

STYLE

THE SUNDAY TIMES

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London Boy

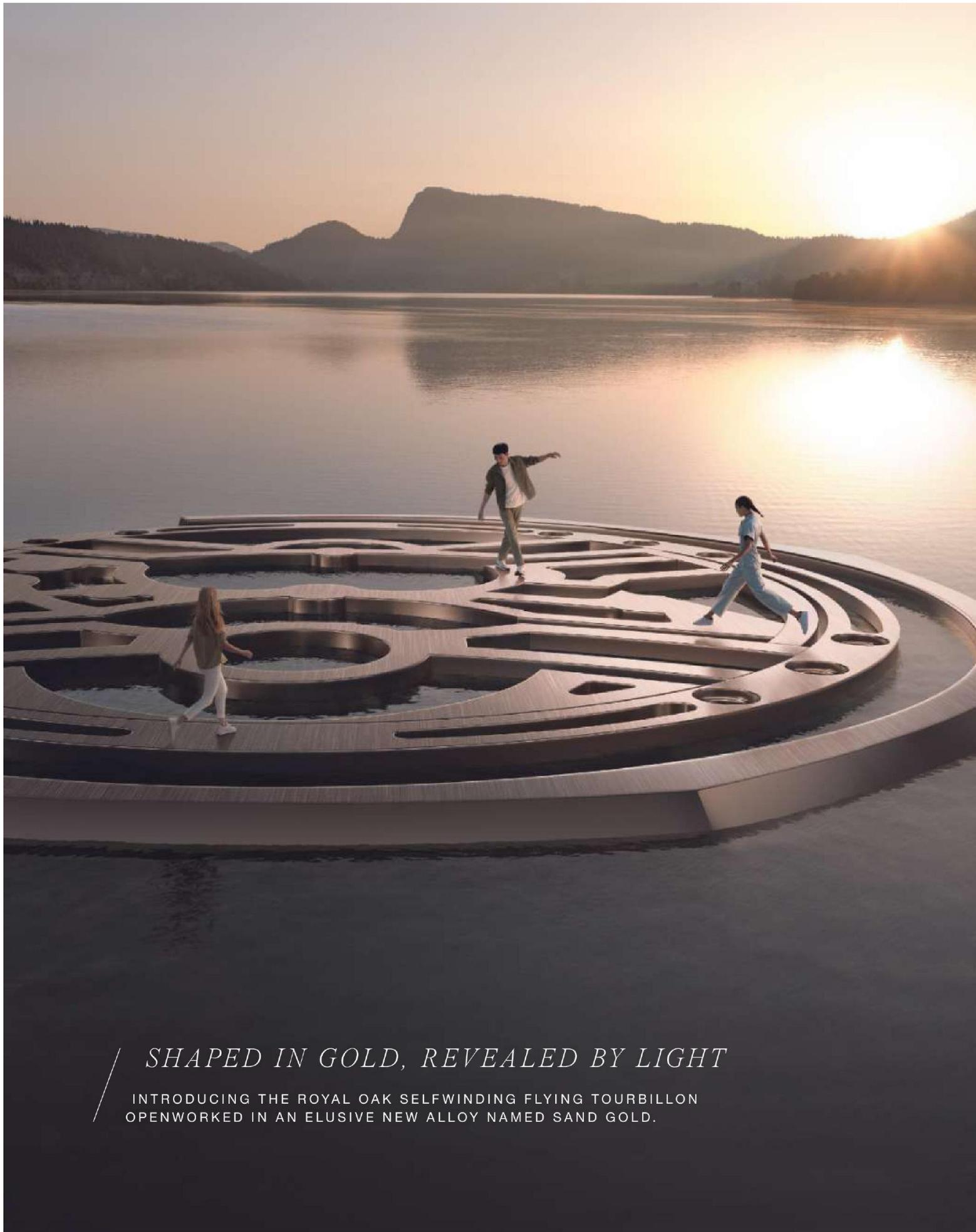
WHAT **JOE ALWYN** DID NEXT



Plus

PITCH PERFECT
WHY FOOTBALLERS
LOVE A MAN-BAG

TANGERINE DREAM
THE FASHION SET'S NEW
HOLIDAY HOTSPOT



SHAPED IN GOLD, REVEALED BY LIGHT

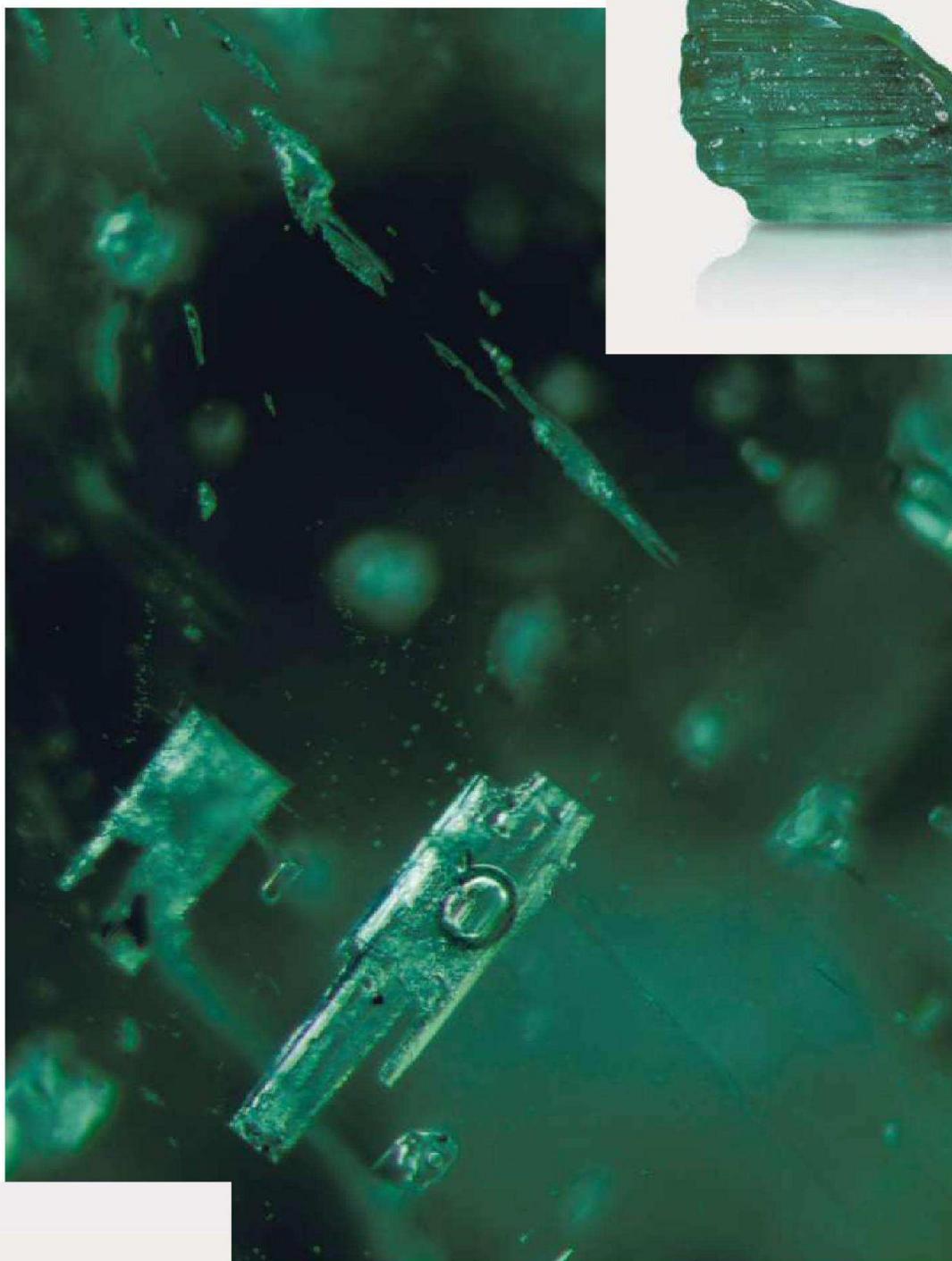
INTRODUCING THE ROYAL OAK SELFWINDING FLYING TOURBILLON
OPENWORKED IN AN ELUSIVE NEW ALLOY NAMED SAND GOLD.

AUDEMARS PIGUET
Le Brassus

SEEK BEYOND



GEMFIELDS



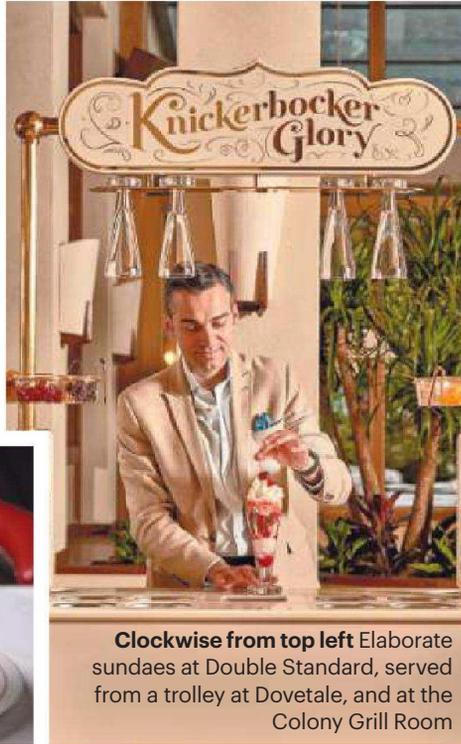
THIS IS AN EMERALD

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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



Clockwise from top left Elaborate sundaes at Double Standard, served from a trolley at Dovetale, and at the Colony Grill Room

I scream, you scream, we all scream for... the knickerbocker glory

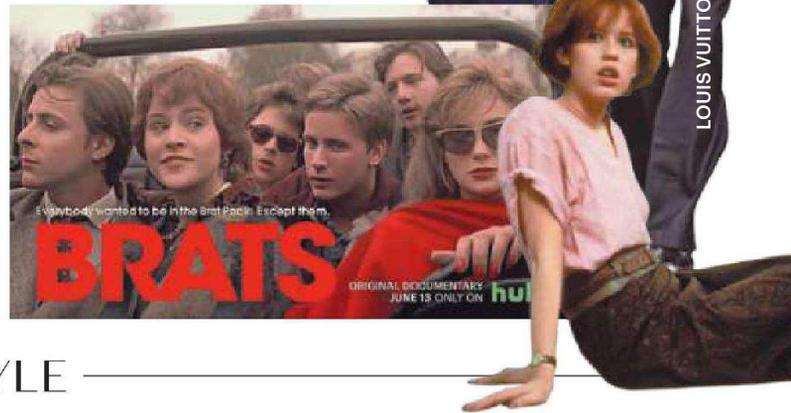
What is the latest dessert to enjoy a retro renaissance, we hear you cry. Yes, it's the magnificent, multilayered nostalgia of a knickerbocker glory. Believed to have originated in New York, these towering ice-cream sundaes have been on the menu at Fortnum & Mason's Parlour since the 1950s. Its present-day version is a lavish Italian meringue-topped medley of vanilla and strawberry gelato, pineapple and raspberry. Seek out one by the seaside at the Harbour Bar, Scarborough, or a contemporary riff with salted caramel, chocolate and whipped cream at Double Standard in King's Cross.

Bespoke knickerbocker glories are constructed on request at the Mayfair hotspots the Colony Grill Room and Dovetale, and they're an annual summer tradition at the gastronomes' fave St John Bread and Wine. Its elevated version, with lemon curd and sherry-soaked praline almonds, is due imminently. Cherry on top, plz.

Cristian Barnett, Jon Day, Alamy, Getty Images

Pretty in Pink! The Brat Pack are back

Big dramas, big shoulder pads and big hair: the Brat Pack were the OG influencers of the 1980s, thanks to cinematic classics such as *Weird Science*, *The Outsiders*, *The Breakfast Club* and *Sixteen Candles* (we could go on), plus gossip-heavy off-set "shenanigans" (drug habits and inter-pack relationships). Praise be, then, that, four decades on, the softboi heart-throb turned film-maker Andrew McCarthy, now 61 and best known for his role as Blane in *Pretty in Pink*, has made the film *Brats*. Streaming now on Hulu in the US, it documents the highs and lows of the dream team, although, as it turned out, the brats themselves hated the name "Brat Pack". "It really irritated me," recalls Demi Moore, while Rob Lowe pulls no punches, calling the term "a f***ing disaster". But the actors may be pleased to know that the Brat Pack look — plaid, oversized blazers, bleached denim — is also back in vogue, as witnessed on the catwalks at Coach, Louis Vuitton, Wales Bonner and Dior. Bubble skirts at the ready!



STYLE

ON THE COVER JOE ALWYN PHOTOGRAPH NATHANIEL GOLDBERG STYLING DAVID BRADSHAW. POLO TOP, £505, JW ANDERSON

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Between the lines

Pull up your bikini straps and flaunt those white bits! Yes, as swimwear moves on from barely-there triangle bikinis to cutouts, bandeaus and high-waist bottoms, it's no surprise we're seeing the

A-list embrace their tan lines. Indeed, disguising them is now incredibly cheugy (look it up). Just ask Bella Hadid, who rocked up at the Cannes film festival in May wearing a draped Jacquemus dress that showed off the itsy-bitsy bikini line proudly bisecting her back. Or the actress Sydney Sweeney (*above right*), who captioned a holiday dump on Instagram "good times and tan lines", proudly showcasing her strap marks in a halterneck top. The model Emily Ratajkowski (*above left*) has long been a champion of the movement: see the campaign for her swimwear brand, Inamorata. It's also a subtle signifier to everyone else that you've just been on holiday, a humblebrag if you will, not to mention a nice reminder. Plus, it's more "authentic" — a 2024 buzzword. And who has got time to fake-tan their white bits to match, anyway? Just remember: factor 50 at all times, guys!

Gimme moiré

A little bit shiny, a little bit sexy, moiré — the watermarked fabric with an almost trompe l'oeil effect beloved by the Victorians — is the material du jour increasingly gracing the fash pack's homes and wardrobes. At the London showroom of the fabric house CC Moulton, walls are adorned with the brand's British-made ruby moiré tissé (*centre right*). The cult interiors store Sister by Studio Ashby is also a fan — on June 24, it is launching a moiré-inspired trio of Trippy fabrics — while Campbell-Rey uses a lavender moiré to upholster its Fabrizia cocktail chair for Invisible Collection (*bottom right*). See it cropping up repeatedly in this season's fashion too. The French label Marine Serre debuted a series of recycled-moiré looks this year, while brides in the know love Loeffler Randall's ballet pumps and bow bags (*top right*). Moiré is more!



Heating up



▲ ALPI WOOD VENEER

The interiors set are covering their tables, walls and shelves in the stuff



▲ THREE WOMEN, THE TV SHOW

Not out until autumn, but the first-look photos are giving us *Big Little Lies* vibes



▲ MAIN CHARACTER BEACH TOWELS

Big prints, bright colours: this summer's one per cent beach flex



Cooling down

▼ DAD CAPS

It's all about the IYKYK visor instead (Pucci, Loewe, Gucci)



▼ SWEET FRENCH TOAST

Foodies have given it a savoury twist with crispy onions and garlic — see No33, Norwich, and Eggbreak in Notting Hill



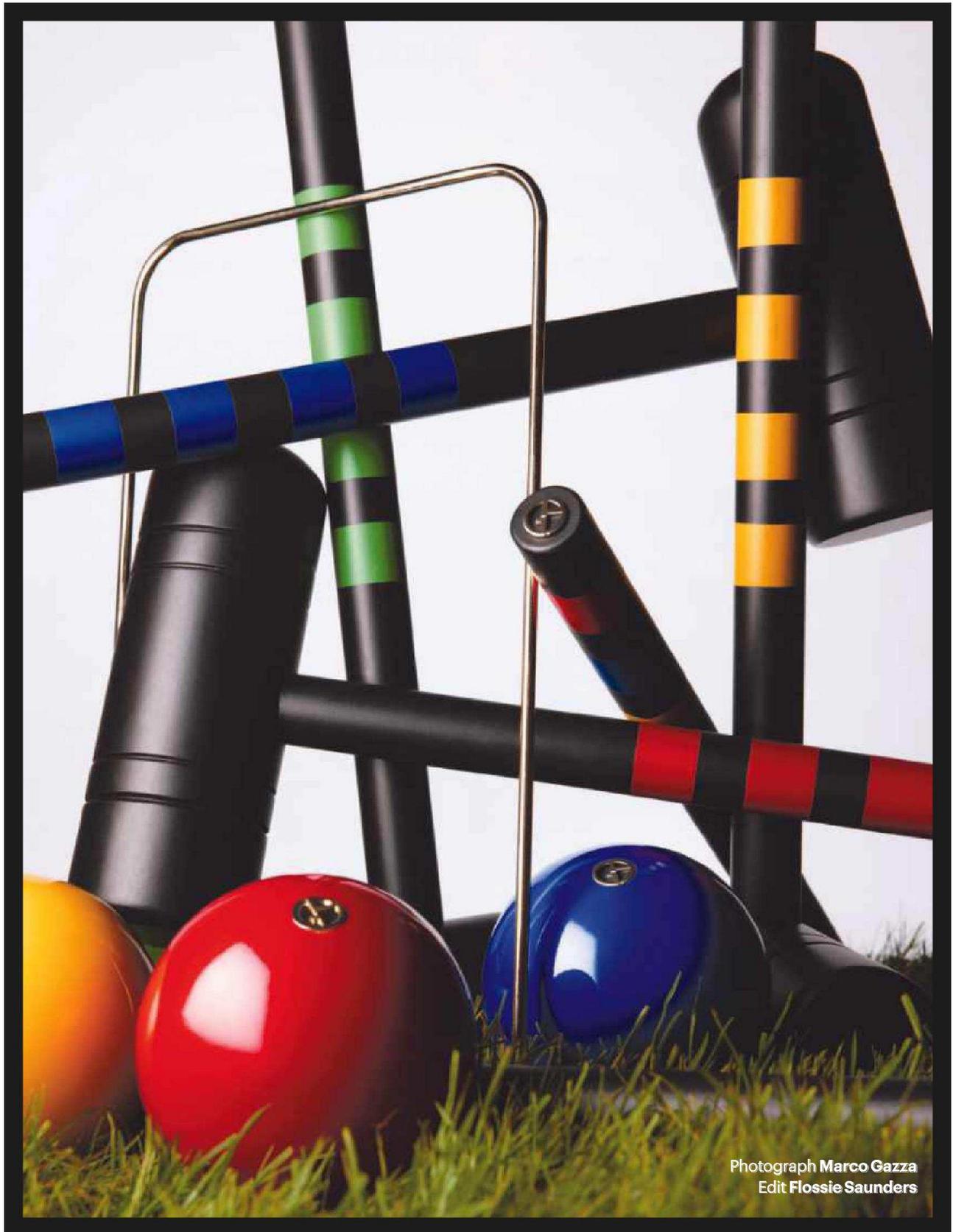
▼ VINTAGE TABLECLOTHS

For your picnic. Gen Z are "sourcing" theirs on eBay. As if we weren't under enough pressure



▼ MESH BALLET FLATS

We declare this footwear officially... ovah!



Photograph Marco Gazza
Edit Flossie Saunders

One more thing...

Time to upgrade your Swingball and moss-covered trampoline! How's this Armani croquet set for a luxury lawn game?

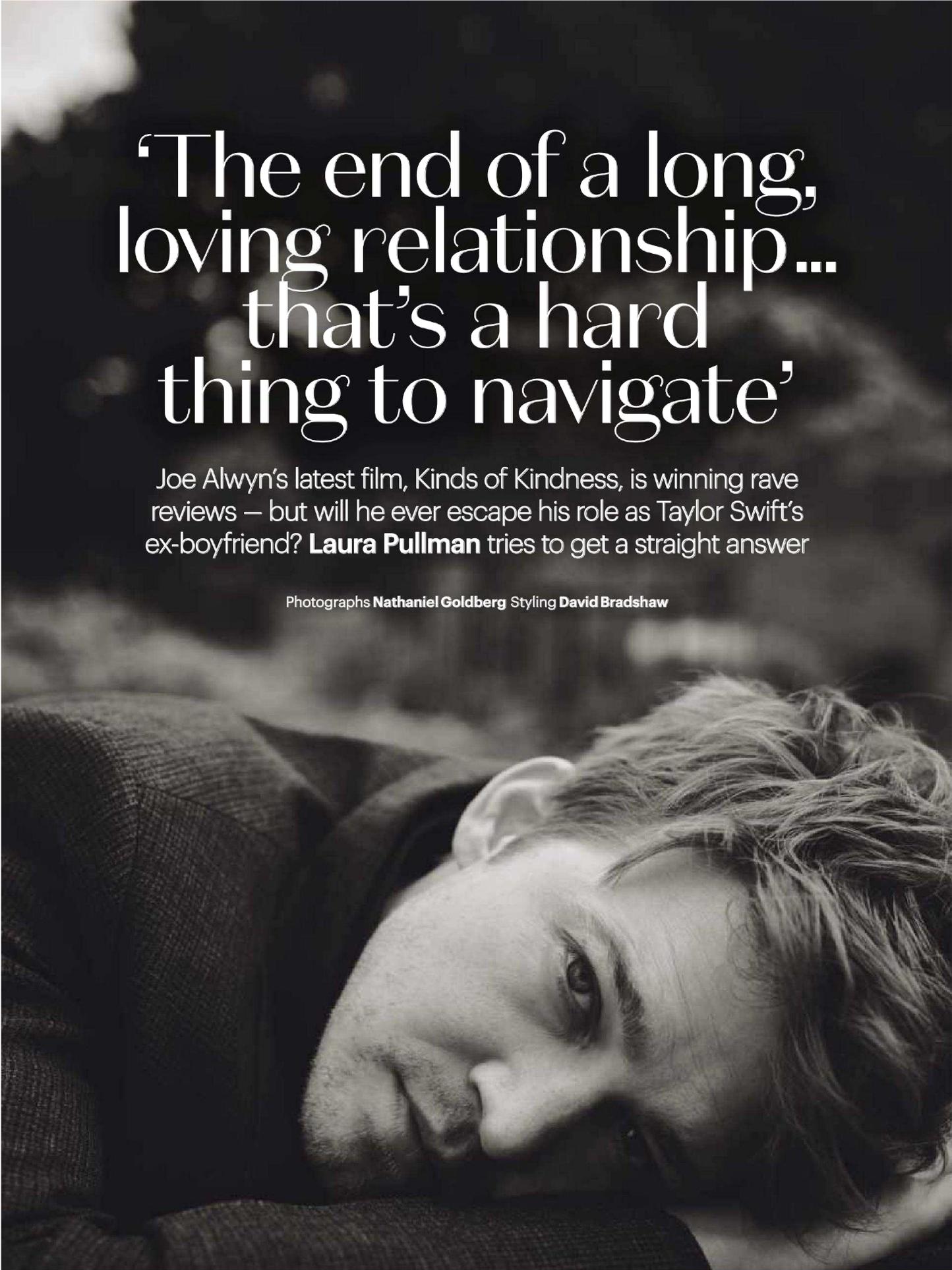
Housed in a neat canvas carry case, the set includes everything you need to score points at the garden party.

Great news for ballers: each piece comes branded with the Armani logo. This summer no one will roll like you do.

Saetta croquet set, £ 2,905, Giorgio Armani, armani.com



This page Cashmere top, £2,400, cashmere cardigan, £2,000, jeans, £1,100, loafers, £820, and socks, £230, Prada. **Opposite** Virgin wool canvas jacket, £2,700, Dior



‘The end of a long, loving relationship... that’s a hard thing to navigate’

Joe Alwyn’s latest film, *Kinds of Kindness*, is winning rave reviews — but will he ever escape his role as Taylor Swift’s ex-boyfriend? **Laura Pullman** tries to get a straight answer

Photographs **Nathaniel Goldberg** Styling **David Bradshaw**

Joe Alwyn has a spring in his step.



He's freshly back from the Cannes Film Festival and looks every inch the off-duty, discreet movie star in his Loewe trousers and Bottega Veneta rubber trainers. "I feel like I could go rock climbing in these," he says of his £710 shoes, adding that they were part of his Cannes wardrobe and crediting his stylist. "She helps with things like that because I'm incapable."

Interviewing the Kent-born, London-raised actor is a tricky gig. He's friendly, engaging and seems an all-round decent bloke who calls his mum and gives up his seat on the bus, but he's also guarded and appears nervous to

say anything that could be construed as even the slightest bit controversial. Clearly being the other half of the most famous woman in the world leaves its mark.

For more than six years, as the boyfriend of Taylor Swift, Alwyn was scrutinised by the online army of "Swifties" and the tabloid press. Every utterance, social media post or paparazzi picture was pored over, picked apart and pulled into a conspiracy theory vortex on a level of intrigue and hysteria typically reserved for the royal family. "I understand people's curiosity," he says, polite as a prince. Obviously I must ask about

the Big Ex and her Big Album, but at the beginning we leave his relationship with the superstar — which ended in early 2023 — as an awkward elephant in the corner.

Thankfully what Alwyn actually wants to discuss is genuinely juicy: Yorgos Lanthimos's brilliantly bonkers new movie, *Kinds of Kindness*. Three films within a film, it comprises 164 minutes of amputations, abuse, co-dependent relationships and cult madness. It made my head spin — what on earth does it all mean? "Anyone who can crack a Yorgos film overnight I applaud, and I'm not sure I have a fully articulated answer



This page Cotton rib vest, £590, and trousers, £1,350, Brunello Cucinelli. Trench coat, £2,600, Bottega Veneta. Loafers, £725, Manolo Blahnik. Socks, stylist's own. **Opposite** Stripy rollneck, £139, and twill trousers, £169, Polo Ralph Lauren. Loafers, £725, as above. Socks, stylist's own



Cotton vest, £39,
Sunspel. Cashmere
jumper, £1,295, and
cotton-cashmere
corduroy trousers,
£795, Dunhill

Grooming Nadia
Altinbas at C/O
Management.
Local production
Town Productions

as to what it's all about," says Alwyn, who also starred in *The Favourite*, Lanthimos's 2018 Oscar winner. "That's one of the reasons I love his films — there's so much ambiguity and they're so wildly singular."

For the past eight years the actor — all watery blue eyes and Princess Dianaesque hair — has quietly built up an impressive CV. After landing the lead part in Ang Lee's war film *Billy Lynn's Long Halftime Walk* (2016) while in his early, pre-Taylor twenties, the work flowed in with films such as *Boy Erased* (2018), *Harriet* (2019) and *The Souvenir: Part II* (2021). In 2022 he came to wider attention, well beyond the Swift-sphere, with a lead role in *Conversations with Friends*, the BBC's much-hyped Sally Rooney adaptation.

Now *Kinds of Kindness* has won rapturous reviews. "It's nice when people connect with things," says Alwyn, 33, settling into a sofa at a hotel in central London. "I try and dial down what it is that people think, whether good or bad, because you can't have one without the other." He enjoyed his promotional turn at Cannes too: "It's a bit of a circus, but that can be fun for a few days."

The starry cast, which includes Willem Dafoe and Margaret Qualley, play different characters in each triptych. In the third triptych Alwyn is a single father trying to win back his wife (Emma Stone) from a cult. "Even though Yorgos really goes into dark corners in his work, he keeps a light atmosphere on set. It's the second time I've worked with him and with Emily," he says,

calling Stone by her birth name. "I love them both and I love working with them, so it felt comfortable." The scene includes Stone throwing up on Alwyn's bare feet. "I think it was some kind of soup," he says of the fake vomit. "Delicious!"

Lanthimos, the Greek film-maker also known for *Poor Things* (2023) and *The Lobster* (2015), gathers the cast together before filming for ice-breaking rehearsals. "Everyone's rolling around playing silly games and humiliating themselves in front of each other in the very best way," Alwyn says, adding that it reminded him of his time at the Royal Central School of Speech and Drama. Maintaining a sense of fun on set stops him from falling into a trap of overthinking and fretting about the reaction to the film, as he's done in the past. "If you start to think too much about all of those things that are outside your control, it ends up poisoning the thing you're actually meant to like in the first place," he says, sipping a flat white.

Emotionally letting go of matters outside his control is a recurring theme of our conversation. On coping with the beast of fame he says: "It's something I try not to think about too much because it is beyond my control. I try and focus on the things in my life that are important, authentic and mean something to me. Everything that happens outside of that I can only do so much about." Those important things are the obvious life-enhancers: "Friends, family, work you care about, people you love."

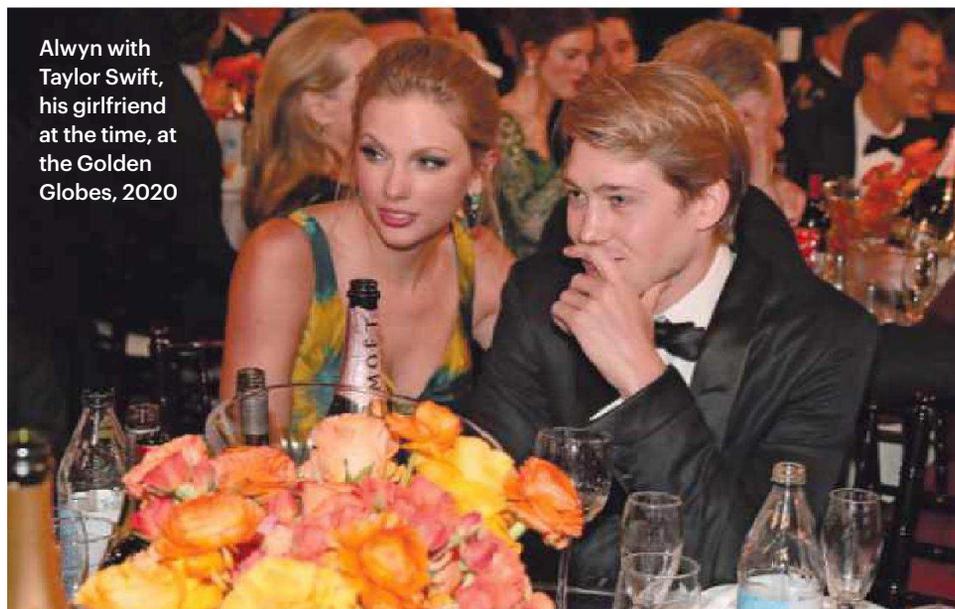
Coffees half-finished, it's time to address the elephant. First, a speedy recap: Alwyn and Swift first met in 2016, reportedly at the Met Gala in New York, and — according to her 2019 hit *London Boy* — he introduced her to watching rugby in the pub, nights in Brixton, Hampstead Heath and, er, "high tea". After her previous headline-grabbing romances with the likes of Tom Hiddleston and Calvin Harris, this was a more private affair. For example, when Alwyn co-wrote songs on her *Folklore* and *Evermore* 2020 albums, he did so under a pseudonym, William Bowery, to avoid frenzy (his work on the albums won him a Grammy and reported royalties). Last April, unexpectedly, the fairytale was over and their break-up was reported. By September Swift had begun a PDA-heavy, highly public relationship with Travis Kelce, the Kansas City Chiefs American football star.

Her new album, *The Tortured Poets Department*, released this April, seemingly nods to a WhatsApp group called The Tortured Man Club, which Alwyn shared with his fellow actors Paul Mescal and Andrew Scott. The track *So Long, London* is rumoured to be about their split. So, has Alwyn listened to the album? "In thinking on what I was going to say, I would think and hope that anyone and everyone can empathise... This isn't a direct answer to your question, but just thinking about what I want to talk about..." he says, before restarting. "I would hope that anyone and everyone can empathise and understand the difficulties that come with the end of a long, loving, fully committed relationship of over six and a half years. That is a hard thing to navigate. What is unusual and abnormal in this situation is that, one week later, it's suddenly in the public domain and the outside world is able to weigh in."

Stern, eyes fixed on mine, he continues: "So you have something very real suddenly thrown into a very unreal space: tabloids, social media, press, where it is then dissected, speculated on, pulled out of shape beyond recognition. And the truth is, to that last point, there is always going to be a gap between what is known and what is said. I have made my peace with that."

It seems that the actor has written his lines and learnt them by heart. It's understandable because, in the feverish Swift universe, diehard fans have spewed countless conspiracy theories, including the unfounded rumours that the couple secretly married and that he cheated on her with a co-star. Cue abuse from the Swifties.

"As everyone knows, we together — both of us, mutually — decided to keep the more private details of our relationship private. It was never something to commodify and I see



Alwyn with Taylor Swift, his girlfriend at the time, at the Golden Globes, 2020

'There is always going to be a gap between what is known and what is said. I have made my peace with that'

RELEASE THE PEACE



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'I feel fortunate to be in a really great place in my life, professionally and personally. I feel really good'

no reason to change that now," Alwyn adds firmly. "And, look, this is also a little over a year ago now and I feel fortunate to be in a really great place in my life, professionally and personally. I feel really good." Later I point out that, arguably, the reason to change tack is because Swift — who has 283 million Instagram followers — has released an album where some songs seemingly relate to their relationship unravelling. "Well, as I said, there's always going to be a gap between what's known and what's said," he repeats.

It's an extraordinary situation. On one hand you have the billion-dollar Taylor Swift machine, where an international tour gives a huge boost to economies around the world, one political post on social media can sway voter turnout in an election and an online behemoth is ready to attack perceived enemies. On the other you have a (relatively) regular Joe who, exiled from the machine post-break-up, seems only comfortable with sticking to a script. He won't discuss whether he's still in touch with his ex or whether he is dating again: "I'm sure you can appreciate, given the level of noise and scrutiny about my past relationship, why I wouldn't want to just open the door to things like that right now," he says.

Moving on to safer territory, he talks about how his friends are still largely the same group that he grew up with around Tufnell Park, north London. "I have brilliant, authentic people in my life," Alwyn says. "I try and live in reality and away from the kind of online noise of Twitter — or wherever else it comes from — and try and just stay in the moment."

Getty Images, Alamy



He laughs off the idea that he'd have to go out in disguise (as Robert Pattinson once confessed to), but clearly avoids the Swift-related conspiracy nuttiness and trolling. "I try and dial that volume down. I was obviously made aware of it and think that mistreating anyone, whether it's in person or behind the anonymity of a keyboard, is shameful."

In real life, away from the online noise, Alwyn has a close-knit family for support. His parents, Richard and Elizabeth, a documentary maker and a psychotherapist respectively, sometimes look over scripts he is sent ("I really value their opinion"). He grins talking about his brothers; his younger sibling, Patrick, arrived when Alwyn was 12. "I loved it. It brought everyone together with a new energy," he says, adding that his other brother, Tom, is only 18 months older than him so they fought endlessly growing up. "In a normal sibling way," he quickly clarifies.

As a teenager Alwyn won a scholarship to the independent City of London School. His childhood sounds a happy mix of sport, family holidays to Cornwall and tentative forays into the acting world. In 2002 he auditioned to play the grieving boy in *Love, Actually* and remembers reading lines alongside a bloke called Hugh Grant, whom he vaguely recognised. The audition was during the World Cup: "I just wanted to get back and watch the football!" After studying English and drama at the University of Bristol he went to drama school, but left a few months early to join Ang Lee's blockbuster *Billy Lynn's Long Halftime Walk*, playing a Texan soldier suffering from PTSD. "A baptism by fire," he recalls.

Today, Alwyn's film career seems steadily on the up. He'll soon appear in a modern-day version of *Hamlet*, as Laertes, opposite Riz Ahmed, and in *The Brutalist*, a drama alongside Adrien Brody. "I would always want to be a part of something that is with interesting, creative people that I admire... If that's in a supporting capacity, then great," he says. "I'd rather do that than be the lead in something that my heart isn't behind." Having a stab at theatre at some point also appeals: "It would absolutely terrify me, but maybe that's a good thing."

Based in London and not tempted to move to Hollywood (he likes walking and thinks that driving everywhere "takes away some of the spontaneity of a day"), what does Alwyn's



From top Joe Alwyn in *Conversations with Friends*, with Alison Oliver; and in *The Favourite*. Left Starring opposite Emma Stone in *Kinds of Kindness*

happiest downtime look like when he's not working? "It probably looks pretty similar to yours, or anyone's — seeing friends, travelling, going to the pub," he says, sounding uncomfortable. "Can I make a more boring list?" I joke that his chosen pub probably won't be the Black Dog in Vauxhall, which Swift fans have deduced is the place name-checked in her new song, also called *The Black Dog* ("And so I watch as you walk/ Into some bar called The Black Dog/ And pierce new holes in my heart.") Capitalising on this association, the pub has recently released merchandise: £50 hoodies, naff caps, tees and travel mugs. "I've never been to Vauxhall," says Alwyn, smiling a smile that hints that there is more to say.

Before our goodbyes, talk turns to measuring success. Personal success, he says, is "being happy with who you are, with the people around you, being in a good space in your head, surrounding yourself with people you care about". Is he in such a headspace? "Yes, I really am." Heading out into the sunshine, spring still in his step, Alwyn seems to be focused forwards. ■

Kinds of Kindness is in cinemas from June 28

Watch Joe Alwyn in our exclusive video at [thesundaytimes.com/style](https://www.thesundaytimes.com/style)

HE SHOOTS...

The biggest talking point at the Euros? Who has the hottest handbag. **Karen Dacre** charts the rise of a new football essential

Designer washbags — carried in the manner of a cocktail clutch — are to the footballers of 2024 what dodgy mullets were to their 1980s counterparts. As proof, let me direct you to the internet, where (with a bit of deep googling) you'll get a front-row view of some of the weirdest, most wonderful and, usually, monstrously expensive bags in circulation.

A haven for monogrammed Louis Vuitton washbags and carry cases branded with more Goyard motifs than you will ever spot in the Selfridges leather goods hall, the route from team coach to kit room is the new catwalk.

Of course what players wear off the pitch has long been of fascination. Well before we had Memphis Depay in a frogged Balmain jacket and a fedora, Hector Bellerin in JW Anderson, or Jules Koundé in flares and the season's must-have motocross look, there was David Beckham in a sarong and George Best, the original football style icon, in drainpipes and a poloneck.

But fast-forward to 2024 and, thanks to a generation for whom nothing seems to happen unless they can watch it play out on social media, footballers' wardrobes count more than ever before. Indeed so great is the interest that, to some, observing "pre-match fits" (that's Gen Z speak for the clobber players wear to show up on match days) has become as crucial to the beautiful game as lukewarm pies and a half-time Bovril. What a time to be alive, eh?

As always the internet is where new-gen fans flock to see footballer fashion in (real life) action. On Instagram @footballerfits (which showcases the outfits of some of the world's most famous footballers on its feed and accompanying TikTok, with its founder, Jordan Clark, delivering commentary) has 708,000 followers.

Big clubs — from PSG to Manchester United — are also waking up to this interest in their players' off-pitch lives and are pivoting their Instagram accounts to include more behind-the-scenes action. As a self-confessed football-fits voyeur (who has lost hours of her life scrolling through the Palm Angels and Chrome Hearts-heavy outfits that are a prerequisite for this generation of ballers), I can confirm that it makes for compelling viewing. And not only for the opportunity to watch a Premier League full back answer questions about what he had for his dinner last night/most famous person in his contacts list (standard content on the Spurs social account) — but also for the handbag collection this viewing brings to the fore.



Top, from left Trent Alexander-Arnold, Declan Rice, Jack Grealish, Jude Bellingham, Ben White, Bukayo Saka. **Bottom** Phil Foden, Marcus Rashford, Harry Kane and Lionel Messi

Football fans will know that the sight of a player carrying his favoured washbag under his arm to arrive at a football park on matchday is no new phenomenon. But times have changed, certainly they've amped up a gear (or ten). In 2024 strutting from the team coach with a status washbag is as crucial to a prematch routine as intense glute stretches and a bollocking from a bystanding manager sporting a navy cashmere jumper.

No doubt we'll see plenty of this status washbag one-upmanship during the Euros. But where will the

England and Scotland players be looking for handbag inspiration?

With the occasional exception, usually from a younger player intent on blazing his own style trail (see Arsenal's Bukayo Saka, who has ditched the washbag in favour of a leather holdall from Bottega Veneta — yours for a cool £4,200), the washbags of choice are distinguished by the fact that they are heavily branded. Dior and Louis Vuitton are big hitters with the male and female squads at the moment, while Goyard, the French leather label with cult status and a queue to rival the Apple store outside its London boutique, is behind one of the top scoring handbags among footballers today.

"The Goyard Bowling 25 toiletry bag is a big one with ballers in recent seasons," Clark confirms. "That's probably because of just how popular the Vuitton ones are — players want something a bit different from their peers and players of the past."

"It's all about logo status and one-upmanship," says Felicia Pennant, a writer and founder of the football and fashion zine *Season*, who believes that UK footballers pale in significance compared with their European counterparts when it comes to their wardrobes.

"In the UK there's a level of professionalism with everyone in branded club tracksuits. In France the players have more licence to really dress up and express themselves, at international and club level."

Is the trophy washbag, then, a means of self-expression for players who would otherwise be lost in a sea of Nike-branded polyester?

"Definitely," Clark agrees. "I think accessories allow the players, who may not have as much freedom with their style choices pregame, to show off their personality and styling ability a lot more."

Credit must also be paid to the present roster of NFL American footballers such as Travis Kelce who refuse to go near a stadium without a haul of designer accessories. As you'll know if you spent any time studying the phenomenon that is "Traylor" (Travis and Taylor Swift, do keep up), the latest Super Bowl was as much a fashion show as it was a football game.

With such showboating in mind, you don't need to have a brain for on-pitch tactics to understand why the stars of the Premier League have become lucrative properties for brands. In luxury fashion terms, footballers are more valuable than ever before, with players helping heritage houses reach a new generation of customer. The Manchester City and England hopeful Jack Grealish has a long-running deal with Gucci, the newly anointed Real Madrid darling Kylian Mbappé is on the books at Dior and Oakley, and his team-mate the England midfielder Jude Bellingham is tipped to become the darling of Louis Vuitton. It's a beautiful game. ■ @karendacre



HE SCORES!



The author
Laura Dockrill
at home

'I'd missed moments I couldn't get back'

Three weeks after giving birth **Laura Dockrill** was hospitalised with postpartum psychosis. Six years on she reveals how she slowly rebuilt her relationship with her son

Photograph **Alicia Canter**

Six years ago I woke up on my first Mother's Day in a nightmare. I was in a strange room, in a single bed of starched white sheets, windows bolted shut. My catatonic gaze found the nurse's eyeball through the gap in the door and it all came back: paranoia, mania, rampant anxiety and the devastating damage I'd caused in accusing my partner, Hugo, my childhood sweetheart and best friend, of trying to steal our three-week-old son, Jet. The guilt and self-loathing made me suicidal. That was why I was here, in a psychiatric hospital.

Since Jet's birth, following a traumatic labour resulting in an emergency caesarean, I'd been hit out of the blue with the explosive, life-threatening postnatal mental illness known as postpartum psychosis. For the best part of a month I'd been performing the show of a lifetime: pretending to be "loving motherhood", terrified that Jet would be taken if I said

otherwise, while keeping up with night feeds, nappy changes and recovering from major surgery. I shared a photo of myself on Instagram, captioned “Guess what world, I’m a mum”. I was wearing bright pink lipstick and holding a celebratory glass of champagne. Just days after that photo was taken I was admitted to hospital.

After two weeks of observation I was discharged, under strict conditions: therapy, psychiatrist appointments, medication and, the harshest of all, that I wasn’t to be alone with Jet for the first week. At home I naively expected everything to fall into place, but I couldn’t adjust. Nothing was as it was. I felt I’d neglected Jet and my responsibilities. I was scared I’d be judged for it. My husband, Hugo, was the hero and I the storybook villain. I’d missed moments I couldn’t get back: Jet’s adorable bath in the kitchen sink, bonding, skin-to-skin contact. I stumbled around feeling side-effects from the medication — lethargy and brain fog — trying to play “Mum”, but simple tasks such as mixing formula were inconceivable. I sunk into a deep depression, which can happen following psychosis. Still I desperately feigned recovery. I hid behind make-up and gripped the handlebars of the buggy for support as I shuffled around the park. I ran baths just so I could cry freely.

When Jet was six months old, with doctor’s instructions I began to slowly taper off the medication, but I also reached for the wine. I had a prejudice and shame towards taking medication — alcohol felt more justifiable than anti-psychotics and I was terrified of insomnia, of going “back there”. Night and day at home with a newborn was repetitive and hard work — we deserved a reward, I would tell myself. The spell of alcohol made Hugo and me seem like any “normal” couple, until I began to rely on it to sleep and escape too. “I’m self-medicating,” I confessed to my psychiatrist. I knew the booze had to go but it wasn’t easy. I associated drinking with being fun and youthful. I was grieving my past life.

Instagram was like a drug too: I went down rabbit holes and doomscrolled, seeking validation and boosting my confidence by using it to appear active and well. In reality all it did was savage my self-esteem as I compared myself to little squares of mums who could “do it all”, child-free friends on holiday who were achieving success in their careers, anyone who wasn’t plagued by mental illness.

I had to face myself: if I didn’t own it — wear the illness, wear survival like a shiny badge of honour — the illness would own me. So I made recovery my mission, through books, podcasts and documentaries. I wrote about what happened on my phone while Jet slept on my chest, reclaiming the narrative. Tears rolled as I hugged him tightly. Does he love me? Does he even know that I’m his mum?

And then, when Jet was about ten months old, we were at my in-laws’ house and it happened: Jet bumped his head, everyone rushed over, but it was “Mama!” that he cried. Nobody else could pacify him as tears sprang from his eyes. As soon as I picked him up he stopped crying. He does know who I am. He has forgiven me.

Postpartum psychosis shook me to the core but I’m grateful for the wake-up call. I used to buy into hustle culture: work all hours and then evolve into a social



Above Dockrill’s new book; with her husband, Hugo, and Jet

butterfly, sacrificing my energy; pacify myself with toxic positive thinking and delusional optimism; feel guilty for taking a day off; suffer from fomo; engage in chronic people-pleasing; drain my emotional batteries dead; care what other people thought of me. But experiencing the psychosis means I appreciate the miniature miracles of the everyday more. I am kinder, more empathetic and compassionate because of it. I’m liberated. I aim for the realistic wins like walking Jet to school. It may seem like I’m less ambitious because I dream “smaller”, but I’m satisfied most days because, quite simply, we made it.

Everything else is the cherry on the cake.

I’m now four years sober and I quit Instagram at the start of the year. I haven’t looked back — my productivity, sleep, creativity and mood have all improved. I want to strengthen real-life interactions, relationships and meaningful experiences to be on the same page as Jet. I love seeing the world through his eyes. It’s where I want to be.

The illness has released me from any unrealistic idealisms of maternal perfection; I don’t beat myself up if Jet has a late night or eats Coco Pops for dinner. He is loved and safe. Now that Jet is six we talk openly about my illness at home — not to scare Jet but to empower him. I want to teach him about

emotions, to ask for help. It’s not a shameful, slimy secret, nor anyone’s fault. In Jet’s own wise words: “I wasn’t the one who made you sick, Mummy, I was the one who made you better.”

Hugo and I always wanted more children, but when my psychiatrist told us there is a 50 per cent chance of me developing postpartum psychosis again if we did, we weren’t even tempted. We would never risk what we have. We are so grateful. Our family is complete because I am here, to wrap my arms around Jet and tell him I’m proud. To lie with him as he falls asleep, clap at his school assembly, put a plaster on his knee, wipe his tears and stick his drawings on the fridge. To feel his warm, sunscreen-skin hugs. To love. ■

I Love You, I Love You, I Love You by Laura Dockrill (HQ £16.99) is published on Thursday. To order a copy go to timesbookshop.co.uk or call 020 3176 2935. Free UK standard P&P on online orders over £25. Special discount available for Times+ members

Now
I appreciate
the miniature
miracles of
the everyday
more. I am
kinder, more
empathetic

Rock the kasbah

Rue de la Kasbah links the new Tangier with the 15th-century walls of its old medina and has lately become a destination for easy luxury, with wearable pieces that are designed and made here using Moroccan materials. There's Rock da Kasbah selling high-quality sweats, totes and tees, then, a few doors up, Las Chicas specialises in off-the-peg luxury plus the kind of carefully tailored harem pants that have become a wardrobe staple for global nomads. For something even smarter, Kenza Bennani's label, New Tangier, has dresses, kaftans and dramatic cloaks that pop up on red carpets around the world.

Something is happening here in Tangier — a new, confident and understated style that shuns fast fashion while mining Morocco's copious artisanal talent. Bennani, formerly of Marc Jacobs-era Louis Vuitton and Jimmy Choo, sums it up: "Here, tradition is a resource, not a burden. Fashion in the West is based on an imbalanced idea of a creative genius at the top when there's no genius about it. It's a combination of good ideas and the artisans who can execute them."

Style has long been what the scene here is about. "In Tangier, as long as you've got style — be it taste, conversation or wit — you're in," says Gordon Watson, a well-known mid-century collector and dealer; everything is for sale in his home in the Marshan district of the city. He, like many of Tangier's expats, is a raging snob, albeit not about money or class but about style.

At the top of Rue de la Kasbah is Yves Saint Laurent and Pierre Bergé's summer house, which Jasper Conran bought in 2019 and is now a 12-room hotel called Villa Mabrouka that has been near-permanently booked since it opened a year ago. Conran, who already has a hotel in Marrakesh, describes Tangier as "a joy... There's a broad brushstroke of people here with good, interesting taste, but they are not all doing the same thing. They express themselves in different ways, so it's exciting. You've got a lot of intelligent expression in gardens, in houses. It's an extraordinary place."

Through the 20th century the famously tolerant yet conservative city welcomed western bohemians, outlaws and aesthetes. And for Swinging London-era boomers, this was the coolest place in the world for intellectuals, writers, rock stars, artists and an elegant demimonde driven abroad by antigay laws. A taste of Tangier's allure can be seen in the list of people who have lent a hand with the production of the American School of Tangier's summer play. One year Yves Saint Laurent made the costumes and Paul Bowles composed the music. Tennessee Williams? Oh, he contributed plays and is said to have sat in the front row to watch them.

It was also, Watson says, "fabulously sleazy and dodgy" back then. No more. Lately the incomers have been "an absurdly disproportionate number of the [Architectural Digest] AD100... a colony of decorators" who have come to buy crumbling palaces, townhouses and villas and further send the tremors of gentrification through the city. "You came here to create your great fantasy of

Chic indie shops, drop-dead interiors and a very louche vibe — no wonder the style set have fallen in love (again) with Tangier, says **Kate Spicer**



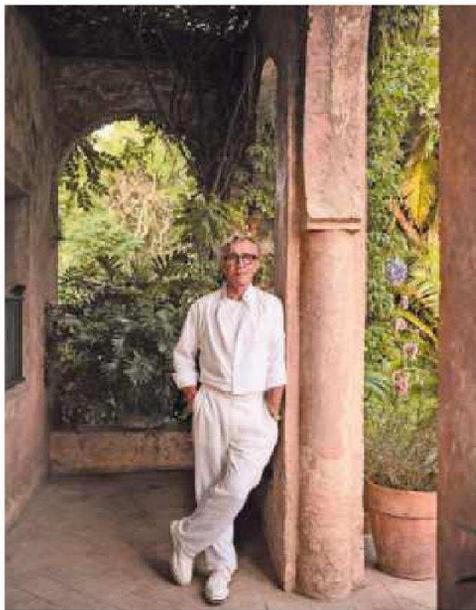
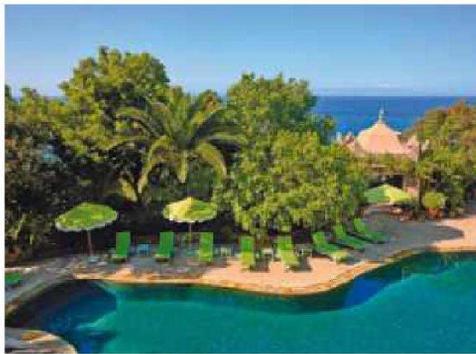
beauty," Watson says. "Tangier is different to any of the other Moroccan cities. The look here is totally unique."

Bennani's great friends, meanwhile, are the three Wheeler sisters, Sarah, Jacquetta and Charlotte, whose maternal great-grandfather moved to Tangier in the 1900s. The three live between the UK and their two family homes here, Dar Sinclair and Lalla Yenou (which they rent out when they're not using them). "Tangier attracts people who are interested in beauty," Jacquetta

Above New Tangier's caramel kaftan. **Right** Rue de la Kasbah is the border between the old and new Tangier, where a new style flourishes



Above The drawing room at Dar Sinclair. **Right** A sea view from the pool at Villa Mabrouka; and its owner, Jasper Conran. **Below** Painted bags from Las Chicas



explains. “If you want to get things made for your home you don’t go to a shop — you go to the rattan furniture maker or the weavers’ market, take the kids and watch it being made.” Take Najim Imran Bando’s furniture studio, Now on the Ocean, which uses gnarled strawberry tree branches to make simple rustic furniture with a cult following among interior designers. Its quirky one-off pieces crop up everywhere from Marfa to Milan.

Even those crumbling houses now go for millions: gentrification is happening at a rapid pace, but at what cost? There are no hedge funders or tech bros here yet, but everyone is a little edgy about newcomers, about whether they will “get” it. “The beaches are staggeringly beautiful but it’s really not a touristy place,” Charlotte says. “There’s no big hierarchy here,” Jacquetta adds. “We mix.”

Another Tangier resident describes being a guest at a famously grand holiday destination and being horrified by “this huge gap between the locals and the visiting rich people. If you behaved like that here you’d be an outcast.”

Preserving and elevating art and culture is seen as one way to buffer the inevitable impact gentrification has on locals. The artist Yto Barrada, who is represented by the super-gallery Pace in New York, has restored the art deco Cinéma Rif into a dynamic cultural hub. Then there’s ThinkTanger, a non-profit organisation with a bookshop, co-working space, vintage store, print shop and a mission to raise up young Moroccans who are pushed further away from the city centre. Hiba Moussa is working here while studying PPE with the Open University. “I wanted to get an English education without having to leave the country because that’s expensive. And anyway I love Tangier — I don’t want to leave,” she says. “It has always been different. We don’t have all the malls and all those global food outlets, they never really take off here. We have our own thing.” Moussa says she doesn’t mind westerners coming, “as long as they are aware of their privilege... and don’t treat it like some exotic and cheap alternative to Europe.”

As Bennani says: “Tangier is not for everyone. Anyone — and I include Moroccans in this — used to a stratified society will leave. Marrakesh has a community of jet-setters, which feels ‘cool’ but really it’s a gorgeous bubble, all conceived for this customer base who want to feel like they’re in some exotic Shoreditch.”

Nor will it serve the yoga-mat mob, all set on self-enhancement and psychedelic-fuelled fun. “Tangier’s not a wellness destination,” Jacquetta says, shuddering at the thought. “Thank God. I hope we can avoid that.”

Instead, if you want to smoke a fat cigar in the middle of a fish restaurant with Provençal rosé on ice, you can do that at L’Océan on the Atlantic shore. There are some serious shops with museum-worthy items alongside the cool little boutiques on Rue de la Kasbah, but there’s no Prada and no Chanel — just cafés, popular but pretty humble restaurants and the hugely loved donkey museum. “The world is shifting,” Bennani says. “I feel we are finally coming to our own understanding of what luxury is. And what we’ve got here in Tangier, that’s the real luxury.” ■



‘I didn’t tell anyone
what I was doing.
I just disappeared’

A record deal, magazine covers and the pop star boyfriend: Florence 'Florrie' Arnold looked like she had it all. But suddenly she quit the industry. Now she's back — and it's on her own terms, she tells **Michael Cragg**

Photographs **Archie Campbell**

On paper Florence Arnold's career was thriving. As a drummer she'd played on Girls Aloud's 2008 classic chart-topper *The Promise* and she had co-written their stomping comeback single, *Something New*, four years later. Her own songs, released independently under the mononym Florrie and created alongside Girls Aloud's production team Xenomania, had landed her a deal with Sony. Her face was everywhere, via modelling campaigns for Nina Ricci, Dolce & Gabbana and H&M, while Tatler popped her on the September 2015 cover: "Strong, sexy, super — singer Florrie Arnold hits the big time", it announced.

Behind the scenes, however, everything was falling apart. The Sony deal had soured quickly and an ultimatum was delivered: if your next single — 2016's *Real Love* — isn't a hit then you'll be dropped. Around the same time she'd started dating the singer-songwriter George Ezra. As his career was going stratospheric — a million-selling debut album, four Brit award nominations — Arnold found herself spiralling into what she would now label a deep depression. "Looking back, through a lot of our relationship I don't feel like I was myself," she says. "I think about stuff that went on and I couldn't advocate for what I wanted because I was so low."

As she was contemplating quitting music — a life's passion she'd been pursuing since she begged her parents for a drum kit at the age of six — she looked around for help. "It got to a point where I — and I don't want to paint [George] as a bad person because he is not a bad person — but I was saying, 'I don't know if I can do [music] any more,' and he was supportive of that. He wanted me to have a fresh start and do something else. Like I'd had my shot. It didn't help me mentally. I was already thinking maybe I'm not meant to do this. I had no self-confidence. He was away touring a lot, and maybe there was a part of him that thought if we were both doing that then we'd never see each other." So at the age of 28 Florrie retired from music and became a nanny. "I didn't tell anyone what I was doing, I just disappeared."

The Florrie of 2024 seems a million miles away from that darkness. Sitting in her sun-kissed apartment in LA, where she recently moved from London to prepare for an American tour with her fellow multi-instrumentalist G Flip, she has a puppyish energy that is infectious, even over Zoom. Most of that is down to the fact that, 14 years since her first single and now aged 35, she's finally releasing her debut album, *The Lost Ones*. Featuring

12 sleek, heartfelt electropop songs, it's an album that transforms all that trauma into anthems of hope. The pensive recent single *Kissing in the Cold* muses on a past relationship that still haunts her memory, but it's not about Ezra, she clarifies (they split in 2019). "I really want to make it clear that it's not a break-up album. I want people to take something positive from listening to it."

It was during a family holiday to Greece when she was six that Arnold became fascinated with the drums, obsessively watching the local band night after night. After her parents split when she was seven, her musician dad would take her to watch bands through the windows of the pubs in Bristol, where she grew up. Five years later, after winning a scholarship to a local music school, she formed a pop-punk band called Fi Fi Saloon (later renamed Selfservice), which started out covering Busted and Avril Lavigne songs. "That band actually got me to London in the end, believe it or not," she says, laughing. After recording a demo and sending it to every music contact she could find, she got one reply: from Robbie Williams's co-writer, Guy Chambers. "At this point I was 17. I had no idea how the music industry worked, and [Guy] basically said: 'I'm signing you, but I'm not going to give you any money, and I want you to move to London.' At the time I thought, that sounds reasonable, it's fine. So I left school after one year of A-levels."

The four band members lived in a one-bedroom flat, while Arnold worked at Gap to cover her rent. Then fate intervened via an introduction to the songwriter and producer Brian Higgins. He was looking for an in-house drummer at his Xenomania headquarters — a ludicrous country pile in a Kent village — and Arnold got the job. Her audition involved drumming on what would become *The Promise*. "I'd walked into this magical land of music — Girls Aloud were there on the day and there was music coming out of every room. I called my various jobs — and my bandmates — to tell them I was leaving." Happy as a drummer and songwriter, the thought of fronting her own songs hadn't really occurred to her. But it's in Arnold's nature to go with the flow. "I thought it could be fun, so I wanted to give it a go," she says, shrugging.



Arnold in a video for the fashion brand Hoss Intropia, 2012



Reassuringly hard to find



CHAMPAGNE
POL ROGER

'I struggled for a long time to talk about anything to do with music. I carried this shame'

Her debut single, *Call 911*, came out in 2010, followed by an EP, *Introduction*. Two more EPs followed in quick succession, as did the modelling work. Tall, blonde and beautiful, Arnold was in high demand, but her image started to hinder her progress in a misogynistic industry in thrall to male authenticity. "I had comments from radio pluggers saying, 'They've already got a few blonde women on the playlist this week,'" she says. "I remember this one manager of quite a big band, who'd seen me play live, said to me: 'You make miming the guitar look really real.' I was like, what the f***? They're just the things I was aware of, but I'm sure it was going on even more behind my back."

In 2013 she signed to Sony. Still naive about the industry, she let the label dictate her sound, and by the time *Real Love* was released in 2016, the writing was on the wall. Budgeted only about £5,000 to film a video for what she knew to be her make-or-break single, the dream was over. "I struggled for a long time to talk about anything to do with music," she says, her sunny disposition shifting. "I carried this shame. If anyone asked me what was happening with music I'd get so embarrassed, I'd go red and be really uncomfortable in myself. I still have it even now, so it has definitely affected me. I felt like I'd let myself down but also everyone else — people I cared about and people who'd put so much work into it." Her union with Ezra was initially a welcome break: "We were in a new relationship so there was an exciting, fun element of that which kept me away from everything else that was going on. But I look back and we were just not compatible."

Arnold — who by this point had become a nanny, but not before a "quite weird" interlude as Robbie Williams's drummer — told Higgins of her plan to retire during a tense meeting in the basement of the Groucho Club. "That was a pivotal moment. It was the downstairs bar and I did not care, I was crying hysterically. It was dramatic. Brian reminded me that I'd been doing it since I was five and that music is in my bones. I can't do anything

else. I've got no qualifications. I panicked because it was all I knew, and suddenly I didn't think I was any good at it."

Slowly she started going back to the studio to write "really sad songs". One track — 2019's mournful piano ballad *Borderline* — had been secretly sent to her music publisher by Higgins and they'd managed to get it featured on one of TV's biggest shows, *Grey's Anatomy*. The day it came out, in a move she insists was a coincidence, she split with Ezra. "[The song] had a great response and that reminded me that there were people still listening and waiting for music."

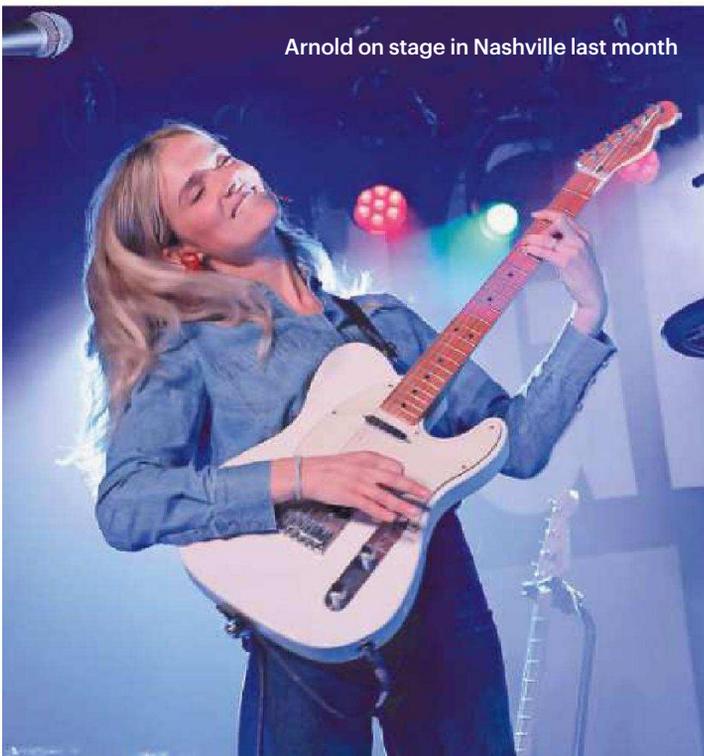
More songs followed and as her confidence grew she signed to another label, BMG, but this time with more than a decade's worth of experience under her belt. *The Lost Ones* is her album, her sound, her statement. Lessons were learnt both privately and professionally. "The reason I felt so low wasn't because I had this great idea of success, it was more because I felt like I had changed myself to fit with what they wanted. I felt like I should have stood my ground more."

In a full-circle moment, years after playing on *The Promise*, this month Arnold will support Girls Aloud at the O2 in London as part of their celebratory comeback tour. "It's amazing, isn't it?" she says, eyes wide with shock. "In my head it feels like no time has passed, but obviously so much has happened." ■

The Lost Ones is out now via Xenomania/BMG



Arnold on stage in Nashville last month



Two become one

Floral dress, begone! Co-ords come in all shapes and sizes this summer

Edit Flossie Saunders



The short of it

The days of men having sole sartorial rights to the holiday shirt and shorts set are over. With vibrant patterns and relaxed styling this co-ord is as at home on the beach as it is in the park on a bank holiday. Dress it up with luxe sandals and classic sunglasses for a look that leaves the party boys in the shade.

1 Orange shirt, £135, and **2** shorts, £125, gant.co.uk. **3** Linen shirt, £285, and **4** shorts, £225, alemais.com. **5** Silk shirt, £835, and **6** shorts, £495, casablancaparis.com. **7** Shirt, £98, and **8** shorts, £98, Florere, johnlewis.com

Matchy-matchy

Banish all thoughts of pyjamas, because while these matching sets are comfy, they are also an effortless way to look polished. Pair with chic slingbacks and a ladylike bag and you're good to go.

1 Red silk blouse, £395, and **2** trousers, £425, joseph-fashion.com. **3** Khaki trousers, £129, and **4** overshirt, £159, arket.com. **5** Stripy shirt, £30, and **6** trousers, £36, zara.com



Gettyimages



Perfect pairing

Think co-ords are just for the kids? Think again. A matching top and skirt is the grown-up way to wear the trend that works for any occasion. Sunday barbecue?

Look to Cos's knitted polo and shirt combo. Next month's wedding? Mango has you covered with a silky set that's church and dancefloor ready. What a pair!

1 Stripy polo shirt, £65, and **2** maxiskirt, £85, cos.com. **3** Stripy blouse, £30, and **4** midiskirt, £50, mango.com. **5** Crochet top, £350, and **6** maxiskirt, £650, [Zimmermann, net-a-porter.com](http://zimmermann.net-a-porter.com)



Suit up

The suit is a staple of the working wardrobe, but there's a new hotshot in town: the tailored waistcoat and trousers. Whether you opt for a classic neutral or a bold red version, this co-ord will be your office best friend this summer.

1 Black waistcoat, £99, and **2** trousers, £109, whistles.com. **3** Cream sleeveless blazer, £350, and **4** trousers, £290, [Jigsaw x Roksanda, jigsaw-online.com](http://jigsaw-roksanda.com). **5** Yellow linen waistcoat, £135, and **6** trousers, £139, wraplondon.co.uk. **7** Red waistcoat, £215, and **8** trousers, £330, [Staud, net-a-porter.com](http://staud.net-a-porter.com)

The Italian job

On the same day I meet the fashion designer and former darling of the London fashion scene Mary Katrantzou, the UK-based label The Vampire's Wife (brain-child of Susie Cave) announces that it will cease trading with immediate effect.

News of the closure, the result of "upheaval in the wholesale market", reaches fashion editors and fans of the brand's floral-print cocktail gowns less than a week after the Serbian designer Roksanda Ilincic announced that her namesake label had been sold to a new brand development platform to save it from administration and less than a year after the Scottish designer Christopher Kane was forced to shutter his business for good.

More small-scale fashion businesses are likely to follow suit. Pained by poor sales, tax complexities enforced by Brexit and the aftermath of the collapse of the British-based retailer Matches, which is rumoured to have left the businesses of many independent London labels hanging by a thread, there has rarely been a worse time to be a London fashion designer.

And yet the woman who sits before me has never seemed happier. "I feel invigorated and excited by where I am with everything at the moment," Katrantzou, 41, tells me. "I've found my new chapter. There's definitely a sense of relief."

The Athens-born designer, who launched her label in 2008 and came of age in a golden era for British fashion, along with the likes of Jonathan Anderson and Erdem, is warmth personified. Dressed in head-to-toe black, she beams at me across the table we are sharing on a rainy Tuesday morning in Rome, chain-smoking and apologising for it.

The reason for her sunny disposition isn't that her label, still adored for its surrealist prints and bold silhouettes, is immune to the financial hardships facing her contemporaries, but the fact that she pulled on the escape cord before things got really dire may have something to do with it.

While Katrantzou, previously known as the queen of print, still has a team and a business based in the UK capital, it is a transformed version of the fashion label it once was.

London designers are facing their toughest times in decades – but Mary Katrantzou has found the key to a happy ending by going overseas, finds **Karen Dacre**

Photographs **Camillo Pasquarelli**



The designer Mary Katrantzou at the Bulgari headquarters in Rome

She no longer holds catwalk shows — “I feel relief about that,” she tells me without hesitation — or produces the four collections a year she once did. These days, Katrantzou specialises in custom and bespoke gowns for clientele that come to her seeking something “truly unique”.

Excitingly, she is also the new (and first) creative director of leather goods and accessories for Bulgari — the Italian luxury house founded by the Greek silversmith Sotirio Bulgari in 1884. It is this appointment and the launch of Katrantzou’s first official line of handbags and clutches for the house that has brought us both to the Eternal City this morning. The bags, which have been crafted with Bulgari codes firmly in mind — think clasps in the shape of serpents and luxurious leather trimmed with beading — go on sale this summer. While Bulgari has yet to disclose the price tags, hefty ones of over £2,000 are expected.

The new chapter for the house is the result of an established relationship between Katrantzou and its senior team (among them the long-standing jewellery creative director, Lucia Silvestri), who had collaborated several times before making it official.

“From my love of and interest in jewellery to their care and interest in origin and even down to the Greco-Roman roots, there are so many elements about Bulgari that make this the perfect place for me,” says Katrantzou, who credits her mother, an interior designer, for instilling a love of jewellery in her from an early age. To the extent that her graduate collection — snapped up by a host of buyers — featured trompe-l’oeil prints of oversized jewellery on jersey-bonded dresses.

Katrantzou’s new job takes her out of her comfort zone of designing ready-to-wear and into accessories. “It’s a huge learning curve, but when you’re learning from the best and you know the capabilities are incredible, it’s pretty wonderful,” she says. I get the sense she is enjoying being part of a team. “For the first time in my life I know what it’s like to be an employee,” she says. “That’s quite nice.”

But she is also quick to tell me that her years in London — where she came to study at Central Saint Martins, going on to complete an MA in fashion, before launching her label — were some of the happiest of her career.

“London is special. I wouldn’t change what I had for the world. It’s not just the support system, it’s the fact that you’re in



Left Katrantzou working on her first official bag collection for Bulgari (bottom).

Below The Mary Katrantzou spring/summer 2011 show



‘For the first time in my life I know what it’s like to be an employee. That’s quite nice’

a dialogue with the creativity around you and the energy that brings. We were a generation that travelled a path together. I think that when you’ve done it for 15 years you’re ready for another chapter.”

Katrantzou’s next chapter began accidentally when, in 2019, she chose to skip her usual spot on the London Fashion Week schedule in favour of a show staged at the Temple of Poseidon in Cape Sounion, near Athens. “The entire collection was inspired by that location, so it felt like there was a real purpose. It was a love letter to Greece in many ways,” she says.

For Katrantzou, it was the moment she realised things could be done another way.

“From that show came so many orders for bespoke dresses that we made the call not to do a show the following season to allow us enough time to fulfil all the orders.”

Covid struck soon after, but when the restrictions were lifted, Katrantzou and her husband, a neurology professor, decided

against a return to the UK. The couple, who celebrated their marriage in Greece in 2022 at a ceremony that doubled as a christening for their son

(now two years old), continue to split their time between Athens and Florence, where the designer spends every other week at Bulgari’s accessories atelier creating her new work. “When my little boy sees an aeroplane, he says, ‘Look, Bulgari,’” she tells me.

While UK travel is hard to fit into her schedule, Katrantzou is adamant that her business remains a London one.

“My team travels to Athens when they need to and we have Zoom — it’s actually easy to manage.”

Otherwise, she’s settling nicely into the Greco-Roman lifestyle the new Bulgari job allows her. Previous collaborations with the house — Katrantzou worked on two handbag ranges and a fragrance with the label before becoming official there — have allowed her to earn the trust of the Bulgari chief executive, Jean-Christophe Babin, with whom she must push through some of her more innovative ideas.

“Bulgari is a high jewellery house and not a fashion house, and so it makes sense that the bags are seen as more than just products. Instead they occupy an interesting space between being considered an accessory or a piece of jewellery,” she says.

Does this mean all practicalities are out the window? “Most definitely not, the feedback I’ve received from some of our most important Bulgari clients is that they need a bag that fits a phone. It’s the number one request,” she says.

Still, she also understands that to succeed with the high-paying Bulgari clientele, for whom a pair of diamond earrings represents pocket-money prices, it’s the extra-special details that make all the difference. “What customers want is something that they feel connected to, and more than that, they want something that’s truly unique.”

There’s still something about Mary. ■



Shop with Style

What our junior fashion editor **Helen Atkin** loves this week

1



LUXE LIGHT

Bottega Veneta's first foray into the candle market was always going to be a visual delight. In addition to its pleasing refillable glazed jar, the Redstone candle has a seductive cedarwood and plum scent. £320, bottegabeneta.com

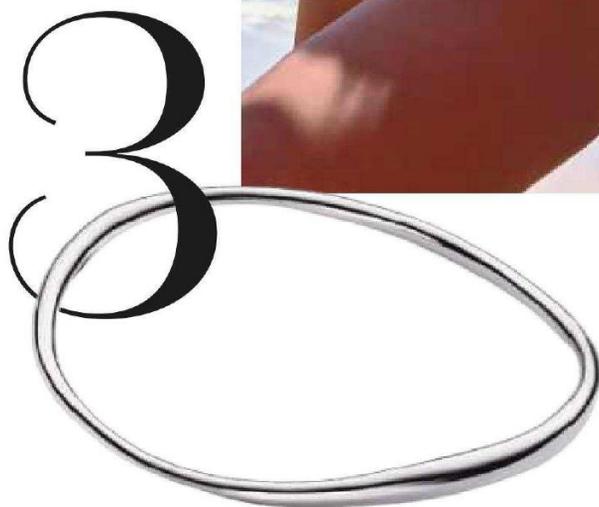


SWIM TIME

I've agreed (slightly recklessly) to go on a surfing holiday with friends next week. Having only stepped on a surfboard once in my life, I have a feeling this red one-piece by Beach Riot will get more wear on the shore than riding the waves. £140, Beach Riot, freepeople.com

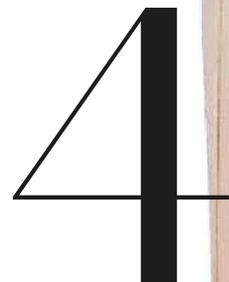
DOUBLE WHAMMY

The perfect summer skirt exists: it's by the Mediterranean-inspired brand Maksu. Smart enough for the office with a stripy shirt and mules or dressed down for the weekend with a tank and chunky sandals. £170, shopmaksu.com



STERLING WORK

If you can't hear me coming, I'm clearly not wearing enough bangles. So this "organically shaped" silver model from Pandora's latest collection will add perfectly to my wrist stack and the gentle jangle of my approach. £100, pandora.net





5

WHITE HOT

The fashion editor favourite label Studio Nicholson has launched its first bag collection — and it's just as chic as you would imagine, with classic shapes and easily wearable shades. I'd like one of each but will happily start with this Fortuna crossbody style in leather. £625, studionicholson.com

WITH A BOW ON TOP

If last summer was the season of the waistcoat, this year it's all about the tie-front top. Wear Usisi Sister's lightweight June version with jeans, stripy trousers or its equally easy-to-wear co-ord skirt. £260, usisi-sister.com



6

FEELING FLUSHED

Looking for that English rose light flush? Then Nars's bestselling blush, upgraded in 20 new shades, will have the hue for you. The reimagined formula promises 16 hours' worth of wear and helps blur imperfections. £34, narscosmetics.co.uk



8

SURE FOOTED

Sandal season is well and truly here and after a fresh coat of nail polish my feet will be clad in this pair by A Emery for the rest of the summer. A slimmer version of its most popular style, they're a go-with-everything triumph. £170, aemery.com



10

DRINK UP

No matter how zeitgeisty they are, there simply isn't enough space in my little flat for a drinks trolley. Instead I've plumped for this scalloped rattan drinks tray — a pop of colour that makes the Pimm's even easier to find. £170, hastshilp.co.uk



BRUSH IT OFF

Make-up brushes and handbags are far from friends. With the risk of squished bristles and smeared diaries, pouches were a fixture in my bag. Enter Otis Batterbee's retractable Magic Powder Brush, which solves both problems in one go. £30, otisbatterbee.com



A photograph of a modern kitchen interior. In the foreground, a long, light-colored wooden countertop is visible. On the countertop, there is a silver kettle on a stove, a dark bowl filled with oranges, and a small wooden tray with a croissant. A wooden stool with a metal frame stands in front of the countertop. To the right, a potted plant sits on a floating shelf. A large, dark, rusted metal pillar is positioned in the center-right. The background features a white wall with vertical panels and a staircase on the left.

SHOW & TELL

The gallerist Méliissa Paul's east London warehouse is the perfect spot to enjoy her collection of mid-century furniture, finds **Claudia Baillie**

Photographs **Benedicte Drummond**

This page and opposite The spacious open-plan kitchen and dining area features a sleek stainless steel counter contrasted with a French industrial-style table. It's surrounded by a collection of Standard and Chaise Tout Bois chairs by Jean Prouvé. **Below** The gallerist Méliissa Paul



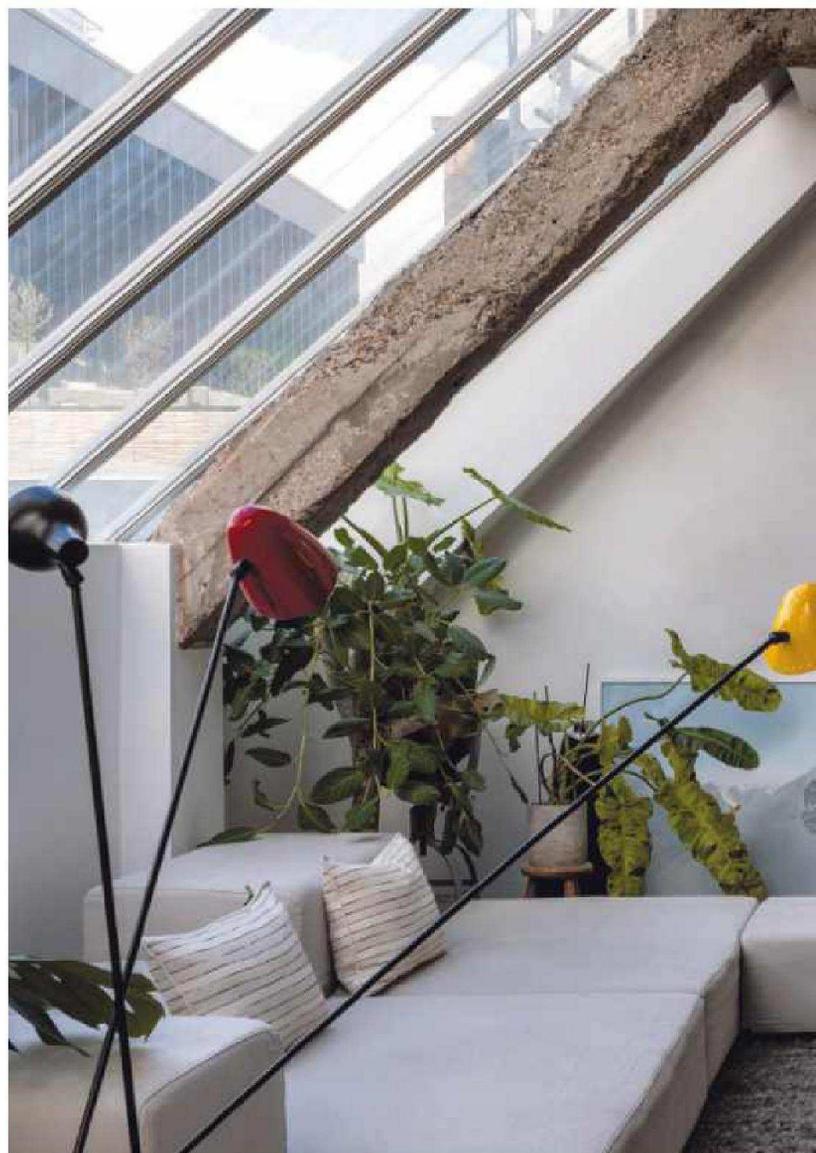
With an inventory of furniture that reads as a who's who of mid-century design, the French gallerist Méliissa Paul's Shoreditch apartment is like a showroom in itself. Home to a treasure trove of impressive pieces by iconic artists, designers and architects such as Charlotte Perriand, Jean Prouvé and Isamu Noguchi to name but a few, its plaster walls, Crittall windows, concrete floors and distressed-iron beams provide the perfect brutalist backdrop for her covetable collection.

Unlike a showroom, what the apartment does have is liveability and warmth thanks to an array of oversized house plants, carefully chosen art, rows of colourful, well-thumbed books and the fact that the furniture, however desirable, is in constant use. A desk topped with red leather by the renowned Swiss architect Pierre Jeanneret, for example, is a favourite find and is traced with light scuffs and more ingrained marks worn smooth over the years. "It has a life in itself, if you know what I mean," Paul, 34, says. "I love the patina of the wood. It says a lot about time."

Originally from Paris, Paul studied fashion design, specifically embroidery, and then worked for prestigious couture houses including Chanel and Balmain before segueing into antiques in 2015. "At the time my partner was collecting furniture for himself and I was selling 20th-century pieces at various flea markets in Paris," she explains. "I'm entirely self-taught so it was a great place to learn about diverse periods and styles and to start to understand the evolution of design."

A gallery in Nice followed, after which she moved to London and opened Galerie Méliissa Paul in 2022. The company, with its offering of contemporary ceramics,





Left, from top Under the huge skylights is a desk, by Jean Prouvé, in front of a large, patinated convex mirror from the 1920s, once used in a train station. The textured plaster walls in the bathroom give it a serene feel

sculpture and collectable 20th-century furniture, based in a showroom a ten-minute walk away from Paul's east London flat, has gone from strength to strength, having exhibited at both Design Miami and the 2023 Paris edition of PAD art fair. "Essentially it's about craftsmanship," she says. "I've always focused on ceramics. You start with a clay that's completely malleable, and then it becomes something entirely different when it's fired. I love to create a dialogue between the ceramic pieces and the furniture. Those scenarios simply reflect my own taste."

Like the gallery, the east London apartment, which she shares with her boyfriend, is elegant and comfortable, with a circular layout that allows one living space to flow gently into the next. Under a bank of sloping glass skylights, the sitting area is home to a huge B&B Italia sofa, ideal for lounging. "It's practical but playful and you can switch it up however you want. We spend the whole Sunday there reading books and papers," Paul says. In front of the modular seating,

'The great thing is that there are so many places to work, read or share ideas'



Left The light-filled sitting area is home to a modular sofa by B&B Italia. The Cansando bench, used as a table, is by Charlotte Perriand and the paper 75A lightshade is by Isamu Noguchi. The floor lamp, a rare find, is by Robert Mathieu. **Below left** The lamps in the bedroom are by Bernard-Albin Gras, from the 1920s. **Right** This restful corner is home to a Jean Prouvé daybed found at Down Town Gallery, Paris

a bench by the French architect and designer Charlotte Perriand serves as a coffee table, while overhead, the instantly recognisable washi paper lantern is by the American artist and landscape architect Isamu Noguchi.

Further along the space the open-plan kitchen revolves around a monolithic, crisp-edged stainless steel worktop, while practical essentials are neatly hidden in a bank of bespoke storage. Directly adjacent to this minimal space, in the convivial dining area, an industrial-style table is surrounded by a clutch of mismatched chairs from the 1940s and 1950s. The work of the French architect and designer Jean Prouvé, they add a flash of primary colour. "We mixed wooden ones with painted metal ones, which are a different model and are really collectable examples," Paul says. Moving into the minimalist bedroom, which has a pair of 1920s lamps by the French engineer and inventor Bernard-Albin Gras, a Charlotte Perriand stool and a low-level bed ("It creates quiet for the mind," Paul says), the palette is strictly neutral and the vibe is calm, sophisticated and serene.

As one would expect from someone embedded so deeply in the art and design world, the overall scheme is brilliantly curated and impossibly chic. "The great thing is that there are so many places to work, read, meditate or share ideas. You can be in the kitchen cooking while your friends or partner are at the table or on the sofa and you can still hang out," she says enthusiastically. "It's an amazing, seamless space that has a wonderful atmosphere. The light and the views over London are fantastic too, and it's such a privilege to live with that." ■

galerie-melissa-paul.com



'My confidence skyrocketed'

Morgan Fargo developed DD-cup breasts at the age of 12 and spent years feeling uncomfortable — until she got the breast reduction that changed her life

Photograph **Victoria Adamson**

"I think that's the first time I've ever *really* seen your boobs," Ben, my boyfriend at the time (now my fiancé), said after the surgeon took his preoperation photographs. I pulled my hospital gown back up. Even though I was into the final hours of these boobs, the ones I had cried over and cursed at for 15 years, the thought of making it meaningful or saying goodbye was noticeably absent. In six hours I would be the proud owner of boobs that were three cup sizes smaller and would sit distinctly higher on my chest. Naturally it was all I'd talked about for months: the skimpy clothing I would wear and the things I would do. Like actually leaving the house when my period was due (the weight of my premenstrual boobs was enough to send me into an emotional spiral). And not having to find new inventive ways not to be completely naked when having sex or getting changed. Short of employing smoke machines and an assortment of brightly coloured scarves, my never-nude playbook ran long.

I wasn't alone in seeking to shrink my chest. According to the British Association of Aesthetic Plastic Surgeons (perfectly abbreviated to BAAPS), breast reductions were the second most popular cosmetic surgery procedure, behind breast augmentation, in the UK in 2023. And as Nora Nugent, the BAAPS vice-president, shared with me, it's not exclusive to one generation — she sees people of all ages in her practice, from 18-year-olds to women post-children and menopause. I could empathise. I had been praying for smaller breasts since mine first appeared, morphing from small mosquito bites to DD cups by the age of 12. My small body stretched to accommodate them, the skin growing lax, and I learnt how to get changed quickly and quietly — shimmying off the two sports bras I had come to wear whenever running was required. I was keenly interested in sports, playing hockey, netball and athletics, and though my boobs didn't stop me, they made the experience an entirely self-conscious one. While my friends pulled on soft crop tops

picked out of Topshop bins, I faced the wall, struggling with three-clasp buckles and a growing hatred.

The first time I seriously considered a breast reduction (and the associated costs) was after a flurry of WhatsApp messages with a friend of a friend. Two years previously she had seen the plastic surgeon and BAAPS council member Paul Harris, who had transformed her large, heavy boobs into incredibly natural-looking, average-sized ones. The results were staggering. They were pert with nipples that looked forward not down. The scarring was minimal and her accompanying smile spoke volumes. I fired question after question at her: what was the recovery like? How were her scars? Had she thought about the fact she might never be able to breastfeed? At last I had a direct line to someone who had made the decision I had wanted to make for years. With a fluttering stomach I made an appointment.

Over the next few months I visited Harris at his Marylebone clinic several times, reciting concerns I had scribbled in my notes app. We discussed the possibility of scarring, as well as the fees. My operation was going to cost more than £10,000, which is expensive for a breast reduction, but diligent research revealed that Harris was one of the most skilled and respected breast reduction surgeons in the country and the cost felt more than warranted. At each meeting he listened intently, providing clear, thorough answers. He was keen to state that many women cannot breastfeed after reduction. "During surgery it's usual for the nipple and surrounding areolar tissue to be disconnected from the majority of the underlying gland where the milk is made," he explained. "This is why most patients are not able to breastfeed afterwards. If this is important to you, my advice is always to delay surgery." Unsurprisingly this was a sticking point for concerned friends, who warned me against making such a decision, forewarning the emotional rollercoaster I might face when the time came. But after some frank discussions and a healthy dose of soul-searching, I set a date. My calendar counted down solely to New Boobs Day and I avidly followed an influencer on TikTok who had just had a breast reduction. On her recommendation I borrowed a wedge pillow from a friend, bought two extra-long phone chargers to minimise movement and a squidgy mastectomy pillow to protect me from seatbelt pressure and accidental knocks.

Finally, showtime. At dawn on a dark March morning Ben, my mum and I bundled into an Uber and made our way to the private hospital the London Clinic. On my way to surgery I grinned at every person who passed. Could they tell that this moment was the culmination of 15 years of wishing? I didn't care

My only diary entry from that day read: 'First time seeing breasts: so tiny!'

Hair and make-up: Stefania D'Agostino. Dress: £120, Mavent Fargo



about scarring or the recovery to come. It would all be worth it, not least for the physical and emotional weight that would at last be lifted.

In the operating room an anaesthetist gently held my head and counted down from ten. Harris chose an anchor-style incision, meaning cuts were made within each nipple and then in a straight line down and under the breast. (Eventually, as the tissue settles after surgery, your boobs naturally drop, concealing the lower scar.) Three hours later I woke up to skin-coloured tape and a heavy-duty-looking surgery bra secured on top. For the next 24 hours I drifted between woozy sleep and bursts of wakefulness, which often followed the succession of nurses checking my blood pressure and encouraging me to drink water.

After a week pottering around at home it was time for dressing removal. A nurse gently removed the tape and wiped away the last of the permanent marker left over from surgery. My heart pounded when it came time to look in the mirror. Where pendulous, teardrop-shaped boobs had sat, now tiny palmfuls rested. I couldn't believe it. I felt elated but also slightly disconcerted. My boobs were smaller but still stitched up and puckered with a little bruising. Seeing my body sewn up like that was confronting. The incredible nurses repeatedly reassured me that the skin would soften and relax as the stitches dissolved. Of course they were completely correct. My only diary entry from that day read: "First time seeing breasts: so tiny!"

While I wasn't in pain, my new stitches felt vulnerable and I moved at a tortoise-like pace. By week three I was trotting around the park, albeit slowly. Three weeks later (and with the green light from Harris), I inched back into Pilates workouts at home. Lifting my arms above my head felt alien and I lived in fear of stretching my scars. Friends who came for supper would look at me expectantly and we would scurry off to the bathroom so I could show them my new boobs. Their reactions mirrored my own giddy excitement. One family member (who had told me I was making a mistake) said that they had been wrong and that these boobs looked like the ones I should have been born with. In living rooms, bedrooms and bathrooms, flashing became commonplace, each happy reaction reinforcing my belief that they really were as good as I'd dreamt. As friends marvelled, my confidence skyrocketed.

Fast forward a year and the elation hasn't worn off. When I strip off to shower or pack flimsy tops for a holiday the novelty still gets me. I now sit in the small C-cup category and my scars have faded to a soft white, similar to a thin piece of thread. Friends, family members and colleagues have asked me for my surgeon's details and some have booked consultations.

People often say that it was never about their *insert altered body part*. In my case it was. My smaller breasts have allowed me to wear clothes I've always wanted to, like rubbishy triangle bikinis and strappy slip dresses. More seriously, they've allowed me to forget about my body, the physical weight no longer a daily reminder of something that sent my self-confidence down the drain. Of course, it's not the right decision for everyone. But for me it was utterly life-changing. I'm free. ■ @morganfargo

The Sunday Times Style presents

SUN SERIES by MECCA COSMETICA

On Thursday, June 27, join The Sunday Times Style's beauty director at large Sarah Jossel and chief MECCA COSMETICA officer Marita Burke for an evening of SPF and skincare related conversation.

Learn why it's important to wear sunscreen every day and which product from the MECCA COSMETICA range is right for you.

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Sarah Jossel

Meet four new powerhouse skincare products
— great results guaranteed



“These are the best Botox serums for a wrinkle-free face, minus the needles!” Oh wait, you don’t think I’ve written those words, do you? Surely you know me better. In fact, my blood is boiling. This headline cropped up when I was scrolling the other day. Botox serums? Wrinkle-free face? On what planet was this title approved?

It made me think of Baz Luhrmann’s song *Everybody’s Free (To Wear Sunscreen)*: “Do not read beauty magazines, they will only make you feel ugly.” I’m sure if he could update the lyrics to say “feel old” he would.

I feel upset because headlines like this give beauty editors a bad rap. It’s selling the impossible, in the same way that 1990s magazines used to promise you “a four-week beach body-ready plan”. It sets up the reader for disappointment every time. After enough people complained about the damaging effects of the “beach body-ready” messaging, brands moved away from that language. We absolutely have to do the same with beauty, specifically skincare.

A reminder for all: skincare cannot give Botox-like results because they do different things. A treatment such as Botox restricts muscle movement where it is injected, whereas topical skincare is responsible for general skin health and repairing and supporting the surface. But skincare can do brilliant things. My face would be an unpredictable, wayward mess without consistent and continual product use. So today let’s celebrate the latest powerhouse skincare heroes and cheerlead them for what they can actually do.

Take the newly launched **SkinCeuticals Cell Cycle Catalyst** (1 £120). Cell what? If your concern is dry or dull skin, then pen and paper at the ready (or take a screenshot). It’s a multi-acid blend that bulldozes roughness and flaky skin. Pop it on straight after your cleanser in the morning or evening and things will look more radiant from your first use. Take note of how much better make-up sits on your skin.

Trinny Woodall has defied all odds — and apparently gravity too — with her new **Trinny London The Elevator** neck cream (2 £68). I was sceptical; your feedback on neck creams in the past has mainly been disappointment. But women across the nation are singing its praises. The decapeptide and oligopeptide and encapsulated alpha arbutin (no, I haven’t mistakenly changed my language settings) all work on crepey textures to rebuild the skin’s scaffolding, restore lost volume and fade age spots. For the dubious, 90 per cent saw a visible improvement in jawline definition

in the clinical trials, which is quite something for a brand to be able to say.

Then there’s **Dr Sam’s Vitamin C NAD+ Serum** (3 £62). If you thought Woodall’s description was complex, this product from Dr Sam Bunting, designed to be applied in the morning between your cleanser and moisturiser, claims to recharge depleted skin

cells. Let me explain: we all have NAD+ in our bodies and as we age it reduces in quality. At the age of 40 our NAD+ levels have dropped by a staggering 50 per cent, which means our cells can’t work as hard for us. The serum replenishes these levels, amounting to an MOT barrier repair and all-over skin regeneration. Dr Bunting says it’s particularly helpful at the menopause stage “when oestrogen levels plummet, stealing 30 per cent of our collagen”. Use it for at least three months to reap the full benefits.

And finally, **Sarah Chapman R&R Glow Recovery Cream** (4 £95) is an anti-redness hydrating balm that instantly soothes and replenishes sensitive or irritated skin. If you’ve overdone it with high-strength skincare, this is the comforting boost your complexion will be craving. Use whenever you’re in need of a lovely dose of TLC.

I’ve just realised that all but one of today’s products were masterminded by brilliant, independent female founders. There is so much to be excited about. New formulas are progressing quickly. There is no need to liken a product to an injectable. They have their own brimming CVs, so consider this my plea to the beauty industry: we need to start being more careful with our words. ■ @sarahjossel



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Ruth Jones
Ruth Jones is best known for her outstanding and award-winning television writing, most notably BBC One's *Gavin and Stacey*, which she co-wrote with James Corden and in which she played the incorrigible Nessa Jenkins.



Louise Minchin
Louise Minchin is most famous for her twenty-year stint on BBC Breakfast, but has also been the main news anchor on the BBC News Channel and written non-fiction titles including *Dare to Try* and *Fearless*.



Rory Stewart
Rory Stewart served in the UK Cabinet as Secretary of State for International Development, and before that as Prisons Minister, Minister for Africa, Minister for Development, Environment Minister and Chair of the Defence Committee.



Decca Aitkenhead
As Chief Interviewer for *The Sunday Times*, Decca interviews leading figures in public life across the world, from politics to the arts, entertainment to science, literature to sport. She is the interviewer A-listers most fear - and most want to talk to.



Mark Billingham
Mark Billingham is one of the UK's most acclaimed and popular crime writers. His series of novels featuring DI Tom Thorne has twice won him the Crime Novel of the Year Award.



Tracy Borman
Tracy Borman is joint Chief Curator of Historic Royal Palaces and Chief Executive of the Heritage Education Trust. Tracy is the author of a number of highly acclaimed books including *Crown & Sceptre* and *Henry VIII and the Men Who Made Him*.



Mike Gayle
Mike Gayle has written for a variety of publications including *The Sunday Times*, *The Guardian* and *Cosmopolitan*. Mike became a full-time novelist in 1997 following the publication of his *Sunday Times* top ten bestseller *My Legendary Girlfriend*.



Denise Mina
Denise Mina is the author of the Garnethill trilogy, the Paddy Meehan series and the Alex Morrow series. She has won the Theakston Old Peculier Crime Novel of the Year Award twice and was inducted into the Crime Writers' Association Hall of Fame in 2014.



Patrick Gale
In addition to his latest, *Mother's Boy*, his seventeen novels include *Take Nothing With You* (2018), which was his fourth *Sunday Times* bestseller, *Rough Music* (2000), *Notes From an Exhibition* (2007), *A Perfectly Good Man* (2012) and *A Place Called Winter* (2015).

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India Knight

An under-eye product that's easy to use — and actually effective? I know just the one



Good under-eye products are rare, and it's usually a question of texture: the stuff that does heavy-duty concealing is seldom as invisible as it claims to be, plus the under-eye area is so fragile and delicate that anything hefty enough for the job — if you have really bad dark shadows — sometimes feels like you're applying stucco to a piece of silk. And then there's the texture of the under-eye itself: if it's lined or wrinkly, even very expensive concealers have an appalling tendency to migrate to creases and sit there emphasising them. I often think that, on

older skins, under-eye concealer actually makes things worse.

Before I start on today's product, a quick note if you have brown or dark brown skin of the kind that gets blue-green shadows under the eyes, sometimes very pronounced: if and only if these bother you, then the only shade of concealer that will actually conceal is orange. I don't mean peachy, I mean actual orange — the darker you are, the oranger you should go, even though your skin is obviously not orange. But orange sits opposite blue/green on the colour wheel (pinks and yellows, which most concealers are based on, are to the side) and it is the only shade that will neutralise these specific shadows on these specific skin tones. Mac does an excellent range or try Huda Beauty #FauxFilter Color Corrector (£26).

But we are here today for **Beauty Pie Superluminous Under-eye Genius** (£12 for members). This is not (quite) a concealer, but rather a corrector, designed to zap dark circles before applying concealer if you need it. Now, I don't want to give false hope: really bad dark circles are very hard — read, impossible — to eradicate completely. What you can do, though, is significantly alleviate the problem. This product seeks to neutralise the shadows, which is at least half the battle. It is also a blurrer of fine lines and a highly effective luminiser.

I don't have significant shadows under my eyes and I use this on its own — if there's more of an issue, then obviously add concealer (Beauty Pie's own is good, or see above). I absolutely love it. What it basically does is smooth over the whole area and make you look like you've had a good night's sleep. You may think it's too shiny when you first put it on, but have faith, because it is perfect and any obvious shine will disappear within moments. What you're then left with is an impression of brightness and perkiness that you notice the moment you look in the mirror. The other thing I love about it is its texture, which is light enough to not look or feel like you have anything on, but grippy enough (without feeling grippy) to do its job and, crucially, stay put. It also doesn't feel like you're dragging delicate skin about when you're applying it. You only need a very small amount. Also, it's £12.

I really love this product, not least because it's so quick and easy to apply — I can't often be bothered to fiddle about with sponges and brushes and setting powders. Here you just dab your finger in the pot, do some light patting and you're done. It comes in three shades to suit all skin tones; the deepest one is pleasingly orange, as is correct. ■

INDIA LOVES

BUY If summer ever comes, Marks & Spencer has pretty plastic glasses — an oxymoron, you would think — called Ikat Brights two-tone wine glasses. They also come as tumblers and taller highballs. There's a nice water jug in the same range. Great for picnics or lunch in the garden for clumsy people. *£15 for four glasses, marksandspencer.com*



You're left with a brightness you notice the moment you look in the mirror

Dear Dolly

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

I've been with my boyfriend for almost a year and I'm head over heels in love with him, but we keep coming back to the same argument. The vast majority of his female friends are girls that he has slept with and/or dated. He keeps in contact with them and sees some of them regularly. One of them is a girl he was sleeping with when our relationship started. He insists that they are just friends and that there is absolutely no attraction there. I trust that he's not going to cheat on me, but it still makes me uncomfortable. He is insistent that the issue is my reaction and that he shouldn't have to do anything to accommodate my feelings on this. Do I need to get over my insecurity and trust that they are just friends — or does it highlight something in his character that I should worry about?



Women keep complaining about this to me at the moment. Their husbands or boyfriends socialising with a harem of women they have been involved with in one way or another. What is the matter with these people? Why can't they be awkward like the rest of us? Why do they have to retain friendships with everyone they've had sex with and be so seemingly cool about it? We aren't living in San Francisco in a Sixties commune.

The first question I'd encourage you to ask is: what does the rest of his wider friendship circle look like? I bring this up in case he's one of those people who remains friends with everyone: classmates from primary school, passengers he sat next to on a plane. If this is what your boyfriend is like — someone who floods his life with friendships — you might want to consider embracing that side of him. Perhaps he is just a highly social, extroverted people magnet, which includes women he once slept with.

But if his only female friends are women who he has been romantically or sexually involved with, I think that's not a great sign. I don't think it necessarily means he isn't committed to you or would cheat on you, but I do think it says something about how he relates to the opposite sex. Why does he need to have had that intimacy with a woman to then embark on a friendship? Why does he need to be known in that capacity with every woman he socialises with? A friendship with someone you've once slept with or dated is different to a friendship that has always been platonic. It just is. Does he enjoy the residual chemistry that carries over from a fling to a friendship? Does he like the validation that comes with a friendship where he knows the other person was once attracted to him? Remaining good friends with one or two exes or people you've slept with is one thing — arguably a healthy and admirable thing. But constantly texting or hanging out with a load of women he has shagged in the name of friendship is something completely different.

And, look, perhaps there's really nothing going on here and he really is just very groovy about these things. Which is absolutely fine. But it's also fine if it's a bit too groovy for you! Perhaps you're looking for someone who is a little more traditional in the way they conduct their friendships. You are not being paranoid or prudish if this is the case.

Which leads me to the most important thing: is he helping you understand the

nature of these friendships or is he dismissing how you feel, making you feel all the more insane and embarrassed? It sounds like he may be doing the latter, which is unkind and not constructive. If he's so desperate to hang on to all these exes, he should be making you feel safe enough to know that they're genuine platonic connections, like any other friendship. If he can't empathise with your concern, I worry he's lacking in emotional intelligence or he's being defensive because he knows he would ask the same questions if all your friends were men you'd slept with.

As always, it's useful to look at whether you're bringing a negative bias to this situation and to check if that might be clouding your assessment of what's going on (eg, have you been cheated on before? Have you cheated before? Has he cheated in past relationships?). But even if that is the case, our partners should be aware of the things that trigger us. And if he has never shown you any sensitivity about this, I think that's a failing.

Ask yourself, realistically, what you would need from him to feel fully secure in your relationship. It may be that he simply needs to acknowledge that these friendships are unusual, but explain why they're nothing to worry about. It may be that you would like to see him with these friends to understand their bond. There are loads of things to explore to make this easier for you before doing anything drastic. It's not often you find yourself head-over-heels in love with someone. So I hope one of them works. ■

To get your life dilemma answered by Dolly, email or send a voice note to deardolly@sundaytimes.co.uk or DM [@theststyle](https://www.instagram.com/theststyle)

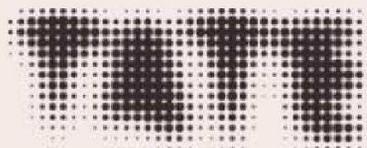


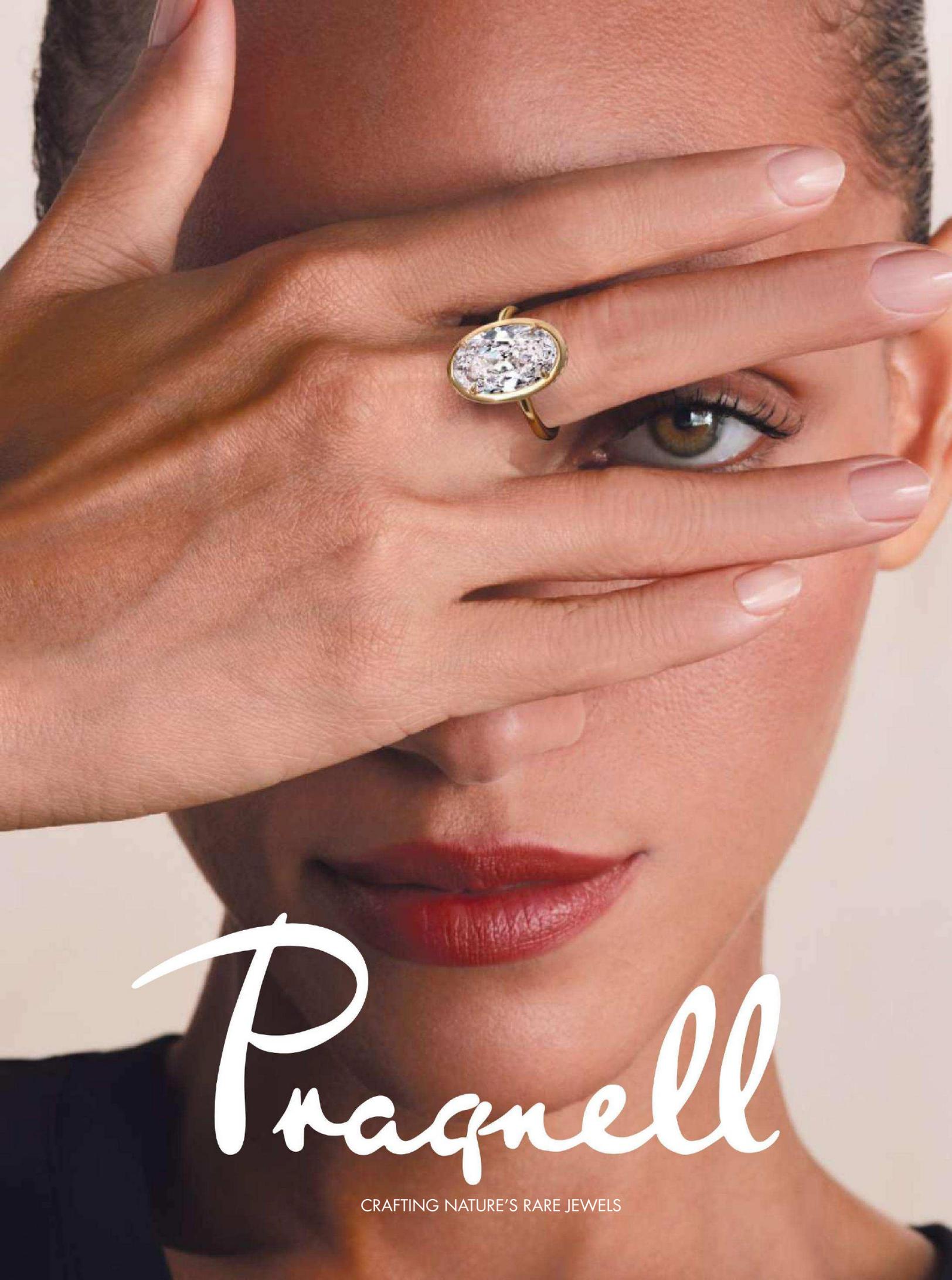
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