

STYLE

THE SUNDAY TIMES

2 JUNE 2024

Alex Scott

'I'm ready to accept love into my life'

Plus

THE SUN SET
HOW THE SUMMER
SOLSTICE GOT HIP

WELL ROPEY
THE RETURN
OF THE
ESPADRILLE





CELINE





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#Perpetual

Harrods
175
YEARS OF
EXCEPTIONAL


ROLEX

A lifestyle photograph of a woman and two children sitting at an outdoor dining table. The woman, with long blonde hair, is on the left, smiling. A young girl with blonde hair is in the center, holding a glass with a straw. A boy with dark hair is on the right, looking towards the girl. The table is set with various dishes including asparagus, bread, and olives, along with glasses of water and juice. The background features a stone wall and lush greenery. Two string lights hang above the table. The text 'THE WHITE COMPANY LONDON' is centered at the top in a white box.

THE WHITE COMPANY
LONDON

The Barometer

Edited by Priya Elan

Fashion! Beauty! People! Things! Welcome to your weekly guide to the stuff everyone will be talking about. Do keep up

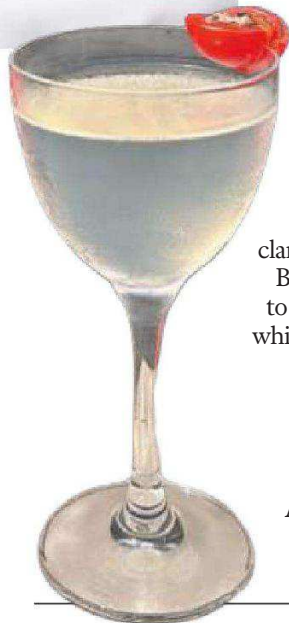
The tomatotini at Updown Farmhouse. Below The savoury tomato spritz at the Sessions Arts Club; the vodka martini at the Rose in Deal



Attention, tomato girlies

Forget the classic bloody mary: there's a raft of new tomato-based cocktails set to dominate the summer drinks scene. How do you like your martini: dirty? With a twist? How about bloody? That's cocktail speak for adding a cherry tomato to your drink, which is what they do at the Rose in Deal, where the vodka martini is crafted with clarified heritage tomatoes, soy, salt and chilli. At Bar Lina in London the current bloody martini to order is made with homemade tomato water, which is then strained and mixed with vodka and vermouth, while the tomatotini at Updown Farmhouse in Kent mixes home-grown tomatoes with vodka and martini, and (brace yourself) the glass comes with a smoked eel gilda perched on top. Finally, at the Sessions Arts Club in Clerkenwell the cocktail to order is the savoury tomato spritz. Aperol who?

Steven Joyce, Getty Images

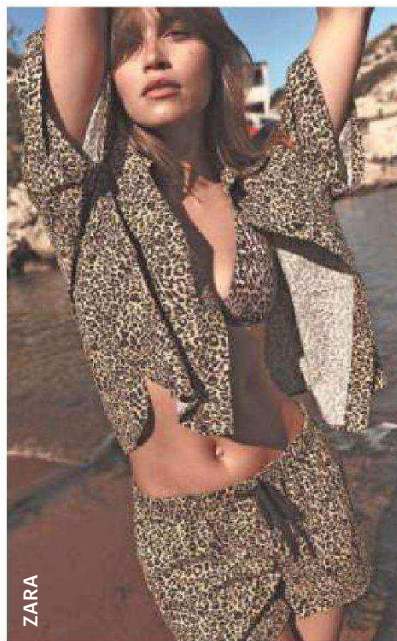


Grrr! Embrace 'summer leopard'

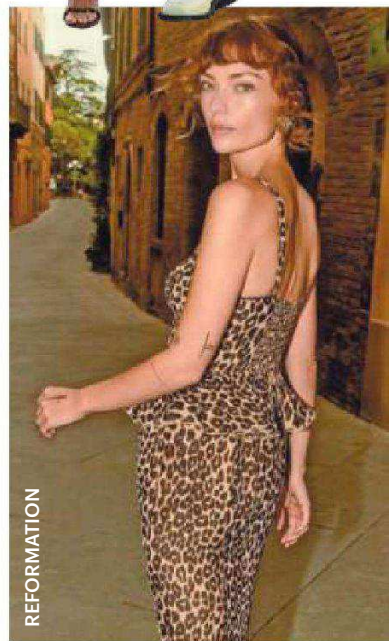
Wild news for your summer shopping list: animal prints are taking over. By which we mean shoppers can't move in their local branch of Zara without stumbling on a leopard-print swimsuit or a wild pair of pyjama pants. It's the same story in the Reformation, with "day at the races" dresses very much in the "does this belong in a zoo?" camp. And of course this stylish breed of animal magnetism extends to pavements too. We've spotted everything from short-sleeve leopard shirts (wear yours with denim Bermuda shorts) to big cat-inspired slip dresses: think Jackie Collins on holiday in the south of France and you're about there. Time to rewild your wardrobe?



JACQUEMUS



ZARA



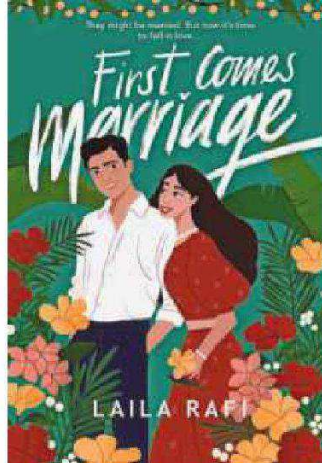
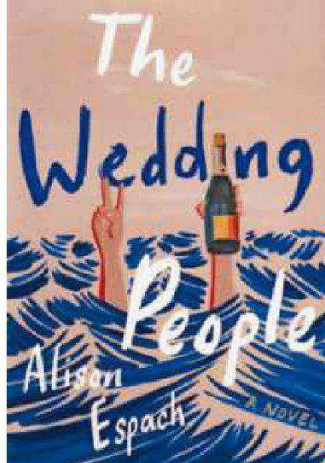
REFORMATION

STYLE

ON THE COVER ALEX SCOTT PHOTOGRAPH CLAY STEPHEN GARDNER STYLING CANDICE BAILEY. ZIP-UP SPORTS JACKET, £2,630, AND JOGGERS, £1,270, LOUIS VUITTON. CROP TOP, STYLIST'S OWN

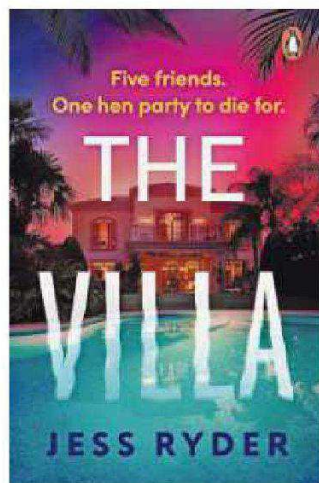
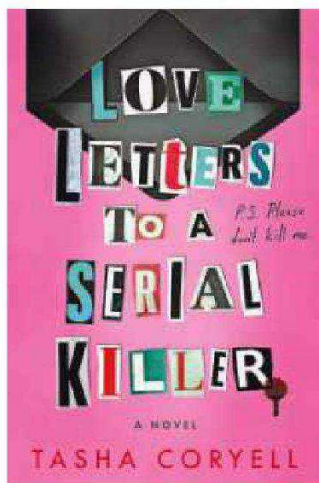
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Say 'I do' to the new hen-lit

Grab the confetti because this summer's biggest fiction theme is all about weddings and hen parties. In Alison Espach's *The Wedding People* (out July 30) a woman at rock bottom is saved from herself when she stumbles upon a wedding party and is mistaken for a guest. If rom-coms are more your thing, *First Comes Marriage* by Laila Rafi (out July 25) is a slow-burn love story of an arranged marriage, while Tasha Coryell's laugh-out-loud novel *Love Letters to a Serial Killer* (July 4) is a compelling page-turner about a woman who falls in love via a series of letters to a man in prison. Also on the darker side is *The Villa* (out July 18). Jess Ryder's gripping thriller follows a group of hens who return to the holiday villa where their friend — the bride-to-be — died during a hen party, as they seek the truth on what really happened. Taking the phrase "till death do us part" quite literally.



Emotional support lip balm? Sure!



Summer Fridays Lip Butter Balm, £23. Below Fenty Skin Lux Balm, £16



When did a lip balm stop becoming something to solely hydrate lips and instead morph into a support system? It's a question that those who have one permanently on standby — and who have repetitive strain injury from applying it so frequently — are asking. Across TikTok and Instagram (yes, there's dedicated content) women have become reliant on good-looking tubes of goo to help them face the day. When trouble strikes, a slick of Summer Fridays Lip Butter Balm in Pink Sugar (£23) is a popular salve, while other key players include Fenty Beauty, Glossier, Laneige, Rhode and Dior. It's just you and your balm against the world, babe.

Heating up



▲ 'FEEDBACK SANDWICH'

Current favourite office speak from the best reality TV show of the moment, *Buying London*



▲ THE TINGINGS

The Noughties indie sleeze duo are back with a new single — and yes, that's still their name

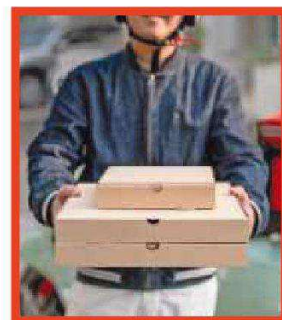


▲ FISHERMAN SANDALS DUPES

M&S (below) and Mango's versions pass as The Row's. We won't tell if you don't

▲ @TAKEAWAYTRAUMA

Like Tripadvisor, but for takeaway food. Addictive



Cooling down



▼ MANIFESTING NAIL POLISH

There are now specific colours for confidence, creativity or, um, rebirth? Not cut(icle)

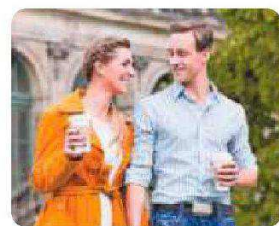


▼ QUEUING IN PUBS

In a straight line. Like you're at the bank. A worrying new phenomenon

▼ THE 'COFFEE AND A WALK' DATE

Gen Z's favoured first date. Can we just go for a drink, please?



▼ SEBASTIAN STAN AS TOMMY LEE

All about Sebastian Stan playing Donald Trump now: getting standing ovations in new film *The Apprentice*



Additional words: Hannah Evans, Roisin Kelly, Karen Dacre, Phoebe McDowell. Photographs: Netflix, Getty Images, Alamy, @thetings, @aiaaia, Backgrid

One more thing...

Are the contents of your handbag worth putting on display? Tory Burch thinks so. How else to explain her latest stand-out accessory: a moulded clutch you can see straight through? A clear contender for cocktail bag of the year, it comes in a juicy shade of green. Talk about new transparency rules. **£4,200, toryburch.com**

Photograph **Marco Gazza**
Styling **Flossie Saunders**



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WE'RE WORTH IT.

Espadrilles, the Marmite of the summer shoe world, are back — and this time they mean business, says **Karen Dacre**

HOT *steppers*

You can tell a lot about a person by the face they pull when they hear the word “espadrilles”. For some (mostly those who enjoy a bouncy blow-dry, a dainty floral and an invitation to a garden party) the mention of the rope-soled shoes ignites an expression of pure joy, but for the rest of us, it’s a curled lip and a turned-up nose. And no wonder: one woman’s espadrille glory is another woman’s (and man’s) style ick. And yet here we are on the precipice of a new golden era for the summer shoes that split more opinions than Elon Musk. Yes, espadrilles are back in vogue. More than that, they’re back in favour with shoppers, with Asos reporting a 40 per cent rise in searches for the shoes in both flat and wedge (yikes) versions.

So, are espadrilles, which have long associations with Spanish culture (they were worn widely by Basque and Catalan agricultural workers, before Pablo Picasso got himself a pair), on their way to becoming the standout footwear of summer?

A quick audit of our favourite luxury brands confirms they are very much on the radar of the Pradas and Loewes of this world — not to mention Chanel, which was responsible for our previous espadrille “moment” when it launched a monochrome homage to the style in 2017. Back then, you couldn’t move on the beaches of the French Riviera and the boujies enclaves of Ibiza without falling over a CC-branded pair of the rope-soled shoes.



Katie Holmes striding out in espadrilles by Franco Sarto in March

Now they have been reborn as an everyday essential with mass market appeal. This summer, be it wedged or flat, espadrilles are the sort of thing you fling on with a trouser suit or a great pair of jeans.

Luxed-up versions are everywhere: some feature almost obnoxiously large logos, while others — see Bally’s pastel pink leather and suede style — are reminiscent of the sort of shoes you would spot on a French teenager, reproduced in artisanal form.

Heeled espadrilles are also a big story, but don’t panic: these aren’t the sort you might spot on a politician sipping champagne on the lawn at Buckingham Palace. Rather they have a streamlined new shape and a dedication to neutral colours. The long-time espadrille-lover Katie Holmes was recently spotted in a pair by the American brand Franco Sarto — worn with loose black trousers and a beige knit — and Jennifer Lopez is also a fan.

For those cautiously dipping their toe into this trend (shoe?) for the first time, it’s probably best to start with a flat version. Steph Stevens, a stylist and espadrille fan, puts the new-found mass appeal of the shoes down to shoe-style evolution: “The return of espadrilles is a logical progression from the ballet flat moment that has been happening for a while now. The rope sole adds a hint of summer to a look.”

Ready to give espadrilles another go? The good news is you don’t need to go to St Tropez to find a pair.



Zara is a hotbed of woven flat styles, with rope-soled mary-janes the most palatable choice. Direct-to-consumer brands — those labels the Instagram algorithm serves you — are also loaded with espadrille-inspired options: see Rothy’s and Love Brand & Co for mid-range styles. Looking for the real deal? It has to be Castañer, the Spanish espadrille brand that, at the behest of Yves Saint Laurent, created the first wedged version in the 1970s and remains the one to beat. ■ [@karendacre](#)



Mary-janes, £36, [zara.com](#).
Top Espadrilles, £860, [chanel.com](#)

‘I’ll always be in therapy. It’s done so much for me’

From an abusive childhood to a ‘beautiful relationship’ with the singer Jess Glynne, the footballer turned broadcaster Alex Scott is now happier than she’s ever been. As she gears up for the Euros, she talks to **Julia Llewellyn Smith**

Photographs **Clay Stephen Gardner** Styling **Candice Bailey**

The sports pundit and former Arsenal and England captain Alex Scott chuckles softly as she talks about the early days with her partner, the singer Jess Glynne. “I remember one of the first times Jess hugged me. I was like ...” Scott stands rigid, arms glued to her side. “She was like, ‘Are you not going to put your arms around me?’ But I didn’t know how to do that. We laugh about it to this day.”

Scott turns 40 in October, but she has already achieved enough for several lifetimes. So it’s true, it’s sort of laughable — but at the same time deeply sad — that for all her triumphs (140 England caps, an MBE in 2017, becoming the first woman to present the World Cup for the BBC in 2018 and, three years later, to host BBC1’s flagship *Football Focus* show) she is still tentatively grasping how to express love towards those who hold her dearest.

That’s the legacy of her traumatic childhood, which Scott disclosed two years ago in her extraordinary autobiography, *How (Not) to Be Strong*, describing the abuse, both physical and mental, she, her older brother, Ronnie, and mother, Carol, suffered at the hands of her “stupidly cruel” alcoholic father, Tony. He has vehemently denied the allegations.

Growing up in Poplar, east London, Scott frequently lay awake all night, listening to Carol’s screams as she was beaten up, praying her mum would still be alive in the morning. Tony terrorised them. “We weren’t allowed to express emotion. Dad didn’t allow us to hug each other or say ‘I love you’. It had a huge impact on us all. To this day, if I want to show people love, I’ll do it by taking them out to dinner and paying.”

When Scott was eight Carol found the courage to tell Tony to leave. From then, Scott says, “Dad played no part in my life.” Of course the psychological scars ran deep, but for years Scott ignored them, distracted first by football and then her carefully planned move into sports broadcasting (“There was no way I was going to retire and go to Mum asking for money”), by way of a media degree completed while playing for Arsenal.

There were endless career highs, but also plenty of “pressure and heaviness” — mainly centred on relentless sexist, racist and classist trolling. Take the former CBI director Sir Digby Jones tweeting that Scott’s Cockney accent was “spoiling” coverage of the 2021 Olympics. “When you’ve come from women’s sport or from disadvantaged areas, you feel like you’re constantly in this battle to be accepted,” she says, but philosophically rather than with self-pity.

All the while her unaddressed trauma was festering. Only in 2018, when Scott realised she was dangerously close to becoming an alcoholic like her father (“If I had any problems, I thought, ‘A drink will get rid of it’”), did she start therapy. “I’ll always be in therapy. It has done so much for me.”

Today, sitting in a café near her home in one of the glossiest corners of north London, Scott is visibly in a good place. Wearing a black Ami Paris jumper, Asos jeans and loafers (“I’ve worn a lot of heels this week and my ankles are hurting me”), there’s an unmistakable glow to her. “Well, I have just been to the gym,” she beams. “But yeah, people have been asking, ‘What’s going on? You look so happy.’ I’ve been working on finding balance in my life that was never there before, from being a footballer, where there are always fears about succeeding, winning another trophy, playing for England, wanting to push and push, then straight into a TV career, and you feel a need to keep going and keep going.

“But eventually you get to a stage where you look back at everything you’ve achieved and you’re, like, ‘Oh my goodness!’ Then it’s, like, but what does it all mean if you don’t actually spend time with friends and family? You need to experience it all with them rather than keep going constantly at 100 miles per hour.”

She may be embracing that more relaxed mindset, but workwise Scott’s in no way slowing down. She’s proud about having just wrapped another season of *Football Focus* (“The viewing figures are the best they’ve ever been”) and excited at the prospect of heading to Paris to cover the



Sculpt stretch-tulle
dress with body,
£1,690, Alaïa

This page Stripy bra, £195, trench coat, £1,575, and skirt with belt, price on application, Dries Van Noten. Earring, £179, Maria Black. **Opposite** Bra, £40, Sloggi. Satin ribbon dress, £3,545, Proenza Schouler. Knickers, £42, Wacoal. Huggie, £71, and large drop earring, £98, Maria Black. Stud, Alex's own





2024 Euros for ITV. Is she becoming a touch blasé about such gigs? “Oh my gosh, no! I remember when I did my degree, being in class and thinking, imagine one day if I present *BBC Sports Personality of the Year*. Now I’ve done it for the past four years. I’ll always pinch myself. But I’m getting better at not worrying it’s all going to be taken away from me.”

Shortly before her dad left home an Arsenal scout spotted Scott, then aged eight, playing football with Ronnie in the fenced pitch outside their tower block. She was signed and spent a total of 26 years on and off with Arsenal Ladies (there were three years in America with Boston Breakers from 2009 to 2012), helping them win seven FA cups. Women’s football then had nothing like the status it holds today. Scott’s salary was so tiny she had to boost it with a part-time job in the club’s laundry, something I find outrageous but she — again — calmly shrugs

it off. “I’m from the East End, I loved *EastEnders*, now I was Dot Cotton — washing Ian Wright’s pants! Doing that, I was learning, having conversations with amazing people like [the men’s team manager] Arsène Wenger about my craft. Ultimately it allowed me to save a deposit that got me my first house when I was 21. So, yes, the men had all these privileges but I was still part of something.”

Similarly she refuses to complain about how much better today’s female players have it compared with her generation. The women’s team can now sell out Arsenal’s 60,000-seat Emirates Stadium. “It shows the viability of women’s football, people are loving what they see. It’s not just young girls getting opportunities to play, it’s young boys with the Lionesses’ names on their backs. It’s the mindset we’re changing. For the next generation there won’t be men’s football and women’s football — there will just be football. So you can either be negative



and ask ‘Why did it take so long?’ or celebrate it while you keep pushing it forward because there’s a lot more to do.”

She thinks England’s men have “every chance” in the Euros. “We’ve got this young, exciting crop of players [the manager] Gareth Southgate has worked on so much in terms of psychology, allowing players to work through fear of failure. When it gets to a semi-final or final, they don’t have this burden — instead they’re thinking about the excitement of winning.”

Over the years Scott has witnessed plenty of flash-points when politics and sport have clashed, including the united response of Southgate’s squad to the racism directed at some players at the 2020 Euros. Then there was the furore surrounding the 2022 Qatar World Cup when Fifa warned players they would receive a yellow card for wearing One Love armbands supporting LGBT rights, in a country where homosexuality is illegal. Just

before her live coverage of England’s opening match against Iran, Scott decided to wear an armband. “I wasn’t a player and I felt so emotional — like, this is just wrong. We’re saying football is for everyone but actually we were seeing the opposite.”

Was she nervous? “Absolutely! I didn’t know if I was going to lose my job, because this was against BBC guidelines, or get kicked out of the country, but in the moment I wanted people to know, I’m with you.” In the end the BBC mildly told her off. “They were, like, ‘Make sure you don’t do it again.’ But this was about love and light, showing what I stand for.”

Scott has dated both men and women, her longest relationship being eight years with a fellow player, Kelly Smith. After it ended in 2013 Scott was too bruised to trust anyone new for years. But when she met Glynne, 34, (she won’t reveal where and when) she was finally in the right



This page Bra top, £53, Baserange. Sweatshirt, £2,600, Rosso Ancora leather midiskirt, £5,660, and heels, £790, Gucci. Earrings, £550, Rachel Boston. Ring, £790, Hannah Martin. **Opposite** Jumper, £840, and utility belt, £730, Tod's



Made-to-measure
jacket, £3,000, and
culottes, £1,160, Jil
Sander by Lucie
and Luke Meier

Hair Momo Seasay
using Charlotte
Mensah Manketti
Oil Hair Pomade.

Make-up Anna Payne
at C/O Management
using Chanel Les
Beiges Summer Spirit
and Hydra Beauty
Micro Sérum Lèvres

Tailor Jess Innes at
Karen Avenell

headspace. “We’ve been in the same kind of industries for all these years, so to me it’s wild how our paths have never crossed before. I’m spiritual — it was meant to happen when it did, when I’m in a place where I’ve worked through so much and am ready to accept love into my life.”

The couple had been spotted together for more than a year, but made what Scott wryly calls their “hard launch” in March, posing together for pictures at the Brit awards. (Glynne also spent the whole day with Scott on the *Style* shoot.) “It took us a while because we knew what we have is so special, so it has been about trying to protect that and keep that for us in such a way that it continues to be beautiful.”

Again, the happiness comes back to finally moving on from that childhood. After Tony left, father and daughter rarely communicated (he refused to buy her £20 boots, saying, “Girls shouldn’t be playing football”; then — after years of silence — in 2019 he texted her out of the blue when she was in *Strictly*, asking for tickets for friends). Yet — despite his behaviour — before its publication she was distraught her book might have repercussions for him. “I was so worried he’d lose his job, I’d ruin his life. For the first time in years I reached out to him, but immediately I got this angry, negative response.”

Tony subsequently gave an interview, denying Scott’s claims he beat her and Ronnie. “I have no idea why she’s saying all this stuff,” he said. “Perhaps she is judging me by today’s standards, I don’t know. Parents were a lot tougher back then. But I was never violent, that’s just not me. I never beat Alex or anyone else in the family or did anything like that.”

“It was another nail in the coffin,” she says. “I’d written that book to free my mum, and here he was, taking her back to that place of lies where she was having to hide everything. I always try to see the good in people, so before I’d been, like, ‘I hope he has healed, he’ll have found love in his life.’ But clearly he couldn’t see I still had love for him. I was, like, ‘OK, I’m done with you.’”

Now she tries to see as much as possible of her mother, Carol, 65, who four years ago was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis. Both Carol and Ronnie still find it near impossible to hug Scott. “I’ve worked through it all, but for

‘We knew what we have is so special, so it has been about trying to protect that’

them there’s still that awkwardness. The love’s absolutely there but it doesn’t come naturally to them.”

Scott’s not remotely fazed about her upcoming birthday. “I don’t see 40 as a negative, I’m actually celebrating. I’ve got this whole life ahead of me still.” She’s reminded her biological clock is ticking by friends and family. “But I don’t put pressure on myself about that sort of thing, though I’ve always said I want kids.”

Adoption is one possibility. “I have friends who have done that and it has made me see how many ways you can give love. What will be, in terms of how I’m supposed to [have children]. All I know is when I have kids I’ll break those old cycles. I’ll show them so much love, so much emotion.” ■

Alex Scott is co-hosting Soccer Aid for Unicef 2024 on Sunday, June 9, on ITV1. Donate at socceraid.org.uk/donate



Above Scott pitchside at a Women’s Super League match between Arsenal and Manchester City, November 2023. On the pitch playing for Arsenal during the same fixture in 2018. **Top** Scott and Jess Glynne at a party last year

How the summer solstice got hip

You've probably never heard of TSPTTR, a cult clothing brand spotted in hipster neighbourhoods such as Clapton, downtown LA and Shimokitazawa, Tokyo. Its highly collectable casual garments explore geeky ideas about popular culture and the next eagerly awaited T-shirt drop is on the day of the summer solstice, trailed with the promising words: "As cosmic temporalities lean fully toward the light, celebrate this most liminal Summer Solstice with a magickal offering that channels both the past and present pagan zeitgeist."

In plain English, the summer solstice is the moment when the Earth's poles tilt closest to the sun, and for the northern hemisphere that will happen at 9.50pm BST, June 20. And getting outside at the rising and setting of the sun on the longest day of the year is inspiring a whole new wave of sun worshippers.

This year, take your pick from the Solstice on the Mount at Wasing Estate in Berkshire, where, through cleansing clouds of sage, you can listen to the Mercury-nominated musician Nick Mulvey, sit fireside for singing and proceed up a hill to drum up the sun. Or you can party for three days without night at the Solstice Festival on a Finnish plateau at the edge of the Arctic Circle. A simpler option? Mark it with a sundown picnic with friends or a contemplative solo sunrise wild swim.

One such solstice fan is Maria Perez, 43, a Bristol-based graphic designer and editor of the female-centric, occult magazine *Hellebore*. "After two decades in England, afflicted by endless winters, I've come to realise the huge importance of the sun," she says. "In Malaga, where I grew up, everyone takes it for granted. In Britain, your sun is an unyielding god and a summer solstice celebration is vital on a spiritual level." In an ideal world, this year Perez would visit one of the stone circles in the southwest "to reflect on alignments and ancient practices and connect to a chain that goes back millennia. But it's not always easy with a family so I try to honour the rising and setting sun in my own way, being out in nature and gathering St John's wort,

From salutations at stone circles to alfresco soirées, midsummer is becoming quite the social occasion, says **Kate Spicer**

the most powerful midsummer herb."

English Heritage, guardians of more than 60 prehistoric sites including the megalithic mother lode Stonehenge, has reported an increased interest in solstices and equinoxes. This year, in the run-up to June 20, there is a two-day Stone Club event at Grime's Graves — the organisation's neolithic flint mines in Norfolk — a free get-together over two days with workshops, poetry, music and talks.

Stone Club is an eclectic community united by a love of neolithic stones. Formed in 2021 in Penryn by the musician Matthew Shaw and his academic partner, Lally MacBeth, it's become an unlikely smash with ravers and hipsters as well as counterculturalists. Other Stone Clubbers include a seven-year-old gemologist; the broadcaster, DJ and author Zakia Sewell; and the 87-year-old Jain monk and peace campaigner Satish Kumar. "People don't want to be burdened by these patriarchal, stern, bearded sky gods," Shaw says.

Indeed, English Heritage is more than happy to be part of this new scene. "We want to inspire visitors to remove from modern worries ... and make emotional connections to our sites," it says.

Stone Club costs £6 to join and has a fanzine, quirky merchandise, homemade

badges and lots of events. "Our members are actively engaged," Shaw says. "We often have talks that look at how the equinox, solstice, moon and solar cycles show up in our lives. Perhaps it's that summer represents the middle of the day, middle of the year, the middle of your life, or a moment of creative expression. Being aware of the annual cycle is incredibly useful as both an awareness of your environment but also as a metaphor for understanding life."

For TSPTTR's owner, Russ Gater, the brand's solstice collection — a collaboration with *Weird Walk*, a zine about "rambling and ancient rubble" — made perfect sense. The solstice is "an ethereal necessity in navigating these heavy 21st-century times", he says. This summer, he is heading to Avebury, Wiltshire, as he has many times before, with his wife, the jeweller Gem Gater, and friends. "We'll get up early to see the sun rise across the stones and observe what's going on around us." He prefers Avebury to Stonehenge up the road, "because you can be near to the stones, touch them — and it's got a nice pub. I've watched a fascination grow in the mainstream that is a definite reaction against organised religion, people looking for pastoral experience. We are overloaded



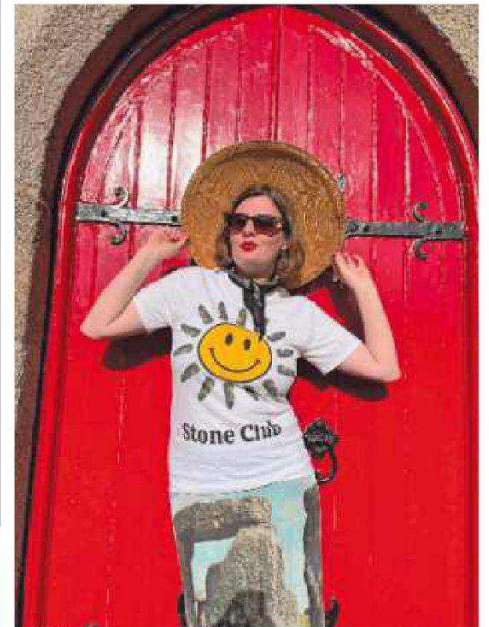
'People are finding solace in something analogue — you cannot capture the vibe of solstice by scrolling'

who may not have experienced anything like this before. "People were surprised. I got feedback along the lines of how unexpected it was, how calm, well-mannered, peaceful and friendly." He is at pains not to sound too weird. "This is for a mainstream audience open to a more conscious experience."

The archaeologist Dr Jennifer Wexler is English Heritage's prehistory expert. She has been to a few events at Stonehenge on equinoxes and solstices. "They can feel really powerful. We do know a lot about Stonehenge, but there is still a lot we don't, and people are drawn to mystery and the unknown, they recognise the power of these places and bring their own emotions and ideas to explore."

She too has seen a surge in interest over the past few years. "More people are interested in marking these seasonal moments to give our lives meaning, connecting to the spiritual power of the cosmos so we can move beyond our daily woes. As an academic I'd never look down on that because I feel that draw too." Last year, close to 10,000 people watched the sun rise at Stonehenge, with another

154,000 on the live stream. "We had beautiful weather," Wexler says. "We were waiting for the sun to come up, there was this little mist on the horizon line, and then the sun came up, this huge orange ball emerging from the mist. It was such a moment. To be here in a place where people have been experiencing this for thousand years... it blew my mind." ■

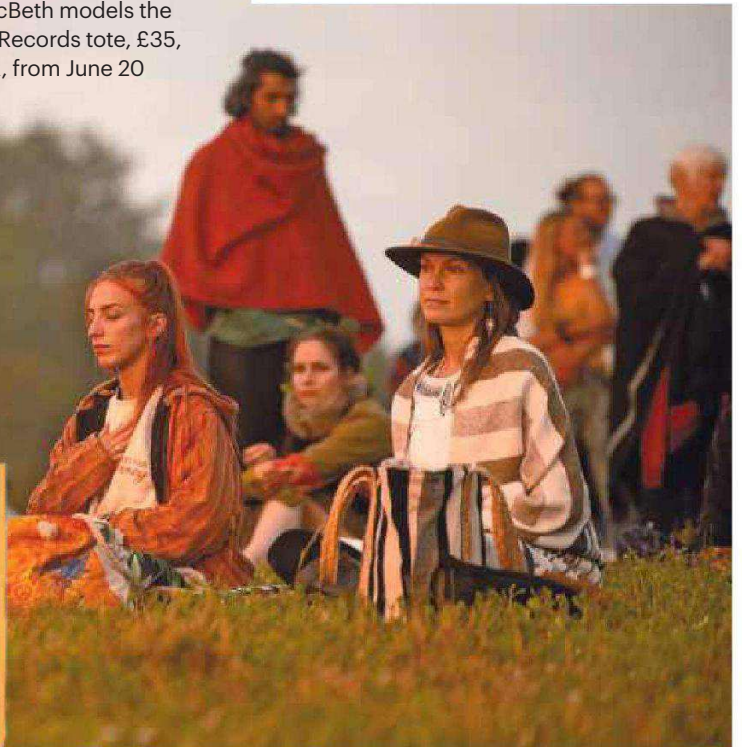


Sunrise at last year's solstice festival, Wasing Estate. **Right** Stone Club cofounder Lally MacBeth models the club merch. **Below** Records tote, £35, Weird Walk x TSPT, from June 20

with information, smothered by social media and ridiculousness. We want something more elemental. People are finding solace and interest in something analogue — you cannot capture the vibe of solstice by scrolling. The experience needs to be tangible."

And it really doesn't get more "analogue", old school or IRL than the rising and setting of the sun or the waxing and waning of the moon. Josh Dugdale, the custodian of Wasing Estate, is confident that there has been a sufficient shift in the British appetite for "conscious", Earth-centric spiritual events that he will not be selling alcohol on the actual solstice night (he will be holding five concerts over the two weeks surrounding solstice). "Instead we sell cacao and legal herbal highs to heighten consciousness, not dull it," he says. "We smudge people as they come in to the concerts with sage and copal mostly. This is not about a primitive return to sun worship, it's more about people being concerned about the environment and the infinitely greater power out there."

Dugdale's audience last year included many from the local Berkshire area and also London



‘Paloma Picasso? She’s an icon!’

Who better to play one of France’s most famous muses in the new Karl Lagerfeld drama than Jeanne Damas? The Parisian It girl tells **Hattie Crisell** about her pivot from fashion to film

There is a *je ne sais quoi* to the best It girls, icons and influencers: it’s what makes them so fascinating and it’s not easily imitated. So when the producers of the Disney+ series *Becoming Karl Lagerfeld* had to cast someone as Paloma Picasso — muse of the 1970s, friend of Lagerfeld and Yves Saint Laurent, daughter of artists and a respected creative in her own right — they reached for a woman with similar magic: Jeanne Damas.

If you don’t know her name, you’ll likely know her style. Damas, 32, has been documenting her life and outfits since joining Tumblr as a teenager; by her early twenties she had hundreds of thousands of Instagram followers. In 2016 she launched the fashion and beauty brand Rouje and has been selling her *je ne sais quoi* to the rest of us ever since.

When we meet on Zoom she is wearing silver hoop earrings and a black pinstripe blazer against tanned skin. Her nails are red and her lips are either bare or painted the perfect discreet pink. (Rouje sells a great tinted lip balm called Le Baume; I know this because I was seduced into buying it.) Damas was delighted when she was asked to audition for the role of Paloma Picasso. “I put on a red lip, some 1980s jewellery and a vintage Yves Saint Laurent corset,” she says. Picasso, now 75, wasn’t involved in the series, but Damas is keen to meet her: “She’s an icon.”

To prepare for filming she studied photos and read about the rivalry between Lagerfeld and Saint Laurent, but it was through the wardrobe that her role really clicked. “What helped me was meeting Pascaline Chavanne, the costume designer. She’d researched the era but also who these people were. Paloma was in high society but she was also in fashion. When we did the make-up trial I said, ‘But shouldn’t it be Eighties?’ And the team explained that Paloma’s taste was different because she was part of the avant-garde.”

Chloé — Lagerfeld was the creative director in the 1970s and early 1980s — provided vintage costumes for the series, but Picasso’s evening wedding dress, which he designed independently, was remade from scratch. It’s an astonishing, ruffled red gown — not your average choice for a bride, but Damas loves Picasso’s confident taste: “She was really flirty with colours and prints and adding flowers in her hair. She wore vintage 1940s dresses.” In fact Rouje’s current collection — full of flamenco-style roses and lace — is a tribute to her.

The series focuses on a period when fashion was in flux and the portrayal of Lagerfeld (played by Daniel

Photograph Bertrand Le Pluard





Brühl) is a melancholy one — he is depicted as a man who kept loved ones at a distance and struggled to feel good enough. The designer died in 2019 and Damas didn't know him personally. "Everybody has this image of him — a character with white hair and a suit — but the series talks about how he got there, through a lot of failure. It was not so easy, and his relationship to love was complicated. He was alone."

She has huge admiration for Brühl. "It was amazing to see his transformation in the morning. When Daniel speaks French he has his own German accent, but when he spoke French as Karl it was a different German accent. He became him."

And, indeed, Damas's own performance is impressively naturalistic — watching the series you realise that she could easily have pursued acting instead of fashion. She grew up in the Bastille area of Paris, where her parents ran a restaurant; the family lived above it and she would pad down in pyjamas to eat with the staff. "I heard a lot of adult conversation," she says. "And because my parents were in the restaurant I was quite free. I was always running around the neighbourhood." At ten years old she made friends with the local designer and stylist Nathalie Dumeix, who would later help her to create Rouje.

After leaving school Damas spent a few years modelling and taking acting classes, but she had plenty of downtime. "I was alone a lot in cafés and I went to the cinema three times a week. It helped me to develop my imagination and my passion for women and how to dress: all the little details that compose a woman."

Her combination of sartorial savvy, social media presence and allure (she uses the word "allure" a lot, pronouncing it in a French purr) meant that her star ascended fast. Her friends were photographers, make-up artists, models and designers, including Simon Porte Jacquemus (of the French label Jacquemus) and the lingerie designer Yasmine Eslami. By her early twenties she was sitting on the front row

Above Damas in *Becoming Karl Lagerfeld* with Daniel Brühl, left, as the eponymous designer and Fabien Caleyre, who plays Picasso's husband.

Below Back in style icon mode in Paris last year, wearing Dior



'I like to follow my instinct. If I meet someone and they propose a beautiful project I will say yes'

at shows, attending the coolest parties and designing capsule collections for brands. Everywhere she went, she says, she was learning: "It was like a ten-year internship."

People wanted a piece of her style — she projects a kind of dream woman: flawless but nonchalant, sexy but aloof — and when she launched Rouje they got it. "At the beginning there was not really a plan. It was just about my instinct and my *envie* [desire] and a certain image. Then, the first year, it was a big success. We were not prepared for that. We didn't even have our own office. We had to move and it became a real job. That's when I quit doing castings."

Rouje's clothes somehow give the impression that, if you shop there, you'll have the longest, sexiest summer of your life. The dresses (costing £150 to £260) are ultra-feminine, the jeans (£140 to £160) are high-waisted, and there's a lot of cleavage. And it works. On holiday in France I bought a Rouje polka-dot tea dress and when I walked into a restaurant wearing it the *maitre d'* threw out his arms and exclaimed, "*Quelle robe!*" — "What a dress!"

Part of Rouje's winning formula is that it is recognisable and consistent. The brand's biggest hit, a wrap dress called the Gabin, is available every season. "I was never interested in trends," Damas says. "It's about my taste and my eye. I just ... feel." This is the kind of statement a French woman can carry off.

Damas keeps her private life offline, but she has a three-year-old child and her partner works in the art world. She had a great time on set for *Becoming Karl Lagerfeld*. "I was already friends with some of the actors and there are a lot of scenes with parties. It was really, really fun.

We smoked a million fake cigarettes." I ask if she smokes in real life and she shrugs. "When I drink alcohol I can't not smoke — but I'm lucky because I don't smoke during the day."

On set she took Zoom meetings for Rouje and this is where her focus remains. "I cannot become an actress because my full-time job and passion is my brand," she explains. "But I like to follow my instinct. What's interesting in my journey is the encounters I have. If I meet someone and they propose a beautiful project I will say yes."

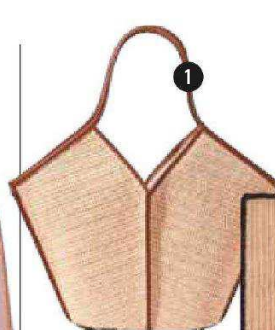
An It girl, after all, must do what she feels. ■

Becoming Karl Lagerfeld is available to stream on Disney+ from Friday

In (and out) of office

A wardrobe that works only for the beach? So last year. Here's how to wear your holiday looks all summer long

Words and edit **Helen Atkin**



The beach to boardroom bag

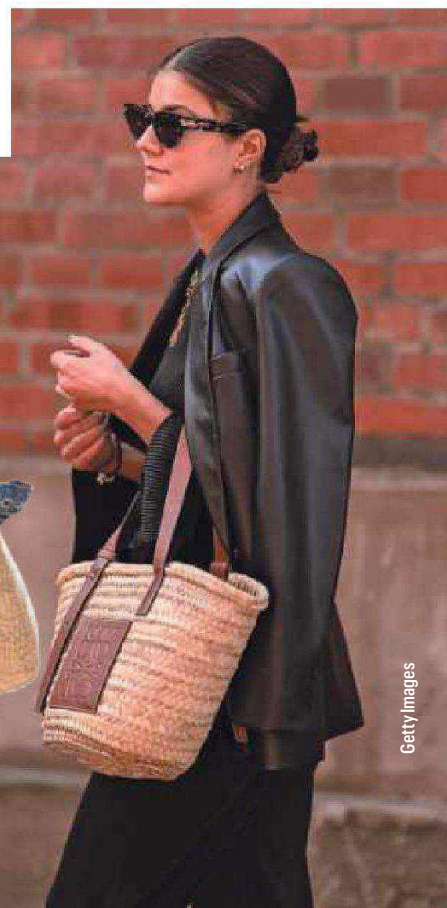
One of the most popular, and practical, of holiday items is the woven basket bag. Used to holding soggy swimwear, suncream and a holiday read, it's probably not accustomed to also carting about a laptop and diary. This season, though, the latest batch of raffia bags, with smart leather detailing, are as suited to the commute as the beach. Talk about multitasking.

1 Tote, £450, hereustudio.com. **2** Basket bag, £350, demellierlondon.com. **3** Tote, £109, whistles.com. **4** Shopper, £169, massimodutti.com

The 'PJ' trousers

A pair of flowing stripy trousers may bring back memories of gap-yah travel (especially teamed with a crochet bikini), but when worn with a smart blazer or a tucked-in white shirt they're ready for anything the work day could throw at them.

1 Orange trousers, £265, [Matteau, luisaviaroma.com](http://Matteau.luisaviaroma.com). **2** Pastel trousers, £659, [Thierry Coulson, net-a-porter.com](http://ThierryCoulson.net-a-porter.com). **3** Pink trousers, £69, hush-uk.com. **4** Blue trousers, £69, nobodyschild.com





The everywhere shorts

Whether you're sightseeing or staring down the barrel of the latest set of stats, a great pair of city shorts is your summer best friend. A loose but tailored fit is the main thing to look for if you're after the perfect crossover style. Length is important too — a micro style might work for Miami, but it's not going to cut it on a Monday morning in front of your colleagues.

1 Linen shorts, £730, brunellocucinelli.com. **2** Pleated shorts, £36, mango.com. **3** High-waist shorts, £75, everlane.com. **4** Linen-blend shorts, £25, uniqlo.com



The not-just-for-holiday shirt

Vibrant short-sleeve shirts have become a must-have item for any summer wardrobe, whether worn as part of a co-ord or thrown over a white vest and denim shorts. But for the office? Why not! Wear your boldest version with a neutral-toned skirt or tailored trousers and heels and your colleagues won't look twice. Leave the souvenir T-shirt at home, though.

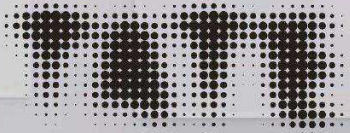
1 Embroidered shirt, £285, farmrio.uk. **2** Linen shirt, £19, hm.com. **3** Gingham shirt, £375, joseph-fashion.com. **4** Neutral shirt, £245, theory.com





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A modest win

After spotting a gap in the market, two friends from east London have started the UK's first Muslim-owned lingerie boutique. And business is booming, finds **Sharin Hussain**

“It’s awkward going to a lingerie store, but what could we do about it? We just dealt with the awkwardness,” Parul Begum says. But last year Begum, 38, *did* decide to do something — along with her friend Hanah Bibi, 26, she founded Hadiqa London, the UK’s first Muslim-owned lingerie boutique.

With lingerie sales on the rise (John Lewis reports an 8 per cent year-on-year increase), it should come as no surprise that Muslim women are keen to invest in underwear as well. But as a Muslim woman, I know all too well that shopping for lingerie can feel intimidating to us. I can still remember the first time I went to a lingerie shop: it was before I got married in 2019. I was 22, a visible Muslim, and I felt myself tensing up as soon as I walked in. It was dark with pumping music, and as I scoured the store, I thought, where do I begin?

Hadiqa London opened in Poplar, east London, last September, and from the outside it’s hard to tell what the shop actually sells, as the windows are covered with wallpaper. This is deliberate: Begum and Bibi initially launched the shop with clear windows but found that customers became self-conscious and kept looking over their shoulder. And this is not the only tweak the duo have made for their clientele. Inside, they provide what they term a “no-nudity space”, meaning they don’t decorate the walls with photographs of lingerie shot on models.

Instead, you are greeted by everything from gorgeous bridal nightgowns to mannequins displaying bra and knicker sets in an



Above Lace and mesh bodysuit, £25, hadiqalondon.com. **Below** The Poplar boutique

array of colours from beige nudes to vibrant reds. The brand’s bestselling lingerie item is a chiffon and lace babydoll (£20) in three colours that comes with a matching thong, while their satin pyjamas (from £25) are also flying off the rails.

Before they launched the brand, Begum went on a course at the London College of Fashion that covered how to start a lingerie label, and it appears to have paid off. “Once we started doing regular social media content, we went from 900 followers to 10,000 within two months,” she says. In fact business is going so well, they will soon be expanding into a bigger space down the road.

Lingerie is a booming market for Muslim women. In Saudi Arabia, for instance, Lamy Alnahdi, 29, and her family launched Blooming Wear back in 2016. She now oversees 35 stores in Saudi and ships her pared-back, classic pieces worldwide including to the UK. The current bestseller is a gown with structured cups costing £55, which has already sold more than 10,000 units since its launch last year.

Like me, Alnahdi only really became interested in underwear when she was about to get

married. “Before marriage, it was never about lingerie. If it was comfortable, then I’d get it,” she says. “It’s the same for all my friends too.”

In fact, it is a Saudi tradition to give a new bride a box with between three and seven white lingerie sets. Blooming Wear realised that no other business was catering to this need and now offers printed bridal boxes, usually including a long satin nightgown with a matching robe and a cami set (from £75).

Blooming Wear also released an edgier collection called the Secret Room last Valentine’s Day, with sheer lace bodysuits and feathered corsets, all while keeping cultural and religious needs in mind. Meanwhile, its recent Ramadan collection was promoted by Zena Emad, a 24-year-old Saudi Arabian singer, to target a younger demographic and to encourage those who aren’t yet married — or who are about to be married — to shop with them.

“The relationship between a husband and wife is a beautiful thing,” Alnahdi says. “But it starts with yourself — you feel nice when you wear something cute and comfortable.” ■

hadiqalondon.com

Halima Begum from Oshen Agency





Shop with Style

What our fashion director **Karen Dacre** loves this week

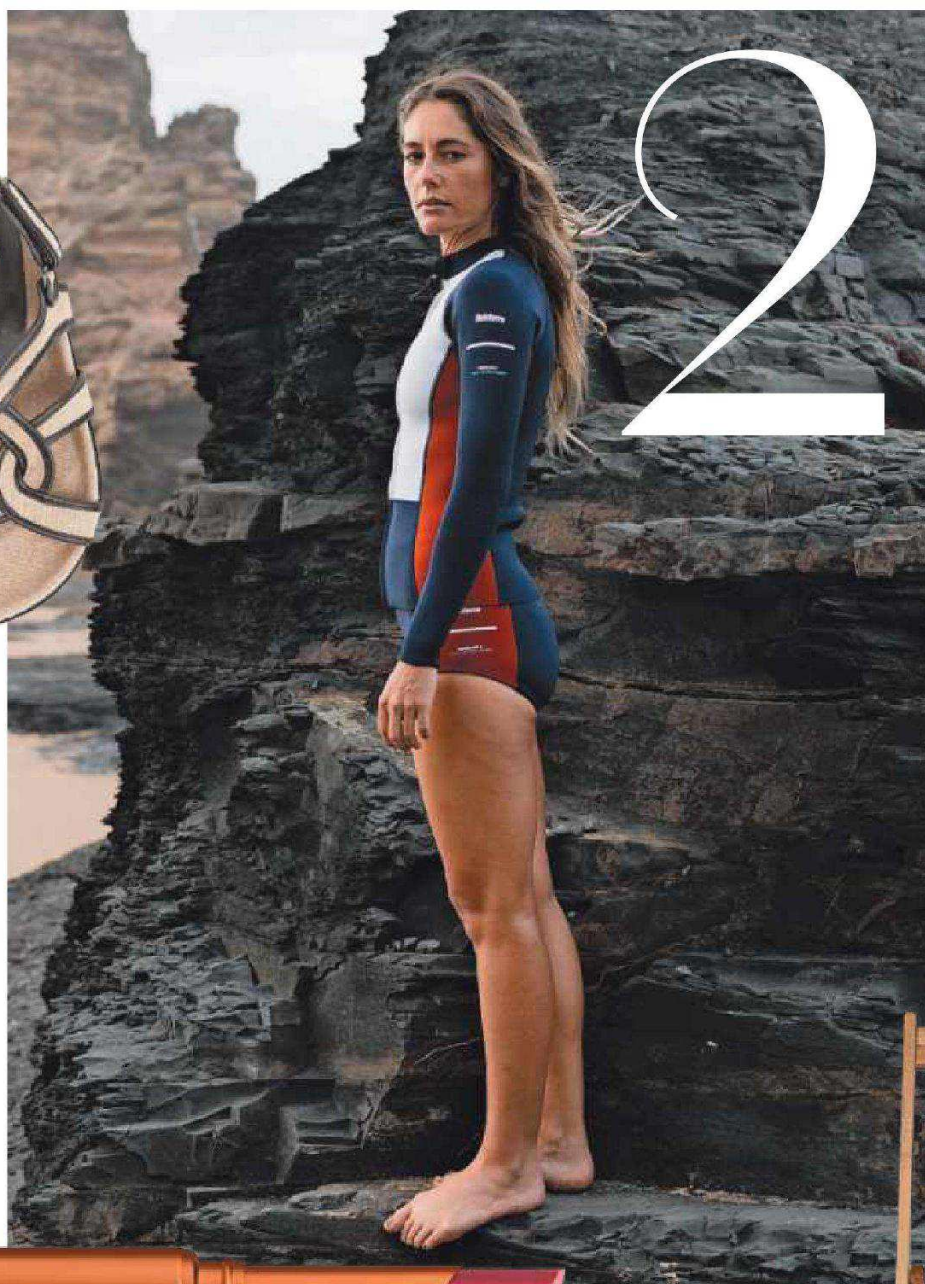


1

TO BOLDLY TOE

I tend to invest in summer sandals, which means wearing the same (carefully chosen) pair all season long.

Toteme's linen and leather Chunky Sandals are the perfect pairing for the oversized shirt dress I have my eye on. £350, toteme.com



INTO THE DEEP

After searching for a swimsuit suited to Scottish summers — and the occasional dip in the local lido — I discovered Finisterre and its brilliant selection of rubber two-pieces and rashguards. I love that they come without fussy prints. From £50, finisterre.com

HIT THE DECK

Googling garden furniture ranks among my top ten pastimes. This candy-striped deckchair from Gucci's new Lido collection might be the chicest I've ever stumbled upon.

Perfect for an east London patio (if you squint it's Positano). £1,190, gucci.com



Victoria Adamson

3



SMOOTH OPERATOR

Having recently seen a photograph of myself with dried-in lipstick I shall be sticking to tinted lip balm henceforth. This one from Chantecaille combines moisturising good stuff with perfect summery shades. From June 16, £33, chantecaille.com

4

5



OVERALL RESULT

Studio Koter is my new favourite childrenswear brand. Focusing on 17 shapes, the British label specialises in genderless, durable, easy-to-wear clothing designed to stand the test of time. The Kai dungarees, above, are surely the ultimate hand-me-down item. From £26, studio-koter.com

SOFT TOUCH

In the same way that new leggings revitalise my workout routine, a new body lotion is just the thing to enthuse me to take care of my skin. Enter Joonbyrd, the newly launched brand that's all about self-care, dermatological expertise and the most upbeat packaging out there. Body wash and lotion duo, £104, joonbyrd.com



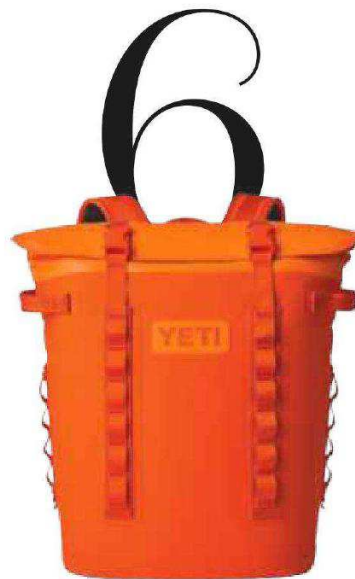
IT'S MARTIN'S WORLD...

... we all just live in it. I can't think of many coffee-table books I'd like to own more than the photographer Martin Parr's latest take on UK culture. Part of Louis Vuitton's Fashion Eye series, and documenting everything from Glastonbury to the coronation, it is a visual love letter to Cool Britannia. £46, louisvuitton.com

UNITED
KINGDOM
MARTIN
PARR



9



CARRY ON CAMPING

With two "driving holidays" on my agenda this year, I'm very much in the market for something to keep the kids' snacks (and a few drinks for the grown-ups) at a temperature that can withstand a ten-hour drive to Glencoe. Yeti's newly launched Hopper backpack is the dream solution. £325, yeti.com

SHORTS STORY

It's the details in these shorts — such as the perfectly positioned darts — that make them the most useful thing in my summer wardrobe. They are the ideal blend of smart and casual, and I'll wear them with everything from shirts and blazers to sandals and a T-shirt. £60, massimodutti.com



7

GORPCORE FOR THE ONE PER CENT

Kendall Roy's favourite brand Loro Piana is jumping on fashion's outdoorsy moment with super-luxed-up clothes for ramblers. With walking shoes and shearling gilets (crafted from "CashFur", natch), it's giving Glastonbury for the super-rich. We're wild for it — even if our wallets are not. Gilet, £5,305, loropiana.com



10

LOVE IS THE RUG

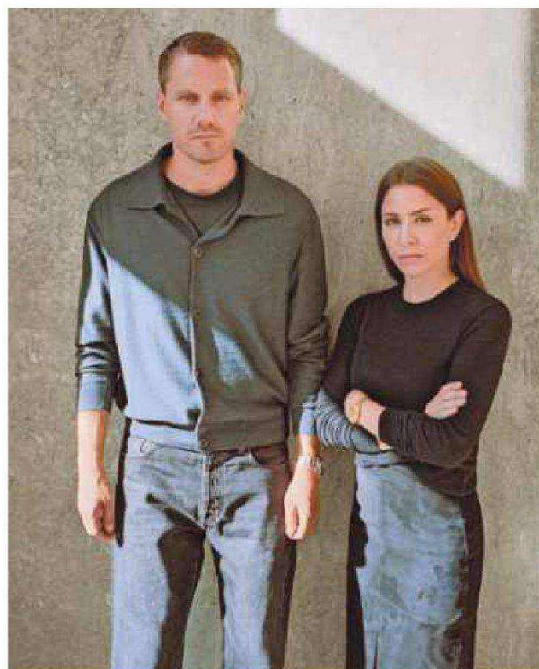
Head to any stylish home right now and you'll find a talking-point rug — and it's likely to be from one particular brand, says **Phoebe McDowell**

In the houses of the design-conscious something is afoot. Well, underfoot. Woven rugs the colour of mushy peas with turquoise vine motifs knotted around their edges, for instance, or brown ones streaked with dusty pink ribbons, or beige ones decorated with doodles of hands. These rugs are very much IYKYK — the work of Nordic Knots.

Founded in 2016 as something of a side hustle by the brothers Felix and Fabian Berglund and Fabian's wife, Liza Laserow, the Stockholm-based brand has become a marker of impeccable taste. Felix is a former poker player, "the brains of the family... the tech guy", says Fabian, who was formerly a creative director at an advertising agency working with brands such as Bulgari. Liza, meanwhile, was in antiques.

Nordic Knots provided an answer to a very particular set of needs. "You either paid \$20,000 for rugs and they took 12 weeks or more to arrive, or they were \$200. Nothing in between," Liza says, referring to the absence of sharp and discerning rug brands at the time. "We experienced it first hand when looking for a rug for our house." Nordic Knots' wool rugs start at £245, while the most expensive is £4,995. Custom sizes, a new offering, start at £150 a square metre.

Swedes hold textiles close to their hearts — the dark days and long nights of winter require even the most unaffected of homebodies to make a house a home. "Rugs were really a utility product back in the day. You covered the floor to keep the cold out. You covered the windows to keep the wind out," Fabian says. "I think we



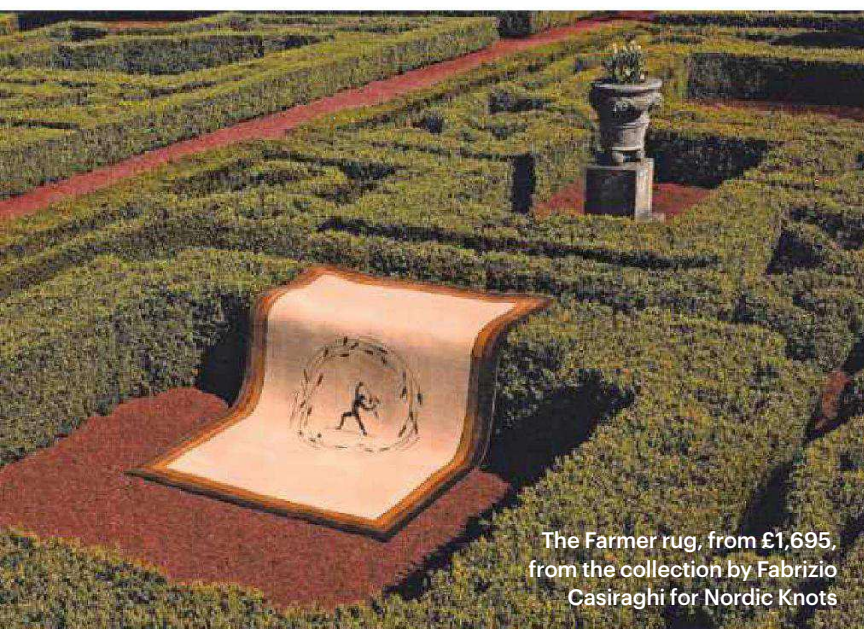
Above Fabian and Liza Laserow Berglund, co-founders of Nordic Knots.
Right The Folding Ribbon rug, from £695, by Campbell-Rey for Nordic Knots







‘For me, rugs are the fourth wall. It’s the backdrop of your furniture, you walk on it and touch it every day’



The Farmer rug, from £1,695, from the collection by Fabrizio Casiraghi for Nordic Knots

bought a Restoration Hardware rug, and it wasn’t bad, but it was quite expensive and not that special.”

And so Nordic Knots was born, with rugs made in India using New Zealand wool and indebted to centuries-old techniques. “For me, rugs are the fourth wall,” Fabian says. “It’s the backdrop to your furniture, you walk on it and touch it every day.”

Theirs have a minimalist sensibility, though not in the blond wood and stark white wall way rife on “Scandi” Pinterest boards. Instead, there is kaleidoscopic colour, albeit muted and dusty — a homage to the façades of Stockholm’s buildings. “It was very important to us that we represented our idea of the Scandinavian aesthetic,” Liza says, also referencing their commitment to “folk”. And this thinking has paid dividends: year-on-year sales for 2022 were up 110 per cent, while in 2023 it was 67 per cent.

Beyond the palette and pattern, the team in the Stockholm atelier ensure the versatility of their rugs, working as interior designers would. “Our miniature mood boards consist of physical fabric samples, wood samples, even metal, to make sure



Left Campbell-Rey's Climbing Vine rug was inspired by Nordic neoclassicism. **Right** Giancarlo Valle's Big Buds design for Nordic Knots. **Below** The brand's Stockholm flagship with Valle's All Hands rug taking centre stage. All from £695

the rugs are not hard to use," Liza says. "Our library of materials allows us to make sure they don't feel intimidating," she continues, referring to even the purplest of purple rugs.

As a result Nordic Knots rugs work as well in antique-crammed country piles as they do in lofty apartments. Just ask those whose floors they cover, from the tastemaker Alex Eagle to the food stylist Laila Gohar and the artist Cassi Namoda. Interior designers such as Hollie Bowden and Martin Brudnizki are fans too, as are the design names that have collaborated with the rug company — a strategic stroke of genius that has cemented the brand's presence. "It's surprising how many people want to make a rug," Fabian says.

The brand's latest collaboration is with the London-based design duo Duncan Campbell (a Scot)

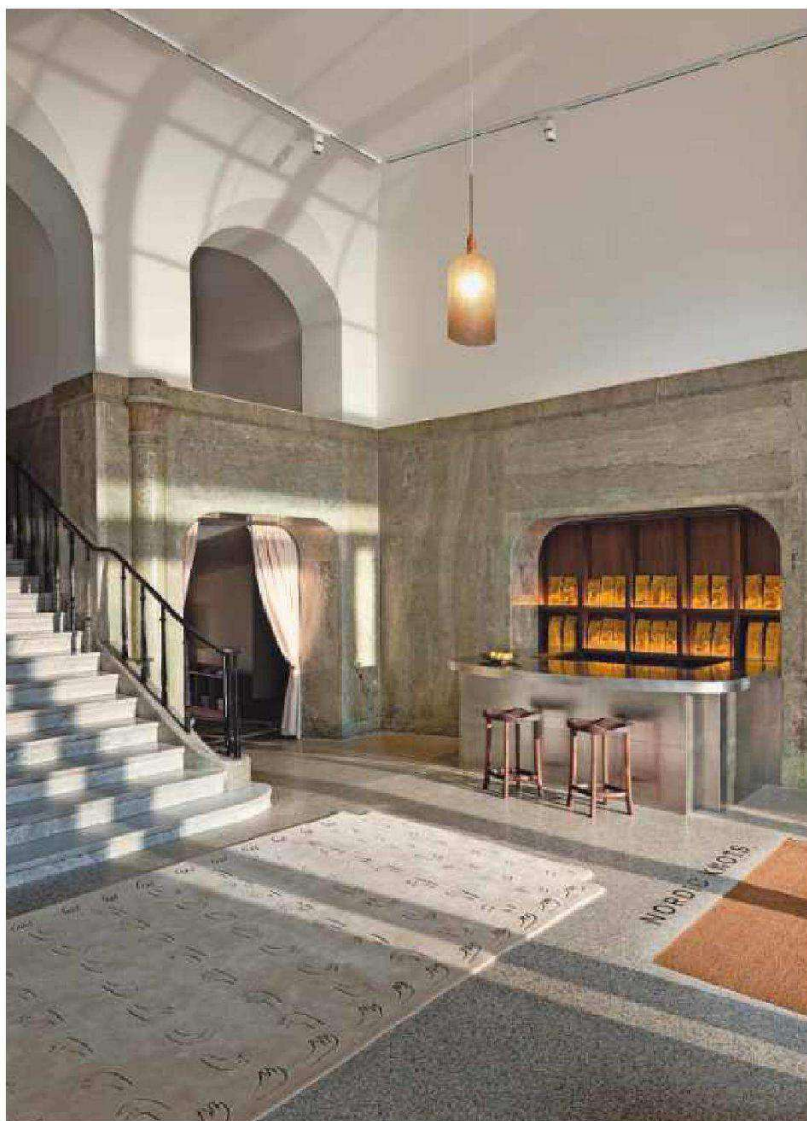


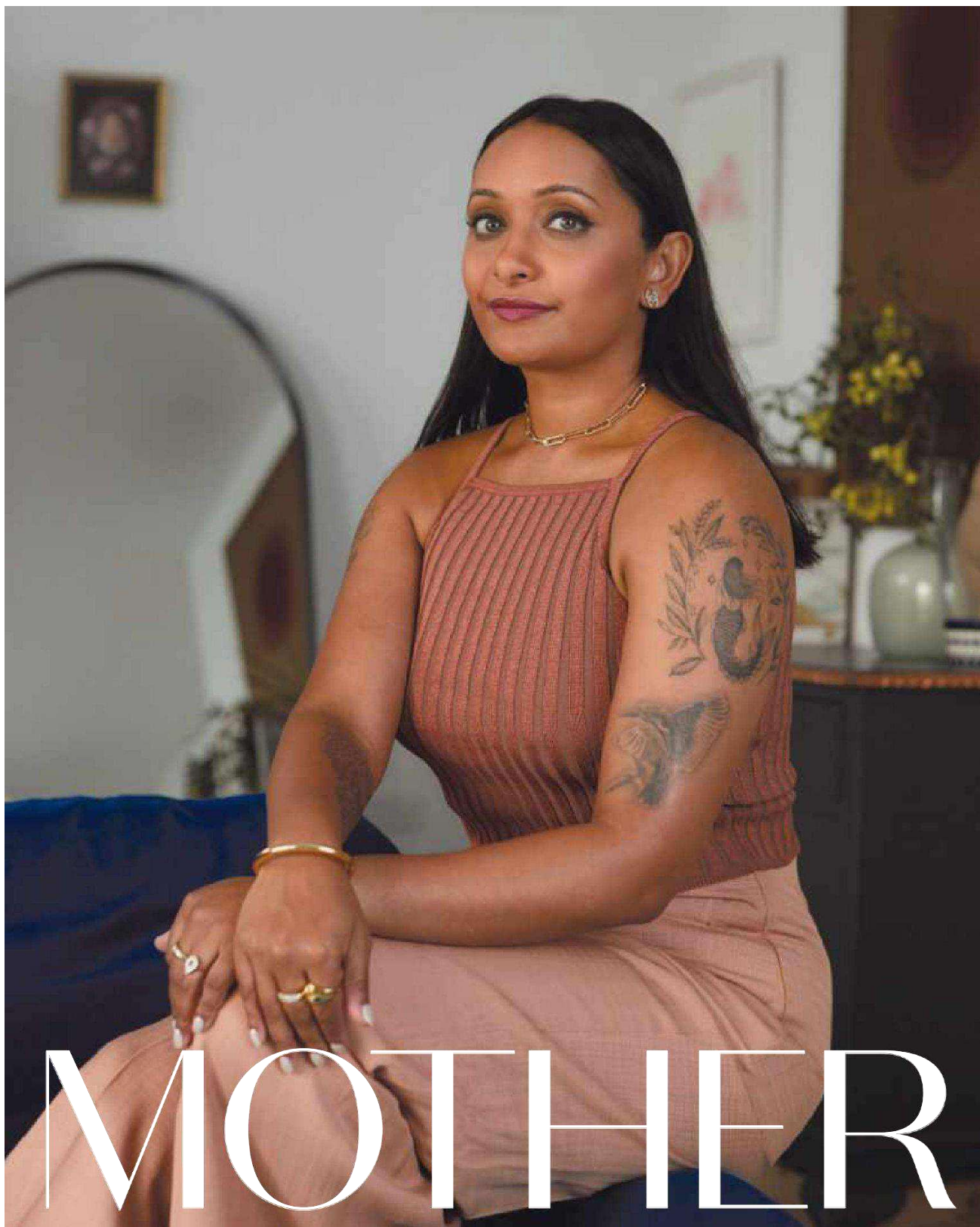
and Charlotte Rey (a Swede) of Campbell-Rey, whose first collection in 2021 was received to rapturous applause. "It leant into the Gustavian period [1780s Sweden] with its joyful colourways and floral motifs," Rey says. "We wanted to dispel the idea of Scandinavian design as only minimalism and neutral colour palettes." The second collection reimagines the designs in saturated, jewel tones, inspired by the masterful colour combinations of the Thorvaldsen Museum, Copenhagen, which houses the work of the 19th-century Danish sculptor Bertel Thorvaldsen.

Nordic Knots has also tapped Giancarlo Valle, a New York-based designer whose work includes the Aquazzura store in New York and Hotel Esencia, one of Mexico's finest, north of Tulum. Embellished with his folkloric doodles of leaves, hands and loops in ochre, barn red and forest green — a palette inspired by the richly decorated cottages in Halsingland in central Sweden — his rugs have an enigmatic quality.

There is no design manifesto, collaborators are left to their own devices, safe in the founders' knowledge that an appreciation of traditional craft and Swedish folklore unites them all. "It's a universal language," says Valle, who was also enlisted to design the brand's flagship store in Stockholm, which opened in 2023, near Fabian and Liza's house, where they live with their son, Ben, three. Housed in an old cinema, its restored marble staircase, green stone walls and terrazzo floor play host not only to the rugs (and curtains, which the brand launched last year), but also more contemporary pieces such as a brushed stainless steel coffee bar. It bodes well for the imminent arrival of a New York store, and their desire to become *the* rug brand — though many would argue they already are. ■ @phoebejmcd

nordicknots.com





MOTHER LOAD

The writer **Poorna Bell** is 43 and doesn't have kids. So why do some people still think this makes her less of a woman, she wonders

Photograph **Victoria Adamson**

It was a warm Sunday afternoon in my friend's back garden, thick coils of smoke emanating from a barbecue in the corner, people fuzzy and drunk on wine. My friend's wife, someone I tended to avoid on account of her abrasiveness, was holding court on how hard it was being a woman. I was in my late twenties at the time and didn't understand how unhappy and frustrated she was at having to do most of the domestic load, and asked if she was able to do something just for herself. She snapped: "You don't understand because you don't have children. Being a woman means being a mother and you won't get it until you are one."

While no one has used those words quite as explicitly since, the idea of motherhood being inextricably tied to womanhood is one I have seen and heard countless times over the years. As girls we role-play motherhood with dolls; as we grow up there are endless rom-coms where having a baby is the female protagonist's happy ending. Even now, aged 43, I don't have to look far on TikTok for "tradwife" content — the movement that advocates a return to "traditional values", which translates to women being homemakers (from milking their own cows to sewing their own blankets), with motherhood an essential part of fulfilling your role as a woman.

When I was younger this felt less jarring because the potential for children still existed. But after turning 40, I made a definitive decision that I didn't want children. Now, the idea that motherhood infers a sense of legitimacy about being a woman feels almost cruel. And if I feel like that, having voluntarily decided not to have children, I can't imagine how it feels for those who want children but cannot have them. Womanhood, after all, comprises many different identities, and parenthood is only one of many. Fewer women are choosing to have children — in February, the Office for National Statistics announced the national birth rate in the UK had fallen to a record low, while last month The Lancet published a study that shows it has dropped globally.

I wasn't always so sure about not having children — in fact, in my late twenties, when I met my husband, Rob, we agreed to have them. He'd always wanted to be a father and I'd always accepted parenthood as one of the milestones of being married. When Rob died in 2015, I saw that future burn in front of my eyes. And when the grief fog dissipated and I started to think about rebuilding my life, I was able to see more clearly.

I realised I had wanted to get married, buy a house and have children without questioning whether that desire had truly come from myself or some pervasive sense that it was what was expected. The truth was that I had never felt maternal or had the urge to be a mother. When I started to vocalise this, the gaslighting that came from almost every corner of society was spectacular. Some would say, "Well, no one is ever really ready." If I said I felt no drive to have children, it'd be a pick'n'mix of "You might regret not having

them", "It's a love like no other", and "Who will look after you when you're older?"

I can see part of that comes from a good place. People who have had children and define their lives around it — such as my own parents — cannot imagine those lives without children in them. And there is an immense amount of joy and love that comes from being a parent — I see it on the faces of my friends, even when they are mad with tiredness. But part of it is also because of this inability to understand that some women simply do not want children. A man's masculinity is not called into question in the same way. For women, meanwhile, it's as if there is something missing. On more than one occasion I have heard someone say, "Oh, that's a shame," or cluck sympathetically at me.

Popular culture is hardly saturated with positive, realistic representations of child-free midlife women. In TV and literature, it's either a zany child-free aunt who drinks bourbon at 10am and shags 20-year-olds or an embittered woman who hates children. That, combined with the fact that society has plenty of occasions to celebrate your life when you have children — from Mother's and Father's Days to baby showers to anniversaries — and none if you don't, makes you feel invisible.

I'm lucky that my female parent friends see time with me as a reprieve from having to talk about their kids and to reclaim a bit of their old selves, but among strangers there is an awkwardness once you are outed as child-free. A sense of "what will we talk about now?", which has always seemed so odd to me given that there is so much else. It is easy, then, for a gulf to grow and become a them versus us narrative. But I don't think any of us benefit from that.

In my late thirties I stopped self-pitying long enough to proactively make friends with people who don't have children, so I would put less pressure on my parent friends. I also sought out child-free role models: the tech queen and sex activist Cindy Gallop, for instance, who is in her sixties and has been vocal about why she doesn't want children, or the actress Miriam Margolyes, who said, "I'm not less of a woman because I don't have children." I thought about the older women in my extended family who didn't have children too, who were great aunties, supporting us when we didn't feel able to talk to our own parents about certain issues. It has allowed me to pass that on to my ten-year-old niece, who I'm helping to raise and mould. I now realise that parenting doesn't come in one shape.

What it really boils down to, though, is honouring each other's choices. Because it's one thing to exist in a world that constantly tells women what they are and what they should do with their bodies, it's another for that message to be coming from women themselves. ■

This Is Fine by Poorna Bell (Cornerstone £18.99) is published on June 13. To order a copy go to timesbookshop.co.uk or call 020 3176 2935. Free UK standard P&P on online orders over £25



Texture

talk

From scrunching to plopping, the pros tell **Morgan Fargo** how best to look after your curls, kinks and coils

Looking up curl routines online is a minefield. There's plopping, squelching, flipping, scrunching — and that's before you've even thought about reaching for a diffuser. Some will tell you to chuck out your shampoo and that co-washing (using conditioner only) will transform the shape and spring of your curls, coils and kinks. So what to do?

Back in the 1990s a new way of categorising hair emerged, created by Oprah Winfrey's hairstylist, Andre Walker. Hair types were numbered from 1 to 4 and then the numbers were divided into A, B or C. Each category, eg 2C or 4B, defined a specific hair texture from straight to wavy, curly to kinky-coily. This is now the chart most widely used.

"The texture-typing system helps identify general characteristics of the hair that can make it easier to choose

suitable products and routines," says the hair stylist and afro-texture specialist Jennie Roberts. "But it falls short in being overly simplified. Hair can have multiple textures and adhering rigidly to one 'type' can mean you ignore your hair's individual needs." But that doesn't mean you should discount it entirely. "Texture typing is useful when gathering information about your hair online or quickly communicating it to a stylist you haven't yet worked with," say Sarah-Jane Crawford, a TV presenter and founder of the hair brand Clean Curls. "Most of us have multitextured hair, though, so it doesn't always line up perfectly."

Still, there are some nuggets that can make life with curls easier, such as wearing a silk bonnet overnight or sleeping on a silk pillowcase. "A cotton pillowcase and sleeping with your



hair out will not bode well for the morning,” Crawford says. “Instead, wearing a silk or satin headscarf or bonnet to bed, with your hair in a pineapple style (loosely bringing it up to a ponytail on the top of your head), will avoid friction damage and tangling as you sleep.”

When it comes to styling, finger coiling — taking a section of wet hair and curling it around your finger — can help define curls and coils, especially if your hair is a mixture of textures. It is time-consuming though, so save it for slow mornings and seal hair with a light oil, says Lauralyn Clinton, head stylist at the scalp-focused textured-hair salon the Steam Bar, based at Selfridges, Oxford Street.

But squelching and scrunching is not to be skipped. Start by layering wet hair with enough styling product that when you scrunch (that’s cupping your hands and squeezing the curls inside) it makes a squelching sound. This noise indicates that your hair has enough moisture to prevent frizziness and maintain its shape. Scrunching is also the most effective way to revive crispy curls after styling as well as first thing in the morning.

Above all, though, “get to know your moisture cycle”, Crawford says. “This is how long it takes your hair to completely lose moisture and need some added back in. Your hair is mostly made up of the fibrous protein keratin, which needs moisture to properly strengthen and shape the hair. Without it, hair grows brittle.” When you feel or see the telltale signs of imminent dryness, spritz a leave-in conditioner or run a hair cream through your lengths, dampening them first. **Colour Wow** has released **Money Mist** (1 £29.50), a lightweight leave-in spray that makes this a doddle. Or reach for the new **Shea Moisture Coconut & Hibiscus Curl Defining Gel** (2 £13) to redefine and reshine lacklustre curls and coils between washes.

Speaking of wash day, Clinton has some words of warning. “Curly, coily and kinky hair is fragile and delicate, requiring time and patience. This means daily cleansing and skipping conditioner is a huge no-no. Look for hydrating, moisturising shampoos instead, being mindful of build-up.” When scrunch-drying, Clinton says to skip terry-cloth towels and instead use a cotton T-shirt or microfibre towel. These are also recommended for “plopping” — carefully dropping your wet hair on to a soft towel or T-shirt and wrapping it up in a mound on top of your head to dry. The **Straand Woven Microfibre Towel** (3 £24) looks similar to those luxurious white towels you find in hotels but it won’t rough up your hair with harsh, overdrying fibres.

Finally, think about what’s happening while you’re in bed. For my hair type (a mix of 2B, 3A and 3C), sleeping in two twist-outs (two-strand braids similar to French plaits), keeps my prep time minimal in the morning. Pineapple up-dos, loose ponytails, wrapped or bonneted are also great options. It minimises the amount of damage done by tossing and turning as you sleep. Remember, maintaining moisture is the name of the game, losing it to your pillowcase is not. ■

@morganfargo

Seven of the best new textured hair products

THE LIGHTWEIGHT SHAMPOO

There’s a common misconception that all textured hair is thick. If you have fine hair, finding a shampoo that cleanses and moisturises without weighing it down can be tricky.

Adwoa Beauty has a shampoo that’s just the ticket:

Blue Tansy Clarifying Gel Shampoo (4 £27).

THE GO-TO BRUSH

Manta specialises in ultra-caring tools to minimise hair loss and has launched a **Kinks, Coils & Curls Brush** (5 £30), designed specifically for textured hair.

THE TWO-FER

Who says sunhats and curly hair protection are mutually exclusive? Not according to **Only Curls**, whose new satin-lined **baseball hat** comes with an open or closed back (6 from £16) depending on your preference. Roll on sunshine.

THE CREAM ENHANCER

One to use on wash day and in between, **Aveda Be Curly Advanced Curl Enhancer Cream** (7 £22) is silicone-free,

adds buckets of shine (not grease, don’t worry) and smooths fluffy flyaways.

THE RICH CONDITIONER

For ultra-moisturisation, newcomer **Cécred** (Beyoncé is the founder, dontcha know) does a **Moisturizing Deep Conditioner** (8 £37) that is buttery soft and rich in oils as well as hyaluronic acid and squalane.

THE ON-THE-GO SAVIOUR

For mini-breaks or gym bags, smaller-sized products are a safe bet. The new **Bouclème Mini Curls Redefined Essentials Kit** (9 £15) contains a hydrating cleanser, conditioner, intensive moisture treatment, curl cream and defining gel.

THE SCALP SPOT

Head over to the Steam Bar in Selfridges to experience a moisture-infused steam treatment that includes scalp and haircare. The salon’s MO is that steam helps textured hair absorb moisture from the environment and products. **The Steam Bar Signature Steam Treatment** includes wash, steam and blow-dry (from £150, thesteambar.com).



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Sarah Jossel

Frizzy hair? Flushed skin? Dry limbs? This week I'm sharing my summer secret weapons



Hello from Spain! It's our first holiday of the year and, I won't lie, it's great to feel the sun on my SPF 50-protected skin. See what I did there? No, really, I am slathering myself — and my daughter, and the other couple we are here with — in endless SPF formulas so that I can report back on the best ones. Although the other couple keep going off on day trips and I can't work out why...

Things are jolly. It's one of those holidays where each day the itinerary is "do nothing unless you want to". Grace has discovered the sprinklers, my husband is listening to *That Peter Crouch Podcast* with the noise-cancelling function switched on and I am attempting to read the novel that you all read last summer: *Tomorrow, and Tomorrow, and Tomorrow*. I'll also be road-testing a lot of the beauty products that I packed. It turns out I can edit a magazine column but I cannot edit a make-up bag. Let me share my top summer secret weapons.

The first product came about on a recent terrible hair day back in London. Forget being a day late for a hair wash, I think I was three days late. We've all been there, right? I scooped out a dollop of **Percy & Reed Session Styling Hair Wax** (1 £18), rubbed it between my fingers and smoothed it into my dry, frazzled hair. Then, using a **GHD The Final Touch Narrow Dressing Brush** (2 £21), I brushed it back into a low ponytail. It looked professionally styled if I do say so myself. Instant mirror shine, every strand of hair perfectly in place, and the pièce de résistance? My hair didn't budge for the entire day. I have never found a hair gel or wax or mousse, or any sort of holding product, that has the power and oomph to make flyaways behave all day. An hour or two, sure. But my hair was still in pristine condition when I got home. I highly recommend this combination as your slick holiday hair go-to. Works beautifully on shorter styles too.

Next, **Supergoop! (Re)Setting Powder 100% Mineral SPF 30** (3 £29). If it came as a charm on a necklace I would buy it because I am forever scrambling in the abyss of my beach bag for this paintbrush. I use it for two reasons: a) it's an invisible setting powder that takes down shine and oil — just think, no greasy forehead, or in my case greasy chin; and b) I know you won't reapply SPF over make-up so this is your trusted top-up, as well as being handy for smaller areas such as hands, ears and the back of the neck. Talking of SPF top-ups, if you're on the move with kids the **Mustela SPF 50 Family High Protection Sun Stick** (4 £9) is a winner. A quick swipe for you, a quick swipe — when they aren't looking — for them. But rely on this for on-the-go only. Stick to your usual creams for the initial applications. They'll thank you one day.

I have always adored instant tans for adding some much needed bronze to my limbs, but on evenings when time isn't on my side I've gone back to a real gem: Nuxe's dry body oils. I had forgotten how golden and yet not vaguely sticky they are. I say a plural "oils" because it has recently launched a new version. **Nuxe Huile Prodigieuse Or Florale** (5 £22) is a rose-gold mist that hydrates sun-parched skin while also delivering the most gorgeous sheeny glow — think sun-kissed highlights for all the areas on show: arms, legs, chest. A tip is to add a few drops to the ends of your hair and the sparkling floral notes will linger.

Finally, **Curél Deep Moisture Spray** (6 £19.50) is a godsend for keeping cool and refreshed without interfering with your make-up. There is a 50ml travel-size version that is handy too. It's actually a year-round blessing for hot flushes and very sensitive skin. Much more than a mere water spray, this has ceramides and eucalyptus to hydrate and calm. Spray as and when you please.

And now it's back to last summer's novel for me. Time for chapter two. ■ @sarahjossel





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India Knight

For a perfectly even complexion, this pressed powder works wonders



Pressed powder reminds me of my grandmother and, specifically, of my grandmother's handbag, which had a distinct smell of leather and faint roses. (Ralf Schwieger made a fragrance for Frédéric Malle called Lipstick Rose, which does something similar with roses, violets and the suggestion of old-fashioned waxy lipsticks.)

I use loose powder (Laura Mercier and Huda Beauty) all the time, but this grandmotherly association with compacts means that, although I am a prime candidate for carrying about pressed powder in my handbag, I don't often use it. This is an oversight. Modern powder is nothing like old-fashioned powder, which was full of talc that sat there visibly on the face and got caught in tiny hairs. Modern powders that come in compacts are as close as you're going to get to applying a mattifying and blurring effect to the bits of your face that need it. They also perform powder's more traditional job, which is to keep unwanted shine under control. You can also, of course, use them to set make-up and therefore prolong its life.

Before my rave — because I love this week's product — I should say that if you are happy with your current face powder, stick with it. I am going through a phase of being absolutely scandalised by the price of everything, including fairly ordinary clothes and sofas (which appear to have literally doubled in price since I last looked two or three years ago). This powder, which is **Hourglass Vanish Airbrush Pressed Powder**, costs £57, which is a lot of money in anyone's book.

However: it is amazing, and here is why. It is minutely milled. It looks as if you have nothing on your skin, even outdoors in bright sunlight. Two, the blur effect it gives is very natural, if you know what I mean — it doesn't look as though it comes from a bottle or, indeed, a compact. Sometimes the blurring effect on a face is clearly the result of using a blurring product and that is fine, but this, again, looks completely natural. It blurs, though — it really blurs. What I mean by this is not that it gives a faintly spooky Photoshopped effect where you look like a smooth egg, or that your pores and finer lines suddenly disappear. It just turns down the volume significantly. My pores were there, but much less there. My fine lines, which I have no issue with anyway, were still fine lines but muted.

Most of all, I loved how well it worked on my under-eyes. If I am really trying to get rid of under-eye business, I use a lot of loose powder on top of concealer, let it sit there for a bit and then buff most of it off with a brush. With this powder, I patted — it comes with a puff, as well it might at this price — a tiny, seemly amount on to the concealer and left it at that. Big, big difference. Then I tried it with no concealer, on a bare, moisturised face. Again, the shadows under my eyes were significantly fainter. Impressively, this effect lasted until I went to bed.

I also tried it as a mattifying powder, again on a bare face. I have combination skin that goes shiny down the T-zone within the hour, but I don't love using too much powder on it because of vague notions about blocking pores. The powder is so fine that this didn't feel like an issue — it sat over them like a veil. The mattifying effect lasted three or four hours, after which I reapplied a tiny bit of powder and was good until the evening; I suspect this may not be the powder for you if you are exceptionally oily. Also, noticeably, the powder glided over drier areas without getting caught in them and becoming too visible. So: the ultimate powder compact, in my view, at a price. ■

INDIA LOVES

BUY Here is something cheap for balance. If you have dry legs that look slightly dusty unless you lavish body lotion on them every day, using one with a little bit of urea in it will make a big difference (urea eats dead skin cells) and keep skin hydrated for much longer. I recently discovered **Instituto Español Urea Hydrating Lotion**, which is £10 for nearly a litre. You can use it anywhere, including on bumpy upper arms, but I can only vouch for the effect on legs, which is fantastic. [amazon.co.uk](https://www.amazon.co.uk)



It is minutely milled. It looks as if you have nothing on your skin, even outdoors in bright sunlight

Dear Dolly

Your love, life and friendship dilemmas answered
by **Dolly Alderton**

I find myself in a rather strange yet exciting situation. I'm 51 years old and my girlfriend, who is 44, recently told me we are expecting a baby this October. I'm a first-time parent and I am trying to come to grips with this. I am a little scared, yet we are both happy about it. It's strange, but by the time I'm 70 I will just be seeing the little one off to college. Is what I am feeling normal?



At 35 years old, I find myself in the middle of the typically youngest and oldest ages that people have children. I am at the summit of the “will I won’t I, should I shouldn’t I, can I can’t I” conversation that begins for many women at about 25 and ends at about 45. From here, I feel lucky that I can see all the peaks, valleys and flatlands: the lost opportunities for those who were busy raising kids in their twenties, the fertility challenges faced by older first-time parents; the boundlessness of midlife freedom afforded to young parents, the fun of fortysomething parenthood for people who have already travelled the world, been to every party and established their careers; the grief of those who didn’t get the family they thought they’d have, the joy of those who chose to be child-free.

I have calmly and contentedly sat at the top of this hill on a bench for much of this year, eating my cheese and pickle sandwiches, enjoying the breeze and the respite from debating and decision-making. I’ve thought about what parenthood is, whether I want it and all the potential times to do it, half of which are already behind me on the trail. And I know I can’t go back to them; back to the boyfriend who was desperate to be a dad, back to the thought of egg-freezing at 30. But this no longer panics me because I now realise that there are equal benefits and downsides to having children younger or older.

And you don’t choose most of this stuff. You didn’t become a first-time dad at 31 because that’s just not what happened. Maybe you weren’t ready or you weren’t with the right person. You can’t long for a life where you’re dropping off your kid at college at the age you are now because that’s a game of quantum physics. That’s an imaginary life dictated by imaginary circumstances. You only get the life as a parent that you find yourself in, and this one is yours.

It is totally normal that you’re feeling daunted about becoming a dad — bringing a person into the world is daunting. And it is good that you are considerate of your age and how this may limit your parenting or the time you may have with your child. But it’s also important to consider what your age could bring:

wisdom, perspective, an appreciation of the time you do have in this new role as a dad. Remember that people generally live much longer and healthier lives than they did when your parents’ generation were having children and midlife parenting felt like more of a risk. And that no parent knows how much time they’re going to have with their children because none of us knows how long our life will be. The

first parental death in my group of friends was when we were in our early twenties; her dad was in his fifties. Another friend is nearly 40 and still has a dad merrily knocking about in his nineties.

I talk to people a lot about their childhoods and their relationship with their parents; it is one of our most defining experiences. The attributes and faults of people’s parents are never entirely down to the age they chose to have a baby. All that matters is the time that they give their child when they’re around; the quality of that time spent together. And whether their child felt loved, safe and accepted.

Perhaps the reason you are feeling daunted is you know all the potential risks of parenthood. All the things that could go wrong. All the future hours of sleep lost, all the restaurant meals ruined, all the carpets professionally cleaned because of a Ribena incident. This is one of the main downsides of having children after 35: we know too much. We’ve heard too many parents complain. Last weekend a friend of mine, who had her children in the first half of her thirties, came to stay and I put this to her. “We complain because you’re a safe space in which to complain,” she said. “But if you messaged every parent friend of yours right now and asked them if their child has, overall, added to or subtracted from their life, they would say the first.”

My advice to you is to focus on your excitement. Your excitement, in this instance, with everything you know about what’s ahead, is the most instructive feeling. And as for me, as I carry on walking along this stretch of time, unsure of where I’ll end up, I think of the other thing that a friend said on parenthood. “It’s so good too. I promise. None of us say it enough, but if that’s what you decide you want, it’s really f***ing great.” ■



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