability earn trust, while storytelling, humour and a touch of theatre make an experience unforgettable. I want a client to feel that they've travelled not with a guide, but with a worldly friend who opens doors. For my part, it has taken me all over the world.

It's a fantastic and deeply rewarding thing to be doing. That aggressive Corporal of Horse was completely right 40 years ago: people follow me to see exactly what is going to happen next!

Discover more about Paddy Renouf's unique talents at serendipitybyrenouf.com

Highclere Castle, the iconic Victorian estate set among sweeping parkland and ancient cedars — and instantly recognisable as the setting for the much-loved television series Downton Abbey.

LORD CARNARVON AT HIGHCLERE CASTLE

By Lord Carnarvon

Lord Carnarvon is the 8th Earl of Carnarvon and custodian of Highclere Castle, the real-life setting of Downton Abbey. An entrepreneur and conservationist, he has revitalised the estate through ventures such as Highclere Castle Gin, Horse Feeds and the Egyptian Exhibition.

Drive through the gates into Highclere Park and you feel as if you are entering another world, a magical unfolding landscape. The glorious 18th century parkland offers and obscures glimpses of the Castle towers hidden behind the majestic Cedars of Lebanon.

The Castle itself is a triumph of early Victorian design and engineering and (of course) a much-loved key element in the worldwide success of the Downton Abbey TV series and feature films.

We never tire of the beauty of the buildings and landscape, but it is the glory of past design that has been the challenge for much of my life. Whilst it has been a privilege to live at Highclere since my university days, I often wondered how to keep this amazing place together, given that so many structures – cottages, follies, parts of the Castle – were slowly deteriorating.

Like many other beautiful estates, Highclere received significant investment in the late 1800s and was part of the *Belle Époque* years leading up to the start of WWI. The end of the first war bought a very different era of much higher taxes and economic uncertainty, followed by financial depressions in the late 1920s and 1930s. Fifty years later, the high inflation of the 1970s largely curbed investment in estate infrastructure and repairs.

My grandfather had kindly given me a significant part of the Estate when I reached 25, but I soon discovered this included cottages much in need of repair. Queues of tenants appeared (quite rightly) asking for modernised plumbing, electricity and watertight roofs!

The 19th century follies were not looking happy, and perhaps one of the most beautiful, the Temple of Diana overlooking Dunsmere Lake had a tree growing out of its rotunda, with stone flaking off in all directions.

"The smoothness of our gin is a result of using our oats in the botanical process."

My father and I opened Highclere to the public in 1988, and some entrepreneurial activity bought glimmers of hope for better returns to the Estate. As ever, farming was producing very low returns, but my father had great connections to the racing world. He sent his horses to Richard Hannon Sr who asked about a more consistent supply of high-quality oats for the racehorses: horses cannot eat oats straight off the field. The hard outer husk must be removed as well as all dust and then only the heavier grains are good enough for the top-class thoroughbreds.

Sourcing second hand equipment from Scotland for milling oats, we created Highclere Castle Horse Feeds, which has made a major contribution in improved margins to the farm, as well as establishing a reputation for quality oats and haylage. Richard Hannon Jr's horses alone have won 553 races and £13.6m in prize money in the last five years, all powered by Highclere Estate oats.

Our links with Newbury racecourse are historic, as it was partly founded by my great-grandfather, the 5th Earl, and an interesting marketing link is that we sponsor races both in the name of Highclere Castle Horse Feeds and Highclere Castle Gin. There is a common thread, too: the smoothness of our gin is a result of using our oats in the botanical process.

The 1990s was a decade of innovation around the Castle, hosting weddings and corporate events such as car launches, while I was also working in London with partners in interesting technology businesses such as Telecom Express, a successful automated telephone services operation which (among many other projects) ran the Daily Telegraph's Premium Rate dating service, and also installed the system for speaking the winning numbers for Camelot and the first National lottery.

Highclere Castle Gin

This side investment helped the Estate, and gave me a background in systems design, which was put to good use when designing our first online barcode ticket system. I think we were one of the first historic houses to offer this way of buying tickets.

The boom years before the 2008 financial crash gave us a fair wind and we fixed the roof with tons of new lead and thousands of slates, working day and night on many weekdays and Saturday evenings, and running events to fund the considerable costs.

Our first serious entrepreneurial venture was the creation of our Ancient Egyptian exhibition in the Castle cellar. We were fortunate to have a collection of real objects from the time of the 5th Earl's work in Luxor, but our goal was also to recreate the excitement of the story of the discovery of Tutankhamun.

The best replicas from Tutankhamun would be key to making the project a success with our visitors. Wonderful craftsman who loved Egyptology had created a brilliant Tutankhamun Museum of replicas in the wilds of Cornwall. It suffered because of difficult access, so we offered to buy the replica collection.

Fiona and I then had to get to work to create a circular walk needing a new linking tunnel of some six metres in the depths of the Castle cellars. It was no easy task to find a safe place to tunnel through what looked like solid foundations whilst avoiding any key structural points and collateral damage.

Using techniques similar to mining in shallow seams with long narrow drills, we managed to spread a film of red dust from the cellars to most areas of the Castle. Finally, we broke through safely and created a steel structure around our new tunnel.

Fiona and I spent much of 2008 & 2009 living like moles in the dark of the Castle cellars. We were lucky to find some brilliant Polish display cabinet craftsmen who helped us build this incredible new exhibition. Fiona, being the more academic of our team, wrote up much of the interpretation, while I was busy procuring all the Tutankhamun replicas.

Fiona's skill in ancient Hieroglyphs allowed us to create what has been recognised as an authentic and really educational exhibition which is seen by just over 50% of our visitors. The considerable investment and risk have made a positive return in every way: people of all ages enjoy the extraordinary skills and accomplishments of this ancient world.

It was a risky project with high costs, and plenty of things to go wrong, from construction issues around the new tunnel to actually obtaining the fantastic replicas, but with persistence, it all came together and has made a valuable contribution to the Castle building and wider estate.

Little did we know that Highclere would be chosen as the location for a new show to be called Downton Abbey. In 2010 it would introduce the Castle to a global audience and the building itself become a much-loved character in its fictional world.

"Persistence, willingness to adapt and think anew has kept us in the game and, we hope, on into the future."

It gave us a chance to develop a brand, and Fiona got this idea off to a flying start with her New York Times bestseller *Lady Almina and the Real Downton Abbey* relating how Almina (née Rothschild) was such a powerhouse of energy, turning Highclere into a proper hospital in WWI. Further books have followed, with *The Earl & the Pharoah* and now *A Year at Highclere*, the most recent.

Highclere Castle Gin is a joint venture with friends in the USA. We worked around the citrus in our Orangery and lavender in the Monks' Garden to construct an authentic new London Dry gin that reflected the long history of entertaining at Highclere but was also unique in aspects of smoothness and flavour.

After many test versions and some frustration, we were nearly there. Only when we added a small amount of our rolled oats into the botanical process did we achieve the very smooth taste which has won over 200 Gold & Platinum awards. The bottle presented challenges to achieve its now well-known design with the translucent purple/blue colour. Launched in the autumn of 2019, it was too close to the start of Covid in March 2020.

Lord Carnarvon and Lady Fiona in the library of Highclere Castle

Quickly adapting, we started a series of virtual cocktail parties, telling stories and making cocktails, even using our much-loved Arab pony Phoebe who starred in our virtual party on the east lawns in June 2020, with an online audience of over 80,000.

This project emphasised the need to adapt and move on and try to link up marketing between the different elements of the Estate. The gin produced a meeting in Nicaragua which led to two beautiful Highclere Castle Cigars now sold across the USA, and some Cigar Bars now stock both Highclere Gin (often drunk on the rocks) and the Victorian and Edwardian Highclere Cigar brands.

Our Instagram account began in a small way, but during Covid (like everyone else) we faced a massive loss of customers and business. It became the way forward, communicating all the best of Highclere in pictures and videos. From hilarious beginnings with both Instagram and Facebook Live the wrong way up or a bit shaky, practice and using the new video edit apps has allows us to become our own little production company.

Highclere is a huge responsibility with so much history, but Fiona and I have loved every minute over the last 22 years, even if some months there were some serious bumps in the road (and potential crashes). But persistence, willingness to adapt and think anew has kept us in the game and, we hope, on into the future.

Fiona, Countess of Carnarvon

Exterior night time view of the Hippodrome Theatre, 1965. (Photo by Rolls Press/Popperfoto via Getty Images/Getty Images)

REINVENTING A LONDON *GIANT*

By Simon Thomas

Simon Thomas is the Executive Chairman and majority shareholder of Hippodrome Casino Limited, the extensive leisure and casino complex in Leicester Square. It is London's premier entertainment venue, employing 850 people and attracting more than 32,000 customers a week.

Jimmy Thomas (Simon's father) and Charlie Chaplin

When I first stepped inside the Hippodrome in London's iconic Leicester Square, I felt two things at once: awe at its scale, and the cold recognition that if we got this wrong, it would finish me.

The building was a sleeping giant, one of London's great venues fallen into neglect: part legend, part liability. I wanted to wake it up, restore its place in the capital's story and prove that a casino could be something more: both a complete entertainment experience and a civic asset.

"It was in a whole lot of a state, but still magnificent under the dust."

Gambling and entertainment are my blood. I'm the seventh generation of a showman family. My forebears ran fairs and amusement arcades across the country. My father, Jimmy, was one of the industry's true pioneers and built Beacon Bingo and Showboat, taking the business from caravan parks to landmark venues. When we sold the group in 2006, it wasn't a retreat: it was merely a pause before the next gamble.

We took on the Hippodrome lease in 2009. It wasn't just in a bit of a state, it was in a whole lot of a state, but still magnificent under the dust. We poured £50 million into restoring it. We linked Cranbourn Mansions – an apartment block attached to the theatre – to create new spaces, rebuilt everything from the plumbing to the plasterwork, and worked through the bureaucracy that comes with a Grade II listed landmark.

I nearly lost the project when the financial crisis hit, and I had to write directly to Bob Diamond, then head of Barclays, to save the funding. To his credit, he listened. That letter kept the lights on, and I've got my wife Fiona to thank for that: she was listening to Diamond on the news saying investment in new business was his priority and suggested I contact him. We opened on 13 July 2012. Boris Johnson, then Mayor of London, cut the ribbon. Within a month we were breaking projections. It felt like a victory for persistence more than luck.

From day one, my vision was to build more than a casino. I wanted a place that represented London at its best: safe, civilised, social, where anyone could find their night. The Hippodrome had always been about spectacle, from its circus beginnings, through Houdini to Swan Lake, Ivor Novello premieres, Dame Julie Andrews, the legendary Talk of the Town and Garland's will-she-won't-she appearances, to Peter Stringfellow's "greatest disco in the world".

I wanted to restore that theatrical heartbeat but also continue the tradition of delivering something new to the West End, something bold,

innovative, daring, cheeky. Something completely new, which was a casino that embraced the Government's new gambling laws to the very hilt. Casinos could be fun, broad market, part of the wider night-time economy.

"Once I realised we'd survive, I did the opposite of what instinct said: I invested."

Against so very many odds, it opened. But from that first day we've been shifting the furniture. It's unrecognisable now from what Johnson launched then. Areas didn't work, others caused log jams, technology grew as did our ambition to use it. We built *Heliot Steak House* above the gaming floor, and a decade later created *Chop Chop by Four Seasons* for late-night Chinese dining. We now have 10 bars that belong in the West End, not on its fringes. Poker became a cornerstone, with the PokerStars Live room now the country's most famous.

our doors who'd never have imagined setting foot in a casino. The show has been running six years and counting. Forget Vegas for a moment, it proved that gaming, hospitality and live performance can share the same stage without compromise in Britain.

Then came Covid. Leicester Square went silent overnight. For a few days I thought that was it; then, once I realised we'd survive, I did the opposite of what instinct said: I invested. We used the closure to build and modernise, adding a rooftop terrace, knocking through new routes, and carving out space for new ventures like *Chop Chop*. When London came back, I was determined we would come back stronger.

What defines the Hippodrome now is reinvention. In 2025, when the government finally modernised Britain's outdated casino laws, we were ready. I'd spent years working with my casino sector peers pressing

Simon Thomas at the Paddy Sportsbook launch

Within weeks of the law changing we launched Paddy's Sportsbook, the UK's first sportsbook inside a casino and a joint venture with Paddy Power. It's an extraordinary space: 56 screens, a twelve-screen jumbotron, table service and a live-sports energy like nothing else in the sports viewing arena. And you can bet too! That's what good regulation should enable, better experiences in safe environments.

Alongside the business, I've always believed that if you operate in the heart of London, you take responsibility for it. I chair the Westminster Independent Advisory Group for the Metropolitan Police, helping to link the force with the local community. I work closely with City Hall, Westminster Council, the Heart of London Business Alliance and our Chinatown neighbours. And many, many others.

If there is one thing I would tell anyone trading in the West End it's to be part of the community and embrace your neighbours. And the great thing is that we rub along very well indeed, because I don't skimp on sharing my vision and ambition. I've nothing to hide.

Shirley Bassey with Simon at the Hippodrome

The first transformational partnership came with Magic Mike Live. We took a risk turning the existing cabaret theatre into a 326-seat show space and it paid off. It became a phenomenon, a genuine cultural crossover that brought thousands of people through for reforms that would allow us to compete with the rest of the world, more slot machines and (for the first time) in-venue betting. Those changes happened because operators worked together and because we could show government what a modern, well-run casino actually looks like. And what an asset to an area we can be.

Together, we've fought for a safer, cleaner, better-lit West End. We even helped to bring in My Local Bobby, a private security team that has reduced street crime and anti-social behaviour around the Square.

"It's where the show, the supper, the sport and the spin all belong under one roof."

That sense of duty also runs through our people. The Hippodrome now employs around 850 staff, making us one of London's largest entertainment employers. Through the Hippodrome Charitable Trust, we support local good causes and cultural festivals, especially in the Chinese community. We've won more than 40 industry awards since opening, but the real prize is knowing that the building feels alive again.

The Hippodrome in the 1900s

The Hippodrome, present day

Simon and Jimmy Thomas

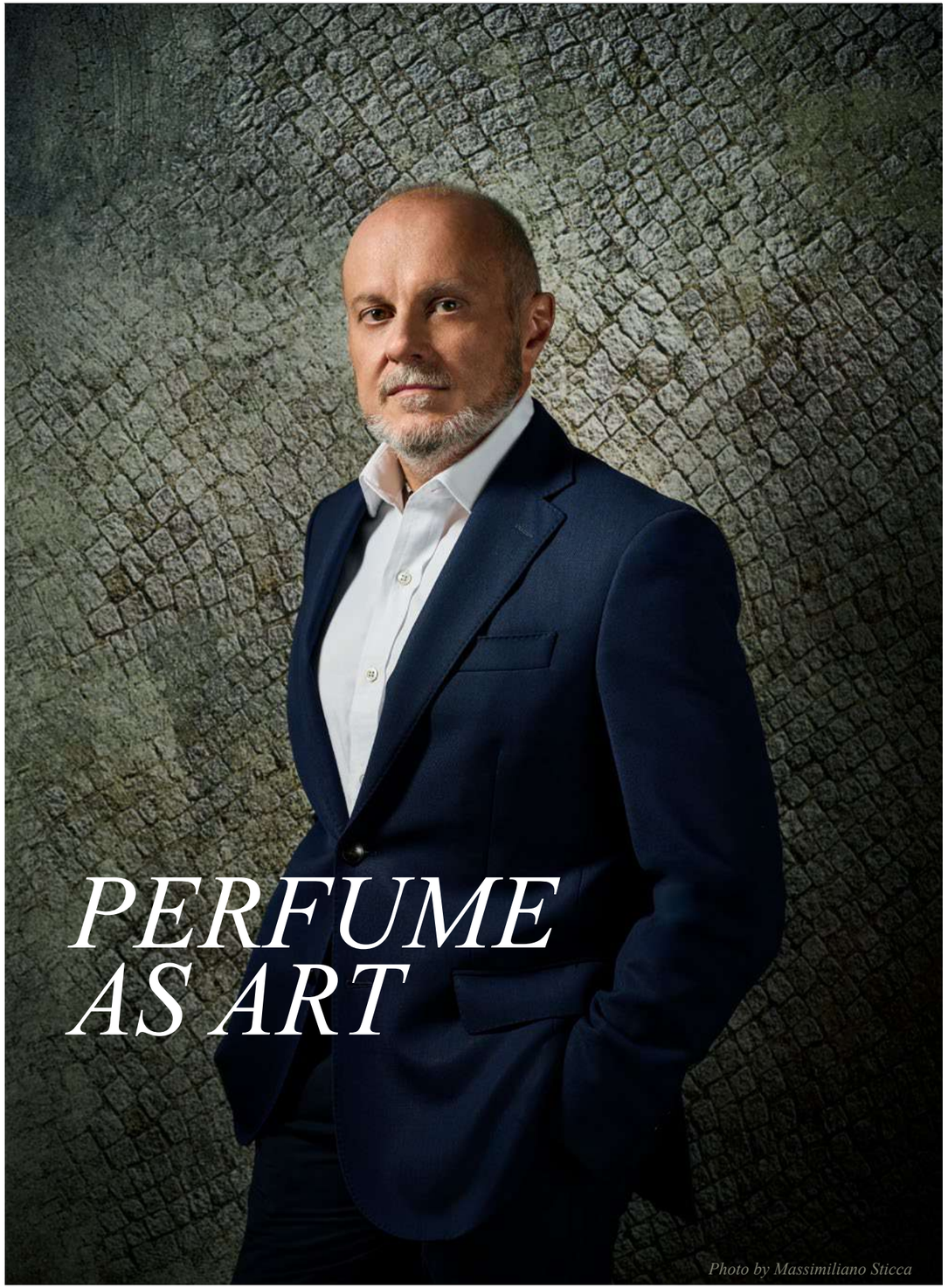
My father, Jimmy, passed away in 2022, aged 88. He'd seen the place at its worst and lived to see it reborn. I think he was proud that the Thomas family finally kept its promise to the building.

He used to say the Hippodrome was a theatre that never stopped performing. I've tried to keep that spirit alive, to make sure it remains part of London's nightly show.

People sometimes ask if I see the Hippodrome as a casino or an entertainment venue. The truth is it's both, and that's the point. It's where the show, the supper, the sport and the spin all belong under one roof.

In an era when high streets are closing and nightclubs are vanishing, the Hippodrome has become something different: proof that the night-time economy can be civilised, creative and open to everyone.

From the fairs and bingo halls of my childhood to the theatre lights of Leicester Square, I've learned one rule that never fails: if you look after people, they look after you. The Hippodrome was built on that belief. And as long as I'm here, it will stay that way.



PERFUME AS ART

Photo by Massimiliano Sticca

By Sergio Momo

Sergio Momo is an Italian perfumer and the founder of the luxury perfume house Xerjoff. He has a passion for creating artistic fragrances, which he began after a career in design, and is inspired by his family's history, travel, music, and other interests.

My father was a world traveller, always returning with small treasures and raw materials like incense and cedarwood. Sometimes he would take me to the mountains, point out a flower and simply say "Smell it." He gave me an awareness of scent, a subtle sense that shapes memory, emotion and imagination. That sensitivity stayed with me, quietly influencing everything I would later create.

I grew up in Turin, a city immersed in art, design and architecture. When I was a child, drawing and creativity wasn't just a pastime, it was second nature to me. I would literally just draw all day: my mother even allowed me to skip nursery to stay home and draw.

When I was a teenager, I told my father that I wanted to be a comic designer: back in those days, many fathers wanted their sons to follow in their paths, but my dad told me to choose something I wanted to do and to do it well.

So, with my parents' encouragement and support, I ended up going to an Italian design school, and there I met some older guys who had opened a small design agency. I was only seventeen, and not legally allowed to work, but I would finish classes and go straight to the agency.

The day I graduated, I finished the exam and headed to the office: not because I had to, but because I loved it. I joined the company the moment I turned eighteen.

"My life is design, art, music, literature, film, vintage cars... so many things, as is the brand I created."

When I was a bit older, I moved to London and worked as a designer for some important brands, and as an illustrator for children's books. London shaped me a lot, and I moved back to Turin a few years later a changed man.

For me, there has never really been a "work-life balance". My mind never differentiates the two. Something I experience – whether it is a work of art, a piece of music, a book I am reading, or even some spices at a market – if it sparks an idea, I will start working on it straightaway, day or night.

What I do is who I am, and I'm not sure that everyone understands that. My life is design, art, music, literature, film, vintage cars... so many things, as is the brand I created. So Xerjoff and Sergio really are the same thing. Design has always meant open-mindedness and creativity for me, breaking boundaries and creating things out of the ordinary.

The idea for Xerjoff emerged from a desire to create a work of art *within* a work of art; for me, perfume offered the perfect medium. My idea was to

Limited Edition Signed Crystal Tony Iommi Deified perfume for Xerjoff Blends

combine the finest natural ingredients with Italian craftsmanship, artistry and design. I wanted each creation to be a multisensory experience, where scent and packaging formed a complete, elegant story that the wearer could actually live. I like to experiment with perfumery in non-traditional realms, and that is what sets Xerjoff apart.

Building the brand was a journey of both triumph and challenge. Sourcing the finest materials, developing unique flacons – perfume bottles – and establishing a distinct identity required patience, creativity and resilience. There were doubts, of course – moments when the path forward seemed uncertain – but seeing how our collections were appreciated by others reaffirmed our belief in what we were building. Especially in the early days, every small victory was a stepping stone toward something greater.

The idea for Xerjoff came about in 2003. I contacted some important people in the perfumery world, and they were kind enough to help me in the creation of a perfume. I think they probably felt sorry for me! By that time, I was married, my two sons were born, and I was studying perfume in Grasse, the historic centre of the French perfume industry.

So eventually, I ended up creating two perfumes, *Elle* and *Homme*, both housed in special quartz flacons, but I didn't know what to do with them next. Xerjoff was really just an experimental project at this point: my everyday job was owning a design agency in Turin, so I had something to fall back on.

I convinced by my business partner at that time to take them, and me, to a design fair that was happening in Moscow, where I met with a contact of hers. I spoke a bit about what I had in my hand and what my idea was. I couldn't believe it when he asked how much I wanted for them.

I actually had no idea, so I added up a few numbers in my head, how much it had cost me to make them, and threw out a number. The businessman replied that he wanted thirty of them: I only had two! So I rushed home, opened Xerjoff officially as a company, and started production. By 2005, Dominique Salvo and I had founded Xerjoff.

The CEO of Champagne de Venoge, Gilles de La Bassetière, with Sergio Momo

"It wasn't long before Xerjoff began to gain recognition on a global scale: today, Xerjoff is present in more than 150 countries."

From there, business started to grow, and not long after, I met Roja Dove. He only sells what he loves, and when he asked to sell Xerjoff, that was a huge step for us. At the time, we had our *17/17 Stone Label* collection, perfumes put through specific distillation techniques and housed in semi-precious stone flacons, and *Shooting Stars*, where the perfume comes with a certified piece of meteorite.

It wasn't long before Xerjoff began to gain recognition on a global scale: today, Xerjoff is present in more than 150 countries. We have opened 13 boutiques in strategic destinations where we can share the portfolio with many clients from different walks of life: our first boutique opened in my hometown of Turin. Milan, Monte Carlo, Lisbon, Frankfurt, Harrods in London, Dubai, Kuala Lumpur, Barcelona and Paris followed, and we will soon open in Santiago, Chile. Our aim is to offer clients a unique experience, guiding them in the discovery of meaningful scents with unique stories to tell.


Xerjoff CoExistence perfume

We continue to push boundaries, exploring new olfactory ideas while remaining rooted in our dedication to quality and artistry. Our repertoire now exceeds 180 original scents, each a testament to the marriage of natural materials and exceptional craftsmanship, including a revival of the 19th century luxury brand, Casamorati, which was an Italian perfume house founded in Bologna in 1888. I wanted to bring that Italian chapter back to life, recreating vintage recipes and creating new, modern ones.

Xerjoff experiments with multisensory experiences: not only is a perfume created, but another form of art is created too, inspired by the scent. Take our collaboration with Michelin-star chef, Yannick Alléno. We met in London a couple of years ago and got talking over a cigar.

It was one of those instant friendships that was born, natural and authentic. We talked about what we do and found out that actually what we do is very similar on so many levels. We decided to take it one step further and create something together.

We created an experience that is held at his restaurants worldwide: a small, scented Xerjoff cloche, so you smell a perfume before tasting the food, and the senses do the rest of the work. This is something that no one else is doing, and you can experience it at Alléno's Michelin-starred restaurants in Paris and Dubai, with Monaco, London and Seoul to follow shortly.

Xerjoff's experiences and collaborations all reflect the same philosophy: perfume as an art form, in which creativity and beauty evoke strong emotions. Collaboration is central to what we do, but it always comes from genuine friendship and shared vision. Our partnerships with people like Brian May of Queen, Tony Iommi of Black Sabbath, and the members of Duran Duran aren't about putting a name on a product: their input is vital, and fully integrated into the creation. The perfumes carry their spirit, not just their name.


Sergio Momo and Catherine, Princess of Wales, at the 2022 Royal Charity Polo Cup.


Xerjoff Tony Iommi Monkey Special perfume.

Philanthropy is another part of our philosophy. We created the *Spray to Help* collection; perfumes made with organisations that are close to my heart: a part of the proceeds goes towards each charity. We also help numerous charities during the year, from the Bal de Noël hosted by the Fondation Princesse Charlène de Monaco to Brian May's Save Me foundation.

Looking forward, I remain driven by the same passions that inspired Xerjoff from the beginning. My vision for the future is simple: to continue to fuse art, passion and perfection in every creation. For me, Xerjoff is not just a business, it is an expression of a lifetime's devotion to beauty, emotion and the transformative power of scent.

The Cinnamon Club's Vivek Singh with Boisdale Life editor Bill Knott at Boisdale of Belgravia

THE TWO BOTTLE LUNCH: VIVEK SINGH

By Bill Knott

For the last 30 years, former chef Bill Knott, the Editor of Boisdale Life, has written about food, drink and travel for a host of publications worldwide, including the Daily Telegraph, Bloomberg and the Financial Times. He never skips lunch.

2026 will mark the 25th anniversary of one of London's most remarkable restaurants, even by the standards of a city in which dining out has become second nature.

The Cinnamon Club, which opened in 2001 on the site of the Grade II-listed Westminster Library, was not so much evolution as revolution. The co-founders, journalist and businessman Iqbal Wahhab and chef Vivek Singh, were determined to shatter any preconceptions of Indian food, both from Westerners and from Indians.

Vivek recalls their opening menu. "No pints of lager, and no curries. We were a poppadom-free zone. We wanted to focus our diners' minds by taking things away." Indeed, other than a pleasant waft of spice in the air, there was little sign that the handsome, high-ceilinged dining room, many of the library's bookshelves still intact, was home to an Indian restaurant.

The tables were as smartly dressed as the (mostly Western) waiters; the wine list would have graced any Michelin-starred French restaurant; the produce had impeccable provenance; and Vivek's plating was accomplished with a painterly eye for beauty and detail. You would scour the room in vain for a prawn vindaloo or an onion bhaji.

Now that London has Indian options at all levels, from street food and breakfasts (Dishoom's all-conquering bacon naan roll springs to mind) to high-end restaurants (Amaya, Gymkhana and many others), it is difficult to remember just how polarised the Indian dining scene used to be.

2001 was a watershed. As well as the opening of The Cinnamon Club, Michelin handed out stars to two restaurants, Atul Kochhar's Tamarind and Vineet Bhatia's Zaika, and Indian restaurants had finally achieved gastronomic respectability.

But Vivek still remembers the struggle he had to convince his customers. "Western diners, whose idea of Indian food was based on their local curry house, thought it was too expensive and the portions were too small. Indians would say that their mothers cooked their favourite Indian food, and asked us why we were trying so hard.

"No challenge was greater than the idea that Indian cuisine should be inexpensive. But we were using top-notch ingredients – our seafood came from the same fishmonger as Gordon Ramsay, for instance – and we were paying our staff properly. You can't do that on a curry house budget."

But, in time, it worked. The Cinnamon Club now serves 100 000 diners a year, and Vivek also oversees Cinnamon Kitchens in Devonshire Square, Battersea and Leeds, as well as Cinnamon Bazaars in Richmond and Covent Garden. He has even relaxed his attitude towards curry: "eventually, we were comfortable and confident enough to put a curry or two on the menu. It helps that there's a younger generation now whose mums didn't cook for them!"

Vivek has come a long way from his roots. He grew up in a small mining community in West Bengal, where his father, a mining engineer, ran the local colliery, a prestigious position: "we were middle class, with a domestic staff of nine or 10". Despite coming from a Hindu family, Vivek was educated at St Patrick's in Asansol, a Christian Brothers school; after leaving school, he gained a place at the renowned Oberoi Institute of Hotel Management in Delhi, where "I sleepwalked through the course, until a friend dragged me into the kitchen, and I really enjoyed it."

His first posting was at the Oberoi Grand in Calcutta, where he was keen to work in the kitchen of the hotel's Indian restaurant. "But I lasted less than 18 months. I felt stifled: there was no experimentation. And there were rumblings of dissent: why aren't we using the top-notch produce that the other kitchens have?"

In 1998, he was appointed the executive chef of Oberoi Rajvilas, in Jaipur, where – at a wedding – he met Iqbal Wahhab, and the seeds of The Cinnamon Club were planted.

Now 54, no longer the fresh-faced 30 year-old who opened The Cinnamon Club – he now proudly sports an impressive grey beard – Vivek is a familiar face to millions of Saturday Kitchen viewers ("I must have done 60 or 70 shows") and he still remains a deep love for the industry to which he has dedicated his life's work. "I still do a couple of nights a week in the kitchen, just to make sure everything is running smoothly, that wastage is kept to a minimum and our ethos remains strong."

There is no sense that he is resting on his laurels just yet, and he takes a keen interest in the burgeoning London Indian restaurant scene that he did so much to foster: Asma Khan, the founder of Darjeeling Express, and Will Bowlby, co-founder of Kricket, are both close friends. And he welcomes today's more enlightened attitude to working in kitchens: "we used to work five split shifts and one straight shift a week, with a day and a half off if you were lucky. Today's young chefs won't stand for that, and they are quite right."

So is London now the best city on the planet for Indian cuisine? Vivek smiles, a little ruefully. "I've got into trouble for this before. I do think London offers the best showcase for Indian food – we have such a long history together – but a lot has changed in 25 years. The world has shrunk, people travel much more, social media has revolutionised how we think and talk about restaurants, and there's a real energy, pace and momentum about all kinds of cuisines now, including Indian."

A selection of Boisdale's own-label wines

We got rather carried away at our supposedly "two bottle" lunch: it was lubricated by several wines from Boisdale's own-label range, including a splendidly sappy and savoury Portuguese white – Passagem Branco – made by Quinta de la Rosa from grapes (Rabigato and Arinto) grown in the Douro; Boisdale's NV Champagne, extended bottle age giving it a pleasingly toasty edge; the Bekaa Valley Grande Cuvée, made in Lebanon by Chateau Ksara from several white grape varieties, including a fragrant splash of Muscat; and the smooth, well-structured Boisdale own-label claret, which partnered our 35-day dry aged Scottish rib-eye magnificently.

LEVANTINE DELIGHTS

A Lebanese breakfast: labneh, olives, and manakeesh with cheese and zaatar

By Michael Karam

Michael Karam, who began his career as a journalist in Beirut, is an award-winning authority on the food and drink of Lebanon. His books include Wines of Lebanon, Arak and Mezze: The Taste of Lebanon, *and* Tears of Bacchus: A History of Wine in the Arab World. *Here, he offers a tantalising glimpse into Levantine cuisine.*

It is eight o'clock on a November morning in Mount Lebanon. A crisp chill rushes into the butcher's shop whenever a customer opens the door. The butcher, who has been at work since 5am, is taking a break at his counter, finishing a breakfast of *kibbeh nayeh*, raw puréed mincemeat, blended with herbs, covered with olive oil and garnished with fresh mint leaves. He makes a scoop with the pitta bread and rounds up the last bit of meat, washing it down with a glass of a pungent white liquid. He wipes his hands on his apron and resumes work.

The white liquid is arak, the anise-based *eau de vie* that is Lebanon's national drink. To understand Lebanese food, you must first understand arak.

The Lion's Milk

When travelling in the region at the end of the Second World War, the travel writer Robin Fedden wrote in *Lebanon and Syria*: *an Historical Perspective*, "arak, the local aperitif, is very good; made from a grape basis and flavoured with aniseed, it is vaguely reminiscent of Pernod, and has, further, the advantage of being something of a specific against the intestinal troubles which so commonly beset the traveller in the Middle East."

Arak (or *araq*) is Arabic for sweat, literally that which is "sweated" from the alembic during the distillation process. The people of the mountains and of the Bekaa Valley call *haleeb il assad*, the lion's milk. It can be drunk at breakfast, lunch or dinner. My grandfather shaved with a glass next to him.

But Arak's primary, and greatest role, is as a bonding agent, the social glue that unites the family around the dining table. Its trick is to cleanse the palate after each of the wondrously multi-flavoured mezze dishes.

Arak, the essential companion to Lebanese mezze

The Most Important Meal of the Day

The Lebanese breakfast is spearheaded by either Arabic coffee or black tea. *Manoushe*, a folded mini pizza, is topped with either *za'atar*, a blend of thyme, oregano, sesame and spices that is the basis of many Lebanese dishes; cheese; *kishek*, a paste made from fermented bulgur wheat and yoghurt or milk; or spiced mince.

Equally popular is *foul medames*, fava beans mixed with olive oil, cumin, chopped parsley, garlic, onion, and lemon juice. But beware: this is "carb-coma" territory, and the day can be over before it's begun.

Not far away will be *labneh*, thick white yogurt drizzled with olive oil, as well as white cheeses such as *balladeh* or *akkaoui*, presented with mint, cucumber, olives and tomatoes. In winter, *kishek* is made in soup form with garlic and meat, but those seeking the "full Lebanese" should opt for *bayd qawarma*, minced meat preserved in fat, served with scrambled eggs and washed down with a shot of arak.

The Lebanese table

Lebanese cooking falls into two categories: *tabkha*, or home cooking, and the more pimped-up mezze, the ornate spreads found in restaurants that precede either a meat or seafood main, followed by lavish sweets, fruit, and thick, cardamom-infused coffee.

Sunday lunch is sacred, an excuse for the extended family to gather...loud, long tables will often host three generations of family and friends.

Tabkha is what Lebanese people eat most of the time. Traditional family recipes, generously served, especially vine and cabbage leaves, courgettes and aubergines, often stuffed with rice and meat. Bulghur (for *kibbeh*) and lentils (for *mujadara*) are hugely important ingredients, as are garlic, sumac, oregano, mint and za'atar. Salads, such as omnipresent *tabbouleh* and its bumpkin cousin *fattoush*, are a staple, as is *loubieh bi zeit*, green beans and tomatoes cooked in oil. Pastries too, filled with cheese, spinach or chard.

Kibbeh, deep-fried pounded bulgur wheat, pine nuts, lamb and spices

There is a restaurant in the Gemmayzeh district of Beirut called Le Chef. Unfairly sniffed at by the Lebanese bourgeoisie, but adored by the late Anthony Bourdain, it is a temple to *tabkha*. There is a set menu. On Thursday, it is *molokhia* a dish of rice on which is served a stew of jute mallow and chicken, garnished with crushed, fried pita bread and an onion and vinegar sauce. Friday is fish day: *sayadieh*, made with seasoned halibut or sea bass, and browned, oily rice, is the most popular dish.

Sunday lunch is sacred, an excuse for the extended family to gather either at home, or at a restaurant in which loud, long tables will often host three generations of family and friends. The typical mezze spread will typically include *hummus* (with or without lamb chunks); *mtabal batenjen* (that's *baba ghanoush* to you); *tabbouleh* or *fattoush; shanklish* (goats cheese mixed with tomatoes, onions and olive oil); *maqanaq* (small sausages cooked with pomegranates); and *kibbeh nayeh*, which, when drenched in oil, piled high with onion and mint, and washed down with arak, must surely be the "money shot" of Lebanese dining.

Sweets

Sweets are a big deal; even at breakfast, when *knafeh*, a flan made with spun pastry dough, layered with cheese and served with a sweet syrup, often sneaks onto the table. At other times of day, you might find baklava, which originated in what is today Syria; *halawet il jibn*, rolls made with semolina and cheese dough, filled with *ashta* (clotted cream); and *osmalieh*, made with layers of shredded pastry with a creamy filling. These are Lebanese cuisine's front-line troops in the war against a trim waistline.

It is impossible to cover such a vast culinary tradition, one that has been influenced by the ancient Phoenicians, the Persians, Romans, Arabs, Ottomans, and Armenians as well as the much-travelled Lebanese themselves. There is much more to seek out. Happy hunting!

As the Lebanese say at any meal to those who have provided the food: *Daymi inshallah*. "May [times like these] always be like this."

Michael Karam is the author of "Arak and Mezze: The Taste of Lebanon"

Moutabal, a smoky aubergine dip essential to the mezze table

And to drink?

Lebanon is one of the world's oldest winemaking regions and today can take a seat at the top table of the wine world. While wine will never dislodge arak at the traditional Lebanese dining table, it is a popular alternative, especially for those who don't like aniseed. The Lebanese drink a lot of white and rosé during the summer, while their more muscular red wines are reserved for the cooler months.

Boisdale – in collaboration with Chateau Ksara, Lebanon's leading producer, founded in 1857 by Jesuits in the Bekaa Valley – lists its own red and white Bekaa Valley Grande Cuvée: both are wonderful examples of French-influenced winemaking (France ran Lebanon from 1918 to 1946) allied to a profound and ancient terroir.

Boisdale Bekka Valley Grande Cuvée and Grand Cuvée Blanc

William Sitwell with the White Hart behind - courtesy of Daffodil PR

SEDUCED BY RESTAURANTS

By William Sitwell

William Sitwell is a British restaurant critic, writer, and broadcaster, known for his work in The Daily Telegraph *and his role as a judge on* MasterChef UK. *He is also, as he reveals here, poised to enter the restaurant fray himself.*

It was my Dick Rowe moment. It was 1999, and I was deputy editor of Waitrose Food Illustrated, a magazine I went on to edit, and worked on for almost two decades.

The food editor, Nikki, suggested we commission a column from a chef with a strange-sounding name. He was doing interesting things near the River Thames in Bray. He had a dish on the menu called Snail Porridge, another called Sounds of the Sea. "You hold a conch shell to your ear," said Nikki, "and there's a small audio device in it playing the sound of crashing waves and seagulls." "Yeah, great, any other ideas?" I said. I am a food traditionalist and found the mutterings of something called "molecular gastronomy" tiresome.

A few days later, Heston Blumenthal gained a Michelin star for his restaurant The Fat Duck and, as Dick Rowe turned down The Beatles, so the chef who was named after a motorway service station was probably promptly signed up to write a column by Olive magazine, our closest rival at the time.

We were on the cusp of the Millennium, and people were excited at the idea of mawkish modernism, the theatre of the restaurant experience and, indeed, people queued around the virtual block for a table at The Fat Duck, so much so that in due course Heston bought the pub next door, The Hind's Head, and one down the street, The Crown.

Bray, which already boasted Michel's Roux's three-star Waterside Inn, a much more traditional establishment, had become a culinary Mecca: not every gastronomic innovation played out in London. So we London-based food writers would have to get on a train to Maidenhead, then get a cab to Bray in order to hang out with Heston in his food laboratory.

There, armed with dragée pans (a sort of kitchen cement mixer), water baths, aerators and rotary evaporators, he would spherify, freeze-dry and revel in the concept of a low-temperature barbecue. But, to me, a meal at The Fat Duck was a form of expensive food tourism; back in London, I was happy to cling to more traditional forms of dining.

Heston Blumenthal outside The Fat Duck, 2009

At Kensington Place, for example: chef Rowley Leigh's magnificent hall of modern British food, steered by a firm adherence to classic French cookery and the influence of Elizabeth David. The Roux-trained Leigh's classics included foie gras with sweetcorn and chicken with goat's cheese mousse.

The place had a vast glass wall at the top of Kensington Church Street and, until Leigh left in 2006, it was a hub for media types and businesspeople shouting to be heard in a vast, Julyan Wickham-designed room. It was a concept on a collision course with a new age of dining, of smaller establishments, of sharing plates.

But the advance of the food of the Middle East, as dished out for the middle classes by Yotam Ottolenghi, or the concept of luxury Chinese, as conceived by Alan Yau at Hakkasan, saw diners encouraged to share, to order a plethora of dishes, the dream sold being to delve deeper into food culture, the actuality being to extract considerably more from your pocket.

The following year, Rowley Leigh opened Le Café Anglais, a fabulously grand dining room in Bayswater and we were all comforted by his next great invention, parmesan custard with anchovy toast. But by then more intimate and casual places were all the rage, and the High Priest of this new style of dining was a man called Russell Norman.

Russell Norman

I went to the opening of his first Polpo, on Beak Street in Soho, where – in a windowless basement beneath his little Venetian *bàcaro* – Russell handed out sips of prosecco in small tumblers.

It felt cool. It was, like Russell, determinedly cool. He listened to cool music: Nick Drake, for example. He was unshaven and floppy-haired. He liked to take the plaster off the walls of a restaurant and go back to bare brick; he hired staff based on their smile and preferably with no previous hospitality experience. One of his next restaurants, Spuntino, had a no-reservations policy.

Which, to me, was distinctly tiresome, but trends are like viruses and before you could dream of phoning to ask for a table for two, the Hart brothers cottoned on with their tapas concept, Barrafina. A deliberate homage to Barcelona's Cal Pep, Barrafina quickly became a chain: it didn't take reservations either, and the eventual reward for diners in the very long queue on Frith Street was a stool at the open kitchen bar.

My first taste of Barrafina was with Soho House founder Nick Jones. How would we get around the queueing malarky? No problem: his PA was dispatched, and we arrived just as she reached the head of the queue.

Soho was a hive of restaurant activity, but others had their centre of gravity further east. Shoreditch became trendy, not least because Dorset-born chef Mark Hix had opened Tramshed. He drew a crowd excited by his simple-but-appealing offer of a whole chicken on a vertical spike, in a room dominated by the Damien Hirst installation "Cock and Bull": a cockerel and a Hereford cow preserved in a glass tank of formaldehyde.

Some of us schlepped to Shoreditch, but the fashionistas

and the hedge funders stayed in Mayfair. Rag trade mogul-turned-restaurateur Richard Caring did his best to keep them happy, buying the nightclub Annabel's and (doffing his cap to the Instagram crowd), opening Sexy Fish.

"***The pandemic was a terrible time for restaurants, of course, but we're over that now. We're returning to sanity. Well, some of us. I, meanwhile, have gone mad."***

But Caring was canny enough to realise London wasn't the only city where the cash was flashed. He opened branches of the Ivy across the UK and even, in 2023, opening a branch of Sexy Fish in Manchester.

As it has been my pleasure to discover over the past 25 years, some of the most exciting dining experiences in the UK are outside London. I've had the best Indian I can remember at Khai Khai in Newcastle; Scof in Manchester was one of the most exciting city openings in recent years; and one of the UK's finest restaurants is a little place called Juliet in Stroud, Gloucestershire.

Juliet does what I've always loved, with a menu that wanders around the Mediterranean: no experimentation, no fripperies, just properly sourced ingredients, great service and a fabulous wine list.

The pandemic was a terrible time for restaurants, of course, but we're over that now. We're returning to sanity. Well, some of us. I, meanwhile, have gone mad.

I've written about restaurants for a quarter of a century and watched how the business, currently battling several economic headwinds, mesmerises people, afflicting with them with the disease of restaurateur-itis. It's a virus that grabs holds of you and convinces you that the best thing they could do with their life is to open a restaurant.

By the time you read this, I should be presiding over The White Hart in the West Somerset town of Wiveliscombe. And I have had plenty of advice, not all of it positive: dining at a new place in Folkestone called Pomus recently, the owner told me "Don't open a restaurant unless you have to."

As I'm slowing realising, it is not a choice: there are some things in life you just have to do. But there will be no dragée pans or water baths. This critic is a sucker for the simple things in food, as long as they're done perfectly.

I'll continue my journey eating in, and writing about, restaurants, but now with a foot (or perhaps my whole body) in the quicksand of the hospitality business.

The White Hart Hotel, Wiveliscombe, William's new venture

Inside the new restaurant

The unmistakable stinkhorn (Phallus impudicus)*: nature's cheekiest and smelliest contribution to the forager's world*

WILD LARDER

By Tom Radford

Tom Radford hails from the New Forest: as well as being a filmmaker and running a production company, he is passionate about foraging wild food. He runs foraging walks all over the UK and is a keen cook and advocate of wild meat and game, while his channel @EatTheCountry offers a wry and comedic approach to educating people about the bounty to be found in the countryside.

In the high-rolling, cut-and-thrust world of foraging, I often find myself at odds with my peers because I refuse outright to use Latin names when discussing wild food and fungi.

The only exception to this is *Phallus Impudicus*, the wonderfully apt description of the stinkhorn mushroom: it resembles male sexual apparatus shamelessly emerging from the undergrowth. Not only does it look rude, but it also smells terrible.

What, you may ask, has this to do with wild food? Well, although there are those who do actually eat the young 'witch's egg' (an immature stinkhorn), I'm certainly not one of them. But this deviation from the norm is really just an illustration of how much fun it is to wander off the path, brave the thorns, nettles and cobwebs, and try something a little different.

As I write, it's autumn and there's talk of sloes and porcini from every quarter. Crab apples, hazelnuts, winter chanterelles and parasol mushrooms abound…but what about the slightly more obscure culinary delights quietly setting out their stalls in the woods, meadows and hedgerows of the UK?

In this piece I want to talk about three of my favourite, lesser-celebrated little gems from the British *menu sauvage.*

The wood hedgehog mushroom

Hedgehog Mushrooms

So named because of the downward pointing spines, as opposed to gills or pores, under the cap. The spines or "teeth" give this mushroom its other moniker, "sweet-tooth". But actually they're not spines at all, they're soft and perfectly edible.

Some people brush them off, probably the same people that chill blackberries to tease out the harmless inhabitants, presumably because they're afraid fruit fly larvae might invade their body and burst out of their chest over breakfast like the Alien...give me strength.

A fairly easy mushroom to identify, the hedgehog is usually a pale buff to apricot colour, while the caps can be irregular in shape and even quite lumpy. But the teeth are the unique to the hedgehog, as far as I know.

Appearing in late summer and autumn, I tend to find them in mixed woodland. When it comes to mushrooms, beech, oak and birch form the Holy Trinity, but I often find a few conifers (spruce and Scots pine, for example) dotted around my favourite mushroom spots. The hedgehog is often hard to spot, but once you find one, you'll inevitably find more.

This is, hands down, my favourite eating mushroom because of its firm texture and wonderfully nutty flavour. As with all the best mushrooms, just cook gently in butter, possibly with a little garlic, and serve it just as it is, or on a slice of toast.

Water Pepper

I suspect I'm the only forager who begins every walk with the phrase 'I'm sorry to disappoint you but 90% of this stuff is just a shit substitute for spinach'. Despite what you might think, I'm not decrying nature's bounty in any way. It's all clean, healthy, nutritious and worth eating...but the bulk of it tastes like lawn.

However, there are some notable exceptions and water pepper is one of my favourite treats. This is one of those plants you'll have seen but not noticed, and now you'll start seeing it everywhere: by rivers and in marshy areas, anyway. It has long, slender leaves and stems covered in buds that end in tiny pink flowers.

Take a leaf, give it a nibble and you'll suddenly get the shock of your life. This little plant has a chilli-pepper hit so unexpectedly Tijuana that it will fill your mouth with joyous spicy fire and have you reaching for a glass of milk.

Water pepper (Persicaria hydropiper)

I find it wonderful that something derided as a common weed, destined to meet its fate at the hands of the nation's strimmers and lawnmowers, is actually a proper culinary ingredient that will drag any disillusioned supermarket salad into the warm light of edibility.

Anti-microbial and astringent, it was traditionally used to treat wounds; also, as is common with wild plants, as a diuretic. Folklore held that it could promote fiery passion and fidelity whilst also keeping evil witchcraft at bay. Witches weren't evil, of course, they were some of the few who actually practiced effective herbal medicine, and yet they were persecuted by imbecilic zealots who preferred quack-like cures such as covering one's body in burned owl feathers to cure gout.

Wild haw berries

Haw Berries

Overshadowed by more celebrated fruit such as damsons, rose hips and sloes, the humble haw berry is often sidelined, a miscarriage of justice I will do my best to correct.

2025 is what we call a “mast” year: stroll down any country lane, and you’ll see trees and bushes weighed down with fruit and nuts. Nature is straining to produce as many fruiting seeds as possible.

Why this happens is not entirely clear. Everything, right from the first snowdrops of January, has been turbo-charged this year. Maybe it’s the cold winter, or a response to last year’s washout. Either way, it has probably been accelerated by one of the driest summers in living memory.

Hawthorn berries are everywhere, wonderful clouds of crimson fruit bending the boughs of their hosts. Whilst edible, the berries are not particularly interesting in their raw form: the soft flesh has a texture not dissimilar to avocado, and little taste. However, boiling the berries, sieving the juice and reducing it with sugar produces a wonderfully tangy tasty syrup. Packed with vitamin C, and excellent on pancakes.

Apparently, hawthorn is Britain’s unluckiest tree, according to a poll taken in the 1930s, anyway. I can’t help but think it must have been a fairly quiet week on the news desk for this to have made the headlines.

Why it is unlucky is unclear, but it is reputed to smell like the plague (I must say I’ve never noticed this). In the Christian tradition, it’s held that Joseph of Arimathea, having finished his adventures with Jesus and the gang, travelled to Glastonbury, where he thrust his staff into the Tor, from which grew a sacred hawthorn. I’ve met people to this day who claim to have trees grown from its cuttings, but I remain sceptical.

Nicknamed ‘bread and cheese’ (presumably the leaves are the bread, and the soft flesh of the berries are the cheese), it’s not advisable to eat the leaves as they contain a beta-blocker, and the stones of the fruit contain cyanogenic glycosides, so discard them as well.

So, these are three lesser-known wild edibles that I look forward to both foraging and cooking with every year. There are treasures to be found at all times of year in the wonderful British countryside: arm yourself with a good handbook, get out there and try something different.

But I beg you, always follow the golden rule...don’t eat *anything* unless you know the difference between Death and Dinner!

To learn more about Tom, book one of his walks, buy gift vouchers or find recipes, visit eatthecountry.com.

Oysters, long hailed as the ultimate aphrodisiac, are rich in zinc, a mineral linked to testosterone and sexual health.

APHRODISIAC FOODS: REAL OR NO DEAL?

By Doctor Feelgood

Boisdale Life's resident doctor, who has worked as a consultant in the NHS for more than 30 years.

Imagine a menu for a candle-lit dinner for two: oysters dressed with champagne mignonette; roast guineafowl with asparagus and liberal shavings of truffle; toasted marshmallow meringue with dark chocolate ganache. Is this the perfect meal for an evening of passion? Do these foods really enhance desire, performance and libido?

The romantic doctor in me believes that there must be something to it, but what does the science tell us? Are aphrodisiac foods real, or no deal? Let's look at some of the likely candidates.

In mythology, Aphrodite, the goddess of love, emerged from the sea on an oyster shell, and the frisky little mollusc has been a central theme of food and love ever since.

The trace element zinc, in abundance in oysters, has an important role in testosterone metabolism. The concentration of zinc in the body correlates positively with total testosterone, and moderate supplementation from, for example oysters, plays an important role in improving androgen (sex hormone) levels. And The Journal of Sex and Marital Therapy published a trial of zinc supplementation that showed an improvement in female sexual function. A good start.

Since the late 1990s, phosphodiesterase type 5 inhibitors (Viagra, Cialis and their pharmaceutical bedfellows) have changed the sexual landscape. This class of drug enhances nitric oxide-mediated smooth muscle relaxation, allowing additional blood flow to the phallus.

Are foods high in nitrates and nitric oxide able to reproduce the effect of popping a little blue pill? The Romans, ahead of their time as usual, had beetroot frescoes in the brothels of Pompeii. They swore by beetroot as an aphrodisiac... and beetroot is, indeed, extremely high in nitrates. Drop the morning latte and make the switch to beet juice? The dark pink wee takes some getting used to, but it is harmless. Should you need reassurance, Aphrodite was also a beetroot aficionado.

To more exalted vegetation. Truffles are the fruiting bodies of soil fungi. White or black, these fungi exude volatile compounds that attract animals for their seed dispersal and thus reproduction. The pungent, musky aroma of truffles is similar to the pheromone androstanol, found in humans. Any resulting sexual arousal might be a result of these volatile compounds, or simply the heady thrill of shaving something so valuable over your food. Napoleon proclaimed that "truffles increase a man's power and woman's desire". He may have had a point, although, as far as we know, nobody asked Josephine.

Chocolate is also widely touted as an aphrodisiac. Is it merely the psychological pleasure of its consumption, or is there something chemical at work? Cocoa contains antioxidants such as flavonoids which are thought to have some beneficial effect on the brain related to cognition and blood perfusion, but there is minimal scientific evidence for its aphrodisiac qualities. The consumption of chocolate is mired in ephemeral pleasure and guilt to such an extent that, in 1998, three scientists developed the Attitudes to Chocolate Questionnaire to evaluate different dimensions of cravings and remorse among chocolate eaters.

Ginseng or panax ginseng has long enjoyed a reputation as a powerful aphrodisiac, particularly in the Far East. The root has been used in Chinese herbal medicine for centuries, and also as an additive to various foods and drinks: ginseng tea springs to mind. Ginsenosides are the class of pharmacologically active components with possible roles in nitric oxide enhancement, antioxidant and immune regulation. These compounds are potent, and overdose can lead to unwanted drug interactions, poor sleep and agitation. In the journal 'Spermatogenesis' there is a comprehensive review on Ginseng and Male Reproductive Function, in which the authors suggest that the use of ginseng may be useful for development of new therapeutic agents for male reproductive diseases or disorders.

The list of other supposedly stimulating foods is long, and you might consider pomegranates, asparagus, chilli or (a favourite of the health-conscious TikTok generation) matcha green tea. A small number of studies suggest that traditional alcoholic drinks may have a link to arousal, although maybe disinhibition is the cause. However, too much and you risk falling prey to "brewers' droop".

Asparagus, delicious with hollandaise and at its best when firm, not droopy

The bottom line is that exercise, stress management, sleep, hydration and a good diet, supplemented by a fair share of aphrodisiac foods, will help to secure body equilibrium, preserve brain functions and its neurotransmitters, blood flow and more, creating the milieu for health and mental wellbeing, which may in turn improve sexual function. There is, however, little hard evidence (if you will pardon the expression) to link any aphrodisiac properties of foods with meaningful performance enhancement.

But there's no harm in trying. For amorous gourmets, I would prescribe an aphrodisiac cookbook. There are plenty to choose from, including InterCourses, by Martha Hopkins and Randall Lockridge and featuring 145 "couples-tested" recipes. As the nights draw in, perhaps it's time to find a companion and experiment?

Ranald Macdonald and Terry Pennington in Santiago

DIVING IN: A JOURNEY THROUGH WINE, FRIENDSHIP, AND THE COLD PACIFIC

By Terry Pennington

Lake District-born Terry Pennington, Export Director for the UK, Ireland & Iberia of Santa Rita Estates, has spent more than four decades in the wine business, and now spearheads the marketing of Santa Rita's premium South American wines, including the legendary Casa Real.

I never considered myself overly competitive. But perhaps Ranald Macdonald brings it out in me. "First into the Pacific Ocean!" was the challenge. Twelve months on, we're still arguing over who was the true winner. Of course, it was me. Wading into the shallows up to one's knees doesn't count: true victory belongs to the one who dives headfirst into the alarmingly cold Pacific. For me, there's no dispute.

That moment capped off our **Boisdale Grand Tour of Chile**, a journey that took us from the foothills of the Andes through the heart of Chilean wine country, finally reaching the volcanic sands of Matanzas, the coastal town beloved by windsurfers and wanderers alike.

Recently, Ranald and I found ourselves reminiscing over a bottle of Casa Real Cabernet Sauvignon, one of Chile's great icon wines. As contemporaries in both age and experience, we've each spent decades immersed in food and wine. But it's only in the past ten years that our paths have crossed, and evolved into friendship.

Casa Real, one of Chile's finest red wines

From the Lakes to the Vineyards

For me, wine wasn't a calling; it was an accident. Growing up in England's Lake District, it was inevitable that I'd spend summers working in hospitality. Those summer jobs turned into a career, first in restaurants, then in wine, with one failed attempt at being a restaurateur along the way. I thought owning a restaurant would be straightforward, even glamorous. I was wrong. I failed spectacularly, and ever since, I've held all successful restaurateurs in the highest regard.

Over the next 25 years, I worked across importing, buying, selling, and hospitality before taking on a new adventure: becoming **Export Director for one of South America's leading wine producers.** That shift brought not only new challenges but new horizons, and a renewed sense of connection with the people behind the wines.

"If there's one thing I've learned, it's that the defining characteristic of the wine business is people."

Lessons from the Road (and the Glass)

If there's one thing I've learned, it's that the defining characteristic of the wine business is people. Whether drinking tea with partners in China or sharing sake in Japan, I've found that warmth and generosity transcend language and culture.

My first night in Shanghai was a baptism by fire (or perhaps by wine). Jet-lagged and bewildered, I faced more than 80 guests, each determined to personally toast me with "Ganbei!" (bottoms up). I quickly learned that tea ceremonies were merely a prelude to the *real* meeting over dinner.

Then there was Mr. Ma from Kunming, a diminutive man with a giant spirit. Over endless hot pot and bottles of fine wine, we discovered we shared not only a Chinese zodiac sign — the Water Rabbit — but also wives born in the same month. Thirty-six hours later, we concluded our marathon lunch, two men united by good humour and too much Cabernet.

Travelling through Asia also led to some unexpected fame. Across Japan, Hong Kong, and Korea, I was often mistaken for Boris Johnson — especially during his tenure as Mayor of London, Foreign Secretary, and Prime Minister. Aside from the laughter of colleagues (and the occasional questionable photo), I owe the former PM a quiet thankyou: his notoriety opened a few doors, and perhaps even sold a few cases of Chilean wine.

Hotel Casa Real set amongst beautiful gardens

A Changing World of Wine

In my day-to-day work, I deal with an eclectic mix of clients, from global retailers to boutique restaurants. The wine world is more competitive than ever, with consumers demanding sustainability, authenticity, and unforgettable experiences.

While I believe that Bordeaux and Burgundy will always hold their esteemed place at the top, there's no denying that the so-called "new world" producers – from Chile, Argentina, and beyond – are crafting exceptional wines that deserve a seat at the same table.

"A trip designed not for trade veterans but for fellow enthusiasts eager to explore the intersection of travel, food, and wine."

A Friendship in Full Pour

My first formal meeting with Ranald came, fittingly, over lunch and fine wine. The ever-hospitable Martin Krajewski, owner of vineyards in Pomerol and St. Émilion, invited me to join him at Boisdale of Belgravia.

At the table sat Ranald, and as Martin poured another bottle of Château Séraphine, a friendship was born.

Since that day, Ranald and I have spent many hours together evangelising the wines of Chile and Argentina at Boisdale's restaurants and beyond. Bringing the premium wines of South America to British consumers is about more than selling bottles, it's about sharing experiences.

At Boisdale, guests can now enjoy curated selections from **Aluvia, Carmen, Doña Paula**, and **Santa Rita**, a collection that showcases the very best of South America: coastal Chardonnays and Sauvignon Blancs, high-altitude Cabernet Sauvignons and Malbecs, and the proudly rediscovered Chilean grape, Carmenère.

Hotel Casa Real and surrounding gardens

Ranald, Terry and friends on the Boisdale Grand Tour of Chile

The Spirit of the Grand Tour

Through my role at Santa Rita Estates, I was thrilled to co-host the **Boisdale Grand Tour of Chile** with Ranald: a trip designed not for trade veterans but for fellow enthusiasts eager to explore the intersection of travel, food, and wine.

Guests experienced Chile's breathtaking landscapes and world-class vineyards firsthand, forging a lasting connection with the country and its people.

Looking ahead, plans are already underway for the **Boisdale Grand Tour of Argentina** in 2026. Readers of Boisdale Life are warmly invited to join us: to become new friends, share in the adventure, and discover the vinous treasures South America has to offer.

A Final Toast

Of course, there's still the small matter of our unresolved bet. The first one fully immersed — *head under* — in the Argentine Atlantic will be declared the true winner. Until then, I'll keep my crown and my pride intact… and perhaps start practising my dive.

THE HORROR!

BY TOM PARKER BOWLES

An American Werewolf in London (1981)

By Tom Parker Bowles

Tom Parker Bowles is an award-winning food writer, restaurant critic of The Mail On Sunday *and the author of nine cookery books, the most recent of which is* Cooking and the Crown*, featuring royal recipes from Queen Victoria to King Charles III.*

I lost it at the video shop. Well, that's not technically true. I first really lost it watching The *Amityville Horror* on late night telly with my friend Jake, way past our bedtime. Or was it *Children of the Corn*, where the kids in a small Nebraska Corn belt town slaughter the grownups, to appease "He Who Walks Behind the Rows".

It could have been the bit in *Raiders of The Lost Ark* when the bespectacled Gestapo agent melts before our very eyes, or Bette Davis in The Watcher in The Woods, or the skeletons in the pool in *Poltergeist*, or most 1970s episodes of *Dr Who*. Or the whole of bloody *Jaws*. But to misquote *Goodfellas*, "as far back as I can remember, I always wanted to hide behind the sofa." I love horror films like Norman Bates loves his mother. With an all-encompassing obsession.

I grew up in the splatter glory days, those heady, pre video censorship days, before the prim, pious and altogether pants Video Recordings Act (VRA) of 1984 gave the British Board of Film Censors (BBFC) the right to rate, cut and ban any film on video that offended tabloids, sanctimonious Tory MPs (I'm looking at you, Graham Bright), or ghastly old puritans (RIP, Mary Whitehouse). Back then, just a wander around Forward Video in Corsham, Wiltshire (or any other VHS emporium) could fuel a young boy's fascination (and nightmares) for years to come.

While films shown in cinemas were rated from U (Suitable for all) to X (adults only), films released on new-fangled VHS or Betamax had no such restrictions, meaning that an entire world of blood-soaked, brain-splattered, breast-enhanced exploitation excess was available to all.

Well, if you could sneak it past your parents, that was. No film was too sick, sleazy or deranged, and with so much filth to choose from, the poster art needed to be lurid, exploitative and a whole lot of fun to stand out. It mattered little that the cover bore little relevance to the film within.

Cannibal Holocaust (1980)

No, one glance at *The Toolbox Murders* ("Bit by bit … by bit he carved a nightmare!"), The Beast in Heat ("Horrifying Experiences in the Last Days of the SS!") or *Zombie Flesh Eaters* ("When the earth spits out the Dead … they will return to tear the flesh of the Living …") and I was hooked. I'd pore over Radio Rental video catalogues like rare vellum manuscripts, dreaming of *Mardi Gras Massacre*, *Twitch of the Death Nerve* (aka *Bay of Blood*, and actually very good), *2000 Maniacs and Bloodsucking Freaks*. And collect Video Today magazines with a reverence verging on awe.

But then the VRA became law, and 39 films, from *Absurd* to *Zombie Flesh Eaters*, were deemed "obscene" by the Director of Public Prosecutions, and illegal either to sell or own. A further 34 (including classics like *The Evil Dead* and *Shogun Assassins*) were put on "parole", while the likes of *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* and The Exorcist were simply refused a certificate until the end of the 1990s. I wanted to see them all.

To a gore-hungry teenager – who had already worked his way through everything from *Carnival of Souls* and *Night of the Living Dead* to *Hellraiser*, *Halloween* and *A Nightmare on Elm Street* – these "video nasties" became horror's Holy Grails, only available from dodgy men in dodgy pubs on dodgy pirated VHS. God, those were the days.

Many were pure crap. Some, like *I Spit on your Grave* and *Anthropophagous the Beast*, simply too misogynist and hateful to ever watch again. I first saw *The Evil Dead* at The Scala in King's Cross, *The Exorcist* (along with Salo) at the ICA, which – as an "arts club" – was exempt from the usual certification law.

But it wasn't all hungry cannibals, psychotic handymen and merrily-slashed jugulars. I also rented, recorded and bought any horror I could find, inhaling every work by every great director: James Whale, Tod Browning, H. G Lewis, George A. Romero, John Carpenter, Tobe Hooper, Wes Craven.

From them, it was a short hop to the Italian maestros: Dario Argento, Lucio Fulci, Mario Bava, Joe D'Amato and Ruggero Deodato, and on to the sexy Euro sleaze of Jean Rollins, via some crazy, balls-out bonkers Mexican, Japanese, Filipino and South Korean flicks. Now, of course, everything is available at the touch of a button. Even the most rare and extreme stuff, from Thundercrack (don't ask) to A Serbian Tale (really, don't ask).

But I do miss the days where to get hold of an uncut copy of Zombie 2 was akin to stumbling across a lost Caravaggio. The illicit thrill! The crap quality! The Horror! A few taps on a keyboard just aren't quite the same.

EIGHT FAVOURITES

Yes, I know, there's no *Nosferatu*, *The Bride of Frankenstein*, *The Innocents*, *Dracula* (Lugosi and Lee), *Rosemary's Baby*, *Don't Look Now*, *Carrie*, *The Exorcist*, *The Omen*, *Halloween*, *The Shining*, *Alien*, *The Thing*, *Evil Dead* 1 and 2, *Audition*, *The Ring*, *The Descent*, *Hereditary* and *Midsommer*. But I assume you've seen them all anyway. If you haven't, why not? Go away, and get watching.

The Bride of Frankenstein (1935)

THE TEXAS CHAINSAW MASSACRE

For a film with such a brilliant (and brilliantly lurid) title, the gore is actually pretty restrained. Set in the searing heat of a Texas summer, and mostly in the daytime (no gloomy gothic castles here), Tobe Hooper's dusty, grimy masterpiece starts off with a gibbering nutter (one of the murderous family, obvs) slicing his hand open, and builds to a near-unbearable crescendo of tension and terror. All set to the most jarring and discordant of soundtracks. Yet there's dark humour here (the supper scene is jet black), alongside a couple of great jump shots.

The Texas Chainsaw Massacre (1974)

THE WICKER MAN

Possibly the greatest British film of all time. Robin Hardy's folk horror classic may not be splattered with blood and guts. But it's strange, subtle and endlessly unsettling, a film that lingers in the darkest recesses of the imagination. And from the moment Neil Howie (Edward Woodward's God-fearing copper) flies into Summerisle from the Scottish mainland – in search of Rowan, a young girl who has gone missing – you know it's not going to end well.

There are folk songs and priapic pagans, lusty couplings and sumptuous wigs. Christopher Lee is wickedly camp as Lord Summerisle, while Britt Ekland writhes and pouts as only she can. It all builds to an incendiary climax. Altogether now – "Christ! No, no dear God! No, Christ!"

The Wicker Man (1973)

SUSPIRIA

Don't come to Dario Argento's greatest work expecting linear plots, coherent dialogue or anything that really makes any real sense. Just immerse yourselves in his mesmerically brilliant, colour drenched visuals, his splenetic editing, and terror-soaked vision of hell.

The plot involves a young ballerina coming to a famous German ballet school, which is also the home of some ancient witches. Thow in a harsh, prickly Goblins score, a neck hungry dog, bloody pits of razor wire, and a batshit-crazy final act. Argento at his finest.

Suspiria (1976)

DAWN OF THE DEAD

George A. Romero's first film of the Trilogy, Night of the Living Dead, may be the more celebrated. But its sequel, set in a shopping mall surrounded by hungry zombies, is not just a gripping, gloriously gory zombie action thriller but a not-so-subtle satire of consumerism in modern America. Albeit with lots of splattered heads, gobbled guts and really good 1980s synth. at his finest.

Dawn of the Dead (1978)

WITCHFINDER GENERAL

Not horror, exactly, although Vincent Price's Matthew Hopkins (the eponymous Witchfinder General) is evil incarnate. Michael Reeves' deeply grim tale is set during the English Civil War, and East Anglia has never looked so forbidding. Beautifully shot, it is unrelentingly bleak. In the worst possible way.

Witchfinder (1968)

AN AMERICAN WEREWOLF IN LONDON

A comedy horror that is actually both funny and scary. Rob Bottin's make-up effects are still incredible, the werewolf attacks brutal, and Griffin Dunne, as his slowly decaying best friend, is superb. It also features cinema's greatest pub, The Slaughtered Lamb. "Stay on the road, and keep clear of the moors." Oh, and "Beware the moon." Obvs.

An American Werewolf in London (1981)

ZOMBI 2

Lucio Fulci's Caribbean zombie epic is supposed to be deadly serious (and has its nasty, gut-munching moments too), as well as nodding to classics like *I Walked with a Zombie* and *The Island of Dr Moreau*. But any film that contains an underwater fight between shark and zombie is perhaps not competing with Kurosawa, less tongue-in-cheek, more tongue-through-cheek. Still, there's the classic scene where an eyeball is popped by a sharp wooden shard. Ands lots of shuffling, brain-hungry zombies too, and a decent final twist.

Zombi 2 (1979)

CANNIBAL HOLOCAUST

Offensive. Exploitative. Uncompromising. Dark, desolate and definitely disgusting too. But Ruggero Deodato's "lost footage" cannibal classic still packs a mightily visceral punch. Watch at your peril.

HOW TO BLUFF AT... THE VISUAL ARTS

The Garden of Earthly Delights, *Hieronymus Bosch, 1503–1515*

By Richard Holledge

Former Arts Editor of The Times*, and a longtime fan of Portsmouth FC.*

Hmmm.
Pause.
Reflective nod of the head.
Hmmm.
And that's it really. That's how to bluff your way in art.

Make an impression.

If you are asked a direct question, however, you need to understand that the history of art is cluttered with one ism after another; Romanticism, Futurism, Classicism, Cubism, not forgetting Vorticism. Realism anyone? But let's start with the Impressionists, those eager tyros who upset the cultural establishment in the mid-19th century. Not for them stuffy realism, they experimented with colour and form, using bold brushstrokes and often, *quelle horreur*, knocking off a painting in a single day.

Woman with a Parasol, *Claude Monet, 1875*

The names are all too familiar; Manet, Renoir, Degas Toulouse-Lautrec, Monet, but you're a bluffer so keep an aside or two to impress. 'Yes Monet, lilies, lovely, but I've always been moved by his beguiling *Woman with a Parasol*. Van Gogh? Of course, those bright colours but you really ought to check out his (somewhat gloomy) early work of peasant life in his native Netherlands.'

Modern and Post-Modern.

Modern art isn't that modern. Some argue this ism was galvanised by Gustave Courbet when he painted *The Origin of the World* in 1866, an X-rated vision of female genitalia which is too bracing to be shown on X. Modern lasted until the 1960s when it became passé and became Post-Modern, starring Andy *Soup Cans* Warhol and Roy *Whaam* Lichtenstein with works which are brash, bright and cartoonish.

Adoration of the Magi, *Sandro Botticelli, 1475–1476*

Jack the Dipper

Pre-Post-Modern; the Abstract Expressionists. A splashing time was had by all in the 1940s and 50s, ew more than Jackson Pollock who dripped paint straight on to vast canvases to create riotous abstractions. Extra kudos for knowing his wife Lee Krasner was a hugely effective pioneer of the movement. As was Joan Mitchell, not be confused with Joni who painted some of her fellow musicians and the covers for her albums.

What's the Pointillism?

It's not enough to know painters used oil and water, you need to understand some technical terms. Take Pointillism, made popular by Georges Seurat who used tiny dots of pure colours, which trick the eye into seeing the images as a whole, but brighter and more sharply defined. When former Disney boss Michael Eisner was trying win over Portsmouth FC fans he played an animated version of Seurat's *A Sunday Afternoon* to emphasise that he planned to bring steady growth to the club. Point by point.

It's surreal thing

Out of World War One erupted a band of artists who were angry, disillusioned and eager to shock. Leading lights included Andre Breton, Marcel Duchamp, Luis Buñuel and Max Ernst whose paintings feature grotesque apparitions such as the flamboyant female in a garish orange cape of feathers with the head of an owl and the body of a woman naked from the breasts down.

They did shock but they had fun

making mischief. Salvador Dalí, who made a sculpture of a phone with a lobster as the receiver once complained that when he asked for grilled lobster in a restaurant, he was never served a cooked telephone. (btw Hiëronymous Bosch was depicting a similarly dystopian world some 500 years before with his array of grotesques in *Garden of Earthly Delights*. Top marks for dropping that into the conversation).

Lobster Telephone, *Salvador Dalí, 1936*

Contemporary Art

More labels here than a Tesco superstore. Land art, street art, feminist art, performance art, video art, black art. All too confusing.

Be a tad controversial by claiming The Young British Artists (YBAs) now the OBAs (Older BAs) were cleverly marketed Sensation seekers. Play safe and laud David Hockney as the Greatest Living British Artist.

Renaissance Man

Now you have to up your game. The heart of soul of the story of art lies in the Renaissance, the golden age of art, music, and literature from the 1400s to the 17th century, in which artists rejected the formality expected of religious work to create a world of harmony and beauty.

The names are household: Leonardo da Vinci, Michelangelo, Botticelli and Raphael. Where to stop? Titian, Tintoretto, Veronese.....

To prove your credentials come up with something slightly left field. Flowers for example. Red carnations in a painting symbolise love, pink is for marriage, a white flower, good luck and white lilies like the one Gabriel presents to Mary in Leonardo da Vinci's *Annunciation* (1472–1475) represent purity.

To really show how clever you are point out where the artists put themselves in the picture.

Raphael peeks out from *The School of Athens* fresco he painted in the early 16th century. Sandro Botticelli portrayed himself as the young blond man on the right of *The Adoration of the Magi* staring boldly out in a sort of Renaissance selfie.

Michelangelo who hated working on *The Last Judgment in the Sistine Chapel* included a gruesome image of himself as St. Bartholomew after he had been skinned alive.

Artful

Picasso, who worked his way through most of the isms of the 20th century, could have a guide to himself. He once declared: 'Art is a lie that makes us realise the truth.'

Hmmm.

Annunciation, *Leonardo da Vinci, c.1472*

A scene from The Curious Case of Benjamin Button, *the* Olivier Award–*winning musical born from years of passion, perseverance, and creative brilliance.*

THE CURIOUS CASE OF THE OLIVIER TRIUMPH

By Richard Darbourne

Richard Darbourne is senior producer at ATG Productions, an international theatrical production company dedicated to producing critically acclaimed, commercially successful and creatively ambitious work for the West End, Broadway and beyond.

"You really should go and see this show, The Curious Case of Benjamin Button." I often heard comments like this, but this was the second person who had said it. It was June 5th, 2019.

"Who is it by?" I don't mean F. Scott Fitzgerald, "who's staged it?", I asked.

"Jethro Compton" came the reply. He was apparently the show's producer, director, writer and designer, and a decade before, we had shared an office as part of an "emerging producers" support programme called Stage One.

We were wide-eyed and penniless, but with enough ignorance to forge ahead in the most turbulent of career choices. Back then, that "career" was more a series of small steps that seemingly would lead nowhere but collectively would create a slow trajectory towards accumulating enough credibility to allow us both to earn a living from putting shows on. When you know someone else has been on that journey, it forges a strong bond. He knew about me, and I knew about him. We both "got it".

They say you need a bit of luck, and that is true. However, the actor Peter Dinklage describes it better by saying "I hate the word 'luck': it cheapens a lot of hard work." Jethro had brought this thing to life with a tenacious, one-man vision to take those hardest and loneliest of steps...the first ones.

If a musical takes off, the royalty remuneration is weighted heavily towards the authors: typically, 50% of the total pot goes to the authors of the music, book and lyrics.

This is why. In the beginning they have not just to create it but coax it into life. Not only do they probably not get paid, but they have to pay others. And raise the initial finance to get it seen and staged in whatever way possible. And it has to be original yet mainstream enough to make the jump from £25 tickets to £75 tickets, competing with every other major production.

Back in June 2019, Jethro was determined to get his work first staged in a 100-seat theatre with five actors. He needed £100 000 to book the theatre, build a set, rehearse five people (who also played all the music on stage) and pay wages and running costs for four weeks of rehearsals. He wrote it, he directed it and then he also designed both the physical production as well as the lighting design.

What enabled him to get it all together? Those small steps during the previous decade. Small steps to get into a position where the theatre owner on the fringe knows him, and his prior work as playwright and director, well enough to give him the slot. He has to have the portfolio of work to cobble it all together, get the actors on board and, crucially, attract the interest of a composer.

Step forward Darren Clark. Darren, a Kiwi and long-time UK resident, had been on a similar journey making connections, writing songs and scores and pursuing a dream. The timing and combination of people was right, and the dream was about to come true.

It was Friday night, it was raining and I wanted to go home. The show was sold out in the 100-seater: you might think that is an easy task on the fringe, but with a tiny marketing budget, only word of mouth can bring a packed house.

Thankfully, they squeezed an extra seat from somewhere and what exploded before me was a glorious score of violins, cellos, guitars, piano, French horn…all played by the five cast members. The visuals were stunning, watching these joyous human beings tell this story.

The story was deep, layered and well structured. It had a maturity about it that it sometimes missing from development work. Often you see potential, but it's scrappy or too niche, too aimed at a younger market who might not buy West End tickets. But not this one.

So now began the second part. The first part – creating it – had taken three years, and the second part – getting it to the West End – took another (admittedly pandemic-affected) five years.

This is where the producer comes in. I had produced around 30 shows of differing shapes and sizes in the previous decade, and in 2015 I had become Senior Producer for Ambassador Theatre Group (now ATG Entertainment), and our producing arm, ATG Productions, had fast become a leading world player, with hits likes *Cabaret* with Eddie Redmayne, *Betrayal* with Tom Hiddleston and *Cyrano* with James McAvoy, and commercial bangers like *Pretty Woman*: *The Musical, 9 to 5: The Musical*, working with Dolly Parton, and Plaza Suite, starring Sarah Jessica Parker and Matthew Broderick.

You don't get a Benjamin Button without a Pretty Woman. A crowd-pleaser that sells more than a million tickets in the UK brings investors returns that allow them to take risks on new material. So, how do you raise two million quid to get a new musical into the West End? The answer is to produce other shows.

How do you get given a West End theatre for new work, when star-led plays and studio-led musicals are more profitable and less risky for the landlord? Firstly, you position the show to (just about) work in a smaller theatre: a smaller theatre is one the landlord can give you without risking shareholder wrath. *Button* would never displace *Paddington* in the Savoy, but in the 400-seat Ambassadors you might have a chance.

The West End transfer was secured in 2023 as we re-staged the show back on the fringe, this time with a company of 13 who played 30 instruments between them. The visual was even more stunning, and, on 8th November 2024, the show's West End life began.

So now the third part: playing to the world. The plan was to use the West End run as a shop window for international markets. The task of refining and evolving the work so it can sit proudly in the company of 30 West End shows, many of them massive hits that have been around a long time, is like landing a helicopter on a postage stamp.

It could not just be good; it had to be very special. The audience were the people who were going to sell the tickets by saying not "Yes, I had good time" but 'Holy shit, you have to go and see this show!' And to get international attention, we needed an award.

Cut to April 2025, the Royal Albert Hall. The company of 13 had been asked by ITV to perform at the Olivier Awards 2025 and we had been nominated for four awards: Best Actor, Best Actress, Best Score and Music Orchestration, and the coveted Best New Musical Award.

As we sat together in our tuxedos on that magical night, I am glad we were able to take a deep breath and remember 20 years of small steps of saying yes, of giving it a go, of knocking the skittles down one by one. Of friendship and collaboration, of taking big swings, of building a network, of everything that gets you to that place. It was our time, we were ready. And the Olivier for Best New Musical goes to…

Jethro Compton and the creative team of The Curious Case of Benjamin Button *celebrate their Olivier Award triumph for Best New Musical at the 2025 ceremony.*

FINDING SONGS FOR THE KING

By Don Reedman

Elvis Presley in concert, circa 1972

I was born and grew up in Wagga Wagga, a New South Wales town of about 20,000 people at the time, halfway between Sydney and Melbourne. My lifelong passion for the music of Elvis Presley was ignited, in 1957, by the release of Jailhouse Rock, Elvis's third movie: aged 11, far too young for what at the time was considered a controversial and definitely adults-only film, I managed to sneak into Hoyts Theatre and watch it.

Elvis's charisma, his raw energy, was extraordinary. I'd never seen anything like it, Wagga Wagga had never seen anything like it, and there must have been small towns all over the world that were just as astonished.

From that moment, I knew I wanted to be a part of the music business. I made it to England in January 1969 full of ambition, but I never thought back then, even as an idealistic kid, that Elvis and his music would play such a huge part in my life.

I landed a job as a promotion manager for Welbeck Music, and the first song I was given to plug was *Sugar Sugar* by *The Archies*. I actually had sugar sachets printed with a line saying "*Sugar Sugar: The Archies*, with compliments, Don Reedman, Welbeck Music": that way, the BBC radio producers got to know both me and the record I was plugging. Luckily it worked: the record went to number 1 and stayed there for eight weeks.

Soon after, I was invited to join Carlin Music, the most successful independent music publishing company in the UK. They also managed Elvis's two music publishing companies, Gladys Music and Elvis Presley Music. My job was to listen to the songs we had available, persuade a top artist to record one of them, and with any luck they (and we) would have a hit.

As well as great American writers like Jimmy Webb *(By The Time I get To Phoenix, Macarthur Park, Wichita Lineman)* and Bobby Darin *(Splish Splash, Dream Lover)*, Carlin also represented Jerry Leiber and Mike Stoller, who had composed the score for Jailhouse Rock. (Although the story goes that they hadn't written anything until, in desperation, Jean Aberbach, the director of Hill & Range music publishers, locked them both in a hotel room. Four hours later, they had written four songs: *I Want To Be Free, Treat Me Nice, (You're So Square) Baby I Don't Care, and Jailhouse Rock.)*

Carlin also had some great British songwriters on their books: Ken Howard and Alan Blaikley, who wrote Elvis's 1970 hit *I've Lost You*; Les Reed, who co-wrote *Delilah* and *It's Not Unusual* for Tom Jones; and Guy Fletcher and Doug Flett, who Elvis: *The Fair's Movin' On*, the B-side of his 1969 single *Clean Up Your Own Backyard*, which I was also involved with.

And there was Clive Westlake. He had ambitions of being a recording artist: he lacked the charisma that a star needs, and he wasn't the best singer, but he was a great songwriter. He had written a song called *It's a Matter of Time*, which he played for me. He wanted to record it himself, but I knew it would be perfect for Elvis.

Clive Westlake

Ever since *Jailhouse Rock* back in Wagga Wagga, Elvis had been in my DNA, so it was a joy to look for songs for him, and I'd already found a few: *Twenty Days and Twenty Nights*, co-written by Clive, and *Just Pretend*, by Fletcher and Flett, as well as *I've Lost You* and *The Fair's Movin' On.*

I'd listen to the demos that the writers made: they often used a session singer called Peter Lee Sterling who could sound like Elvis, making it easier for Elvis to imagine how his vocals might work when he was in the studio.

In 1972, just at the time I had *It's a Matter Of Time* in my head, the president of Carlin, Freddy Bienstock (Jean Aberbach's cousin, incidentally), made one of his frequent visits to London and asked me to find new material for Elvis. He was scheduled to record in Memphis in the following couple of months.

So, without Clive knowing, I quietly borrowed the demo from his drawer while he was on holiday, and I played it to Freddy. I told him that Elvis needed an up-tempo song to prove to the world that he was still the King of Rock'n'Roll. Freddy agreed, played it to Elvis, and he loved it. Elvis's producer Felton Jarvis matched it with Dennis Linde's *Burning Love*, Elvis recorded them both, and the single went to number 2 in the American charts. I was over the moon, and Freddy was delighted that we had come up with a double A-side smash for Elvis. It turned out to be Elvis's last top ten hit.

I always felt that Elvis deserved bigger and better production values on his records, particularly the ballads. He had a wonderful operatic tone in his voice that could cope with, and be heightened by, the sound of a full symphony orchestra.

And so, some 45 years later, having had this idea in my mind and having created my own original concepts with symphony orchestras on two hit albums – *Classic Rock*, with the London Symphony Orchestra (we recorded another eight albums), and *Hooked on Classics*, with the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra (and two more of them) – and having made four albums with the legendary Michael Crawford employing the talents of both of those great orchestras, I came up with the concept of taking Elvis's great songs, including both hits and lesser-known album tracks, and having them arranged for an album of great quality and class for the RPO.

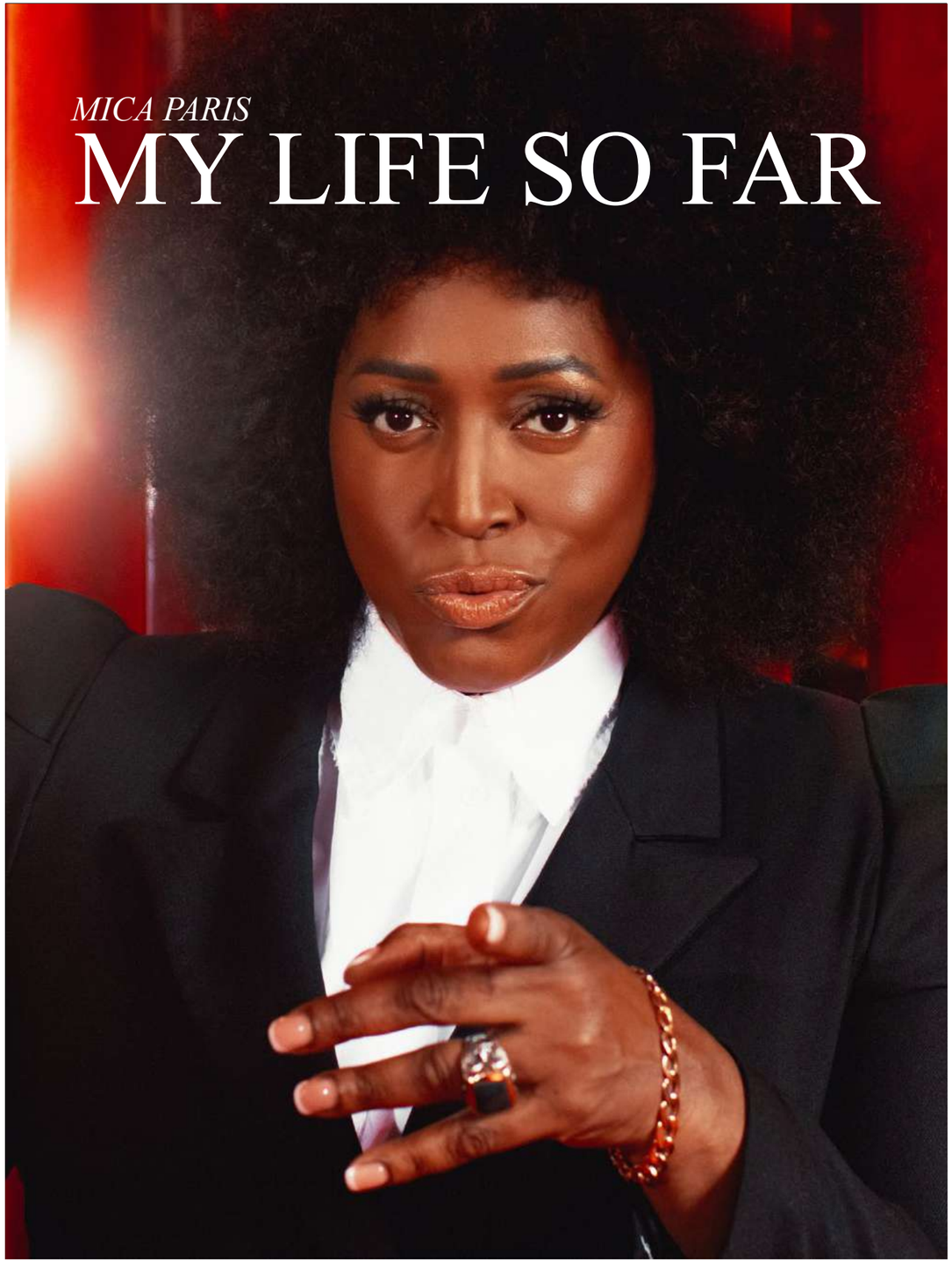
It took me five years of determination and passion to convince the powers-that-be at Sony Music. Then I had the thrill of meeting Priscilla Presley, Elvis's ex-wife and, as an actress in *Dallas* and the *Naked Gun* film series, a star in her own right, as well as a smart businesswoman who had overseen the opening of Graceland as a museum. At the time, she was performing in pantomime at Wimbledon, so I invited her to afternoon tea and told her about my vision for Elvis.

Thankfully, she thought the idea was great, and said it was something that Elvis would have loved to do. So between us we convinced Sony to let me go into Abbey Road Studios with the RPO, and try out my idea.

Well, it worked a charm and the album *If I Can Dream* was born. It went straight to number one, selling more than a million CDs in the UK alone. Worldwide, it has sold 5 million copies (and counting).

We went on to make two more albums with Elvis and the RPO, and launched six tours with Elvis and the RPO, including venues in the UK, Europe... and back in Australia, where my dream had been born all those years before. Elvis may have left the building, but his spirit lives on in our hearts.

Priscilla Presley and Don Reedman



Mica Paris, photo credit Jack Alexander

By Mica Paris

Michelle Antoinette Wallen MBE (known professionally as Mica Paris) award-winning English singer, presenter and actress.

From church pews in South London to singing with Prince, hosting shows on BBC radio, and launching a fashion line... I've lived a life in music. It's been wild, soulful, sometimes surreal. But more than anything, it's been mine.

The first time I really *felt* music, not just heard it, I was about seven or eight. I'd come home from school, race round to my aunt's house, and sneak into her front room. Now, in Jamaican culture, the front room was sacred. Immaculate. Always cleaned and untouched, strictly for guests. You weren't *allowed* in there.

But that's where the records lived: those glorious gospel vinyls, imported from America.

So I'd sneak in, put on the Edwin Hawkins Singers' *Oh Happy Day* and just… listen. Study. Mimic. I was obsessed. I knew every note, every key, who played what. I had perfect pitch even as a child. That's where it all started.

My grandparents were Pentecostal ministers, and our church was my first stage. Every Sunday, they'd get me up to sing — and the congregation would go *mad*. By 11, I'd won my first award at Wembley Stadium, singing for the national Pentecostal convention. Can you imagine? Wembley at 11! My grandmother basically became my agent after that, dragging me all over the UK and Scotland, singing in every denomination you can name.

That voice – my voice – was a gift. But it wasn't just a gift. It was a calling. I was constantly learning. Constantly absorbing. I wasn't just singing gospel. I was listening to jazz, soul, funk... the real stuff, from the States. That became my secret education.

The First Wave

I joined a little gospel group called *The Spirit of Us* when I was barely in my teens. I was the baby — the lead singer, though. Eventually, a label came sniffing around, but they only wanted me. That led to me singing backing vocals for *Hollywood Beyond* — they had a huge hit with *The Colour of Money* — and then, at 17, I got a call from Julian Palmer at Island Records.

He saw something in me. He signed me. We made my first album together — and here we are, all these years later, working together again. Life really does come full circle. When *So Good* dropped, I was just 18. It went platinum.

Mica Paris on the set of BBC's Eastenders

Everything exploded. One minute I was in South London, the next I was on *Letterman*, flying Concorde, doing three TV shows a day. It happened *that* fast.

My One Temptation took off, and suddenly I was a fashion reference. I'll never forget the outfit I wore in the video — a sleek little suit with buttons down the sides. The moment I got my first pay cheque, I ran to Carnaby Street and bought it for myself. That was the first of many full-circle moments.

The Gospel According to Prince (and Chaka)

What followed was a wave — six years of hits, collaborations, travelling, creating, learning. I worked with Prince. Prince. He wrote *If I Love U* 2Nite for me. Brought me on stage with him in Camden just six months before he passed. That was the first venue he ever took me to. Again, full circle. Magic.

Natalie Cole was another huge force in my life. She should've been a teacher: she was so wise, so kind. She put me on the bill at the Nelson Mandela concert at Wembley. She was a friend and a real mentor.

And Chaka. Well, Chaka Khan became family. She's godmother to my children. A mother figure. A sister. She's even duetting with me on my next album, out in 2026. I still can't believe it sometimes.

Soul Solutions & Amy Before the Fame

At some point, BBC Radio 2 asked if I'd sit in for Dionne Warwick: she was unwell one night. I'd never done radio before, but I thought: why not? I gave it a go. And I loved it. That one night turned into 24 years.

My show was called *Soul Solutions*, and it became this beautiful space where I could speak to other artists: Mary J. Blige, Bobby Womack, Amy Winehouse. And because I was one of them, they *got* me, and I got them. We could go deep. No fluff. Just soul.

I recognised Amy's talent instantly. I put her on stage at the Café de Paris, and from there, she flew. You could see it. You could feel it.

I wanted to speak to women from all cultures, especially those aged 30 to 60, and help them feel good, feel powerful, feel seen.

What Not to Wear, and What to Stand For

From there, I leapt into TV, joining *What Not to Wear* with Trinny and Susannah and my best friend Lisa Butcher. Four million viewers a week. Wild.

That show changed the game for me. It introduced me to brands, to fashion, and led to me launching my own clothing line with Simply Be. I even wrote a book, Beautiful Within, in 2007. I wanted to speak to women from all cultures, especially those aged 30 to 60, and help them feel good, feel powerful, feel *seen*.

It wasn't just about clothes. It was about owning your story.

Legacy Isn't a Buzzword — It's a Responsibility

Now, after 40 years in this business, I think about legacy constantly. I'm still singing. Still acting. Still producing. I created a show for Sky called *Gospel Christmas*: it's aired twice and may return this year. That's the sort of work I want to keep doing. Uplifting. Rooted in something deeper.

I feel incredibly lucky. So many of the people who gave me chances were not people of colour, but they saw me. They believed in me. And I don't take that for granted.

Yes, it's been hard being a woman of colour in this industry. It still is. But if your intentions are good, and you keep going, the work will speak. That's why I choose not to dwell on the negative. It doesn't help. It doesn't serve.

We're all in labour right now, you know? The world feels that way: painful, raw, full of tension. But something beautiful is coming. We just have to push.

Passing the Baton, Holding the Mic

I want to leave something behind: not just music, but meaning. We've had so many incredible women of colour come before me: Shirley, Joan, the greats. But the legacy often stops short. The next generation doesn't always know who came before them. I want to bridge that gap.

Gen Z, especially the multicultural, magnificent young women I meet, are smart. They're aware. They're kind. I want them to see that this career can be done with grace, with fire, with faith.

I've had the honour of blazing a few trails, but there's still work to do. I'm still writing. Still building. Still believing. I haven't "cracked it". That would be boring. I'm still evolving. Still dreaming. Still singing.
And I can't wait for what's next.

Mica Paris' upcoming album, featuring a duet with Chaka Khan, will be released in 2026. Her Sky TV special Gospel Christmas is expected to air again this December. Her next performance at Boisdale is 30th of January.

Mica Paris performing to a packed house at Boisdale of Canary Wharf

BOISDALE

RESTAURANTS | BARS
LIVE MUSIC | CIGARS
HEATED TERRACES
DJ NIGHTS

BOISDALE.CO.UK
@BOISDALE_RESTAURANTS

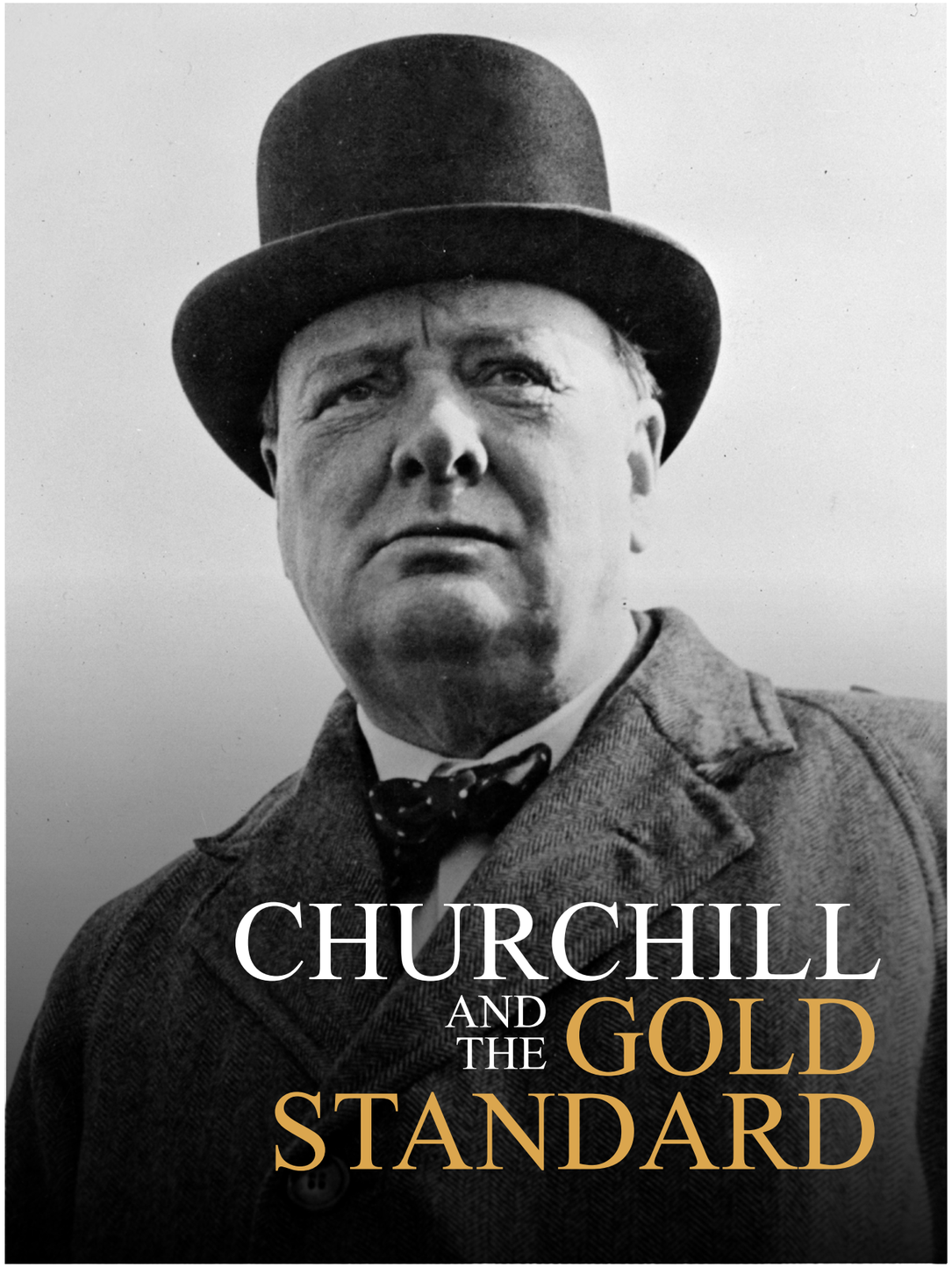
TOP 10 RESTAURANT WINE LIST

Awarded by *The World of Fine Wine* Magazine, 2022

Boisdale is uncompromising in its pursuit of exceptional wine. We ship the majority of our cases directly from producers, selecting only estates whose craftsmanship reflects our own commitment to quality. Every bottle is stored in optimal conditions to ensure perfect service at the table.

Our Group Wine Buyer, Pavel Androvics, travels extensively to source wines of distinction and rare value, with a focus on authenticity, provenance and character. The result is one of the most carefully curated collections in London.

Boisdale Members enjoy a 20% discount on selected wines across our wine lists.



CHURCHILL AND THE GOLD STANDARD

Prime Minister Winston Churchill in 1941

By Bruce Anderson

An Orkney native who read history at Emmanuel College, Cambridge, Bruce Anderson is s political columnist and a former political editor of The Spectator, for which he now writes as the magazine's drink critic.

Throughout his early career, Winston Churchill always revelled in controversy, and on occasions he provoked it. From the beginning, he seemed to be a strong candidate for political eminence.

In one of the final eras of aristocratic political dominance, an able young man from a ducal background could expect early preferment; what would now be called "entitlement". Churchill did indeed take that for granted.

Yet there were always problems. Churchill's father, Lord Randolph, was also a young man of brilliant promise. He became Chancellor of the Exchequer at an early age; full of ambition, there seemed to be no barriers to those ambitions: the premiership itself appeared to be within his grasp.

The Right Hon. Lord Randolph Churchill

But Randolph lacked solidity and judgment. He came into conflict with Lord Salisbury. Although less colourful than Gladstone, that paladin of the house of Cecil could be regarded as Queen Victoria's greatest Prime Minister. He had a massive solidity that Churchill lacked. There was a clash. Salisbury won. Randolph resigned from office and his health then gave way, possibly due to syphilis. The House of Churchill appeared to have turned into the House of Icarus.

Twenty years later, some sceptics saw Winston Churchill as a second Icarus, destined not for the heights, but for another fall. The early and middle phases of his career did nothing to assuage those doubters: as Home Secretary, an office which normally demanded a certain gravity on the part of its holders, he seemed inclined to excitability, turning up in person to take command of the Siege of Sidney Street, when a few anarchists exchanged fire with policemen. This was not how such matters were normally conducted.

Then there was Gallipoli. Churchill knew that war meant a butcher's bill, but he hated the thought of wasting lives needlessly. He was always ready to employ a powerful intellect and strategic radicalism to search for an alternative to sending millions of men to chew barbed wire in Flanders.

Hence Gallipoli, an attempt to force a way through those narrow straits, open the road to Constantinople, thrust a dagger into the underbelly of German-Austrian domination of Central and Eastern Europe, knock the Turks out of the war, bring Bulgaria and Romania in on the allies' side, make it easier to reinforce Russia, and thus swing events decisively against Germany.

Dramatic stuff, and as long as military history is studied, that campaign will be re-fought. There is an argument that Gallipoli failed because Churchill only half-persuaded his colleagues. Had he been given bolder generals and admirals, and more material, it might have worked. Others say that the obstacles were too great. Above all, we under-estimated the Turks, who were dogged, brave fighters, and formidable in defence.

British soldiers evacuated from Gallipoli in 1915 are transferred to Salonika in Greece

Churchill survived, although "Gallipoli" was regularly used as a term of abuse during his conflicts on the hustings. But by the 1920s, he was still too formidable to ignore. In 1924, Balwin won an election and wanted to reunite the Conservative party.

Although Churchill had broken with the Tories twenty years earlier, he then more or less rejoined them during the wartime coalition. He was still widely distrusted in some Tory circles. but Baldwin sought harmony. There is a vulgarism, which was uttered much later by Lyndon Johnson about J. Edgar Hoover: "I'd rather have him inside the tent pissing out than outside the tent pissing in". Though Baldwin would never have said anything like that, he would have understood it. He protected his "tent" by making an offer which delighted Churchill: the Chancellorship.

This was not necessarily a ministerial

misfit. Before the war, Churchill had been interested in social policy; influenced by Bismarck, he believed in using the State to improve social conditions and, like Bismarck, he believed that men brought up in happier social circumstances would make better soldiers.

"As Prime Minister, a few years later, he had to deal with some of its military consequences. Fortunately for Britain and the world, he was up to the challenge."

Churchill and others had been alarmed by the spavined, hollow-chested specimens who turned up at the recruiting offices to try to join up during the Boer War. During the Liberal government, he was ready to cooperate with the Webbs – Sidney and Beatrice, co-founders of the London School of Economics – and other reformers to put matters right.

By 1924, however, a new priority preoccupied the Treasury. In order to symbolise a full recovery from the Great War, the weight of establishment opinion was in favour of rejoining the gold standard, at the pe-war parity of $4.86 to the pound sterling.

Initially, Churchill was unconvinced. By strengthening sterling, the measure would have been deflationary and would also have priced British goods out of export markets. This was especially damaging to the coal industry. In general, bankers would benefit from the gold standard, but manufacturers would suffer. Recognising this, Churchill declared that; 'I would rather see finance less proud and industry more content.' But official opinion prevailed, reinforced by national pride.

The coal owners responded to decreased revenues by cutting wages. This provoked a strike, which led to the General Strike. At that stage, Churchill's natural belligerence kicked in. Baldwin's conciliatory instincts were brushed aside. Churchill took charge of the government's propaganda, supervising an anti-strike newspaper, The British Gazette. After six months, the miners were defeated, leaving a legacy of bitterness.

Churchill as a war correspondent during the Second Boer War, Bloemfontein, South Africa, 1900

What other legacy? By rejoining the gold standard. Churchill has often been blamed for laying the foundations for the Great Depression. This is unfair. A large number of factors were involved. The gold standard, deflation in America, over-exuberance on Wall Street, the crippling of the German economy through reparations - and a failure to counteract the slump by widespread reflation.

Keynes understood this earlier than most and expressed his views in a coruscating pamphlet. "The Economic Consequences of Mr Churchill". This helped to pin the blame on Churchill, to an unfair and exaggerated extent. Almost the entire weight of frock-coated orthodoxy was in favour of the measures which led to depression, slump, unemployment and political chaos. Economic failure incited Fascism and Communism.

As Chancellor, Churchill could not have prevented the Great Depression; as Prime Minister, a few years later, he had to deal with some of its military consequences. Fortunately for Britain and the world, he was up to the challenge.

British paratroops in Hamminkeln, Germany, during airborne landings east of the Rhine, March, 1945

BRIDGE TO VICTORY: *HOW MONTGOMERY CROSSED THE RHINE*

By Peter Wall

Ex-soldier and military historian General Sir Peter Wall served as Chief of the General Staff, the professional head of the British Army, until September 2014.

By the spring of 1945, Germany was under threat from both sides: in the east the Soviet Army was across the River Oder and poised to attack Berlin, whilst in the west, Eisenhower's armies had the Germans pinned down on a broad front from the Low Countries to the Alps. Much of Europe lay in ruins, and everyone, soldier and civilian alike, wondered how much longer the war would last, and at what cost.

For Britain, the answer would come from one of the best-orchestrated operations of the war: the crossing of the Rhine, led by Field Marshal Bernard Montgomery. Success would allow the Allied armies to break into the heart of Germany and force the unconditional surrender of Hitler's Third Reich.

The hard winter battles of 1944 had taken their toll. German forces had launched their final desperate attack in the Ardennes, the "Battle of the Bulge", but by January 1945, they were spent: Hitler's last gamble in the West had failed. The Allies pushed eastward until they reached the western bank of the River Rhine, Germany's last great natural barrier.

The Rhine was not just another river. It was deeply symbolic of German identity, a line the Germans vowed would never be crossed: and it was 400 yards wide.

But Montgomery, commanding 21st Army Group, had other ideas. His plan, known as Operation Plunder, would send the British 2nd Army and the U.S. 9th Army across the Rhine near the industrial town of Wesel, while airborne troops would seize a bridgehead in a daring assault codenamed Operation Varsity.

To cross the river and breach the heavy German fortifications, the British 2nd Army amassed 120,000 tonnes of ammunition, engineer stores, and special equipment. More than 60,000 combat engineers would participate in the assault, equipped with bridges, pontoons and specialist assault tanks, supported by 5,500 artillery pieces, anti-tank and anti-aircraft guns, and rockets. As Montgomery's briefed his commanders:

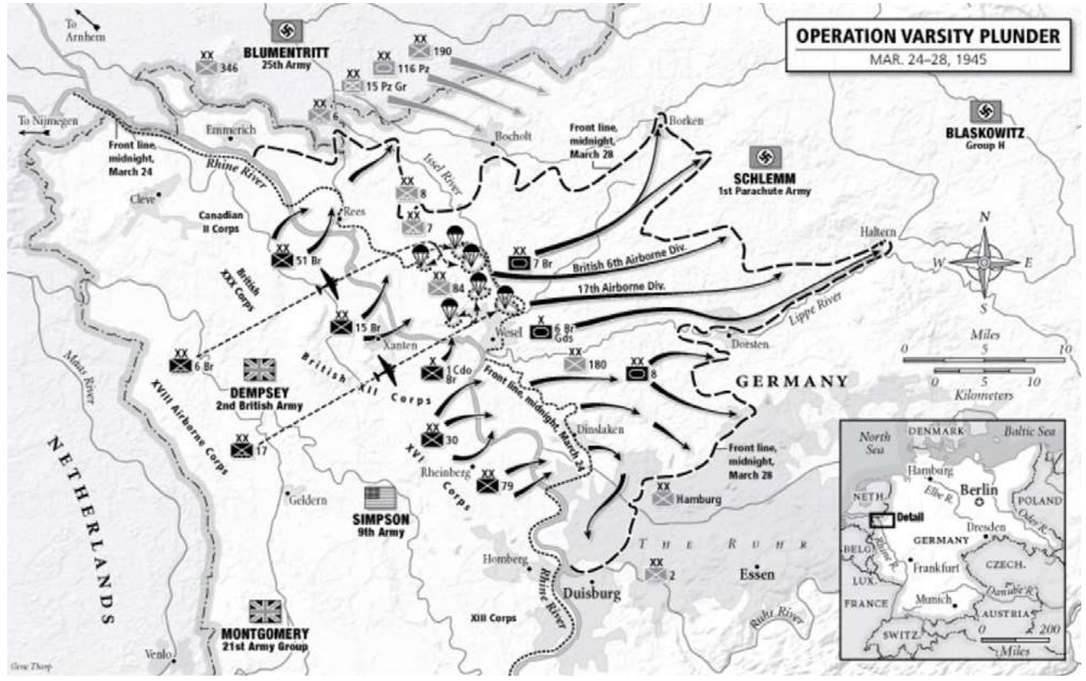
"21st Army Group will now cross the Rhine. The enemy possibly thinks he is safe behind this great river obstacle. We all agree that it is a great obstacle; but we will show the enemy that he is far from safe behind it. This great Allied fighting machine, composed of integrated land and air forces, will deal with the problem in no uncertain manner.

"And having crossed the Rhine, we will crack about in the plains of Northern Germany, chasing the enemy from pillar to post. The swifter and the more energetic our action, the sooner the war will be over, and that is what we all desire; to get on with the job and finish off the German war as soon as possible. Over the Rhine, then, let us go. And good hunting to you on the other side."

By mid-March 1945, Montgomery's forces were arrayed along the Rhine's western bank preparing for the assault, well protected by Allied control of the skies, for the *Luftwaffe* was a spent force.

The Germans opposing them were the battered remnants of General Alfred Schlemm's First Parachute Army; they were exhausted, but still dangerous. They dug in along the eastern bank, determined to make the British and Canadians pay dearly for every yard of progress.

As darkness fell on 23rd March, the silence was broken and the night sky erupted in flame. British and Canadian guns delivered one of the heaviest bombardments of the war, pounding



A map of Operation Plunder, March 24-28, 1945

German positions.

Just after midnight, assault troops pushed their boats into the river. Searchlights pierced the smoke to mark the way, as men of the 15th (Scottish) Division and the 51st (Highland) Division began their crossings near Rees and Xanten. German shells sploshed into the water; machine-gun fire rattled across the surface. Many boats were hit and men lost, but they pressed on. By dawn, bridgeheads had been secured, and engineers began building pontoon bridges under fire to get vehicles and logistic stocks across.

At first light on 24th March, thousands of paratroopers from the British 6th Airborne Division and the US 17th Airborne Division dropped behind German lines, 16,000 men descending from the sky in a hail of flak and tracer fire. They landed scattered and under heavy attack but quickly regrouped, capturing vital roads and bridges to stop German counterattacking towards the river.

Fierce fighting ensued on the eastern bank. German paratroopers, young, determined, and still disciplined, defended every village and wood-line. In ruined towns British troops fought street by street, clearing cellars and shattered buildings, the defenders refusing to yield until they were overwhelmed.

Allied firepower was devastating. Fighter-bombers screamed overhead, hunting down German vehicles. Artillery pounded every strongpoint. Within 24 hours the crossings were secure, and British armour was massing on German soil for the first time.

Montgomery's meticulous planning, often criticised for its caution earlier in the war, had paid off. Casualties were far lighter than expected. The operation was a textbook example of Allied coordination between land and air forces, something that had proved elusive earlier in the war.

By 26th March, the bridgehead was more than ten miles deep. Resistance crumbled as Montgomery's men surged forward, pushing eastwards into the German heartland alongside US forces who had crossed the Rhine further south.

For the soldiers, the Rhine crossings brought a strange mix of elation and weariness. Some had faced defeat at Dunkirk in 1940, then fought against Rommel in the western desert. Many had fought their way from Normandy, through Belgium and Holland, and now stood on the brink of victory. Within weeks, their advance would sweep through northern Germany, liberating cities like Bremen and Hamburg, and unearthing the full extent of Nazi evil at Bergen-Belsen. The crossing of the Rhine had opened the path to the final elimination of Hitler's Reich.

Watching the offensive from a forward vantage point at Rheinberg, Churchill commented to Eisenhower, "My dear General, the German is whipped. We have got him. He is all through." Montgomery's Operation Plunder was a symbolic triumph.

For the men who fought it, and for the families waiting at home, it was more than that. It was the moment when those who had confronted and survived the horrific challenges of WW2 at last had the end in sight.

British prime minister Winston Churchill (l) talks to Field Marshal Bernard Law Montgomery (r) and Field Marshall Sir Alan Brooke (m) in March 1945, shortly before the end of the war, during an improvised picnic on the shores of the Rhine in the Netherlands.

A Cossack family

A PERILOUS QUEST

By Count Nikolai Tolstoy

Count Nikolai Tolstoy is a historian and author of White Russian descent, known for exposing Allied forced repatriations after World War II and challenging official narratives.

At the beginning of 1978, I published my book *Victims of Yalta*, which recounted the tragic and shameful story of the forced repatriation of well over two million Soviet citizens and others handed over by the British and US governments following the close of World War II.

At the Central Mediterranean Force, commanded by Field Marshal Alexander, the Political Adviser was Harold Macmillan. On 13 May 1945 he flew to newly-occupied Austria, where he issued a "verbal directive" to the local Corps Commander, General Keightley.

In his diary compiled at the time, Macmillan noted of his visit that "among the surrendered Germans are about 40,000 Cossacks and 'White' Russians, with their wives and children. To hand them over to the Russians is condemning them to slavery, torture and probably death. To refuse is deeply to offend the Russians and incidentally break the Yalta agreement. We [*he and Keightley*] have decided to hand them over."

On his return to Allied Headquarters at Naples, Macmillan covertly pushed through his unexplained and brutal policy. Most of the Cossacks were either slaughtered on being handed over to SMERSH at Judenburg or died subsequently in Gulag's slave-labour camps.

Macmillan lied when he claimed that the Yalta Agreement of 1944 covered these shameful operations: in reality, the Agreement related to mutual repatriation of citizens in enemy hands at the close of hostilities. Despatching them to "slavery, torture and probably death" was naturally not intended by the British and American negotiators at Yalta (apart from Stalin, of course), requiring as it did the gravest violation imaginable of the 1929 Geneva Convention and the laws of humanity generally.

On the day before Macmillan's fateful visit to Austria, 15 Army Group in Italy reported that: "Eighth Army are holding some 40,000 Germans and 50,000 Cossacks, of which latter 20,000 are women and children, in their present Zone of Action". I fear Macmillan was as merciless as any SS killer.

To this shameful action the two British war criminals gratuitously arranged a parallel handover to the genocidal dictator Tito of tens of thousands of Yugoslav refugees in British hands. The betrayal of these troops and refugees to certain death at the hands of Tito's executioners was if anything more appalling – certainly more immediate – than the fate accorded the Cossacks.

Harold Macmillan

The great majority of Keightley's chief-of-staff Brigadier Toby Low (later Lord Aldington)'s victims were slaughtered: most of them were thrown into great natural chasms in the forest of Kocevje, where they were butchered by shooting. High explosives were detonated among the ever-increasing heap of victims.

Being of White Russian stock myself (my father escaped from the Soviet Union as a boy in 1920) I was more struck than might perhaps be others by Macmillan's inadvertent admissions. As the Cossacks were serving in the German Army in German uniforms, they fell under the protection of the 1929 Geneva Convention. They were accordingly prisoners of the power to which they had surrendered: in the case of the Cossacks, this was the British.

"I was smuggled by village priests and foresters to the dreadful natural pit in the forest of Kocevje, where thousands of victims had been slaughtered."

While the 1944 Yalta Agreement provided for the humanitarian return of Allied prisoners of war and refugees to their own countries immediately following the cessation of hostilities, it did not and could not legally transfer them to a third party likely to treat them with extreme brutality.

The situation was further exacerbated by the fact that the USSR had never acceded to the Geneva Convention, and (as Macmillan explicitly acknowledged) was notoriously cruel in its treatment of "class enemies". Worse still from the perspective of international law was the inclusion of White Russians for "return". This term covered people like my father who had fled Soviet rule, never held Soviet citizenship, and had in consequence either acquired that of the country where they had settled, or bore a League of Nations "Nansen passport".

Stalin was particularly concerned to lay hands on such people, whom he correctly regarded as being inherently hostile to Soviet oppression. It was in large part my background which made me particularly alert to this consideration. Previous English and American writers on the forced repatriation assumed that the White Russians prominent among the Cossacks were included "by mistake", and despite Macmillan's inadvertent admission in his diary, this pretext was eagerly adopted by subsequent defenders of his callous policy.

Over the years following publication of *Victims of Yalta*, fresh evidence inevitably came to light, in particular concerning the parallel secretive delivery to Tito of thousands of fugitive Yugoslav royalists and others. At a time when Communist rule in the former Yugoslavia was still all-powerful, I was smuggled by village priests and foresters to the dreadful natural pit in the forest of Kocevje, where thousands of victims had been slaughtered. Their piled bones remained as mute testimony to this abominable policy.

In due course I published a fresh book, The Minister and the Massacres, which included all the fresh evidence known to me at the time of writing. The Minister was of course Macmillan, which aroused frenzied rage on the part of the Establishment. But this did not distress me unduly!

Macmillan died about this time without ever having condescended to explain his responsibility for flagrant violations of international law and its horrific consequences. Keightley had died years earlier, before I could speak to him. I had, however, interviewed British soldiers of all

ranks who had been involved, the overwhelming majority of whom expressed, both at the time and since, their detestation and shame at being compelled to participate in operations all too comparable to those practised by the defeated Nazi enemy.

After Macmillan and Keightley had died, the sole surviving author of these deliberate infractions of the Christian code and international law alike was Lord Aldington, who had deliberately altered orders to confirm the inclusion of identified non-Soviet citizens among those particularly wanted by Stalin. Precisely similar conduct perpetrated by German chiefs of staff had been punished at the Nuremberg Tribunal with lengthy terms of imprisonment.

However, in consequence of events too complex to be recapitulated here, the only person punished for these mass war crimes was the writer of the present article. In 1989 I was fined £1,500,000 in the High Court, together with £500,000 to cover Aldington's costs. In fact, it turned out that Aldington had perjured himself when claiming costs, since it subsequently emerged that they had been secretly paid by Sun Alliance, of which Aldington had been Chairman.

Count Nikolai Tolstoy

However, legal judgments on historical events may prove delusory. Within a year, Aldington's alibi in 1945 was blown apart by unique contemporary evidence of his departure date discovered in the Public Record Office.

More astonishing still for me was the *volte face* in my position brought about by the collapse of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s. While in exile, Alexander Solzhenitsyn had been an outspoken defender of my cause, arranging for a Russian translation of *Victims of Yalta* to be published in Russian.

On his return to Russia, he became close to President Yeltsin, whom he urged to come to my aid. Yeltsin shared his view and instructed his chief-of-staff to contact me. In the course of a week, he telephoned me twice, enquiring what the President could do to help.

Although gratified by this offer, I could not see what even he might achieve. However, at the close of the same week I received a further call, in which I was politely asked whether it would assist were the President to grant me access to the relevant secret Soviet files!

"I should think so!" was my gleeful response, and within a couple of weeks I was received in the dreaded Lubyanka building, where the deputy head of the FSB (formerly KGB) General Kondaurov presented me with a bulky file of photocopied SMERSH documents from 1945.

There is insufficient room here to explain the extraordinary extent to which the new evidence upheld my accusations, but that it does to an unanticipated extent is set out in my recent book *Stalin's Vengeance*. (British publishers proving afraid to publish it, it came out in the United States).

I had from time-to-time entertained nightmares about entering the dreaded building but was now received with courtesy and total co-operation by the courteous Kondaurov. As General Volkogonov, head of the Russian archives, genially declared to me beforehand: "I hope you can see that your name still carries weight in our country."

A curious postscript to this dramatic visit occurred in the following year. Finding myself again in Moscow (I bear a Russian passport as well as a British one), I received from General Kondaurov an invitation to lunch at the Hotel Metropole, former headquarters of the Comintern.

After some pleasant discussion about this and that, he startled me with an invitation to head the international operations of Bank Menatep, in which he now occupied a senior position. I felt obliged to decline: not least because I am so innumerate that my wonderful wife Georgina (a loyal partner in all our adventures) long ago took over management of our household accounts.

Meanwhile, in the eyes of the English judiciary only one person remains guilty with regard to postwar British war crimes – and that is not Lord Aldington! Although his perjury is now public knowledge, the judiciary has needless to say made no move to throw out his claim for expenses; furthermore, the law has always held that the dead cannot be libelled. Although Aldington died at the turn of the century, my legal adviser's submission that the court injunction should accordingly be lifted has been met with an evasive refusal.

DECODING THE MODERN MIDDLE EAST

By Simon Mayall

Lieutenant General Sir Simon Mayall KBE is a retired British Army officer and a Middle East adviser at the Ministry of Defence.

Lieutenant General Sir Simon Mayall

The concept of the Middle East was largely a construct of the British Foreign Office in the 1850s, who sought to draw a distinction between Britain's colonies in the Far East, the Indian Raj, and her interests at the far end of the Mediterranean.

In doing so, they chose to encompass the totality of the declining Ottoman Empire's presence in the Eastern Mediterranean, the Levant and Mesopotamia, the Persian Empire of the Qajar dynasty, and those tribal areas that would, in time, become the Gulf States.

This area had geographical contiguity, positioned as it was between Asia, Europe and Africa, and, although extraordinarily diverse in terms of religion and ethnicity, it had been dominated by the religion of Islam for more than 1 200 years, and by the "organising principle" of "the Caliphate".

The twelve centuries since the death of the Prophet Mohammed in 632 can be divided into four broad periods. The first 600 years were the time of Arab dominance, when Islam destroyed or debilitated the Persian and Byzantine Empires.

During this period, the message of Allah was taken west, through the Holy Land, across North Africa, and up through Spain and over the Pyrenees, and east, by armies to Central Asia, and by maritime merchants, across the Indian Ocean, to the Malayan Peninsula and the islands of Indonesia.

For Muslims, only the divine intervention of God could account for such rapid and comprehensive success. In this period the capital of the Caliphate might have moved from Medina to Damascus, to Baghdad and then to Cairo, but the instinct for religious certainty would be undiminished. The only fly in the ointment in this period of expansion and success was the establishment and existence of the relatively short-lived Crusader kingdoms in the 12th and 13th centuries.

The second period was that of the late 15th and early 16th centuries, when the whole dynamic of the region was changed. This was a period when the Christians completed their reconquest of Spain, expelling Muslims from the Iberian Peninsula; when the Persian Safavid dynasty embraced Shi'ism as the official religion of Iran; and when the Turkic Ottomans defeated the Egyptian Mamluks, transferred the sword and the cloak of Mohammed to Istanbul, and with them the seat of the Sunni Caliphate.

The third period saw the cockpit of war move to the Mediterranean and to Central Europe, until Ottoman expansion was defeated outside the walls of Vienna in 1683, leading to a fourth period, that of a 250-year decline in Muslim power, with a corresponding increase in the power of the European, Christian empires.

This Muslim decline reached its nadir in 1918, when the Allied Powers, utilising the ethnic split between Turks and Arabs, defeated the Turks, forced the capitulation of the Ottoman Empire, and remade the Middle East in their own interests. At the same time, Kemal Ataturk, the Ottoman hero of Gallipoli, abolished both the Ottoman Sultanate, and subsequently the Caliphate.

The "new" Middle East no longer had any imperial or religious "organising principle", just an array of new political entities, including the new British Mandate territory of Palestine, with its commitment to providing a national home for the Jewish people, albeit with the caveat "that nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine".

It is easy to be critical of the Allied Powers for the nature of their approach to the region in the early 1920s, but the "original sin" lay with the Ottoman decision to back the Central Powers. Britain and France, wrestling with the tragedy of their own 2 million dead, were left with the consequences of Ottoman failure and collapse, not to mention that of the German, Austro-Hungarian and Russian Empires.

Needless to say, the reassuringly straight lines on the new maps of the Middle East, and those of Central and Eastern Europe, disguised the reality of the complex ethnic and religious mosaic that lay underneath, including all the frictions, fractures, and fissures.

A region whose multiple identities had, for more than a millennium, been rooted in family, clan, tribe and city, with religious loyalty owed to a distant Caliph, was now confronted with western concepts and models of nation, state, liberalism, democracy and secularism. In the intervening century this has, predictably and understandably, proved to be a very difficult and uneasy fit.

A region whose multiple identities had, for more than a millennium, been rooted in family, clan, tribe and city, with religious loyalty owed to a distant Caliph, was now confronted with western concepts and models of nation, state, liberalism, democracy and secularism. In the intervening century this has, predictably and understandably, proved to be a very difficult and uneasy fit.

The establishment of the State of Israel after World War Two added further religious and political complexity to the equation for, like the Crusader Kingdoms of an earlier time, its existence was deemed an affront to the establishment of Islam as the dominant ideological force across the region. Hence the routine use, by Al Qaeda and Islamic State, of the pejorative expression "Zionists and Crusaders".

Given the complexity of the region, when people now talk in general terms of the Middle East, they need to be challenged as to which Middle East they mean. Countries and regions may have very obvious geographical and physical length and breadth, but they also have very important historical and religious depth. Such cultural depth gives people, and peoples, the opportunity to create national mythologies, based on the selective use of entitlement, inspiration and grievance, as Putin has done in Russia.

In this context, a good way to approach an understanding of the Middle East is to adopt the model of the Olympic Rings. In such a model it is helpful to put the first ring around the Arabian Peninsula, which was the birthplace of the Prophet Mohammed, and the origin of Islam, its Five Pillars, the Koran, and the Two Holy Cities.

The second ring goes around Egypt, possibly the first "nation state", with its memories of pre-Islamic, Pharaonic greatness, and its more modern consciousness of Nasser and pan-Arab leadership.

The third ring goes around the modern Republic of Turkey, where the example and memories of Ottoman dominance are never far from the surface, even with its modern Islamist alignment.

The fourth ring fits over Iran, whose Persian imperial past continues to influence its attitude and approach to the region, and the world, and whose Islamic Revolutionary identity and championing of the Shia communities of the Muslim world has been so problematic in the last half-century.

The last ring, positioned in the centre of this geo-political Venn diagram, rests across the area of the "Sykes-Picot Agreement", and contains the modern states of Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Israel, and the Palestinian Territories, none of whose actions can be examined or understood without recourse to assessing the impact on, and the attitudes and reactions of, the other four rings. Only in this context can the Israeli – Hamas/Palestine/Gaza conflict be understood.

Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman of Saudi Arabia, President Sisi of Egypt, President Erdogan of Turkey and the Grand Ayatollah of Iran are all conscious of the continuing influence and responsibility that the cultural depth of their inheritances place upon them.

In 2016, the third bridge over the Bosphorus, named after the Ottoman Sultan Selim the Grim, was opened. It was Sultan Selim who had expanded the Ottoman Empire into the Middle East and North Africa in the 16th century, defeating the Mamluks and conducting a fierce and relentless campaign against the Shias and the Iranian Safavids. The symbolism was not lost on other countries in the region.

Truly, if you want to understand any issue in this fascinating, frustrating and fractious region, you will have to get yourself a bigger map.

BOISDALE CLUB

Membership: £240 Per Annum

For futher details, visit:
www.boisdale.co.uk/membership

NEW MEMBERS OFFER

Enjoy a free *Highclere Castle Gin & Artisan Tonic*
EVERY DAY for your 1st year! PLUS:

Exclusive 20% discount on a vast range of wines, whiskies, and cigars
Membership benefits extended to private dining and events
Free or subsidised exclusive tastings and events
Access to Boisdale of Canary Wharf's Member's Heated Garden Terrace
Priority access and bookings for Boisdale of Belgravia's Cigar Terrace
Free table upgrades (when available)
Member's discount on Boisdale online shop purchases
10% off music-only tickets at Boisdale of Canary Wharf for up to 4 tickets per show
Priority booking on selected acts and events
Member's exclusive special offers and discounts
Birthday treats for Members

BOISDALE

Creating memories since 1989

Two remarkable London venues.
One spirit of hospitality, live music and good living.

RESTAURANTS | BARS | LIVE MUSIC | CIGARS | HEATED TERRACES | DJ NIGHTS

BOISDALE.CO.UK | @BOISDALE_RESTAURANTS

Stanley Johnson and Jane Goodall, Gombe, Tanzania, January 2010

ME STANLEY, YOU JANE

By Stanley Johnson

Writer, environmentalist and former Conservative MP with a long-standing interest in wildlife conservation. He has written numerous books on environmental and animal welfare issues, including Where the Wild Things Were. A former trustee of the Jane Goodall Institute, he has travelled widely to document conservation efforts around the world.

Since the death of my friend Jane Goodall earlier this year, much has been written about her extraordinary and pioneering work. She was someone I had known and admired for years.

***I wanted to offer a personal tribute, based on my 2010 encounter with Jane and the chimpanzees in Gombe, as it appeared in my 2012 book* Where the Wild Things Were.**

I not only had the pleasure of meeting Jane at Gombe and elsewhere over the years, I also served as a trustee of the Jane Goodall Institute which, I'm glad to say, is continuing her good work not just with the chimpanzees in Tanzania, but for good causes around the world.

There are at least two good reasons for going to Kigoma, a dusty Tanzanian town situated on the eastern side of Lake Tanganyika, about 25 miles south of the Burundi border.

First, it was here, on November 10, 1871, that Henry Morton Stanley famously met David Livingstone. A mud-hut museum in nearby Ujiji contains a larger-than-life plaster-of-Paris model of the two men and other flyblown memorabilia.

Second, Kigoma is the jumping-off point for the amazing Gombe National Park, where, in 1960, at the age of 26, Dr Jane Goodall first began to study the behaviour of chimpanzees in the wild. She was sent there by Dr Louis Leakey, the renowned palaeontologist, who spotted her potential. "He watched me, he saw how I behaved with animals, he realised that I didn't care two hoots about the things that lots of girls care about - clothes, hairdressing.

He saw I was very tough and I could make do with very simple things: every day we had just one cupful of water for washing. He also realised I had an absolute passion for animals."

Jane Goodall and infant chimpanzee Flint, the first infant born at Gombe after Jane arrived

Fifty years on, it's hard to think of any long-term wildlife research that has achieved such great worldwide recognition. The fact that chimpanzees are our closest living relatives, sharing 99% of our DNA, has made insights into their behaviour and social structures especially relevant. "They can be loving and compassionate, and yet they have a dark side", was Jane's view.

Goodall has been criticised by the scientific establishment for giving the chimps names, not numbers; for distorting their behaviour by feeding them bananas; and indeed for having no scientific training.

Her fans, however, argue that it was her fresh approach and empathy that enabled her to make new discoveries in the field. "There's no sharp line dividing us from the rest of the animal kingdom", she maintains. It was she who learnt that chimpanzees not only use tools but also make them, for instance, stripping twigs to "fish" for termites. This challenged many scientists' belief that we humans are unique in our tool-making abilities.

I have seen chimpanzees in the wild in Kibale, in Uganda, and in the Ngamba Island sanctuary on Lake Victoria. But for me Gombe has long been some kind of Mecca. To track Jane Goodall down was no mean feat. She travels for more than 300 days a year, campaigning for conservation. So when I learnt that she was to visit Gombe, I asked to meet her there.

I flew into Dar es Salaam, and after a night's recuperation at the magnificent Kilimanjaro Hotel Kempinski, I continued on to Kigoma. And finally, there she was, on the veranda of the Jane Goodall Institute (JGI) headquarters. "Stanley, I presume?" she joked. Then she gave me a great bear hug and invited me in for a cup of tea.

Anyone who has read Jane's books, particularly *In the Shadow of Man*, her account of her early years at Gombe, will know how she first came here. But to hear her retell the tale right there at Gombe made it especially piquant.

Brought up in Bournemouth after her parents' divorce, Jane left school at 18, took a secretarial course and a couple of different jobs, before jumping at the chance to stay at a school friend's parents' farm in Kenya. There, in Nairobi, she met Dr Leakey, who was the curator of what is now the Nairobi National Museum, and was offered, with one other girl, the opportunity to accompany Leakey and his wife, Mary, on one of their annual paleontological expeditions to Olduvai Gorge in the Serengeti plains.

It was Leakey who told Jane about a chimpanzee population at Gombe, suggesting that she might undertake an unprecedented study of them in the wild. In those days before women's liberation, the proposal must have been highly unusual. The (then colonial) authorities certainly felt so. They were not happy about an unaccompanied white woman camping for months in the bush. But Jane had wanted to live with animals since reading the Tarzan books as a child, and she had the support of her mother, Vanne, who told her: "If you work hard and really want something and never give up, you'll find a way".

"Louis Leakey helped find the funds to finance my first field work", Jane recalled. "But the authorities wouldn't let me set up camp on my own". Fortunately, Vanne was able to come with her. Her presence at Gombe during Jane's first stint in 1960 was absolutely central. Vanne helped out in many ways, looking after the camp while Jane was in the hills, running a clinic for nearby villagers, above all just being there. "I still have some of my mother's ashes in a dried-milk tin at the camp", Jane confided. "I'm planning to scatter them in her favourite places at Gombe".

Jane Goodall with palaeoanthropologist Dr. Louis Leakey

Frodo the chimpanzee

We journeyed across the lake to Gombe itself, joined by a guide, Bernard Gichobi, and by Dr Anthony Collins, a director of her institute, who has worked with Jane since the 1970s, but still manages to look after his wife and family in north London. “It’s hard”, he confessed as the boat got underway, “but somehow after so many years I feel more at home here than in England”.

Lake Tanganyika is the second-deepest lake in the world, containing 17% of the world’s fresh surface water. It is bounded to the west by the Democratic Republic of Congo. Over the years there have been frequent incursions, even invasions, by refugees both from the Congo and from Burundi. The signs of population pressure are obvious: hillsides denuded of vegetation; dramatic gullies where the exposed soil has been eroded from the hills in heavy rains. At the boundary of the park, however, the change is dramatic. At last you see the luxuriant sweep of trees that you expect of a tropical rainforest.

Jane and Anthony were to stay in the house Jane and her first husband, the photographer Hugo van Lawick, built in the early 1970s. They divorced, and in 1975 she married Derek Bryceson, a former RAF hero and director of Tanzania’s national parks. Five years later, he died of cancer, a tragedy that is still raw.

I was staying a mile or two away in the Gombe Forest Lodge, a privately run tented camp. Jane and Anthony came up there in the boat. After sunset, we lit a fire on the beach and opened a bottle of whisky. We looked out over the flat-calm surface of the lake to the lights of a line of fishing boats, extending as far as the eye could see, and I found myself thinking about the ripple effect of the Jane Goodall phenomenon. The importance of Jane’s research certainly helped to ensure Gombe’s designation in 1968 as a national park. This in turn increased the protection not just for Gombe’s chimpanzee population, but for other denizens of the forest - baboons, monkeys, egrets, herons, eagles, vultures… and, crucially, for the forest itself.

Last December Jane was in Denmark at the Climate Change Summit. “A lot of things went wrong in Copenhagen - or didn’t come right - but I think everyone recognised how vital the forests are. I was with Chief Almir of the Surui tribe from Amazonian Brazil. We were part of the South-South Initiative, which trains indigenous and local people to monitor their forests using Google Android cellphones. This information goes straight up to a satellite. It will enable them to prove they are indeed protecting their forests and thereby qualify for international assistance”.

What an extraordinary journey it has been for her! The 26-year-old dragging up her boat on to the shore, with “one ex-army tent, one pair of lousy binoculars and a couple of tin mugs and plates”, has turned into a star of the international circuit. Hectic as her life now is, she doesn’t want to be known simply as “the chimpanzee lady”. In 2002, Kofi Annan, the then secretary-general of the UN, appointed her, with other notable personalities, as a messenger of peace. She told me: “I was the only one who actually showed up in New York for the ceremony”.

Stanley, Dr. Anthony Collins, Jane Goodall and Bernard Gichobi

As the whisky bottle went round again, Jane remembered the moment in May 1975 when the Congo exploded into their lives. “It was the middle of the night. The kidnappers came in by boat, parked on the beach down there” - she waved towards the spot. “They grabbed four of the students. They sent one of them back almost at once with a message. The parents came out.

I think money was paid, because the next two were released. I think the figure was $250,000. But the fourth didn’t come back for some time”.

She was evidently deeply marked by that event. In practical terms, it meant she had to give up full-time residence at Gombe. “We had to go: the authorities wouldn’t let us stay”. But even without the abductions, one wonders how long Jane and Hugo could have remained. Kidnappers were not the only menace. They had a son, Grub, to bring up, and Gombe is not safe for an infant. Jane had noted early on that chimpanzees were omnivores. She showed me “Grub’s cage”: a wire-netting enclosure, it was designed to protect the boy, but was not a long-term solution.

Later, Anthony was to tell me how Frodo, a male chimpanzee, once grabbed, killed and partially ate a village woman’s child.

Next day, I took a trek up through the Gombe hills to find a group of chimpanzees located by trackers earlier that morning. “That’s Freud”, Anthony told me. “He used to be the alpha male, but he’s been supplanted by Ferdinand. And here comes Frodo, watch out!” I had put my backpack on the ground and Frodo was out to get it. He had also been an alpha male and was now making a bit of a comeback.

A mother and daughter chased each other around a tree. Groups of chimpanzees called to each other across the clearing, “pant-hooting”. The alpha male shook the trees and the females submitted to his will. “If they don’t come at once”, said Anthony, “Ferdinand will beat them up”.

When we met up with Jane, we gave her a full account of the day’s events. The last chimpanzee of those she first met in 1960 died three years ago, so she has known all 106 of the current Gombe chimpanzees since their birth. Her thinking about her extended family has evolved over the years. If she ever idealised them, she has moved on. She has witnessed terrible internecine fighting, as one group all but obliterated another. She watched a deadly rampage as one female took her daughter on a killing spree, murdering and devouring any infant chimpanzees they came across.

When we told her that Frodo had charged my backpack, she shook her head. “I’m afraid to go out now if Frodo’s around. He makes a beeline for me and tries to knock me down. He almost killed me once, dragging me to the edge of a cliff and pushing me over. Mind you, I think he knew there were trees that would block my fall”.

Despite such fears for her safety, even today she insists on walking the hills alone, hour after hour. I remarked that nobody wants to hear on the news that she is dead. She smiled. “It would be quite a story, wouldn’t it? I wonder what it would do for the cause of conservation, ‘Jane Goodall killed by chimpanzee!’”

It would be more than a personal tragedy. Goodall is still desperately needed, not just in Tanzania, but in the wider world. While we were in Gombe, the US announced a grant of $5.5m to her institute, to support community development in more than a score of villages, extensive forest regeneration and corridors linking Gombe with other areas with important wildlife populations including chimpanzees. The new grant is intended to build on, and to expand, JGI’s programme of community-based conservation, known as TACARE (Lake Tanganyika Catchment Reforestation and Education).

“It has changed the attitude of every village around Gombe”, Jane said. Local people are eager to protect the animals they now view as “their” chimpanzees from the bushmeat trade. The culmination of her life’s work lies in mobilising rising generations. Twenty-one years ago, sitting with young Tanzanians on the terrace of her house in Dar es Salaam, she conceived the idea of the Roots and Shoots programme, aimed at encouraging children all over the world to develop their own clubs and associated projects. Today it has a network of tens of thousands of participants in more than 100 countries. And she continues to campaign with evangelical zeal.

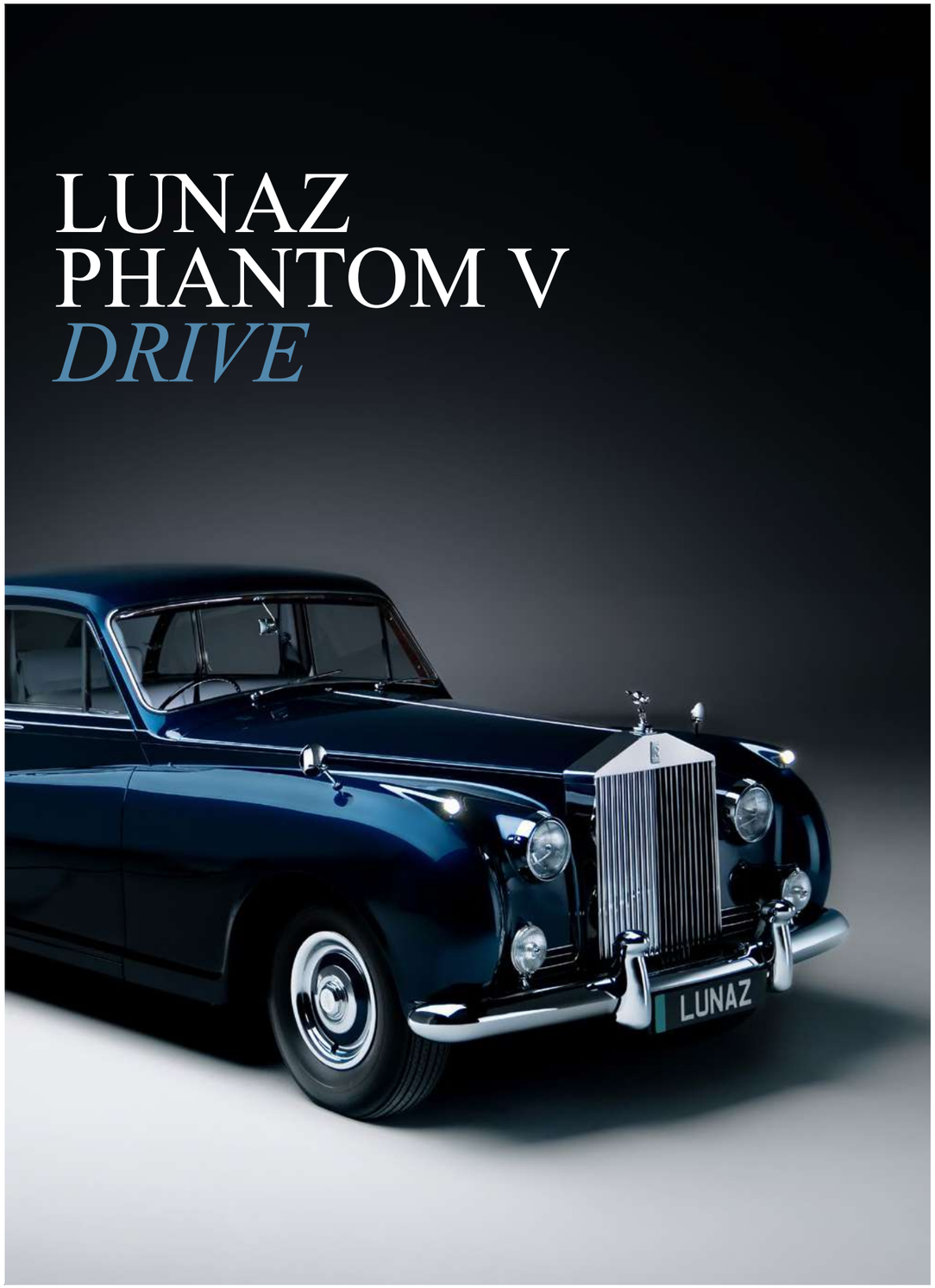
That night at dinner, she said: “Think of the most beautiful tree you know. Then think of how that tree began. When little shoots try to reach the sunlight, they can break through the cracks in the wall. Actually, they can bring the wall down”.

We all knew what Dr Jane Goodall CBE meant. We raised our glasses. “Happy 50th anniversary, Jane,” we chorused.

Jane Goodall Institute

The Jane Goodall Institute is at www.janegoodall.org.uk/

LUNAZ PHANTOM V *DRIVE*



By Adam Hay-Nicholls

Adam Hay-Nicholls is a journalist and author specialising in motoring, luxury, and travel. He contributes to titles including Boisdale Life*,* The Times *and* Country Life*, and is known for his witty, first-hand takes on high-end cars and culture.*

This year, Rolls-Royce has toasted 100 years of its Phantom limousine. It's a car that still makes people stand to attention. It is, and has always been, an Everest of metalwork – a monument to the idea that refinement is simply vulgarity with better manners. It's a rolling reliquary of British self-regard and it's maintained its reputation through a century of constant, often profound change.

The Phantom V presented on these pages is the most iconic of eight generations. This is the car you buy when you've run out of space to store your art collection and have taken to hoarding duchesses. It came to market in 1959, and over 13 years 832 were built. They were delivered to royals, rockers and rogues. Famously, John Lennon had his tarted up to look like a gypsy caravan, which made the Queen weep into her gin. They were all bespoke, but the Phantom seen here is the most unusual of all. Like The Beatles' back catalogue, it's been remastered.

While Rolls-Royce are busy making Phantom VIIIs, a start-up called Lunaz, based in Silverstone, has turned its attention to the Spirit of Ecstasy's vintage hits. They'll exhume an old Rolls, strip the whole thing down to the paint, and re-build it with discrete modern technology and the latest in leather and marquetry, so what you're left with is a 1960s motor that's basically brand new bar the chassis plate. All the nostalgia, none of the leaks.

Most novel is the powertrain. At this point purists may start to bleed from the teeth, but as well as restoring the car and putting in things like electric dampers, modern electric windows and windscreen wipers, USB ports and a discrete sat nav and reversing camera (which you will need), under the bonnet is a vast, humming sarcophagus of lithium.

The Phantom V now has sat-nav, which would've been spy-fi in the '60s

Are you telling me this sucker is electrical? Yes, m'lady. In place of the original 6.23-litre V8 is a proprietary powertrain which produces just shy of 400bhp (the original only mustered 220bhp). Weight has only increased by 90kg, as it was so sumo-sized to begin with - a whalish 2.7 tonnes.

The price: More than a million quid. Who's in the market for this emission-free leviathan that's 30-times the cost of a Tesla and took 5,500 hours to build? Very wealthy people, obviously, who appreciate classic lines and state-of-the-art tech, who perhaps have been put off classic car ownership before because they don't want to breakdown, belch fumes or cover their alabaster gravel driveways in engine oil. And given a Rolls-Royce should be smooth, silent and bullet-proof, it makes more sense than any other EV out there. Another party that's taken an interest are extremely high-end hotels who love to have a statement piece parked out front, something truly memorable to whisk guests from the airport, and they like that this emphasises their green credentials.

Lunaz are in talks with a number of properties, including the Maybourne group, which manages The Berkeley, The Connaught, The Emory and Claridge's in London. This is where epic blag of the day No.1 comes in: I've acquired an impressive suite at The Berkeley overlooking Hyde Park, champagne in the ice bucket for after my spin. Epic blag of the day No.2 is parked in front, resplendent in navy blue, with pale hide and enough walnut to reforest Surrey. A Phantom fit for the two kings – Charles III and Elvis. The owner of this 1961 piece of automotive sculpture is Adar Poonawalla, an Indian biotech billionaire who collects Rolls-Royces the way other people collect air miles, who also happens to be an investor in Lunaz (something he has in common with Sir David Beckham).

A Phantom is as at home in Belgravia as a three-wheeler in Peckham

Lunaz's founder, David Lorenz, took me through the controls before leaving me to my own devices. At which point I put Led Zeppelin on full blast and wafted my way around Belgravia and Knightsbridge. It was Halloween, and the streets were thick with witches, vampires and skeletons. The Phantom is spectral not only in name. Even without an exhaust pipe, it seems to create its own fog. Scarier still is its titanic length, which means you have to be very careful around SW1's tighter corners, not helped by wing mirrors that reveal almost nothing. The turning circle, David told me, has been much improved, but I'd still measure it in postcodes. The steering is light at speed, but the crawling pace of Sadiq Khan's traffic means you really have to put your back into it. Manoeuvring it in rush hour was like trying to fold the Natural History Museum. Yet it glides with ethereal beauty, and draws open-mouthed stares not of envy but respect. Pedestrians stop and bow slightly without realising they're doing it. You could drive it over a fainted guardsman and not feel a bump. Rolls-Royce always talk about the champagne test: Can you floor it without spilling your passengers' drinks? The torque delivery here is even smoother than Sir Henry Royce managed.

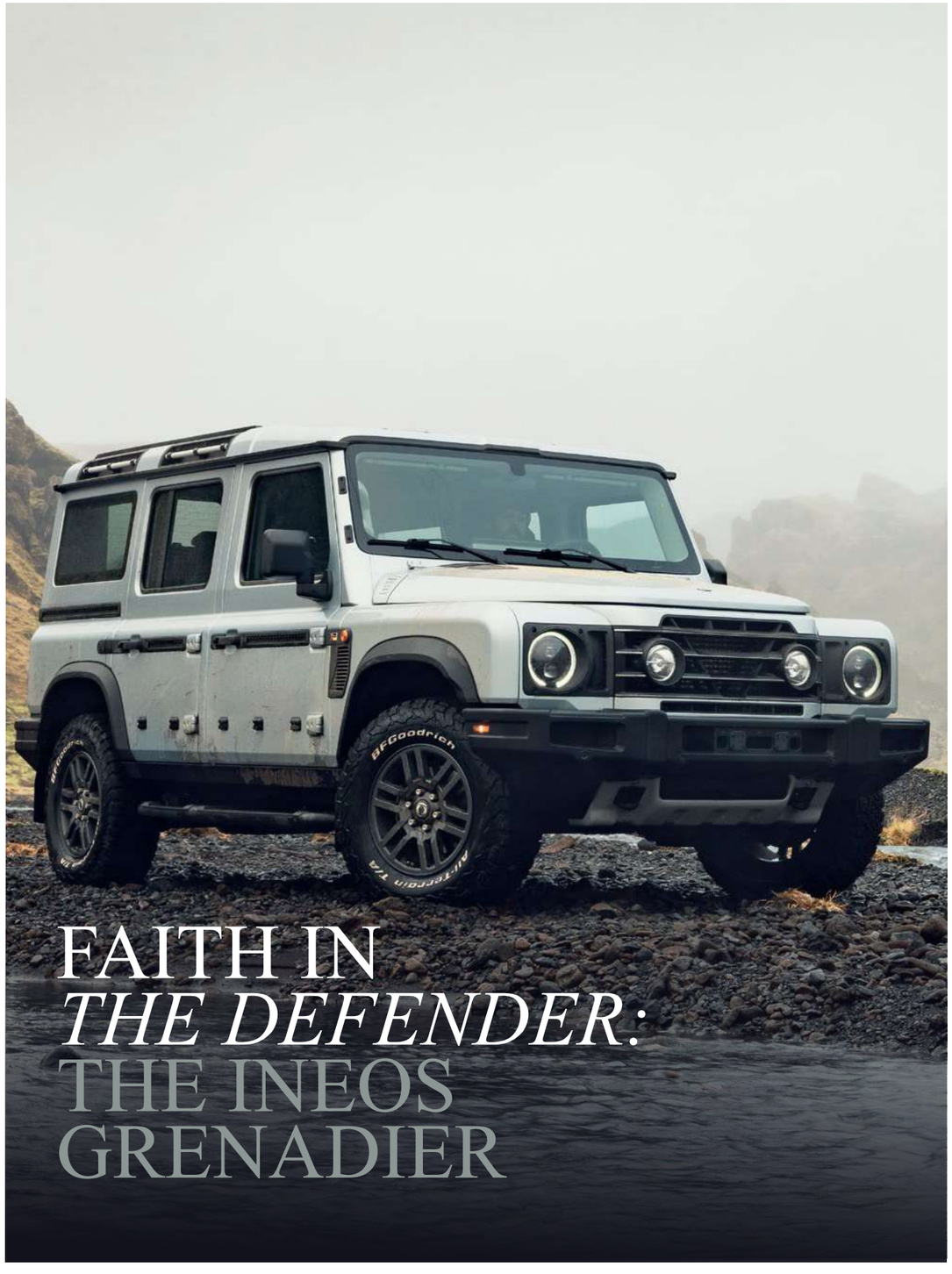
A Phantom is really all about rear passengers, so I went and picked some up. I swung by the Fox & Hounds on Passmore Street, my local, and loaded four regular punters and the landlady in the back (there are two additional flip-down seats either side of the custom whisky bar) while the barmaid gamely shared the bench seat upfront and played co-pilot. The pub was left unsupervised as we cruised the length of the King's Road, which I'm sure did marvellous things for the profits.

I went back to The Berkeley for phase two of my mission. The test driving of fancy cars was something I often parlayed into my romantic life back in the day, or at least the hope of a romantic life. Then I came to learn that it's stressful enough driving a six or seven-figure car with which one is unfamiliar without the extra dollop of nervousness that comes with trying to charm your way into someone's knickers at the same time.

Therefore, for my next test I employed a chauffeur who would dispatch my date and I to and from the Royal Albert Hall to see the Irish rock band Inhaler. Apt, I felt, given the Phantom V is the most rock n' roll car of all time. The pulchritudinous date in question was far out of my league you won't be surprised to hear, much like the car, but if The Berkeley and a Phantom weren't going to do the trick, nothing was. For a few glorious hours the world seemed to belong entirely to us – or at least to Adar Poonawalla's insurance company.

It has at least earned me the promise of a second date, though I'm not sure a basement flat and an Uber is going to get the job done. The Lunaz Phantom allowed me to dream for a day.

Checking into The Berkeley with family in tow – the shorter-wheelbase Lunaz Silver Cloud



FAITH IN *THE DEFENDER*: THE INEOS GRENADIER

By Ben Oliver

Ben Oliver writes about cars and the car industry for newspapers and magazines around the world: his favourite assignment saw him drive a standard Mini to the highest place a car can go, the 18,000ft Khardung La pass in the Indian Himalayas. Ben also writes about technology, travel and watches and runs a business in the film industry.

It is hard to imagine a more Boisdale car than the Ineos Grenadier. It was conceived in and named after another Belgravia drinking hole, in this case the Grenadier pub owned by Sir Jim Ratcliffe: founder of the Ineos chemicals group, part-owner of Manchester United and occasionally Britain's richest man. The pub also lends its name to the Ineos Grenadiers, Sir Jim's all-conquering professional cycling team.

Like Boisdale and much of its clientele, the Ineos Grenadier revels in wilful idiosyncrasy and iconoclasm, rejecting the engineering orthodoxy which has sucked the life and character out of other modern cars.

And, like Boisdale, it is rural by inclination, if largely urban by location: it was designed to be bought and used by farmers, adventurers, field sports enthusiasts and the horsey set, even if most will be confined to town.

The story of the Grenadier's genesis is as unusual as its design. Sir Jim loved the original Land Rover Defender, and, when its maker announced that it would kill it off in 2015, he tried to buy the tooling to keep it in production. Land Rover refused, not wishing to distract attention from the modern reinterpretation of the Defender it has since launched. Irked, Sir Jim responded as only a billionaire can, deciding to establish his own carmaker after few pints in his own pub.

Land Rover then objected to the Grenadier's design, claiming in court that it was too close to that of the outgoing Defender. The litigation which ensued (and the pandemic) meant that the Grenadier wasn't launched until early 2024. The bankruptcy of a major supplier then forced Ineos to suspend production for months, and the uncertainty over tariffs has disrupted its introduction to the US, easily its biggest market. Put all this together and the car first conceived a decade ago is only now hitting its stride.

"The Grenadier feels remarkably well-made, as if its maker has been doing this for years. And that's because it has."

Despite his other responsibilities, Sir Jim was very hands-on during its design and testing, and he has made the car he always wanted. The question is, does anyone else? The Grenadier has a deliberately archaic chassis, suspension and steering design: more capable and largely unbreakable off-road, but leaving it with somewhat agricultural manners on-road, where it will spend the vast majority of its time.

Traditionalists will rejoice in its resolutely unelectrified drivetrain: the Grenadier uses a 3.0-litre BMW straight six in either petrol or diesel, driving all four wheels (of course)

through an eight-speed automatic gearbox and up to three differential locks for extreme off-roading. Don't worry if you don't know what a differential lock is: despite Sir Jim's intentions, most Grenadier owners won't know either, and I suspect they will never touch those particular switches.

"The feel inside is more premium-utilitarian rather than pure luxury: think Belstaff motorcycle jackets, a company Sir Jim also owns."

From the outside, you can see why Land Rover objected. Rather than employ a conventional car designer, Sir Jim gave the job to Toby Ecuyer, the designer of his yachts.

The resulting exterior is upright, functional and rectilinear: not conventionally handsome, but certainly not the amorphous blob too many modern cars become when their makers prioritise aerodynamic and energy efficiency.

Ecuyer's contrarian approach works better inside. Here the modern, Tesla-led trend towards controlling most

Interior of the Grenadier

The Inios Grenadier roof panel

of a car's functions via a massive touchscreen has been rejected in favour of banks of chunky rocker switches designed to be operated in gloves, redolent of a military helicopter. They even extend to a panel in the roof. No first-time passenger will climb aboard (and it is a climb) without commenting on them.

For a product from a new carmaker, the Grenadier feels remarkably well-made, as if its maker has been doing this for years. And that's because it has.

Sir Jim isn't daft, and although the design idiosyncrasies of the Grenadier are all his, he drafted in experts to build it. Austrian firm Magna-Steyr, which builds the mighty G-Class for Mercedes-Benz did the engineering, and the Grenadier is assembled in a former Mercedes plant in Alsace, explaining the entwined British and French flags on the exterior. The doors close with a pleasingly mechanical, very 1980s clunk-click, and the feel inside is more premium-utilitarian rather than pure luxury: think Belstaff motorcycle jackets, a company Sir Jim also owns.

Although it is technically and legally a passenger car, those agricultural underpinnings mean that, to drive, the Grenadier feels less like a conventional car than anything else on the road. Everybody comments on the steering: the turning circle is so large that parking is more akin to bringing a destroyer around, with a similar number of turns of the tiller required. The diesel engine is gruffly audible (but those who despair at the electrification of the car will welcome that) and the ride is surprisingly comfortable, especially at speed, if only because the Grenadier's weight crushes all below it.

For all its flaws, I adore it. It can boast what too many modern cars lack: character, idiosyncrasy and a sense of itself. And, having driven it extensively across the great estates of the Highlands, I can attest that its on-road compromises at least deliver unstoppable off-road abilities, matching the rock-crawling abilities of the original Defender which inspired it.

When the Grenadier was first launched, cynics questioned Sir Jim's aim of such a Marmite vehicle finding 30,000 customers per year, but his seemingly contrarian approach may turn out to be prescient. Old-school off-roaders like the Grenadier have not been swept away by the rising tide of bland Chinese EVs, as some feared they might.

Quite the opposite. The new Defender has been a riotous success: it is Land Rover's biggest-seller by a country mile, accounting for nearly a third of its 375 000 annual production, and the lion's share of last year's £2.5bn profit, the company's best in ten years. The Mercedes G-Class, meanwhile, is recording its best quarterly sales in its 46-year history and has been outselling the S-class in the US.

BMW is the latest carmaker to develop a proper mud-plugger, due to appear in 2029 and its first since the 1930s. The Toyota Land Cruiser had a recent retro reboot, and even the Chinese carmakers are getting involved: the Great Wall Tank and Yangwang U8 are both proper off-roaders with a similar, old-school body-on-frame construction to the Grenadier. The U8 can even swim.

The Grenadier doesn't need to capture much of this growing market to be success. Polarising design and engineering are an advantage when you only need a small percentage of the market to love it enough to buy it, as is a brand which only makes proper, rugged off-roaders and isn't seen on hatchbacks. There's an electric sibling to the Grenadier planned, to be launched when demand for EVs recovers.

Until then, Sir Jim's "eff-you" to Land Rover will continue to win customers at a surprising rate. I suspect that more than a few of them will be Boisdale regulars.

INEOS GRENADIER

From
£62,495

A rare and intimate homage to Uisge Beatha (Scots Gaelic for "the water of life"), hosted by whisky legend Mark Thomson (right) and Jonathan Ray of The Spectator

THE WATER OF LIFE

A once in a lifetime extraordinary journey across Scotland with the old scarce whiskies

By Mark Thomson

Whisky specialist Mark Thomson has worked in the industry in a variety of rôles for 25 years: a Keeper of the Quaich, he is also a three-time winner of Whisky Ambassador of the Year.

I recently had the delight of hosting a very special whisky evening at Boisdale Canary Wharf, held in conjunction with *The Spectator*. Our select group included Ranald Macdonald and Jonathan Ray, *The Spectator*'s wine columnist.

The whiskies were selected from the Duncan Taylor collection. Duncan Taylor Scotch Whisky is an independently owned scotch whisky specialist which was established as a cask broker and trading company in 1938. The company's devotion to the principles of providing exceptional casks for filling from the finest distilleries, has been a key feature of its history. The multi-award-winning company has built a reputation for its ownership of one of the largest privately held collections of some of the world's most sought after vintage and rare whiskies, and it continues to act as a reputable whisky merchant, blender, bottler, and cask broker.

My aim for the evening was to "impress with the liquid" and (after much deliberation with Duncan Taylor's UK sales director, Andrew Sinat) we had before us an incredible array of drams totalling more than £150k... in just six bottles.

So how exactly does one decide on a running order for such exceptional whiskies?

I chose flavour and character over distillery, region or age, starting with a single-cask Bruichladdich from 1991. Islay whiskies typically have coal tar soap and smoke billowing from the glass, but this particular bottle was unpeated and – as it was only from an American oak cask – had an incredibly sweet and salty nose. A true coastal whisky, which started the evening as I wanted it to: with surprise, delight and plenty of questions.

Jonathan Ray of The Spectator

Next up, a (long!) hop to Orkney and a Highland Park from 2004. Initially matured in an American oak cask, it showed wonderfully warm vanilla and salted caramel notes, with a hint of Orkney smoke (much more delicate that its Islay cousins). A nine-month finish in a small European oak cask, known as an octave, wrapped the entire character in rich toffee and Christmas spice. Duncan Taylor is renowned for the octave process: they began using it in the early 2000s and it is now responsible for the majority of their portfolio's brands.

Now to the mainland; again, I was hoping to throw a curveball with the next offering: a 1987 Dumbarton 35-year-old single octave. This distillery no longer exists: when it did, most of its production was used to help create Ballantine's blended Scotch. So it is not only rare to see as a whisky in its own right, but even rarer to sample it with such age. A buttery, warm, cocoa and popcorn delight which surprised many around the table.

From the banks of the Clyde to the banks of the Spey, and once again opened a long-gone distillery: Caperdonich. The distillery was built across the road from Glen Grant and was called Glen Grant No 2 until the 1960s when it took on the name it kept until its closure in 2002. A single malt of exceptional style and grace, this 50yr old from 1969 was from a single cask of American oak only which allowed the whisky to develop its soft pulpy orchard fruit note, sweet vanilla, hints of coffee and light backing spices. It really was the stand-out glass of the evening. Boisdale had paired this with a vanilla cheesecake and the combination could not have been more perfect.

With only two whiskies left in the evening, it was time to bring in some heavy-hitters and there are none greater when it comes to flavour punch than Laphroaig. Renowned for its bold, heavily seated aroma and powerful palate I could see as it was introduced a few faces being pulled indicating what I already knew would be the case - not all whisky drinkers are lovers of peat. With this known, the Laphroaig Decided to introduce was 28yrs old and a single cask which, with its age allowed the flavours to integrate, dissipate in some cases and become an intriguing and far more approachable style of Laphroaig - a gateway peated dram perhaps.

Before I reveal the final whisky I think it's worth saying here that although this event was aimed at the whisky lover, there was more than one guest at the event who were beginning their whisky journey and had come along to learn more and perhaps develop a love for the water of life. I have to say that the only issue they may have after this tasting is that it may be difficult to continue the exploration when the bar has been set so very high with the line-up of the evening.

Mark Thomson

Finally, a Macallan. Possibly the world's best known single malt brand and as such, there were no surprises here. The 1991 31yr old Octave single cask I'd selected was exactly what you should expect from such a distillery. Big, bold, rich and intriguing on the nose with cedar, raisins, red apple and cinnamon spice. The palate followed suit with a rounded, integrated character some said reminded them of Black Forest gâteau or Christmas cake. The bite sized morsel of rich dark chocolate brownie alongside was this luxurious drams perfect partner.

As the evening drew to a close, glasses drained but conversations still lively, it struck me how whisky has this rare ability to connect people — whether long-time aficionados or curious newcomers. That night at Boisdale wasn't just about rare drams; it was about shared discovery, good company, and the joy that comes from exploring flavour together. A true celebration of the spirit in every sense.

If you wish to learn more about Duncan Taylor please email: sales@duncantaylor.com

The calibre of the Christiaan Van Klaauw, Grand Planetarium

INDEPENDENT WATCHMAKING, THE BOISDALE WAY

Alon Ben Joseph

By Alon Ben Joseph

*Alon Ben Joseph is an independent watch journalist and co-founder of leading watch podcast "*The Real Time Show".

The reason I became a Boisdale Club member is simple: it was love at first sight. The moment I stepped into Boisdale Belgravia, I felt as though I'd come home. Both Boisdale establishments are a living embodiment of their founder, Ranald Macdonald: unique, full of character, eclectic, soulful, and positively dripping with quality. For those who appreciate sartorial elegance, you'll be familiar with the Italian term *sprezzatura*, that studied nonchalance, the art of making the difficult look effortless. That, in essence, is what Ranald and his exceptional team deliver daily in the world of hospitality. Calling it "casual luxury" would be a disservice. It's art. It's masterful.

Over a spontaneous and thoroughly enjoyable lunch at Boisdale of Belgravia with Ranald, he asked me a question that stopped me mid-sip of a glorious Château La Mission Haut-Brion 2006: "Who are the true artists of the watchmaking world, those who still craft their own movements?" The red wine, rich with blackcurrant, tobacco, cedar and earthy truffle, remained untouched as I launched into an impassioned oration.

Naturally, I began with the British Grand Masters: Roger W. Smith, heir to the late George Daniels on the Isle of Man; Charles Frodsham & Co., arguably the finest watchmaker in the UK; Struthers Watchmakers, a husband-and-wife duo reviving British haute horlogerie; and Garrick Watchmakers, known for their bespoke craftsmanship.

From there, we journeyed swiftly to Switzerland, home to the classicists: Greubel Forsey, Ferdinand Berthoud, Philippe Dufour, Kari Voutilainen, Rexhep Rexhepi, F.P. Journe, and Petermann Bédat, all of whom produce watches entirely in-house. Though not fully in-house, I must tip my hat to the avant-garde visionaries who have reimagined time itself: Urwerk, founded by Felix Baumgartner and Martin Frei; and MB&F, the brainchild of Max Büsser. Heading north, we find the German masters. While A. Lange & Söhne is the most recognised, it's arguably become a touch too mainstream (dare I say, industrial). I am far more excited by Lang & Heyne, Moritz Grossmann, Jochen Benzinger, and D. Dornblüth & Sohn, who continue to push the boundaries of traditional craftsmanship.

As a proud Dutchman, I must give an honourable mention to the disciples of the legendary Christiaan Huygens: Christiaan van der Klaauw; the Grönefeld brothers; Michiel Holthinrichs; and Stefan Ketelaars, all of whom design and produce their own calibres.

And what of the United States? For years, no watch brand could legally bear the title "Made in the USA", one of the strictest manufacturing standards in the world. That changed when Californian watchmaker Josh N. Shapiro rose to the challenge. His creation, the Resurgence, is the first modern American timepiece to earn that distinction.

In my enthusiasm, I barely left room for Ranald to get a word in edgeways. He eventually cut in and asked, "But what makes them so unique? Most people have never heard of them".

Now, my mother always taught me never to answer a question with a question, but I couldn't help myself: "My dear Ranald, why do you stock such an extraordinary list of niche wines, whiskies and cigars at Boisdale? Wouldn't it have been easier to stick to the big brands everyone knows?"

And that's where we found common ground. I'd struck a chord. But he had me there: I needed a moment to collect my thoughts. He'd pressed a button. I paused, picked up my glass, inhaled the glorious bouquet of the Mission Haut-Brion, and finally took a sip. That's when it hit me.

These independent watchmakers are akin to independent winemakers. Each is distinct, each utterly unique. They are consumed by a pursuit of perfection, never content with compromise. Their quest for excellence is unrelenting. It's not driven by monetary gain: it's a vocation. They know no other path, and more importantly, they have no desire to. Creativity resides deep within them, and it demands expression.

So why are these handmade watches so sought after? Why do waiting lists stretch for years—sometimes even a decade? Why do they fetch double or triple their original price at auction? Because, like a fine vintage, they are rare. They are crafted with blood, sweat and tears. And as we all know, a small increment in quality often means a giant leap in price. These watchmakers are the best in the world. They push the envelope in both design and mechanical innovation. It's not just watchmaking: it's art.

J.N. Shapiro - Resurgence - Hero Variant 1

THE BOISDALE WATCH CLUB
to launch in 2026

In a world driven by constant technological change, one industry has stood the test of time, literally. For over 300 years, mechanical watchmaking has remained true to the pioneering inventions of legends like John Arnold, Abraham-Louis Breguet, Abraham-Louis Perrelet, George Graham, and Thomas Tompion.

Now, Stephen Lee of Remontoire and Alon Ben Joseph of Ace Jewellers, two experts with decades of experience in haute horlogerie between them, invite you to experience *the art of time*. Through exclusive, tutored demonstrations, they'll showcase the craftsmanship and innovation of independent luxury watchmakers, the smaller, distinctive brands that define true aspiration in fine watchmaking. The events will take place early evening at either Boisdale premises and will include an interesting wine tasting and matching canapes. **If you would like to be invited to the inaugural event please email: stephen.lee@remontoire68.com**

Joshua Habursky

CIGAR TALK: JOSHUA HABURSKY

LEADING THE CHARGE FOR AN INDUSTRY AND ITS FUTURE

By Ricardo Carioni

In the world of premium cigars, where craftsmanship meets culture and the ritual of smoking transcends time, few figures embody both intellect and passion as seamlessly as Joshua Habursky, Chief Executive Officer of the Premium Cigar Association (PCA). At the helm of the industry's leading organisation, Habursky represents a new generation of leadership: articulate, insightful, strategic, and unwaveringly committed to protecting and promoting one of the world's last artisanal luxuries.

In an age where nuance often yields to noise, Habursky embodies a rare blend of intellect and conviction: he is a leader equally at ease in a congressional hearing as in a cigar factory or lounge. Under his direction, the PCA continues to champion not only the rights of an industry but the preservation of a culture and a centuries-old art form: one that speaks of craftsmanship and freedom in its purest sense.

I sat down with him to discuss leadership, regulation, education, and the enduring spirit of an industry built on heritage, freedom, and community, from Capitol Hill to the rolling fields of The Dominican Republic and Nicaragua.

INTERVIEW

Ricardo Carioni (RC):

Joshua, you've become one of the youngest leaders to head a major trade association. What drives you personally, and how did your journey lead you to the world of premium cigars?

Joshua Habursky (JH):

Personally, I relate to the premium cigar industry being the underdog. I moved to Washington DC, not knowing anyone, didn't come from a political family, and had to work three jobs to afford intern housing and make it through graduate school. This experience taught me a lot about sacrifice and resilience, which are helpful attributes for running any organisation, especially one with many demands, personalities, and challenges.

I have a great support system of close friends and family who have mentored me along my career path, but I have also encountered rejection, failure, and adversity, which have had an equal impact, pushing me towards creativity, advancement, and success.

I started smoking cigars as an undergraduate at Washington & Jefferson College, in the Winston Churchill Society, where we met every week to smoke cigars and talk politics. I entered the industry as the Director of Federal Affairs in 2019, wanting a career that combined my love of politics and cigars. I became the Executive Director in 2024 and the Chief Executive Officer in 2025, working my way up and learning from retailers, manufacturers, and enthusiasts alike.

RC:

The PCA is both a guardian of tradition and a voice for progress. How would you describe your leadership philosophy, and what do you believe makes the PCA unique among global trade organizations?

JH:

My leadership philosophy is to surround myself with good people who have the right attitude and ambition. Most skills can be taught, but the foundation of any successful organization is the character of its people. From the board of directors to the staff, the PCA has a strong foundation, and I am proud to lead the organization even through challenges and setbacks.

The PCA is uniquely positioned at the centre of retail and manufacturing, with the world's largest trade show for premium cigars in the world's largest market. We can partner with many other organizations worldwide to defend, protect, and expand the premium cigar sector for discerning adult consumers.

PCA can curate and expand ideas through tools, technology, and information-sharing that transcend borders as we tackle global challenges. The association is nearly 100 years old, and I am deeply cognisant of tradition and the obligation to preserve it on behalf of our members, while ensuring the association's future development.

RC:

You manage a complex portfolio – advocacy, memberships, education, global partnerships, and the PCA Show – all under political and social pressures. How do you prioritise and keep the organisation both nimble and visionary?

JH:

Leveraging the team's skill sets, I don't micro-manage and identify project leads and support from the outset. We are a small team that can react quickly, and everyone on staff does the work of three or four people. When I speak about the work of PCA to other association executives, they are continually amazed at the output of our small team of eight, and the scope of projects that we are working on at any given time.

In addition to running the association, I remain a member of the advocacy team and manage the federal government affairs portfolio, including the White House, Congress, regulatory agencies, and litigation. I learned quickly that I can't be involved in every project, and I trust our team to deliver even when I am not. I often work with membership, education, events, and partnerships staff on major decisions, budgets, and communications, while allowing them to lead as the department expert.

RC:

Education has become a defining pillar of your leadership. What's your vision for PCA Education, and how can it transform the way the world understands premium cigars?

JH:

I want the professionalisation of the premium cigar sector and education to be part of my legacy. PCA has an incredible opportunity to provide educational resources to

all its members through partnerships like our Masterclass with FIU, or our commissioned book release in 2027.

PCA is striving to create career paths in the premium cigar sector, and not just a paycheck that people fall into. Education and learning are essential to the industry's longevity moving forward. Without investment in this area, the association and industry will tread water rather than sail to their destination.

RC:

Turning to regulation, many readers enjoy cigars but may not follow the legal battles behind them. How would you describe the current landscape for premium cigars in the U.S. and some other parts of the world? What are the major victories, and what key challenges remain?

JH:

There is no shortage of challenges: from taxation and tariffs to generational smoking bans and restrictions on the ability to smoke indoors and outdoors. These changes are present in localities in the United States and in countries around the world.

Fortunately, the data, research, and court precedent are on our side in differentiating premium cigars from other tobacco products. The three court victories against the Food & Drug Administration are major victories that will have a lasting global impact as the battlefield shifts to small towns and far-off countries.

RC:

The idea of generational bans on tobacco has been spreading internationally. What's your view on this type of legislation, and what does it mean for personal freedom and cultural heritage?

JH:

This is nonsensical public policy that will lead to many issues, including black market sales. Fundamentally, this policy discriminates against adults in deciding whether or not to enjoy a premium cigar. What's next? Gin? Slot machines? Coffee?

Beyond the product itself, these initiatives are the most troubling because governments step in to make decisions in place of individuals. Personal freedom is at stake more broadly than any one product category.

Hopefully, non-smokers understand that if they support these prohibitions, someday something that they enjoy could face the same unjust treatment.

RC:

Premium cigars are, at their core, about culture, community, and craft. What message would you give our readers, many of whom see cigars as one of life's great pleasures, about what makes this culture worth defending?

JH:

Do not shy away from being in the premium cigar industry at any level: retail, manufacturer, or consumer. It is an honourable profession and pastime that we need to preserve for the next generation to make their own decision about whether to enjoy a cigar when they are of legal age.

Do not be fearful of the social stigma around smoking, and continue to savour cigars with friends, family, or in a contemplative state on your own. Premium cigars can represent the celebration of moments to remember, a shared social experience between people, or just sheer relaxation. Whether it be a recreational hobby, your career, or your lifestyle, this industry is worth protecting, which is why I am committed to making sacrifices, handling adversity, and remaining resilient, leading the PCA for many years to come.

Christopher Gilmour, Ranald Macdonald, Alejandro Turrent & Ricardo Carioni at Casa Turrent's tobacco plantations in San Andres, Mexico 2025.

BOISDALE CIGAR REVIEWS

Our Cigar Editor, Ricardo Carioni, chooses the best cigars for a smooth winter smoke

Ricardo Carioni

ARTURO FUENTE MAGNUM ROSADO NO. 52

Few cigars display such poise and refinement as the Magnum Rosado No. 52. From the first draw, I was reminded why Fuente remains the benchmark of Dominican excellence. The Ecuadorian Rosado wrapper, aged for nearly a decade, gives the smoke a beautiful balance — creamy, medium-bodied, and harmonious from start to finish. It's a cigar that rewards slow appreciation; elegant, dignified, and deeply satisfying.

Provenance:
Dominican Republic

Length:
5"

Ring Gauge:
52

Strength:
Medium

ALADINO 85 ANNIVERSARIO RESERVA ROBUSTO

This cigar is a love letter to the golden age of cigars — and to Julio Eiroa's remarkable legacy. Smoking the 85 Anniversario, I was struck by how seamlessly it balances strength and smoothness. It's full of presence, yet never overbearing, with the unmistakable refinement of authentic Corojo. Every puff carries the confidence of a master blender at peace with his craft. A truly memorable Honduran puro.

Provenance:
Honduras

Length:
5"

Ring Gauge:
50

Strength:
Medium to Full

MITCHELLERO ROBUSTO

I've long admired cigars that overdeliver — and the Mitchellero Robusto is precisely that. It's impeccably constructed, with an even burn and cool draw throughout. Medium-bodied and smooth, it's a wonderfully honest cigar that asks for nothing but your time. A perfect companion for an afternoon stroll or an unhurried coffee — approachable, flavourful, and unpretentious.

Provenance:
Nicaragua

Length:
5"

Ring Gauge:
50

Strength:
Medium

BOLÍVAR ROYAL CORONAS

There's something profoundly satisfying about a Bolívar, and the Royal Coronas encapsulates it beautifully. Its bold, full-bodied nature is unmistakably Cuban — earthy, powerful, and yet impeccably smooth. Each draw unfolds with commanding presence, and as the smoke builds, so too does its elegant strength. A cigar of substance and tradition; unapologetically classic, and thoroughly rewarding.

Provenance:
Cuba

Length:
4 7/8"

Ring Gauge:
50

Strength:
Full

DAVIDOFF WINSTON CHURCHILL ROBUSTO

The Winston Churchill Robusto has long been a favourite of mine for its effortless sophistication. It carries itself with the same quiet confidence as the man it honours — refined, assured, and wonderfully balanced. The draw is flawless, the body smooth, and the overall impression one of composure and grace. It's a cigar that pairs as naturally with conversation as it does with an aged Scotch.

Provenance:
Dominican Republic

Length:
5 1/4"

Ring Gauge:
52

Strength:
Medium

TATUAJE 7TH NICARAGUA COROJO CORONA GORDA

I've always admired Pete Johnson's devotion to authenticity, and the 7th Corojo is a testament to that philosophy. This cigar feels alive — expressive and well-built, with a medium-to-full body that carries a beautiful tension between strength and sweetness. It's lean, elegant, and deeply satisfying. For those who appreciate Nicaraguan character without excess power, this is a gem.

Provenance:
Nicaragua

Length:
5 5/8"

Ring Gauge:
46

Strength:
Medium to Full

OLIVA SERIE V DOUBLE ROBUSTO

Each time I light the Serie V Double Robusto, I'm reminded of why it remains one of Nicaragua's finest achievements. It's a cigar of power and finesse — bold and full-bodied, yet undeniably smooth and poised. The draw is effortless, the burn consistent, and the smoke deeply satisfying. It's a masterclass in balance, proving once again that strength and elegance can coexist beautifully.

Provenance:
Dominican Republic

Length:
5"

Ring Gauge:
54

Strength:
Full

CLE CONNECTICUT ROBUSTO

The CLE Connecticut is, to me, a quiet revelation. It's gentle but never dull — mellow, creamy, and full of subtle nuance. Its construction is impeccable, the smoke refined and steady from start to finish. A cigar to unwind with, not to analyse — the sort of pleasure best enjoyed on a sunlit terrace with a moment to breathe.

Provenance:
Honduras

Length:
5"

Ring Gauge:
50

Strength:
Mild to Medium

CHARATAN LONDON CLARO HALF CHURCHILL

I've always found charm in cigars that reflect our pace of life, and the Charatan Half Churchill captures that perfectly. It's a refined, mild smoke that feels distinctly British — understated, polished, and quietly luxurious. Its creamy, smooth draw makes it ideal for a morning indulgence or a short reprieve between engagements. A small cigar with great character.

Provenance:
Nicaragua

Length:
4 1/2"

Ring Gauge:
46

Strength:
Mild

MACANUDO EMISSARY ESPAÑA ROBUSTO

Smoking the Emissary España is like a journey through the world's finest tobacco regions. Its five-country blend achieves a rare harmony — balanced, expressive, and exceptionally refined. Medium-bodied yet complex, it's a cigar that commands quiet appreciation. With its flawless construction and cosmopolitan elegance, it represents Macanudo's most sophisticated evolution to date.

Provenance:
Multi-National Blend

Length:
5"

Ring Gauge:
52

Strength:
Medium

DELMA

SWISS MADE

The 1924 Tourbillon

Born from a century of independent, family-owned craftsmanship, the 1924 Tourbillon celebrates DELMA's unwavering dedication to Swiss precision watchmaking and progress through generations.

At its heart beats the Calibre DT100.01, a 100% Swiss-made, proprietary hand-wound tourbillon, that marks a milestone in our legacy.

UK Representative - Remontoire 68 Ltd. - remontoire68.com

www.delmawatches.com