THE TIMES
MAGAZINE
22.06.24

The real Ms Lancaster

Policewoman, menopause campaigner – and Rod Stewart's better half

RACHEL REEVES

'I always feel like I need to prove myself'

INSIDE THE TRIAL OF GHISLAINE MAXWELL

SACRÉ BLEU!

The king of French champagne defects to Kent

ARE WE NEARLY THERE YET?

Sathnam Sanghera and family go on a walking holiday (for the first time)

WHAT MAKES A ROLEX A ROLEX?

It's not the wheels and cogs. It's not the steel we shape nor the gold we forge. It's not the sum of every single part that we design, craft, polish and assemble with countless skills and constant care. It's the time it takes. The numerous days and months that are necessary until we can print this single word on each individual dial leaving our workshops: ***"Superlative."*** It's the mark of our autonomy, responsibility and integrity. This is all we make, but we make it all. So that, in time, you can make it your own.

#Perpetual

LAINGS
SINCE 1840
GLASGOW | EDINBURGH
SOUTHAMPTON | CARDIFF
laingsuk.com

ROLEX


Reassuringly hard to find
POL ROGER
175
1849 • 2024
CHAMPAGNE
POL ROGER

DON'T MISS
RACHEL REEVES: HOW MY CHILDHOOD SHAPED ME

Listen to Rachel Sylvester and Alice Thomson's interview with Rachel Reeves on their podcast, What I Wished I'd Known, *on the Times Radio app or wherever you get your podcasts*

FAB FIVE: FESTIVAL WELLIES

£50, LE CHAMEAU
French, and lined with a fast-drying jersey (lechameau.com)

£59.95, BARBOUR
Mid-height, with Barbour's signature tartan lining (barbour.com)

£28, REGATTA
In shiny PVC. Four other colours (houseoffraser.co.uk)

£150, MOON BOOT
By the cool retro snow-boot company (moonboot.com)

£72.50, HUNTER
From the original cult wellie brand (blacks.co.uk)

CHOSEN BY GEORGINA ROBERTS

COVER: ROBERT WILSON. DRESS, DOLCEGABBANA.COM. SHOES, AQUAZZURA.COM. THIS PAGE: MICHAEL LECKIE

EDITOR NICOLA JEAL **DEPUTY EDITOR** LOUISE FRANCE **ART DIRECTOR** CHRIS HITCHCOCK **ASSOCIATE EDITOR** JANE MULKERRINS **ASSISTANT EDITOR** TONY TURNBULL
FEATURES EDITOR MONIQUE RIVALLAND **COMMISSIONING EDITOR** GEORGINA ROBERTS **CHIEF SUB-EDITOR** AMANDA LINFOOT **DEPUTY ART DIRECTOR** JO PLENT
DEPUTY CHIEF SUB-EDITOR CHRIS RILEY **PICTURE EDITOR** ANNA BASSETT **DEPUTY PICTURE EDITOR** LUCY DALEY **CONTRIBUTING EDITOR** BRIDGET HARRISON

Non-stop bangers

Let summer come to you

ocado

CAITLIN MORAN

I'm back in Paris after 20 years, and ready to face its rude waiters. But where are they?

The last time I went to Paris, I was in my twenties, and I was well aware of what everyone thought about it. "It's *wonderful*," they would say. "Magic, charming, elegant, sexy, slightly mad. You'll love it. But Paris will *hate* you. Don't take it personally – Paris hates *everyone*. If you speak English, they'll hate you. But if you try to speak French, they'll hate you *even more* – for mangling their beautiful language with your awful, residual Birmingham accent."

"So what do I do?" I asked. "In a shop? If I want a thing?"

"Point at what you want, saying, with deep mortification, '*Je suis désolée – je suis britannique.*'"

"Will they like me then?"

"Oh, no. That will never happen. Don't expect to be liked in Paris."

Well, I went – and everything I'd been told came to pass. Indeed, after all the warnings, I was so scared of speaking French that I left the first shop hopefully crying, "*Merci! Bonjour!*" to a roomful of eye-rolling sighs, and the rest of the weekend wasn't much better. Waiters were openly contemptuous. A woman at the Musée d'Orsay was so angry about me using the "wrong" door she chased after me, made me leave and then come back through an adjacent door. Presumably there was some "entrance paperwork" she wanted to keep compliant.

After three days I left, feeling like I'd had a date in the most beautiful place in the world – but with someone who couldn't stand me. I figured it was best if me and Paris didn't see each other for a long, long time. We needed to give each other some time – to heal.

Anyway, last month, I went back to Paris for the first time in 20 years – finally feeling strong enough to cope with Parisians due to my continuous, low-level, perimenopausal fury.

"Let Paris try to be arsey with me!" I thought. "I'm jacked up on testosterone cream and – after 22 years of motherhood – people rolling their eyes means *nothing* to me. I will fight fire with fire. No one can keep Paris from me *now*."

Well. Guess what! Paris has changed. Did *you* know Paris has changed? No one told *me*. I couldn't understand why this hadn't been international news, on CNN: "PARIS HAS LOST ITS ARSEYNESS."

At some point in the past 20 years, it seems, the crucial outriders of Parisian attitude – the haughty middle-aged waiters – have fallen. Vanished. Maybe they sighed so much they deflated and floated away.

ROBERT WILSON

After two decades of motherhood, the French rolling their eyes means nothing. Let Paris try to be arsey with moi!

In their place, there's now a whole tranche of international Gen Z kids who seem to *like other humans*, and who seem to have brought with them the miracle of international food too. I know French cuisine is supposed to be the best, but that's only a belief you can hold if your dream meal is "a pint of cream poured over everything, plus a sprinkle of ham, for luck". Personally, I have always found it, to use the correct term, "a bit much". Well, it seems like New Paris does too! It's now rammed with Mexican, Ethiopian and Middle Eastern joints – thus radically reducing the number of industrial cream and ham tankers on the roads every morning. It feels like a lot more people are getting to say what Paris *is*, in the 21st century, than did in the 20th.

And so on this recent visit – neither nursing incipient gallstones, nor whispering, "Why don't they like me? Why does no one like me?" over and over again – I finally, *finally* got to enjoy Paris. I *love* it now. It is truly insane. Have you seen how they have *mirrors* at Metro stations, so commuters can check their hair and lipstick? Like a governmentally enforced "maintaining chicness" initiative. And the Food Seriousness is truly respect-inspiring: at one market diner, a huge ball of exquisite lard that looked like marble was being passed from table to table – spiked with small butter knives, so everyone could take a slice. It was like watching a very slow gastronomic game of football.

And the fashion is so *committed*: the Parisian women – unlike those in London, Stockholm and New York – are still rocking their heels. I lost count of how many I saw. When fashion brings the heel back in the rest of the world – as, surely, it will – women will have to fly to Paris to retrain in the athletic art of strutting in a stiletto, on cobbles, in the rain, by those who have kept the faith. Perhaps they will adopt the bold twist Parisian women currently have, of wearing a frilly ankle-sock over the shoe, to keep it on.

It's so madly extravagant – each pair of socks must surely be binned at the end of the day – but so New Paris. It's fashion – but also quite... silly. As if Paris is laughing at itself – and we're all allowed in on the joke now. Paris has finally *relaxed*. ■

We've grown relationships with British farmers for decades.

Working with the same farms, sometimes for over 50 years, helps us get fresh, tasty and local produce.

Good to know

Sainsbury's

Good food for all of us

SPINAL COLUMN
MELANIE REID

MURDO MACLEOD

Rob Burrow's final words were: 'Every day is precious.' So I go to the beach with my best friends

I'm in sensory overload. Most of my life is spent in a small, dark room, sitting very still. Now I'm being buffeted by wind, blinded by sun, sea and the expanse of the horizon, and my head swirls with white light and noise. The tide is incoming and the waves are lapping at the great fat grey tyres of my beach wheelchair.

"Sure you don't want to dip your toes?" shouts my mischievous friend. "OK, bye!" and she retreats from the waves, leaving me there. The chair has no motor and no push rims for self-propelling – I am King Canute bowing to the inevitability of the tide.

Idly – for I have turned powerlessness into stoicism – I consider what would happen. When the water lifts me, would the chair stay upright, floating on its moon buggy wheels, a pedalo without pedals, and let me bob calmly out from the coast into the North Sea? If that happens I will wave graciously to windsurfers and porpoises, then call the RNLI to rescue me as the light fades and I get hungry.

Or maybe I'll keep floating onwards and become the mystery reverse Viking, the old woman who went to sea in a wheelchair and started another life in Norway.

But my friends didn't leave me. They continued pushing me along the firm, wet sand, the stretch of St Andrews beach immortalised by the movie *Chariots of Fire*, discussing times we'd spent there in the past. There is something deliciously mind-scouring about the seaside, some strong magic in the space and the air and the sound of the gulls. I think it's as close as you can get to the freedom of being at the top of a mountain.

And no, I couldn't paddle, or swim on impulse, or pick up the shells that caught my eye, or spread my arms and twirl with the wind, or run, but I was there, with some of the best friends it's possible to have. And having watched the heartbreaking BBC documentary *There's Only One Rob Burrow*, about the rugby league player who died that very weekend of motor neurone disease – "Every day is precious. Don't waste a moment" – I've vowed to dwell no more on regrets.

As it turns out, none of my friends could have run either. These are sporty people: one's awaiting a knee rebuild, one a second hip replacement, one has had two new hips and is waiting for his knees to be done, and the other has a bad knee. And then there are me and Dave.

Later, after I'd managed to transfer off the beach buggy back into my chair, the six of us sat behind a shed out of the wind drinking tea. "If I wasn't paralysed I'd be fitter than all of you," I crowed. And they had no answer to that, none at all.

Ironically, I'm wearing out in a different way. My substitute legs, my two wheelchairs, both Ottobocks, are faltering. The trouble with chairs is that after a certain length of time, they just become part of you; you take them utterly for granted. You forget they're machines that eventually wear out.

The manual one, 13 years old, is catching on one side and pulling in circles. Over time I've replaced most of its moving parts, but now it feels creaky to its core. Were it an NHS chair, it would have been condemned long ago. I visit my lovely local wheelchair specialists, experts in spinal and neurological need, to order a new one, and if I outlive it, well, I'll be very happy. The new model thankfully still has the vital option, for me, of a single flip-up foot plate, which no NHS chair supplies.

While I'm there, I ogle power chairs. It's like a car showroom, only friendlier. My little power chair, vital for driving or being independent in town, has never broken down. But after eight years' battering, it's gubbed. Bald tyres, wrecked suspension, armrests scraped to the metal, and now the motor is starting to devour batteries. It's not a model they make any more.

But the replacement is impressive. Like my old one, it rises, tips, reclines. It's still lower than standard height, therefore easier for getting under tables and transferring chair to chair. Legs are essential, I reason. I'd love to outlive another set. I ask myself what Rob Burrow would do. ■

St Andrews beach wheelchairs are available free of charge (wheelchairs@standrewsenvironmental.org; 0300 012 2014)

@Mel_ReidTimes
Melanie Reid is tetraplegic after breaking her neck and back in a riding accident in April 2010

MAKE LOAF NOT WAR

loaf

Beds, Sofas and Supplies for Loafers

What I've learnt Rafe Spall

Actor Rafe Spall, 41, grew up in south London. He has appeared in The Big Short, Black Mirror, Hot Fuzz and One Day. He is starring in Trying and is expecting a baby with his co-star, Esther Smith. He has three children with his ex-wife, the actress Elize Du Toit. His father is the award-winning actor Timothy Spall. He lives in London.

Even though I'm ostensibly thin, I still feel like a little fat kid inside. I was overweight as a child. If you were overweight, had goofy teeth or big ears, you got absolutely ripped apart at my school. It was really, really terrible and I still wear the scars of that today. It's not a sob story; it's just fact.
I go up and down in weight all the time. It's a real pain in the arse. I hate it. It's very difficult for me to find a middle ground. I go through periods of really depriving myself, then overindulging. I'll exercise five times a week, then I won't go to the gym for four months.
There is definitely a pressure on male actors to look a certain way. I've felt it my entire life. I don't know whether I've put that on myself or if it has been extraneous – it's probably a mixture. You can chart what people find attractive in men through James Bond – Sean Connery and Roger Moore looked very different from Daniel Craig with their tops off.
I'll be keeping my pants on from now on. I've taken my kit off a lot on screen. It's not fun. It's as embarrassing and makes you feel as vulnerable as you would expect. I don't want to ever do it again. And I'm too old. I don't think people want to see it.
Having a famous dad has positively affected my career, without a shadow of a doubt. Nepotism works in myriad ways and I've been a beneficiary of it. To declare anything to the contrary would take away from those who have come at this industry from a standing start. I'm not saying that my dad's ever made a phone call saying, "Get my son in the door" – he hasn't. I never ask him for tips on a scene, but we love a good gossip about directors.
Madonna once danced with me wearing a gold grill, a corset and fingerless gloves. She had invited my ex-wife and me to dinner. Whenever you lose perspective on how lucky you are to be an actor, you have to remember outrageous occasions like that, which you're going to tell your grandkids about and cherish for their absurdity, wonder and brilliance.
For me to say, "Oh, I might join Instagram now," would be akin to me saying, "I might start doing heroin." I'm on no form of social media. I've got quite an obsessive personality, so if I joined I'd become obsessed. I'd be giving myself problems and things to worry about. I've got enough to worry about in the real world.

PAL HANSEN/GUARDIAN/EYEVINE

PORTRAIT Pal Hansen

'Madonna once danced with me wearing a gold mouthguard, a corset and fingerless gloves'

INTERVIEW Georgina Roberts

I really try at parenting, and I really get it wrong. Every day, I worry about not doing it right. It's intense, but it's the biggest source of joy in my life and the best thing that ever happened to me.
I struggled academically at school. I got very few GCSEs. Two of my kids have been diagnosed with dyslexia and I'm positioned to let them know that, just because they're not able to easily translate their intelligence or understanding of big ideas using pen and paper, it doesn't mean they're any less clever than their peers.
I'm really proud to have been in the less successful version of *One Day*. [Spall played Ian in the 2011 film.] It's a real crowning achievement in my career to have been in the adaptation of a beloved book that didn't set the world alight.
It's a real shame that when you don't drink for a couple of weeks, you feel terrific. If I'm going through a period of anxiety, I'm afraid to say the boring things do work – exercise, connecting with nature, getting off the internet, reading, drinking less.
I was one of a small group of white kids in my class. There were a lot of kids of Nigerian, West Indian and South Asian heritage. So from an early age, I was around a very varied grouping of children. I'm grateful because it gave me a social grounding which means that now, as a grown-up, I don't often feel out of place.
I identify with being a Londoner over being English. When I go to a foreign country and people ask me where I'm from, I say: "London." I'm deeply proud of it. It's the best city in the world. ■

Rafe Spall stars in Trying. *Season four is out now on Apple TV+*

I could have walked away. I could have been cowed by the leftists who wanted me out of the party, who tried to deselect me. But I stuck it out and I fought back

In two weeks, Rachel Reeves could be Britain's first female chancellor. So what makes the self-confessed 'girlie swot' tick and what will she do if she gets to Downing Street? Interview by Rachel Sylvester and Alice Thomson

PORTRAIT Michael Leckie

Rachel Reeves, 45

When Rachel Reeves was a junior chess player, her trademark move was the Sicilian Defence, a particularly aggressive opening. "I was quite a risk-taker in chess," she says. "Attack is the best form of defence, I felt." It seemed to work. She won her first match when she was seven and became national champion at 14. Her father used to drive her all over the country for tournaments.

Often, she was the only girl and one of the few state school pupils taking on the ranks of privately educated boys. "It did make me more determined," she says. "One tournament I was playing in, I was drawn against a boy, and his friend came over and said, 'Lucky you, playing a girl.' You can imagine, if I wasn't going to be giving it my all before, I certainly was after that comment. And so I beat him." The shadow chancellor pauses and smiles. "There were two things I always wanted to prove: that a girl could be just as good as a boy, but also a girl from an ordinary background could be just as good as a boy from a more privileged background."

Having spent 14 years as MP for Leeds West (now Leeds West and Pudsey), Reeves believes that there are parallels between chess and politics. Both are about combining strategy and tactics; both require enormous levels of patience and concentration. "You have to think about what your opponent's doing and change what you're doing based on what they've done," she says. "You've got to be able to adapt quickly and think several moves ahead." She's convinced the most important thing she learnt was that competitive edge. "Of course, I wanted to win in my chess games, but it was a determination to prove myself. That is something that has gone with me throughout my life. I always feel like I need to prove myself – even now, really. And that's something that I think I learnt from chess, because I did feel like people underestimated me."

Now, possibly only two weeks from becoming the first female chancellor of the exchequer, have they underestimated her in politics too? "Probably at first, yes. It's not been the easiest 14 years to be a Labour MP. I could have walked away. I could have been cowed by the leftists who wanted me out of the party, who tried to deselect me in my own constituency. But I stood up to them as well and I wasn't going to be forced out by people who had joined the Labour Party five minutes ago and thought that they had a better idea about what the Labour Party should be than I did. I stuck it out and I fought back. I'm here now and a lot of them have gone." Reeves, who is 45, has never suffered from impostor syndrome at Westminster, but says, "I do know that it's not usual for girls from my background to go on to do what I'm doing today and I'm very driven to ensure that more young people from my background, and more girls as well, get the opportunity to get on and thrive and believe they can do anything."

A few years ago, one television executive described Reeves as "boring snoring" after a particularly wooden *Newsnight* interview. Dressed in a simple Next suit and £35 Marks & Spencer trainers ready to run around on the campaign trail, and with her tidy bob, she is not flashy or attention-grabbing. The former Bank of England economist is clever and sensible, a self-proclaimed "girlie swot" and "worrier". But as she stands on the verge of power, she is one of the most interesting as well as powerful figures at Westminster. With a deep throaty laugh, she has a real sense of humour and those who know her best say that, away from work, she is enormous fun. She loves Ronnie Scott's jazz club, goes to the opera in Leeds as well as the pub, and enjoys late-night wild swimming in freezing cold lakes.

Reeves knows she can't be complacent, but she is now daring to think about her first budget and her first 100 days at the Treasury. "The position of chancellor has existed for more than 800 years and there's never been a female chancellor of the exchequer. You've had a woman prime minister, foreign secretary, Speaker of the House of Commons, home secretary. That would be a huge honour, clearly, but also a big responsibility, because all the women who are my political heroes have done something to improve the lot of women. I would love to be the chancellor of the exchequer who closes the gender pay gap."

She would inherit the role at a daunting time with growth flat-lining and global instability, unlike her Labour predecessor Gordon Brown in 1997. "I'm not under any illusions about the scale of the challenge that will confront me if I become chancellor," she says. "The economic inheritance is pretty dire. Taxes are at a 70-year high. Public services are on their knees, debt as a share of our economy is the highest since the Sixties. It's the first parliament on record where living standards are going to be lower at the end than they were at the beginning. So I recognise that I'm not going to be able to do everything that I might like to do as quickly as we might have wanted to, but there is no shortcut," she warns. "It has got to be through economic growth. If you just increase taxes, what you'll end up doing is probably choking off the growth that you're trying to achieve and therefore not actually having the additional money you want for public services."

Reeves in 2012, with Labour leader Ed Miliband

REX FEATURES, GETTY IMAGES, DAN CHARITY/NEWS GROUP NEWSPAPERS LTD

'I would love to be the chancellor who closes the gender pay gap'

If Labour wins on July 4, her relationship with her Downing Street neighbour and boss Sir Keir Starmer will be crucial. She hopes it will be more like the collaboration between George Osborne and David Cameron than the combustible and at times rancorous combination of Gordon Brown and Tony Blair. "Tony and Gordon are two political heroes of mine, [but] the relationship wasn't always a straightforward one. Obviously, David Cameron and George Osborne worked very closely together," she says. "I can confirm I have never thrown furniture across the office or elsewhere. But if you ask any of my colleagues, they would tell you that, if they come to me with spending requests, I can be very robust in my response. I'd always want to do that in a way that was well mannered, but I think I'm quite steely in making decisions."

Reeves is not tribal in the advice she seeks. "George Osborne is the last shadow chancellor to have gone from that role into the role of the chancellor and one thing that he said to me is you go in with a very clear idea of what you want to achieve. A person going from another government department into the Treasury hasn't had that chance to think."

She has not, however, consulted John McDonnell, Jeremy Corbyn's shadow chancellor who lists one of his hobbies in *Who's Who* as "fermenting [sic] the overthrow of capitalism". "We're not close political allies. I was on the back benches for five years when Corbyn was leader of the Labour Party. I haven't read *Das Kapital*. I believe in a dynamic, capitalist economy but I think there's an important role for the state because markets don't always work and markets sometimes fail." Is she a socialist? "I'd say I'm a social democrat."

Reeves was born in southeast London, the daughter of two primary school teachers who went on to become head teachers. She went to her local

En route to a shadow cabinet meeting with Sir Keir Starmer in April

With her sister, Ellie, also an MP, in 2020

comprehensive, Cator Park, and has a younger sister, Ellie, who is also an MP and in the shadow cabinet. Did her parents set out to create politicians? "It was quite a normal childhood: we had summer holidays in south Wales, days out at the beach. My mum would dress me and my sister in very similar clothes. My brown hair, Ellie's blonde hair, in plaits. We usually had matching hairbands. Mum really cared that we always looked smart and well presented." They had informative day trips to castles and National Trust properties. "I remember lots of bucket and spade holidays."

Her parents, she says, were aspirational for their daughters but would never have imagined she could end up in the cabinet. "People did not expect girls like Ellie and me, from the school we attended, to go on to do jobs like this. I am really proud of what both of us have achieved because we weren't born into a privileged family; we weren't born into a political family." Yet even at primary school, where her mother taught, she was driven. "I would always ask for extra homework. I was ambitious. I wanted to do well." When her secondary school boycotted Sats exams at 14, she did the tests herself in her lunch hour. "I was really competitive – I wanted to know how good I was. I do push myself."

When her secondary school boycotted Sats exams at 14, she did the tests herself in her lunch hour

At seven, her parents separated and she and Ellie had to split their time between two households, but she says emphatically that she wasn't traumatised. "It wasn't acrimonious. They never had arguments about money; they never argued about what weekends they saw us. They were just very grown-up and sensible about it. A lot of teachers at our secondary school wouldn't have known that our parents were divorced. They would turn up together at parents' evenings, school concerts or end of year assemblies. I never felt like I had two parents who were fighting over things. They just weren't happy together and so they split up and that was probably the right decision for them and Ellie and me as well." It did make her ferociously organised. "We'd have to pack to go and stay at my dad's at the weekends, make sure we took the right homework. But I wouldn't define myself as the child of divorced parents."

Family finances, however, were squeezed. "Money was tight. My mum kept all her receipts and when she got a bank statement, she'd tick off things on it. There wasn't money to spare. I certainly was aware [of it]. When my dad was paying for music lessons, one of the reasons I practised was because I knew that he was making quite a big sacrifice for me to be able to have that opportunity."

She played the flute – "Like Keir, but not as good as Keir."

Rachel has always been protective of Ellie, who is now the deputy national campaign coordinator of the Labour Party. "If you saw us together, you would know that I was the elder of the two, the responsible and bossy one. We're very close. There's less than two years between us. Politics can be quite a lonely business. If we've got late-night votes, we will often go to the tearoom together. That's really nice to have somebody who you know is totally on your side."

She looks horrified by the idea that they would ever stand against each other for the leadership like the Miliband brothers. "I don't think either of us want to be leader of the Labour Party. I was an economist. Ellie was an employment lawyer, so we've got quite different interests in politics. [My children] love Christmas and birthday presents from Auntie Ellie because she's much more stylish and fashionable than their mother is."

Reeves was only the third student at her comprehensive to go to Oxford, then joined the Bank of England, one of the six women among 37 graduates. She was seconded to the British embassy in Washington DC, where she met her husband, Nick Joicey, a senior civil servant, and spent three years working for HBOS (the merged Halifax/Bank of Scotland company) in Leeds, after turning down Goldman Sachs. "I've been in male environments for a long time," she says. "I would love there to be a female governor of the Bank of England before too long."

If Reeves becomes chancellor she will face her greatest challenge since losing in a friendly chess match to Garry Kasparov. The Institute for Fiscal Studies says around £20 billion of spending cuts will be required to balance the books if taxes don't rise. Gordon Brown has proposed that the Bank of England should stop paying interest to some commercial banks, which could potentially raise about £37 billion. Reeves is "not convinced that's a good idea", but she is going to have to find some money from somewhere.

Labour have ruled out increasing income tax, national insurance or VAT. What about capital gains tax? "We've got no need to increase capital gains tax," she replies carefully. It is not a categorical no – does she need to leave herself a bit of flexibility? "I'm not going to write five years' worth of budgets," she insists, "but I've been really clear that I don't see the way to prosperity as being through higher taxes. I don't wake up in the morning thinking, 'How can I tax people more?' I think about how can we grow the economy." Property taxes are another possible revenue-raiser. When Buckingham Palace pays less council tax than a three-bedroom semi in Blackpool, surely it is time for a revaluation? "If I do become chancellor, where is my focus going to be? Is it going to be on fiddling around on tax rates, or is it going to be on doing the things to unlock growth? It's going to be focused on growth." Again, it's not a denial.

For months, she and Starmer have been wooing business leaders with a relentless "smoked salmon and scrambled eggs offensive" of breakfast meetings. If Labour gets into power, Reeves wants business to become more involved.

Starmer has set five missions for his time in power. "We're not going to be able to achieve those missions," Reeves says, "just through government departments in Whitehall and Westminster – only ➨


Trustpilot
We are rated EXCELLENT
FT FINANCIAL TIMES
statista
1000 EUROPE'S FASTEST GROWING COMPANIES 2024
BuyAssociation
Maximise
your property
portfolio's potential!
The North West is expected to deliver the highest 5-year growth at 28.8%*
Book in for a FREE portfolio review and to gain access to new opportunities before they hit the market.
+44 (0) 330 822 1450
UK Buy to Lets - HMOs - Holiday Lets – STL
Savills Residential property market forecasts 2024*

if we work with business, the voluntary sector, the trade unions, our mayors and local authorities. Everybody's got to be brought in." It sounds like David Cameron's Big Society a decade ago. "One of the sad things about the Big Society is it never really got off the ground – it was never much more than a slogan. I want this to be something that excites people."

Reeves does not agree with Ed Miliband, who as Labour leader differentiated between predators and producers in business. "I wouldn't use that language because I think the vast majority of businesses look out for their employees. They see their staff as their biggest asset. They care about their customers and want to put something back into society." What about Lord Mandelson's suggestion that Labour should be intensely relaxed about the filthy rich as long as they pay their taxes. "I want people to be successful and to get on in life," she says. "That includes earning plenty of money."

If Brown had child poverty and Osborne had the northern powerhouse at No 11, Reeves says her defining purpose as chancellor would be education.

"I always go back to what motivated me to get involved in politics in the first place, and that was my experience at school. Our sixth form was two prefab huts in the playground; our school library was turned into a classroom because there were more children than there was space; and there were never enough textbooks to go around so you had to share. One of you did your French homework on one night and the other did the maths homework. I just knew that the government didn't care very much about schools like mine."

Every time she meets CEOs now, she tells us, they say that it's really hard to get the skills they need. "Businesses need to have a direct impact on what is being taught. If we've got a shortage in construction and engineering and tech skills, what is happening at the college nearest to that business? It goes to universities as well. There are many more places at Oxbridge to study classics than there are to study computer science, and the number of children applying for computer science [means] it's very hard to get in. Whereas if you apply for classics, there's a much higher chance. We should be expanding the courses that businesses say that they need people to have the skills in."

There also needs to be much more breadth and creativity in schools, the chess prodigy suggests. "Something else that I find really depressing is that if you come from a privileged background, the chance to learn a musical instrument or to learn a new sport, to sing in a choir, to do drama, those opportunities exist, but from a poorer background and at so many state schools today those things don't exist.

HAIR AND MAKE-UP: LUCIE PEMBERTON USING CHARLOTTE TILBURY

'I don't wake up in the morning thinking, "How can I tax people more?"'

Lost Einsteins and Marie Curies... a lost Beethoven or Vivaldi."

As someone whose concentration skills were honed in four-hour chess matches, she is determined children shouldn't become addicted to social media, including her own, who are nine and eleven. "I don't look at social media at all. I don't even have the log-ins on my phone any more. That has given me back hours in my life that I didn't have previously and I think it's been good for my mental health. I'm a pretty resilient and robust 45-year-old. For a young person, a teenager, and particularly for girls, I'm not sure that the resilience and robustness are there. I do think the social media companies should take greater responsibility for what young people are able to see – it is difficult to navigate these things as parents – [but] it is constantly there in your face, this sort of peddling of perfection. I learnt to concentrate through my chess. Maybe kids today are going to be able to multitask in ways that grown-ups are never able to, but it does worry me."

Her grandparents were stalwarts of the Salvation Army and she worked in one of their charity shops as a teenager, but Reeves wears her religion lightly. "I do go to church although I must say sorry to my vicar that I haven't been recently. I've been quite busy. But I do believe in God, and I am a practising Christian. My dad was brought up in the tradition of Salvationism and that's had a big influence on me, although I've never been a Salvationist myself. My grandparents didn't have very much – they moved from south Wales to Kettering in the Thirties to find work in the shoe factories. They were really quite physically demanding jobs." Her grandmother's health was damaged by the glue she used for the laces. "The work my grandma did had a very negative impact on her health, but they never complained and they gave all their time to help people less fortunate than themselves."

She saw her cousins recently while campaigning in Kettering. "They told me about the food bank that they run at the Salvation Army, and the warm bank because so many people struggle during the winter to keep their homes heated. They've set up a laundry for many people on low incomes who don't have access to a washing machine and indeed homeless people, to make sure that they have showers. This is 2024. I came away from that thinking we've got to change things in this country."

Reeves is careful not to put faith at the centre of her politics. "I think that we all bring to our jobs those things that make us who we are. Those experiences, for me, of working with my grandma and grandad in the school holidays in a Salvation Army shop, that did have an impact on me. This strong belief that my parents instilled in me, and my grandparents, that you shouldn't just take, you should always give something back, that's had a big impact."

Labour is likely to look at assisted dying legislation if it moves into government next month. "I haven't made up my mind about assisted dying," Reeves says. "I would need to give it more consideration. I can understand why people would want it, and certainly, my mum's parents suffered from Alzheimer's and dementia. The last few years of their life, my mum would say, were not worth living – they were deeply distressed and had no quality of life. But my worry would be that people would feel under pressure: 'I'm no good for anybody; people would be better off without me.' That would worry and scare me, so I'd want to make sure that the right safeguards were in place."

Her family is obviously incredibly important to her. Her husband, Nick, is the second permanent secretary at the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs – home life must be chaotic as they cope with two careers, PE kit, meals and after-school activities. "I think we're quite good at keeping all the balls in the air, but it is a balancing act. I have a very strong family, and I do get support from my mum and stepdad and also my dad and stepmum, so I'm very lucky."

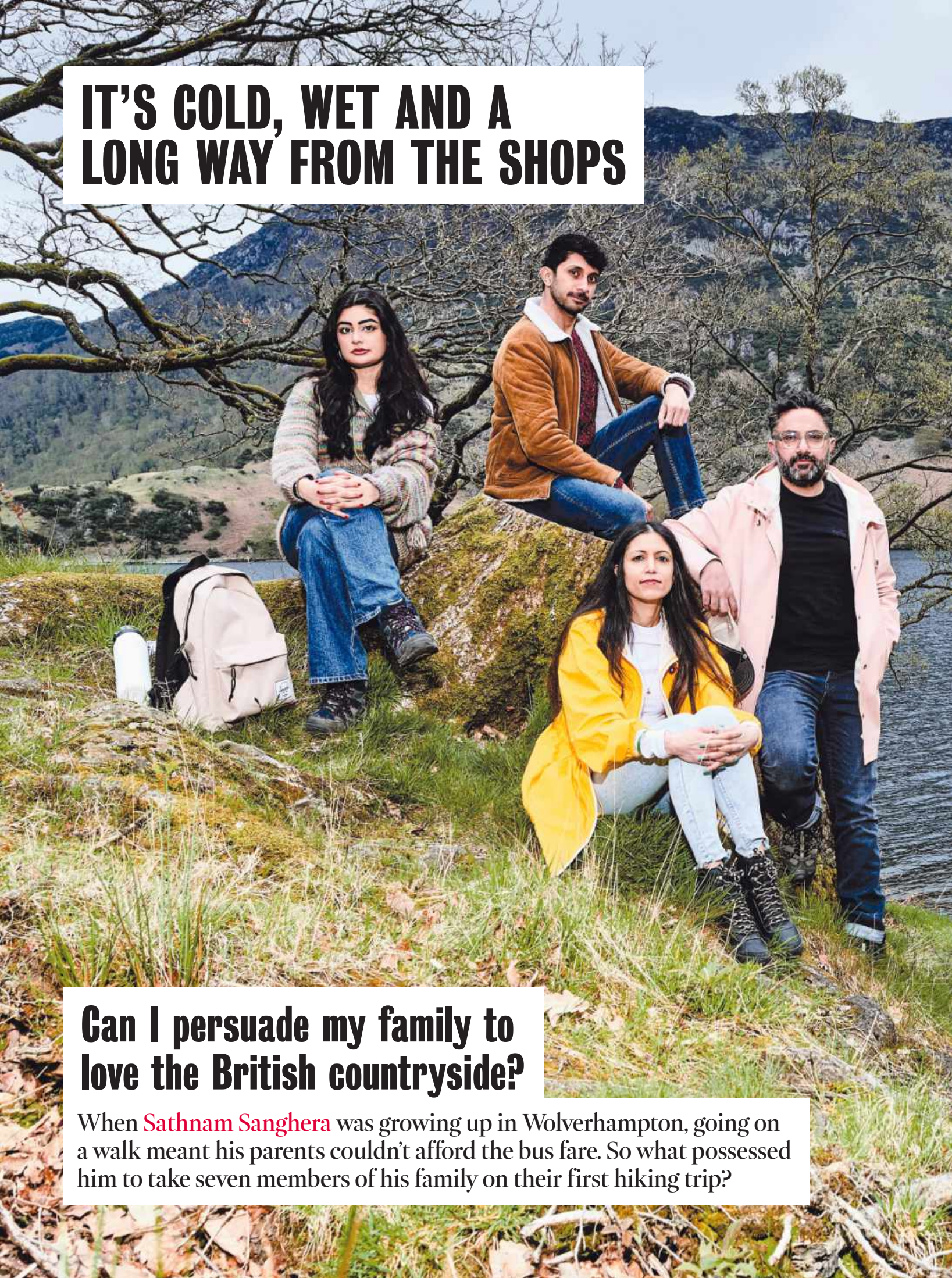
Now, she could be moving to one of the flats in Downing Street. "We will cross that bridge when we hopefully come to it, but obviously there'll be big changes in my life and for my family if I become chancellor. My work matters hugely to me, but also I need to make sure that these are conversations that I have with them when the time is right."

She was still at school when Blair won a landslide victory in 1997. Does the idea of going into power terrify or excite her?

"It excites me. Fourteen years I've been in opposition and it's pretty demoralising. You stay at work late. You go through the division lobbies, you lose, you come back. You repeat the next day and the next year and the year after that. I didn't come into politics to make great speeches or to heckle or to argue for something. I came in to do something. I haven't had that chance yet and that's what I want to do." ■

Listen to Rachel Sylvester and Alice Thomson's interview with Rachel Reeves on their podcast, What I Wished I'd Known, *on the Times Radio app or wherever you get your podcasts*

IT'S COLD, WET AND A LONG WAY FROM THE SHOPS



Can I persuade my family to love the British countryside?

When Sathnam Sanghera was growing up in Wolverhampton, going on a walk meant his parents couldn't afford the bus fare. So what possessed him to take seven members of his family on their first hiking trip?

Sathnam Sanghera, fourth from left, with, from left, his niece Kiran, nephew Manraj, partner Noor, niece Simran, niece Jasveen, sister-in-law Ruky and brother Jas, photographed in the Lake District by Tom Jackson

I want to go on long walks in the British countryside. I want to clamber up Tryfan in Snowdonia and peer down at the ribbon lake which, according to legend, is the final resting place of Excalibur. I want to hike up to Helvellyn in the Lake District, having scrambled along the infamous Striding Edge. I want to know what The Times is on about when it publishes its walking guides to Britain, and to understand what is meant when a gradient is said to be one in four.

I'm not entirely sure what has brought the feeling on. Physical decrepitude might have played a role: injuries mean I can no longer run at the age of 47, but long walks proffer something close to the same high. Maybe the need to be in nature just creeps up on you with age – it would be nice to see more of the planet before dropping dead. Or perhaps it's just the influence of David Nicholls's latest novel, *You Are Here*, which tells the story of two divorcees finding themselves and each other while walking the Lakes and Pennines.

The problem is that I quite literally don't know where to start. I can't tell from maps which walks I am capable of as an amateur and which ones I should avoid. I don't know how to arrange long walks so that there is somewhere to stay in the evenings. I don't know what to wear. I also don't know whom to do the walking with. I once tried to drag a bunch of my siblings, nieces and nephews up Snowdon, in the driving rain. While my brother Jas and I found the experience exhilarating, despite not making it to the summit, most of the family still talk about it as if it were the worst thing that has ever happened to them. Meanwhile, my partner, Noor, grew up in London and her only real experience of the "countryside" was through the Duke of Edinburgh's award scheme at school, which seems to have involved little more than walking from Hampstead in London to Alexandra Palace in London and camping overnight in a London car park.

Hooray, then, for Macs Adventure, a company that takes the pain out of the process of setting up walks for groups. It's aimed at "independent, active people who don't want to be part of the crowd or restricted by set dates and schedules" and even my family couldn't object to an invitation to three days of walking in the Lake District where Macs planned the routes according to our (in)ability, dealt with our hotel logistics and transported our luggage between walking points so we wouldn't have to lug around our belongings. Though, needless to say, I found myself regretting the idea in the build-up to the trip.

I regretted it when my niece Jasveen asked whether in the absence of walking boots she could just wrap her feet in plastic before putting them in trainers.

TOM JACKSON, COURTESY OF SATHNAM SANGHERA

The Sangheras in Ullswater

We saw more outdoor retailers called Blacks than actual black or Asian people

I regretted it when my sister-in-law, Ruky, asked about "the dress code", as if walking across the Lake District was like going to a cocktail party. I regretted it when Noor, despite being one of the smartest people I've ever met, with a first-class Oxford degree under her belt, asked if there would be hills (she appeared to think the Lake District was restricted to lakes and the Peak District to peaks), inquired whether Wolverhampton was further north than Cumbria and inadvertently referred to Scafell Pike as Scarface.

I continued to regret it as we gathered in a car park in Grasmere for the first of the three walks, eight of us having travelled from various parts of the country. My nephew Manraj and niece Simran had ill-fitting work rucksacks by way of luggage – Manraj's still had a laptop in it. Most of us were in jeans and only some of us were wearing hiking boots. Noor, who had brought along an umbrella, announced she would give up if her feet began to hurt and Ruky said she would give up if it rained.

In short, we were a long way from channelling the spirit of Alfred Wainwright. Still, the first day and a half of walking, around the Helm Crag Loop and then towards Glenridding, went quite well. The Macs app took a lot of the hassle out of navigating country paths – you just follow an arrow on your phone screen. The gradients and weather were merciful. The breaks were not too infrequent. The snacks were plentiful. And we occasionally walked through villages with actual toilet facilities.

Looking down on Lake Windermere from a summit, Kiran, my youngest niece, remarked that, "Lana Del Rey would hit different here," which I think was her way of saying the view was inspiring. My second niece, Simran, managed to channel the experience through the prism of Taylor Swift lyrics, which is the only way she can enjoy anything nowadays

The group on the walk from Ambleside to Glenridding

(although I must take issue with the factual accuracy of Swift's description of the lakes in her eponymous song as being "where all the poets went to die"). Meanwhile, the threats of giving up subsided, probably because Noor and Ruky discovered that there was nowhere to escape to when you're in the middle of nowhere.

As for me, it struck me that long walks are the best possible way to catch up with an extrovert family when you're an introvert. On a long walk, you can break away from the group if you've momentarily had enough of everyone in a way you can't do politely at dinners, weddings or funerals. On a long walk, you can also do the opposite and dip into other people's conversations if you suddenly have the appetite for them in a way you can't do politely at dinners, weddings or funerals.

What did we talk about? Among other things: hip replacements; quantum physics; a dachshund that made the news after biting off and eating the cheek of a mother; the beauty of red squirrels – and racism in the countryside. It's an unavoidable topic when you're a group of eight brown people walking through the Lake District and encountering almost no other brown people at all. Over 48 hours we came across more outdoor retailers called Blacks than actual black or Asian people, which felt remarkable in a multicultural nation like ours in the 21st century.

Racism in the countryside is also, of course, a total media obsession. Barely a week passes without it making headlines as a controversy. In March the BBC's John Craven came to prominence after claiming people of colour are made to feel unwelcome in the countryside. Nihal Arthanayake, a presenter on BBC Radio 5 Live, had warned not long before that calling the countryside racist stopped ethnic minorities from enjoying the outdoors. In the same month, the clothing company the North Face became the subject of controversy when it offered customers a 20 per cent discount if they took an hour-long "allyship in the outdoors" racial inclusion course.

Indeed, it's such a hoary old topic that I remember writing about it 15 years ago when I took my mother on a short walk in Yorkshire, courtesy of a project aimed at encouraging more ethnic minority visitors to our national parks. The complaint I made then remains ➡

my complaint now: that there is no nuance in how the subject is discussed. The fact is that opposite things can be true at the same time, and claims about racism in the countryside and denial of racism as a problem in the countryside are both exaggerated.

There is nothing intrinsically racist about the countryside, just like there is nothing intrinsically racist about brick or water. Moreover, sometimes people see racism in the countryside when what they're actually just experiencing is the hostility of locals to all outsiders – whether it is rich Londoners or people from the next village. As Richard Younger-Ross, the former Lib Dem MP for Teignbridge, put it in 2004, "One lady in Widecombe said she was fed up with all the foreigners moving in... But she didn't mean people from different ethnic backgrounds; she meant people from Newton Abbot."

At the same time, when country dwellers react defensively and furiously to reports of racism, they're sometimes denying real, provable, lived experience. John Craven's recent remarks weren't a political viewpoint: they were based on a detailed two-year university study that found that racism in the countryside can come across in "mundane" ways, such as staring, silence, laughter and "mutterings",

I felt both cold and sweaty at the same time, in a way that only the British countryside can somehow make you feel

but also in dramatic ways. The researchers cited examples of two women who live in rural areas, one brown and one black, who were subjected to racist taunts, spat on and even threatened with weapons.

The answer to most of this, of course, is for more people of colour to visit the countryside, and for them to be made welcome when they get there, a process that will gradually break down prejudices on both sides. It's already happening: I sensed occasional annoyance at the size and loudness of our group ("Is there a bus stop here?" remarked a walker on one summit. "There's a lot of you"), but it didn't feel racialised and many, many more people went out of their way to be friendly (as a group, walkers are pretty much the nicest people in the world). Different parts of the country are getting accustomed to multiculturalism at different rates, and it feels like the countryside is where football was in the Nineties. So much has changed for the better there: my team, Wolves, has gone from being supported by fans who were once known for sporting KKK hoods to matches to being a team with a racially diverse fanbase and a former captain who was half-Punjabi. The countryside will end up in the same place eventually.

If it's proving slow it's because there are more barriers to entry than with football. You need to know where to go, and people of colour often don't have this knowledge because they live predominantly in urban areas. There is kit involved, in the form of boots, unattractive thermals and waterproofs. There are certain cultural habits to become accustomed to, which if David Nicholls's novel is anything to go by, include everything from a commitment to travelling light (so intense that you are willing to wash your underwear in hotel room sinks overnight) to a commitment to continue walking even if a bus offers you the opportunity to escape a rainstorm.

This is not an easy sell, especially when walking is what lots of us immigrants and children of immigrants did when we were poor and couldn't afford the bus fare. It's a generalisation, but when it comes to

leisure British Asians would rather go shopping, visit relatives or go to weddings in SUVs. As the writer Hanif Kureishi once pointed out, his family would never have gone trekking in the countryside because it was considered demeaning for middle-class Indians "to traipse about like peasants". And I got an insight into how hard it might be to convert people to the cause in the second half of my family's three-day walk in the Lake District when the weather turned, the gradients went from moderate to strenuous and the daily walking distance went from about 4.5 to 13 miles.

As everyone tired, the previously easy conversation became entirely focused on the cold, the wet, how much further there was to go, blisters and the lack of toilets. When I pointed out the sensational views, the consensus was that the views were repetitive and didn't make up for the physical pain. When I suggested that nature made you appreciate what really mattered in life, the consensus was that it only really made you appreciate toilets. The only thing that seemed to lift morale was when I slipped and fell into a stream.

They had a point. I had made a mistake in committing amateurs to nine hours of strenuous walking on day two. By the end of the walk I was actually the one struggling the most, crawling along at the back of the group. When you're tired and climbing uphill, views cease to matter: all you see is the path in front of you as you try not to trip over a ledge and towards your death. Walking downhill becomes even more difficult: every time your foot makes contact with the ground, all your aches ache a little more intensely. I felt both cold and sweaty at the same time, in a way that only the British countryside can somehow make you feel both cold and sweaty at the same time.

The experience made me realise that my desire to go on very long walks was partly an overreaction to everyone around me not wanting to walk at all. The truth is that while I'd like to clamber up Tryfan in Snowdonia, I only want to do so if there are generous snack breaks every two hours. I wouldn't mind hiking up to Helvellyn in the Lake District, but only if it's not raining and only if there's a four-star hotel to look forward to at the end of it. Given a choice, I'd rather not do any walk where I have to tackle a gradient more challenging than one in four (I now understand that the lower the second number, the steeper the hill), or wash my underwear in a hotel room.

We could barely speak at dinner, out of exhaustion. Frankly, it was a relief to cancel the third and final walk, of ten miles, on the Sunday. But we had still come a long way. The last country walk that Simran had been on had ended with her getting stuck in a cattle grid. Jasveen recalled a walk in Wales where she twisted an ankle in the first two minutes and then twisted the second ankle three minutes later. The last time Kiran walked in the countryside, she tripped over her own laces, and one of the last times Manraj went walking with his friends, on the island of Skye, he did so in a formal coat, smart dress shoes and bearing an umbrella.

Moreover, after everyone had detailed the extent of their injuries, expressed how much they resented me for destroying a potentially nice weekend and had a drink, they all pretty much conceded that they'd be willing to repeat the experience in a different part of the British countryside, in the distant future, if the walk was shorter. I feel that a family tradition, of a highly reluctant sort, has been set among the Sangheras. If a few hundred thousand other families follow in our blistered footsteps, there will be real change in rural Britain. ■

Macs Adventure offers a four-night self-guided Lake District short break from £485pp, including B&B accommodation, baggage transfer, walking routes, maps, GPS app and 24/7 support (macsadventure.com)

Penny Lancaster, 53, and her husband Rod Stewart, 79, in London last year

‘ROD SAID, “WE’VE GOT TO GET YOU TO THE DOCTOR. YOU CAN’T CARRY ON LIKE THIS”’

Four years ago Rod Stewart's wife, the television presenter and policewoman Penny Lancaster, was terrified she was having a breakdown. It was her husband and then HRT that brought her back from the brink. She tells Polly Vernon how her marriage survived

PORTRAIT Robert Wilson
STYLING Hannah Rogers

Photographed at Hanbury Manor Marriott Hotel & Country Club (01920 487722; marriott.com)

Menopause hit Penny Lancaster like a truck. The model, broadcaster and special police constable was 49 years old. She, her husband Rod Stewart and their two sons, Alastair and Aiden, had decamped to their home in Florida in early March 2020 when rumours of the first Covid lockdown started swirling and, quite suddenly, "I found that one night after another, I was waking up, sweating head to toe.

"It wasn't just a little discomfort in the night. I was on top of the covers, feeling like this inferno was rising, as if I was standing in a pit of fire," she says. "The heat started in my feet and rose up my legs. It was as if I could feel it going through my blood vessels, my blood was boiling. I could feel it rising, closer and closer to my heart and into my head. You think, 'How much hotter can I actually get?' So I'd wake up to the heat, to the fire – bearing in mind we had air conditioning, it wasn't hot in the house – find myself on top of the bedcovers, finally cooling down, and then, of course, waking up *again*, freezing cold because my temperature had settled, because my skin was damp and then cold with the air-con. Then back under the covers. And this was a vicious cycle for about four times a night."

Lancaster assumed she had Covid. The family had a TV news channel playing "24/7, just to get updates". "Those horrific images: people in the hospital wards, down corridors, saying they didn't have enough ventilators..." she says. "And of course one of the main symptoms was a cough and ridiculously high temperatures. But at the time, there were no tests. I was keeping my distance from the kids. I was scared."

The first people to alert Lancaster to the possibility she might not be suffering from the virus at all – but rather from an entirely natural but highly disruptive, even debilitating hormonal withdrawal – were her fellow panellists on the ITV daytime show *Loose Women*. Lancaster was a regular alongside broadcasters like Carol McGiffin, Janet Street-Porter, Jane Moore and Denise Welch, all of whom are a few years older and all of whom already had at least some experience of menopause.

The cast were communicating over Zoom from their own homes at this point. "We were all discussing how we were coping through Covid," she says. "And this was one of the things I was mentioning. They said it could be menopause. I was like, 'I'm not old enough for that.'"

But... you were?

"Well, of course I was! In my head I was like, 'That's when you've been round the block a hundred times and it's time for retirement. But surely not in my late forties! That's too young. People are still working!' It didn't make sense to me."

'I threw these plates of food across the room as hard as I could and collapsed on the floor'

At the end of March 2020, the British government advised that all nationals travelling abroad should return to the UK while they could still get flights, so Lancaster and her family left Florida for their home on the Hertfordshire and Essex border. Once there, her disruptive, distressing symptoms worsened. "I had a few... what I could classify as 'mental breakdowns'. We got chickens at that time and I remember I hung a hammock in the chicken area. I was the crazy chicken woman. If the kids wanted to know where I was, they'd find me wrapped up in this hammock."

With the chickens?

"With the chickens. I was just, like, 'Curl up and hide.' I couldn't cope with anything. Every time I woke up, the build-up of anxiety and fear! I've never been like that. I've always been like, 'It's OK!' People will come to me and say, 'I've got this sticky situation and I don't know what to do. There's this problem, Penny, solve it.'" But suddenly, she says, "I didn't have answers for myself, let alone anyone else."

Things reached a head one evening while Lancaster was cooking.

"That's all you were doing, wasn't it, really? Cooking. You lived in the kitchen, trying to come up with new and exciting ways [to feed everyone]. And we were so fortunate, to be in the house we were in, with a nice garden, all the space. So you kept feeling guilty: 'What must other people be going through? Pull yourself together!' I remember, I was calling and calling them to come down for dinner. They finally came down..."

The two boys and Rod?

"The two boys and Rod. And I picked up the plates and I threw them across the kitchen. Which is an outrageous thing to think of – who the hell would throw the dinner? But the physical act [was hard to stop]... Because I couldn't contain it any more. I didn't want to hurt anyone. I didn't want to hurt myself. But I felt like it was getting to that point."

Of hurting yourself?

"Hurting myself. Hurting *someone*. I threw these plates of food across the kitchen as hard as I could, to make as much noise as I could. As if the noise... as if someone would wake up, someone would notice me, someone would have the answer."

Did it hit anyone?

Lancaster and Stewart on a Valentine's Day lunch date in New York, 2001

"No. Luckily. But it ended up redecorating the kitchen. I collapsed on the floor in a heap, burst into tears, shaking in the corner. Of course, it was an absolute shock to Rod and the boys. Rod just went, 'Boys, in the other room. Leave Mummy.' He came over and said, 'It's all right, darling. It's OK, it's OK.' I was shaking. 'I can't do this. What the hell is going on with me?' I thought I was going mad. Rod said, 'Right, we've got to get you to the doctor's. You can't carry on like this. There's got to be an answer. There's got to be something.'"

Stewart has since explained that he "hadn't seen the menopause before, because my [previous] marriages didn't last that long". His first wife, Alana Stewart, was 39 when the couple divorced in 1984 and his second, Rachel Hunter, left him when she was 29 in 1999.

Lancaster assumed she was having a mental health crisis inspired by the stress of Covid. She'd gone to her GP – "who was male, and from my understanding when you study medicine you get an option to study menopause. It's an option

PREVIOUS SPREAD: HAIR: CAROL SULLIVAN AT ARLINGTON ARTISTS USING INNERSENSE ORGANIC BEAUTY. MAKE-UP: JULIA WREN USING CHANTECAILLE. DRESS, RABANNE (SELFRIDGES.CO.UK). SHOES, TERRYDEHAVILLAND.COM. GETTY IMAGES. THIS SPREAD: GETTY IMAGES, REX FEATURES

The couple at the Las Vegas Grand Prix, 2023

On duty for the City of London police in 2022

for a GP." (According to figures published in 2021 by the campaign group Menopause Support, this is the case in 41 per cent of UK medical schools, none of which have mandatory menopause education on the curriculum.) "So there's this private GP, and of course I sat in front of him and just burst into tears and he said, 'Uncontrollable tears, anxiety, de de de... You're suffering from depression. Here are some antidepressants.'"

Lancaster, who had no history of mental health issues, who'd never so much as seen a therapist before, thought, "Shit. OK – so I've lost it. I'm a mental case now."

Is she angry with that doctor for misdiagnosing her?

"I am angry at him, yeah. Well, angry at the system mainly because, I guess, what would he know? He only knew what he was trained [to know]. But surely there were enough women coming through his surgery?"

Or a wife, mother, sister, someone, *anyone* who could make him think a woman in her mid-to-late forties exhibiting these symptoms might not be depressed and might have something else going on? A woman on reception, even?

"Yes!"

The antidepressants made Lancaster feel worse – terrified, even, because if they weren't the answer, what *was*? – but also "numb". "I couldn't feel happy or sad. I've still got everything. The heat, the anxiety... But now I've gone numb. Now I don't care. Before, I cared about the way I felt. Now I don't care about anything."

Not even Rod? Your children?

"Didn't care about anything that was happening."

Finally, months and months after Lancaster first started experiencing symptoms, the *Loose Women* performed an intervention. "They literally wanted to grab me and shake me! We'd started going back in the studio – no audience, we were doing the two-metre thing, the desk was bigger. But it was more face-to-face and they were able to really see and hear and recognise what was happening. Thank God for them."

The combined power of all of them, Lancaster tells me, of all their experiences, finally got through to her. They told her about Dr Louise Newson, the increasingly celebrated menopause specialist who, Lancaster learned, "holds back an emergency slot every day in her surgery for suicidal women".

Menopause can make women suicidal?

"Yeah! It can make them take their own lives. Women do take their own lives."

Newson diagnosed Lancaster over Zoom in one of those emergency slots. "I wasn't [suicide] bad, but...

"She said to me: 'If you're of a certain age and you tick enough of these boxes on the list of symptoms, you're there.'"

Lancaster was there.

"I burst into tears because of the good news." Because it was just the menopause and not mental illness? "That's what it was. 'I'm not going mad. I can save my marriage. I can keep my family together.' I thought everything was falling apart."

Newson weaned Lancaster off the antidepressants and prescribed hormone replacement therapy (HRT) – oestrogen patches, progesterone tablets and a testosterone cream which isn't routinely available on the NHS. (This is something Lancaster rails against. "Women have testosterone too! But I guess we don't need to be strong. We don't need to be virile. Except, of course, we do. I'm able to purchase it privately, so I have all three.")

'Police training is not just how to handcuff someone. I've learnt to stand up for myself'

Did she feel better instantly? "Almost immediately. I think it's a placebo as well, thinking, 'This is it. I've got the magic medication.' Because I was depressed, having been told I needed antidepressants. Within a week or two, I slept through the night and my bedsheets weren't wet. And then I could function during the day, and then I was just uplifted. I had more energy, more confidence. I wanted to start exercising again. The chicken hammock went into retirement. That's not there any more. But that was a moment, definitely an important time to reflect on and to be able to talk about, like I am."

This, then, is how Penny Lancaster became a menopause activist – a loud, proud, outspoken poster girl for education, information, diagnosis and treatment, which is why she is meeting me today in a conference room of a country hotel not far from her home. She wants to raise the profile of Menopause Mandate, the organisation with which she's involved. It was formed two years ago; Louise Newson mobilised Lancaster, along with Carolyn Harris ("Our matriarch"), the Labour MP for Swansea East since 2015, Mariella Frostrup, Lisa Snowdon, Carol Vorderman and other "household names, doctors, people in the industry; people who can spread the word".

Menopause Mandate's first mission was "to reduce, if not eradicate" the cost of HRT, something it achieved in April 2023 when the UK government introduced the HRT pre-payment certificate: £19.80 for 12 months of prescriptions. Next on the list is to integrate a conversation with women patients about the menopause – what to expect, what to look out for and what to do – into the general health check to which all women are entitled aged 40 (apparently: I had no idea).

I tell Lancaster it sounds as if Rod Stewart – her rock star husband, the serial marrier of impossibly beautiful, tall, blonde women (Lancaster, beautiful, blonde and 6ft 1in, is a case in point), the spiky-haired, tartan-clad, gravelly-voiced peacock, the erstwhile scallywag – dealt with this exceptionally well.

Was she surprised? "I kind of was. He dealt with it very well."

Lancaster started dating Stewart in 1999, when she was 28 and he was 54; she's now 53, he's 79. Lancaster was born in 1971 in Chelmsford, Essex, a dancer who'd given it up in her teens because she'd grown so tall. She had replaced the dancing with aerobics, qualified as a fitness instructor and been scouted as a model, which she'd given up in her mid-twenties to study photography. Having met her briefly the previous year, Stewart got in touch to ask her to photograph one of his shows. They'd

Continues on page 35


The tastiest squeeze
that protects the bees
PROTECTING BEES AND BEEKEEPERS
HIVES FOR LIVES
Est. 1938
Rowse
runny
HONEY
Our Hives for Lives programme has
supported bees and beekeepers
for over 15 years

THE TIMES
Eat!

4-PAGE PULLOUT

THE ONLY 6 SALAD DRESSINGS YOU'LL NEED THIS SUMMER

How to zhuzh up your leaves by Theo Kirwan, the king of salads

PHOTOGRAPHS Matt Russell

WHITE BEAN SALAD

Serves 2

1. CHEAT'S AÏOLI DRESSING

• 1 garlic clove, finely grated
• 1 tbsp lemon juice
• Shop-bought mayonnaise
• Salt
• Olive oil for drizzling

• 1 lemon • 400g cherry tomatoes • 3 tbsp olive oil • 1 tbsp fennel seeds • 1 tbsp runny honey • Pinch of flaky sea salt • Jar of white beans, drained (400g drained weight)

1. Preheat the oven to 200C fan/gas 7.
2. Peel the zest from the lemon with a peeler and add it to a small roasting tray with the tomatoes, olive oil, fennel seeds, honey and sea salt. You want the tomatoes to fit snugly in the tray so that they roast evenly together. Roast for 15 minutes until slightly charred.
3. Make the cheat's aïoli dressing by mixing the garlic and lemon juice into some shop-bought mayonnaise in a small bowl. Season with a little salt.
4. Remove the tray from the oven and add the drained beans. Roast for another 10 minutes.
5. Remove the beans and tomatoes from the oven and spoon onto a serving plate. Serve with a dollop of the mayonnaise, drizzled with extra olive oil.

CHICORY SALAD

Serves 4 as a side

2. ORANGE & MUSTARD DRESSING

• Finely grated zest of 1 orange and the juice of half
• Juice of half a lemon
• 1 tbsp Dijon mustard
• 2 tbsp extra virgin olive oil, plus extra to finish
• 1 tbsp white wine vinegar

You can use any hard salty cheese for this recipe.

• 2 heads of chicory, leaves separated • 100g walnuts • 100g Gouda cheese, cut into small cubes • Flaky sea salt • Freshly ground black pepper

1. Arrange the chicory leaves on a platter.
2. Toast the walnuts for 3-4 minutes until lightly golden. Set aside to cool, then roughly chop.
3. To make the dressing, put the orange zest in a bowl followed by the orange and lemon juice, then mix in the mustard, extra virgin olive oil and vinegar.
4. Add the cheese cubes and toasted walnuts to the dressing and toss together.
5. Spoon the cheese and walnuts over the chicory and add a pinch of flaky salt, black pepper and a drizzle of olive oil.

BIG GREEN SALAD

Serves 4 as a side

3. FRENCH DRESSING

• 3 tbsp extra virgin olive oil • Juice of half a lemon
• 1 tbsp white wine vinegar • ½ tbsp maple syrup
• 1 tsp English mustard • 1 tsp wholegrain mustard
• Salt and freshly ground black pepper

Fresh, crisp Butterhead lettuce and a sharp French dressing – perfect!

• 60g walnuts • 3 celery sticks, plus any celery leaves you have
• 1 Butterhead lettuce, leaves separated
• 75g good-quality blue cheese, such as Cashel, crumbled

1. Toast the walnuts in a small dry frying pan over a medium heat for 3-4 minutes until golden. Remove from the pan and set aside.
2. Snap off the ends of the celery and pull off any stringy bits. Slice into small pieces, along with a few leaves if you have them.
3. To make the dressing, blend all the ingredients together. Or use a whisk or a fork in a bowl. Put in a jam jar, screw on the lid and give it a good shake until well combined and smooth.
4. To assemble, add the toasted walnuts, celery, lettuce leaves and blue cheese to your salad bowl and pour over as much of the dressing as you like – I use about 5 tbsp.

ORANGE AND BURRATA SALAD

Serves 4 as a side or as a starter

4. BLACK PEPPER VINAIGRETTE

• 2 tbsp extra virgin olive oil • Juice of half a lemon
• 1 tbsp red wine vinegar • 1½ tsp runny honey
• Pinch flaky sea salt
• Lots of freshly ground black pepper

• 3 oranges • 1 ripe mango • 1 red onion • 200g ball of burrata
• Small handful of basil leaves

1. Slice off the top and bottom of the oranges, then peel off the skin with a sharp serrated knife, removing as much of the white pith as you can. Slice the oranges into 1cm rounds.
2. Slice off the skin of the mango, then cut the flesh into evenly sized pieces. Thinly slice the red onion and arrange on a platter with the orange and mango.
3. To make the vinaigrette, add all the ingredients to a small bowl, finishing with plenty of black pepper – about 20 twists. Whisk together, then taste and adjust the seasoning.
4. Break the burrata onto the platter, then add the basil followed by the dressing. ➨

CUCUMBER AND HERB SALAD

Serves 2 as a side

5. TAHINI DRESSING

• 60g mixed herbs, such as mint, chives, dill, parsley and coriander • 3 tbsp extra virgin olive oil • 2 tbsp good-quality runny tahini • 1 garlic clove, peeled • Juice of half a lemon (reserve the remaining half for the salad) • Salt and pepper

• 1 large cucumber • Salt • 2 tbsp white and black sesame seeds • Very small handful of the herbs reserved from the dressing (see below) • Pinch of Aleppo chilli flakes • Pepper

1. Cut the cucumber in half lengthways, scoop out the seedy insides with a teaspoon and set aside to use for the dressing. Slice the cucumber into half-moons 1cm thick and add to a bowl with a big pinch of salt.
2. Toast the sesame seeds for about 2 minutes. Remove from the pan and set aside to cool.
3. To make the dressing, pick the leaves from the mint, finely chop the chives, then tear the dill, parsley and coriander and reserve a very small handful for the salad. Add the rest of the herbs to a blender or food processor with all the other dressing ingredients, salt and pepper and the cucumber seeds. Blitz until you have a creamy dressing, adding a little cold water if it's too thick.
4. Add 3 tbsp dressing to the cucumber and toss together. Dress the reserved herbs in the juice from the remaining lemon half.
5. In a large serving dish, add the tahini-dressed cucumber, followed by a pile of the lemony herbs, then finally the toasted sesame seeds and chilli flakes. Season with salt and pepper if needed and serve.

LITTLE GEM SALAD

Serves 4 as a side

6. SWEET MINT DRESSING

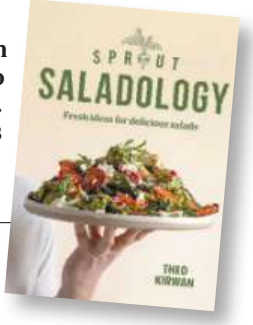
• Small handful of fresh coriander • Small handful of mint (about 15g), leaves picked • 2 green chillies • 2cm piece of fresh root ginger, peeled • 1 tbsp sugar • Generous pinch of salt • 6 tbsp olive oil • Juice of 1 lime • 2 tbsp rice vinegar

The dressing tastes rather like a savoury mojito – delicious! It would work equally well with a piece of grilled white fish or halloumi.

• 1 tbsp mixed white and black sesame seeds • ½ tsp Aleppo chilli flakes • Salt • 2 Little Gem lettuces, leaves separated • 1 shallot, finely sliced into rounds

1. Blitz all the dressing ingredients together in a blender. Adjust the seasoning if necessary. It should be sweet, minty and a little spicy.
2. Toast the sesame seeds in a small dry frying pan for about 2 minutes. Remove from the pan and set aside to cool, then stir in the chilli flakes with a pinch of salt.
3. To assemble, dress the lettuce leaves in the sweet mint dressing and top with the shallot, toasted sesame seeds and chilli flakes. Serve immediately. ■

Sprout & Co Saladology **by Theo Kirwan (Mitchell Beazley, £22). 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**



Cotton TRADERS

The style of your life cottontraders.com

2 PACK

CORAL/AQUA

COBALT/SOFT LEMON

HALF PRICE now £20

PACK OF 2 TUNICS

~~£40~~ £20 SAVE £20

Flattering fit and **pure cotton** soft jersey for easy comfort. In different pairs of vibrant colours.

Sizes 10 to 26

Length approx 30" (76cm)
Machine Washable 100% Cotton
Dusky Pink/Meadow Coral/Aqua
Cobalt/Soft Lemon

AA14108

PULL-ON STRETCH TROUSERS

~~£40~~ £20 SAVE £20

Stretchy, straight leg denim or twill with an **elasticated waist**.

Machine Washable 98% Cotton 2% Elastane

White

Sizes 10-24
27" (68.5cm) inside leg **AC14773**

Sizes 10-26
29" (74cm) inside leg **AC14774**
31" (79cm) inside leg **AC14775**
33" (84cm) inside leg **AC14776**

Stonewash Dark Denim

Sizes 10-24
27" (68.5cm) inside leg **AC14609**

Sizes 10-26
29" (74cm) inside leg **AC14610**
31" (79cm) inside leg **AC14611**
33" (84cm) inside leg **AC14612**

Plus only £3.99 standard delivery

• FINAL OPPORTUNITY •

Fast and reliable UK delivery service with easy returns

order today at **cottontraders.com**

0844 844 1111

Enter product code, add to your basket and then add your promotional code to apply your savings online.
14 day money back guarantee if not completely satisfied.

Trustpilot

Post to: **Cotton Traders, Neptune House, Pacific Court, Pacific Road, Altrincham, Cheshire WA14 5BJ**

ORDER CODE	SIZE	1ST COLOUR CHOICE	2ND COLOUR CHOICE	QTY	TOTAL

Name

Address

Postcode

Telephone

Card Number

Expiry Date Security Code*

UK STANDARD DELIVERY £3.99

TOTAL

PLEASE USE THIS PROMOTIONAL CODE TO CLAIM YOUR OFFER

F349

Cheque payable to: **Cotton Traders Limited**

LANAI
OUTDOOR

VERANDAS · GLASS ROOMS · PATIO AWNINGS · CANOPIES
SUPPLIED AND INSTALLED THROUGHOUT THE UK

CALL **0808 134 2118** OR VISIT **LANAIOUTDOOR.CO.UK**

GIVING YOU THE SPACE TO LIVE, WORK AND PLAY

SPRING SALE NOW ON – SAVE UP TO 30%

Solar panels can be added to the roof blades.

Convert your terrace into a more flexible outdoor space with a remote controlled roof.

FIND MORE INSPIRATION AT
LANAIOUTDOOR.CO.UK

begun an affair which no one thought would last – Stewart had by that point been married twice before and had six children by four other women – but did.

In 2005, Lancaster gave birth to their first son, Alastair; in June 2007, the couple married near Portofino, in Italy. In February 2011, she gave birth to their second son, Aiden, who was conceived following three rounds of IVF.

"My first son, boom! Just there. I was 34. But two years later, I'd hit the brink." At 36? "Yeah. Instead of [a] gradual decline [in fertility], it's jumping off a cliff. It just goes – *whoosh* – down."

Lancaster forged good relationships with Stewart's ex-wives – "When I met Rod, I realised it wasn't just us; it was the children, the ex-wives. I had to show that I was genuine, show kindness, and it works," she said in 2019. The family is close and even go on holiday together.

Twenty-five years, two kids and one bad menopause on, Stewart and Lancaster are solid. When I interviewed him for The Times in 2018, Stewart couldn't stop dropping her name; he clearly adores her. I've even read that Lancaster put an end to Stewart's longstanding friendship with Donald Trump, whom he once described as a "dear friend", after Lancaster said the comments Trump had made about women were "a disgrace". Do the two of them have as gilded and glamorous a life as we might imagine?

"There are very glamorous moments. But I lost it for a bit. I put on weight; my husband would say it was a very sensitive subject. He didn't want to say, 'Do you really need that second portion?' or 'Do you want that whole bowl or do you want to just break off a little square or two?' but he was thinking it. He might have hinted." Lancaster says all this having now lost the weight she gained before starting HRT. "My friends say I've got my sparkle back."

But then: "I lost my sparkle just recently when I couldn't do policing because I tore my meniscus."

Lancaster really made it on to my radar in 2021, when she completed police training and entered the City of London police as a special constable. This struck me as the most unusual and impressive celebrity career segue on record. She now serves "200 hours a year" with the force: "We do it for nothing." She was part of the police presence at the Queen's funeral and the coronation and has arrested people ("Twice!"). A friend who was once involved in organising a glitzy event to which Lancaster and Stewart were invited remembers laughing because "Penny can't make it – she's on night shift".

Lancaster trained after appearing on Channel 4's *Famous and Fighting Crime* in 2019. "My agent said, 'Penny, there's an opportunity for you to take part in this,' and I thought, 'That sounds exciting.' I've always had a great respect for the police. In the past I've been a victim of crime."

GETTY IMAGES

The family celebrating Stewart's knighthood in 2016

'When I put on weight, Rod didn't say, "Do you need that whole bowl?" but he was thinking it'

In 2017, Lancaster spoke about having been drugged and sexually assaulted when she was a teenager, working as a model. "I found myself face-down on a bed with him on top of me," she said. "He was a guy that I had worked with. I was naive and I trusted him."

As a result, she tells me: "There's something about getting justice for people. My husband, in particular, was shocked at how enthusiastic and how excited and what a buzz I was on, every time I came home. Sometimes I didn't come home, because it would be late shifts and we'd stay up. We were filming in Peterborough with the Cambridgeshire police. I'd stay over for the next shift the next day, depending on the pattern.

"There was one awful incident that they couldn't show, where this male had suffered a cardiac arrest. We were called out to assist the paramedics because they couldn't get into the building. In the end, when we arrived, they'd smashed through the glass with their oxygen tank. He was laid out on the stairwell and a paramedic was performing CPR. I'd never seen that before. But the paramedic turned to me and, seeing a uniform, he just assumed I was a regular officer. He said, 'Could you take over?' I had no training but I was watching and I recognised that this man's life was at risk here, on the line. So I just got down on my hands and knees. The male was only in his underwear and I was kneeling in his sick, and it was an experience. Sadly, he didn't make it."

Despite this kind of trauma, Lancaster fell in love with policing and decided to train once filming ended. "People said, 'Why?' And I said, 'Why not?'"

What did Stewart and her sons think? "When I first told them the idea of joining, they thought I was absolutely mad. And also, being young lads, my sons didn't think it was cool. But now they're so proud. It's a complete turnaround. I think it's because they've heard the stories and seen the change in me. To begin with they were like, 'Mum, you've become stricter. I don't like this.' And even Rod would say, 'You've changed. You're more forceful, you're more this, you're more that.'"

Are they right?

"Well, you know what? I think it came at about the same time as menopause. So when women hit 50, hit the menopause, it's kind of like, 'Right, stop, tools down... Like, actually, I'm going to reinvent myself.' There is a change in me because the training is not just how to handcuff someone, learning legislation. They teach you about morals and ethics and they teach you about the natural unconscious bias that you have. So yes, I might stand up for myself more, talk out more."

Has Lancaster ever felt in danger on the job?

"You have to accept that there is an element of danger. Whenever you stop and ask someone to account for their whereabouts; when you stop a vehicle. You don't know what's in that car, who's in that car, what it could escalate to. I've felt the threat. A group that we were trying to move on once had got rather rowdy. It escalated somewhat. There were alcohol and other substances involved and people don't act how they would normally. I felt the threat, but the training kicks in. I also felt that my colleagues had my back, and I had their back... It is like a family."

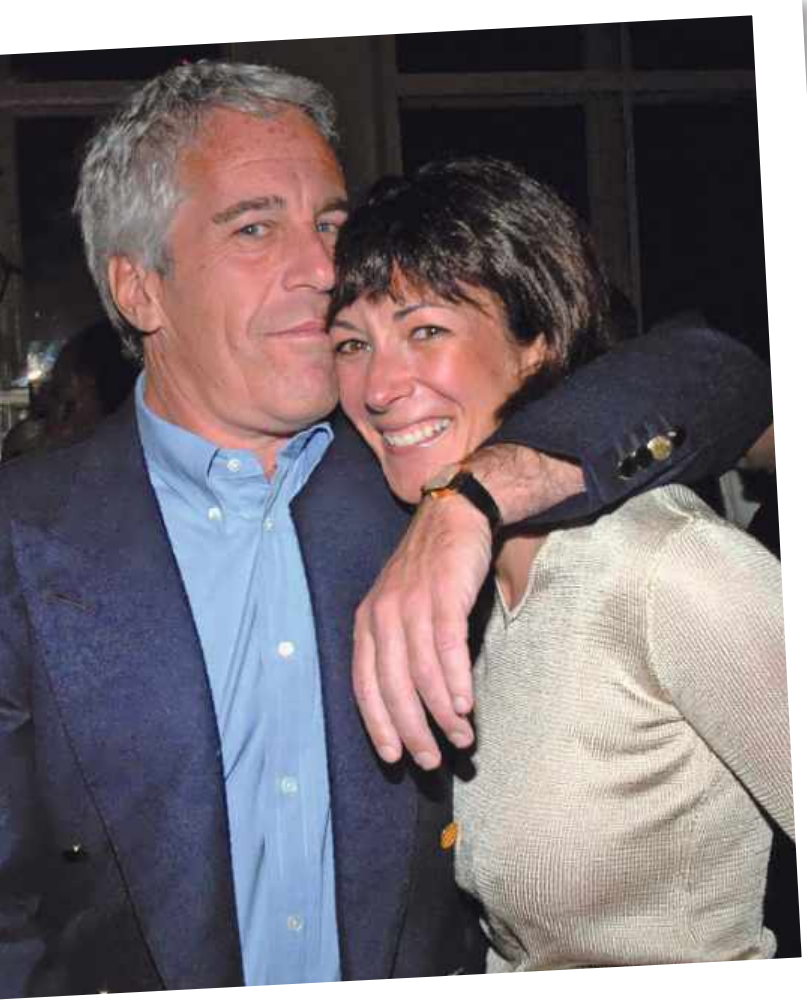
The injury to her knee has meant that Lancaster hasn't been able to go out on patrol for the last few months, which is why, she says, she's lost some sparkle. "They said if it got any worse I'd have to have a full knee replacement. I'm missing it a hell of a lot. We went to an event yesterday – it was the King's Foundation Awards – and there were police officers outside. Rod's like, 'Come on, darling!' And I'm like, 'I'm just having a chat... How long is your shift?' I miss it. I miss it."

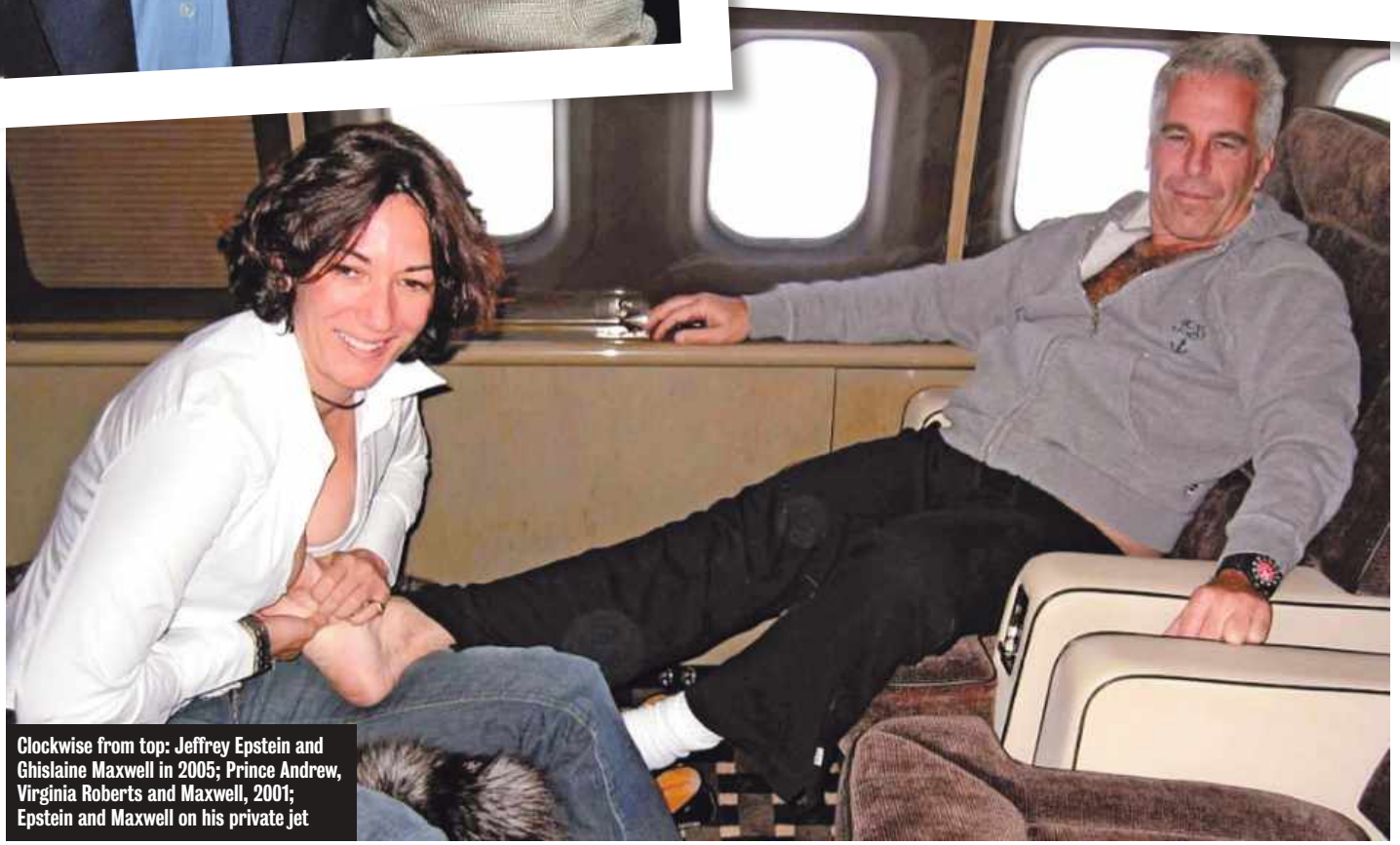
I ask Lancaster what's next and she tells me she wants to get stuck in to re-establishing trust in the police, particularly among women. "I just want to get that uniform back on." As for her menopause activism, she wants to get the message through, not just to women but to men so they are "not just in sympathy with women, but can recognise that if we can fix women's problems, a lot of other problems will be fixed. At the end of the day, the government were quite happy for Viagra to be free. So maybe men are recognising that if we look after them...'"

Enlightened self-interest, then?

"Yeah. What's that saying? Happy wife, happy life." ■

MY PART IN GHISLAINE MAXWELL'S TRIAL
I knew she was guilty. I was abused too





Clockwise from top: Jeffrey Epstein and Ghislaine Maxwell in 2005; Prince Andrew, Virginia Roberts and Maxwell, 2001; Epstein and Maxwell on his private jet

Lucia Osborne-Crowley, 31, photographed by Michael Leckie

Reporter Lucia Osborne-Crowley sat in court every day covering the trial of Ghislaine Maxwell for helping Jeffrey Epstein abuse under-age girls. She was one of only four journalists allowed in the room but the case was personal – she had been groomed and sexually abused as a child. This is her story

I set my alarm for 11pm so that I can arrive at the Thurgood Marshall Courthouse every day between midnight and 3am, to make sure I am one of only four reporters allowed into courtroom 318 to witness the trial of Ghislaine Maxwell. I know from my newsroom colleagues that journalists need to arrive extremely early for high-profile trials if we want to secure one of the seats in the press gallery. With these kinds of cases, the courts set up a series of "overflow rooms", where reporters can watch video feeds from a separate, empty courtroom. But I am not in the least bit interested in that – I am going to be in the room if it kills me.

Ghislaine Maxwell, as I'm sure you know, was the right-hand woman of Jeffrey Epstein and is now a convicted sex offender serving a 20-year prison sentence for the role she played in helping Epstein recruit under-age girls for the purpose of sexual abuse. And, as we heard during the trial, in some cases allegedly also engaging in the abuse. *She was in the room when it happened*, the prosecutor's voice rings in my head still now, nearly three years later.

On that first afternoon, Judge Alison Nathan tells the attorneys to prepare for opening statements. So it's time for me to introduce you to the main characters in this story.

I want to start with Alison Moe, because we will hear from her first. Alison is tiny – about 5ft 3in – but she's not even the smallest person on the prosecution team. She wears a sensible court skirt suit, all black, with a crisp white shirt underneath. Everything she says is measured – not a single word out of place. In law school, and at my first law firm, I was always in awe of the lawyers who could do this. These lawyers are as careful with their words as writers are, but they do it in real time.

To Alison's immediate right is Maurene Comey. Maurene is the opposite of Alison in stature – she is incredibly tall, just like her father, James Comey, the former chief of the FBI who oversaw the agency during the 2016 presidential election. Maurene seems acutely aware of her height when she walks. She is always slightly bent over herself, as though apologising. But when she questions witnesses or addresses the court and the jury, there are no apologies. She is fierce and, like Alison, incredibly self-assured. Also like Alison, she wears a dark skirt suit each day of the trial with a pressed white shirt underneath and flat shoes. She wears no make-up, as though she wants to direct all her energy to the task at hand.

To the right of her is Lara Pomerantz, the tiniest of them all. She is maybe 5ft 1in, at a push. When she stands next to Maurene, the taller prosecutor has to almost bend double to whisper prosecutorial secrets in her ear. Lara's stature belies a fiery core. When she speaks to the court, her voice is steady, and always feels like a warning: "Don't push me. I know exactly what I'm doing."

On the other side of the room, the defence table. These are, without a doubt, some of the most talented attorneys I have seen at work. They are formidable when it comes to dextrous legal argument. What they actually believe, underneath it all, is a mystery to me.

My favourite is Bobbi Sternheim. She will become an obsession of mine over the next few weeks. How to capture her on the page? Bobbi is less a person than a presence. She lights up a room when she walks in – not with a smile, necessarily, but with something else: intellectual heft, perhaps; a sense of purpose. She always wears starchy white shirts with an upturned collar. Every day, the upturned collar.

With the collar, Bobbi wears a different coloured blazer each day. But not a muted court blazer. Hers are velvet, tweed, linen. They are purple, green, maroon. They too are a statement. Alongside the blazers and the collar, Bobbi wears fantastic ankle boots, with a slight heel on them and a pointed toe. Black with silver studs along the bottom. Half country and western, half runway.

I could spend my life trying to understand Bobbi Sternheim. She is a prominent left-wing activist and she and her wife are very active in the LGBTQI+ legal community. And yet here she is defending Ghislaine Maxwell with a passion that, to me at least, reads as genuine. Bobbi doesn't know me yet, but soon enough she will recognise that I am one of only four reporters who is here every day of the trial. When she registers this, she begins to say, "Good morning," in this warm manner; one that jars with the way I will come to see her treat, and speak about, victims during the next few weeks.


Alison Moe and Maurene Comey at Epstein's trial, 2019

The PROSECUTION

'EVERYTHING MOE SAYS IS MEASURED, NOT A WORD OUT OF PLACE. I'M IN AWE'

Next to Bobbi is Christian Everdell. Christian is an interesting addition to the defence team because he is, at heart, a prosecutor. He has only recently switched sides, as they say in the legal world. He is the only one of the defence team who does not profess to have a genuine emotional connection with Ghislaine Maxwell. Rather, you get the sense that he believes strongly in the idea that everyone deserves a defence, and that he likes to challenge his legal mind. The heated spats he will get into with Judge Nathan over the coming weeks will prove this.

Next to him is Jeffrey Pagliuca, whom I will come to recognise anywhere on the streets of Lower Manhattan – and I start to see him around an awful lot – by his distinctive backpack. In truth, it isn't distinctive at all – it stands out in its plainness. It is a standard sports backpack, like the one my dad used to carry cycling while I was growing up. The others have posh briefcases, but Jeffrey Pagliuca doesn't stand on ceremony, not for anyone.

Finally on the defence table, we have Laura Menninger. Laura Menninger is the one I will come to see as Ghislaine Maxwell's fixer – her equivalent of Rudy Giuliani. She has been representing Maxwell for 20 years and you can tell from the way that she walks into this room that she is on a mission to clear her friend's good name. She is an attack dog, and the moments when she is unleashed on Maxwell's victims will be the hardest for me to sit through of the whole trial.

And, of course, Maxwell herself. Perhaps the most mysterious of them all. She spends the entire time appearing relaxed and at ease, confident. A few days after her birthday – Christmas Day – she happily receives kisses and hugs from her

PREVIOUS SPREAD: GETTY IMAGES, REX FEATURES. STYLING: HANNAH SKELLEY. HAIR AND MAKE-UP: ARIANE YOUNG AT JOY GOODMAN USING UNITE HAIR AND LAURA GELLER MAKE-UP. DRESS, WHISTLES.COM. THIS SPREAD: REUTERS, GETTY IMAGES

The DEFENCE

‘STERNHEIM’S WARM MANNER JARS WITH HOW SHE TREATS VICTIMS’

Bobbi Sternheim outside Maxwell’s trial, 2022

lawyers and family as the words “Happy birthday” ring around the room. One lunch break, Maxwell turns round to her sister Isabelle. She pulls her Covid mask down to her chin and this is the first time I have seen all her teeth. She smiles widely.

For the first time, she turns to face us in the press gallery. Her eyes are so dark they are almost black. She looks at me for a very long time, and it almost feels as though a conversation passes between us. She picks up her Biro and starts drawing.

Jane Rosenberg, the court artist, picks up her own pen and turns her gaze to Maxwell. We sit like this for what feels like several minutes, Maxwell staring right into my eyes, sketching us, while Jane sketches Maxwell. I have never felt such an intense gaze in all my life, either before or in the three years since.

Now might be a good time to tell you that I am a survivor of organised child sexual abuse not dissimilar to the playbook used by Jeffrey Epstein and Ghislaine Maxwell. I am also a survivor of child sexual abuse whose perpetrators will never be brought to justice. I’ve made my peace with that – but it might also be why I’m here.

Not only was I violently raped at 15 years old – as some of Epstein’s victims were, we hear at the trial – but more importantly, I was groomed and sexually abused from a young age, in a very similar scenario to the one set up by Epstein. When other victims of this same man went to the police, the case got thrown out because the system is stacked against adult victims of child sexual abuse who cannot, for years and years, understand their abuse and therefore disclose it.

Just before I escaped this figure, a group of men distracted my friends on a night out drinking, while one man grabbed me by the hand, out of nowhere. I remember two things: first, the startling feeling of being touched when you aren’t expecting it; second, the way his grip tightened until I couldn’t feel my fingers.

But as you’ll learn from the survivors in my book, *The Lasting Harm: Witnessing the Trial of Ghislaine Maxwell*, being sexually abused as a child encodes survival responses in you that you cannot control. Mine, I have learnt over years of therapy and a stint in a psychiatric hospital, is usually “freeze”, also known as submission. So when the man led me into a nearby McDonald’s and up several flights of stairs to a disused bathroom, still with that terrifying grip, I followed him. I was frozen inside.

Once he locked the door to the bathroom, he pushed me onto my knees so hard I would have bruises for weeks and forced me to give him a blow job. Then he pulled out a Swiss army knife and raped me, over and over. I was sure that when he was done, he was going to kill me. I noticed a bottle next to the toilet seat and I smashed it, hard, across the porcelain toilet bowl. My attacker was drunk and, I think, on drugs, so he was slow to react. It was enough time for me to unlock the door and run.

I got a taxi home and washed the blood off my thighs. I took time off all sports training so no one would see the bruises. Two weeks later, my abuser – the one you know about already – said, “How did you get this cracked rib?”

The injuries from that rape ended my sporting career, and I have hardly been able to set foot in a gym since. I’ve developed chronic abdominal pain from the internal injuries caused by my assault, and have been diagnosed with endometriosis and Crohn’s disease, both of which may be linked to early experiences of sexual trauma.

I did not tell anyone about my rape for the same reason I did not tell anyone about my abuser: because I lived in a world that had taught me that I had done something wrong. It took me ten years to work up the courage to speak about what happened to me, a refrain you’ll hear again from the witnesses in the Ghislaine Maxwell trial. So, here’s something I can tell you for certain: if you have kept a secret out of shame and fear of punishment, this does not mean that it didn’t happen. If anything, this is evidence that it did.

So as soon as Ghislaine Maxwell was handed her federal indictment and a trial date was set, I knew in my bones that I had to be there for every second of it. Because I knew enough about Epstein and Maxwell to know that she was crucial to his grooming scheme – it was her, and not him, who often gained the girls’ trust and ensnared them. Since I have begun to understand, through years of therapy, how my abuser gained my trust and the trust of those around me, I have been on a mission to explain what happens. If we, as a society, understood how organised child sexual abuse – where an offender grooms the child, the parents and the environment in order to gain trust and love and then uses that trust to sexually abuse the child – perhaps I, or one of the Epstein victims, might have been spared. Perhaps someone might have intervened.

The person I learnt the most from, and the person I dedicated my book to, is one of the witnesses, Carolyn Andriano. Carolyn met Ghislaine Maxwell and Jeffrey Epstein when she was just 14, introduced by Virginia Giuffre – née Roberts, the woman at the centre of the sexual abuse allegations against Prince Andrew – who explained she could earn some money by giving a very rich man a massage. Carolyn came from a traumatic background – she’d dropped out of school to support her mother, who had addiction issues. She was the perfect victim. This sexual abuse operation was founded on the idea of preying on vulnerable girls who had crucial things missing in their lives – parents, affection, love, money.

Carolyn testified under a pseudonym because she’d never told her story. But she agreed to speak to me. So I flew to Palm Beach after the trial, in September 2022, to meet her. Carolyn’s story was arguably the most important testimony, for several reasons. First, because the charges associated with Carolyn’s story carried by far the longest sentence – the two charges that relied on her evidence carried a total sentence of 40 years, whereas the charges associated with the other victims’ stories carried between 5 and 15 years.

That’s because Carolyn was trafficked by Epstein and Maxwell between 2001 and 2004, making her ordeal the most recent of the four, with the other three victims being abused in the Nineties. When Maxwell and Epstein abused Jane, Kate and Annie – the other victims who testified – no substantive federal law existed criminalising sex trafficking. By the time they abused Carolyn, a federal sex trafficking act had been passed that significantly toughened sentences for the offence.

So by the time Maxwell was charged 20 years later, the crimes she committed against Carolyn would be the only ones that could attract a substantive sex trafficking charge. But there’s a more important reason why Carolyn’s story was crucial to bringing Maxwell to justice: because it laid bare, in an excruciatingly honest way, just how severe the lifelong effects of trauma really are, because ➨

Win BST Hyde Park VIP tickets and a stay in London with ALL

American Express presents BST Hyde Park is one of the most-anticipated events in the festival calendar every year. It brings some of the world's legendary headliners to London's Hyde Park alongside a stellar list of rising stars. As a Times+ member, you have the chance to win two tickets to see either Stevie Nicks, Shania Twain or Stray Kids, complete with a hotel stay.

Visit mytimesplus.co.uk

TIMES+
OFFERS | COMPETITIONS | EVENTS

All.com

T&Cs apply.

Carolyn hid nothing from the jury about her life. Her testimony was raw, honest, unfiltered. Carolyn's story perfectly captures the way that trauma in childhood alters the course of our lives; the way it leaves us vulnerable to addiction, self-loathing and more trauma; the way it traps us in a cycle of violence and shame; the way it refuses to let us go.

So here I am, almost a year after verdict day, sitting on a Greyhound bus from Miami to West Palm Beach, to meet Carolyn in the flesh. Carolyn has requested that I book a hotel room for our interview so that we can have some privacy. I recognise her immediately, of course, from the witness stand, but what I didn't expect is that she would recognise me too.

When she asks me why I am interested in the Maxwell trial, I answer honestly. "I was sexually abused and groomed as a child," I say. "And I'm still living with the effects of it. I want the world to understand it better." Carolyn's face changes.

"I'm so sorry that happened to you," she says, very seriously. "I'm so, so sorry. It's so unfair."

My instincts were right, by the way, about this trial shedding light on how grooming works. The prosecution called an expert witness called Dr Lisa Rocchio, who explained, in eerie detail, exactly what had happened to me. She explained that groomers and sexual predators identify a child they would like to abuse. Then they slowly develop a relationship with them. Over time, that relationship becomes loving and trusting. "You know I love you like a daughter, right?" my abuser used to tell me.

She explained that they will often choose children whose parents are absent or distracted. They choose children whose need for love and affection is not being met. Next, they groom the parents. They tell the parents that they will look after the child. They tell the parents that they'll make the child a star – often a model or actor or singer in Epstein's case – and in this way they similarly gain the trust and love of the parents.

Rocchio explained that this is called "grooming the environment". It is so that, when the perpetrators ask for increasing amounts of time alone with the child, no alarm bells go off. This person is often the most trusted figure in a family's life.

It also develops a deep conflict in the developing brain of the child, because every child needs love and affection, and every child wants to feel special. And so they do, truly, trust and love the perpetrator. Often, this uncomplicated version of the relationship lasts a long time. So when the abuse begins, the child becomes extremely confused. How can a person who saved me also want to hurt me? How can that same person tell me he is not hurting me, but that in fact the hurt is just another expression of the love they had already proven in legitimate ways?

MICHAEL LECKIE

'MAXWELL STARES AT ME. SHE PICKS UP HER PEN AND STARTS DRAWING'

This leads to what Rocchio calls "delayed disclosure". It's why – and this is why we need to change our justice system, which currently has no understanding of this – victims of organised child sexual abuse almost never disclose their abuse while it is happening. It's because they are confused. It's because they trust and love someone who is also hurting them. It's because they don't want to get their perpetrator in trouble.

I'm in a Palm Beach restaurant, looking through my notes after talking to Carolyn when I notice a man in his sixties approaching my table. He nods at my blue notebook, open to the last page I have been scrawling on, and says, "When you finish that book, I want a signed copy." I smile nervously.

"How did you know I was writing a book?"

"I've seen you here a few times, writing furiously in that notebook of yours."

I shift uncomfortably in my seat, feeling watched. I laugh, trying to placate him.

"What's the book about?" he asks, taking a seat next to me and signalling to the server that he'd like another drink, and ordering one for me.

"It's about Jeffrey Epstein," I say, sounding more confident than I feel.

"Ah, I thought so," he says, and something on the back of my neck prickles.

"I know one of his pilots," he continues. "Would you like to meet him?"

I feel, in this moment, that playing along is the best strategy. I wonder to myself whether this man sitting next to me is the private investigator that Carolyn had told me visited her earlier that day, and I kick myself for not getting more of a physical description from her. I ask him a few questions about the pilot, to try to figure out who this man sitting next to me really is, but he keeps changing the subject – he is offering me drugs, then showing me a pile of cash in his wallet, which he says adds up to $5,000.

He asks me to tell him more about the book. Mostly I lie, not knowing what to say or how best to remain in control of my fear. He says again how wealthy he is, how he likes to give his money away to people like me in exchange for favours – such as not writing books.

By this time, he has moved his chair so close to mine that his thighs are touching mine. There is a slit in my long skirt up my left thigh and he starts thumbing it, staring at me, saying, "This slit is too tempting for people like me." I excuse myself and move towards the bathroom, catching the eye of my waiter, Manny, on the way through.

I go into the bathroom and as I come out, the manager – a woman – is waiting for me outside the stall. "My colleague said you are having trouble with that man?"

"Yes."

"Don't worry, I'll take care of it. You stay inside the restaurant and I'll ask him to leave."

I nod, and she ushers over another waiter to take me discreetly back into the main restaurant. All the doors are shut – it's closing time – and I can see through the window that the man is arguing with the waiter who is asking him to leave. Once the man has left, we watch his truck, sitting outside with the window down. Manny gets me a glass of water in a pint glass, full of ice. We all wait, but the man doesn't leave. We wait for 30 minutes, and he is still there.

"OK," the manager says, "this seems dangerous. I'm going to take you out the staff exit and put you in an Uber."

Once I am safely back at the hotel, I do not sleep all night. When I tell Carolyn and her husband, John, the next day, they confirm that the man from the restaurant was the same man who turned up at their house.

Carolyn says, "Someone knows you're here."

Eight months later, Carolyn's husband rings with terrible news. Carolyn has died in her sleep. The authorities will report that it was an accidental overdose. She always worried that she would be silenced somehow. What I believe is this: whether her death was orchestrated directly by one of Epstein's circle or not, they killed her. They put her through abuse and its aftermath – addiction, mental illness, terror – which are, in some cases, simply not survivable. ■

Kallas meeting Ukrainian president Volodymyr Zelensky in January

The prime minister on Vladimir Putin's most-wanted list

Kaja Kallas has become a star at international summits, but her forthright warnings about the need to stand up to Russia have made the Estonian leader a target of the Kremlin's fury. Edward Lucas meets her

With President Biden in Washington this year

Kaja Kallas, 47, photographed by Kroot Tarkmeel

Kaja Kallas is in demand. The Estonian prime minister's international profile belies her country's size (population: 1.3 million; land area: a bit larger than Switzerland). Winning prizes, storming through summits, she relentlessly makes a simple, existential case: stand up to Russia now or it will be worse later.

Russia's onslaught on Ukraine has vindicated her warnings and fuelled a stellar career. Her country's first woman prime minister (she took office in 2021), she is tipped for a top job in Brussels in the carve-up following the latest elections to the European parliament.

With Ursula von der Leyen of the centre-right European People's Party (EPP) all set to stay in charge of the Commission, Antonio Costa (socialist, former Portuguese PM) becoming head of the European Council, and Malta's Roberta Metsola (also EPP) continuing as European parliament boss, Kallas, whose Reform party is the main liberal force in Estonia, is already pencilled in for the top diplomatic job: the high representative for foreign affairs and security policy. Crucially, she appears to have won the support of French president Emmanuel Macron.

Kallas is battling not only the Kremlin and political rivals, but also prejudice. Lingering Soviet-era sexism at home leads to sneering press coverage; she blames that on the predominance of "older men" in Estonia's political press corps.

Abroad, foreigners are wowed by her, busting outdated stereotypes of "east European" politicians as jowly, besuited men with laboured English. Fans abound. One talks of her "political pheromones"; another western policymaker calls her "the hottest date in Europe". Timothy Garton Ash, the Oxford University historian, praises her "Churchillian" virtues of "courage, resolution and clarity".

But Kallas, 47, is wanted in another sense. Russia has started criminal proceedings against her – the only head of government to be treated this way. In the Kremlin's clutches, she would die in prison.

Estonia's history adds grim context. Portraits of Kallas's eight predecessors hang in her office overlooking Tallinn's medieval old town. Five died at Soviet hands, in captivity or executed, and one shot himself to avoid interrogation. After snuffing out independence in 1940, the Soviet occupiers targeted tens of thousands of people whose only crime was good education or professional success.

Kallas's grandfather, grandmother and great-grandmother were among them. "My mother was just six months old at the time, and there was little hope of survival," Kallas recalled in an anniversary speech. "The people in the cattle wagon dried the baby's diapers on their bodies because it was the only warm and dry place." Caught between Hitler and Stalin, Estonia lost one fifth of its population. The Soviets made every effort to destroy the country's identity, dumping hundreds of thousands of Russian-speaking migrants into the towns, destroying monuments and imposing Russian as the language of public life.

Estonians are famously reserved people (in 30-plus years living and visiting there, I have been invited to perhaps five homes). But memories of Soviet repression mean they quiver in sympathy at Ukraine's agony. Putin's goal is something that they escaped only narrowly themselves: the annihilation of a nation's political, cultural and linguistic independence and identity. And, as Kallas says repeatedly, if aggression is rewarded, it will continue.

It is against this backdrop that Kallas walks her tightrope, promoting her country as one of the post-communist success stories, while urging allies to do more to counter the threat from Russia. Overdo the gloom, and business confidence shrivels and investors will flee. Allow complacency to persist, and Russia will exploit it.

During an exercise with Estonian Defence Forces

'It's not polite to say, "I told you so." If others had helped Ukraine too, there'd be no war'

With Christine Lagarde and Ursula von der Leyen

Kallas's effectiveness is based on self-confidence, coupled with a command of history. "The mistake we made in 1938 and 1939 was to treat events in isolation," she says, citing Italy's attack on Abyssinia, Japan's war in China and Germany's seizure of the Sudetenland. "If aggression pays off somewhere, it happens elsewhere."

She exemplifies a new generation of east European leaders: unscarred by communism, while remembering enough to be revulsed by any whiff of the past. Kallas recalls a visit to East Berlin in 1988. Her father took his wife and two children to the Brandenburg Gate and told them to breathe deeply of the "air of freedom" that came from West Berlin.

Now freedom reigns, but not yet respect. In the contest to find a European politician to be Nato's next secretary-general, the word was that a woman, and one from the "new" member states, should break the mould. Kallas fitted the bill. But the Dutch prime minister, Mark Rutte, got the job. "The big ones decided," says Kallas coolly. The Dutch politician Frans Timmermans dismissed Kallas's candidacy, implying that someone from a country "next to Russia" would be provocative. Yet the current holder, Jens Stoltenberg, is Norwegian – his country's border with Russia was first defined in 1826. All European countries are equal, but some are more equal than others.

Now Kallas is in the running again. She is coy when it comes to discussing her lightly concealed ambitions. "Would I like it? I'd like an ice cream. The decision is not in our hands. But it would be a great honour to be considered."

I catch up with Kallas at Estonia's annual security conference, where she steals the show in opening and closing sessions. Few westerners know the country better than me. I ran a newspaper in Tallinn in the Nineties. My eldest son was born there, the country's first "Nato baby". I remember Kallas's father, Siim, as finance minister, introducing the new kroon in 1992, replacing the hated "occupation rouble". Kaja was 15.

Estonia has since become a byword for modernity and economic success. It stars in league tables for internet freedom, transparency and the rule of law.

I have witnessed Estonia's warnings about the danger from Russia fall on deaf ears. "It is not polite to say, 'I told you so,'" Kallas says drily. Estonia, she notes, rushed weapons to Ukraine before Russia's onslaught. "If others had done the same, there'd be no war."

Estonia has already put 1.3 per cent of GDP [about £425 million] into helping Ukraine, more than any other country in Europe relative to its population and economy. It has also pledged 0.25 per of its GDP from 2024-27 as military aid. "If all countries did the same, it would lead to

PREVIOUS SPREAD: KRÕÕT TARKMEEL/ANNE &, STILL MAGAZINE, @KAJAKALLAS/INSTAGRAM.
THIS SPREAD: REX FEATURES, @KAJAKALLAS/INSTAGRAM, AP

Ukrainian victory," she says. "Ukraine is losing lives – the only thing they ask of us is reallocation of resources... Promises do not save lives. Air defence does."

Estonia has passed a law transferring Russia's frozen assets to Ukraine. Others should do the same, Kallas says. Why should western taxpayers pay for Ukraine's reconstruction when Russia did the damage, she asks. She lambasts the idea that the way to end the war is with a negotiated settlement, in which Russia gains some Ukrainian territory in return for peace. Kallas will have none of that. Too many think, "Let Russians have what they want and things will settle down," she says. Far from it. "Ukrainian defeat tells the world aggression pays off. You can colonise another country and nothing happens."

Estonia also spends heavily on its own defence. But not enough to pay for the air-defence systems, warplanes and other equipment needed for full security. Like its Baltic neighbours Latvia and Lithuania, Estonia hosts tripwire forces from larger countries. But these contingents are for deterrence, not defence. The British armoured deployment in Estonia, for instance, lacks the air defences needed for combat. Most member states have yet to provide the forces required by Nato's new defence plans. And the prospect of a Trump presidency casts even bigger doubts on future security.

Plugging the gap is costly. The country's military wants an extra €1.5 billion (£1.25 billion) for ammunition, giving Estonia the chance to use new US-made artillery to strike up to 125 miles inside Russia. Government dithering on this has prompted a sharp political row and the resignation of the defence ministry's top official.

Kallas's hawkish line contrasts sharply with the rhetoric from the Biden White House or Olaf Scholz's Federal Chancellery in Berlin. Western leaders tend to say that they will support Ukraine "for as long as it takes", without specifying the "it". Kallas wants the war to end, but with defeat for Putin. More than that: Russia must be "held accountable for what it has done".

Most western leaders find the idea of forcing Russia to pay reparations not just impractical but worrying. The Putin regime could become more aggressive, reaching for its nuclear arsenal. Or the country could break up, leading to chaos, civil war and refugees. Kallas brushes such fears aside. It is the prospect of Russian victory that is really worrying, she says.

Kallas stresses that Russian aggression already reaches the west. "Our adversary knows that migration is our vulnerability," she says. "Push migrants to the border, create a problem and then say, 'It's human rights. You have to accept them.'" Baltic spooks are on alert for a new wave of this. But right now, they and colleagues across

With her husband, Arvo Hallik, in 2023

'We don't understand how serious the situation really is'

Europe are alarmed by a Kremlin tactic: hiring local hooligans to carry out acts of sabotage and intimidation. Instances in the Baltic states include arson, beatings and vandalism. Here in Britain, a similar attack targeted a Ukrainian-owned logistics company in London.

"Russia wants to sow fear, make us refrain from supplying Ukraine," says Kallas. "We don't understand how serious the situation is," she complains. Allies should "join the dots" and stop treating these as isolated events, share information between governments and tell the public what is going on. The petty criminals who perpetrate the attacks should be punished more severely: under national security laws, not for criminal damage. Those caught in Estonia, she says, will be deported to Russia if they are not citizens. "The €3,000 they get [for an attack] does not outweigh going back to Russia for ever."

She offers no easy answers, beyond consulting with (read: educating) allies who fail to see the threat. "If we don't respond now, we'll have more casualties."

Kallas is unapologetically blunt, but with a deceptively friendly tone. Under pressure her Nordic cool hots up. She becomes more animated, eyes flashing. By Estonian standards, this is positively Italianate. It is also misleading. Kallas smiles a lot, but not always because she is pleased.

She also lives up to Estonians' reputation for stubbornness. At her first EU summit after becoming prime minister in 2021, she single-handedly blocked an attempt by France and Germany to restore routine meetings with Russia. Other leaders from the continent's east felt the same way. Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine should preclude any rapprochement. But none of them felt ready to speak up. The EU's unspoken rules are that the big countries get their way on such things.

Nobody had told Kallas that. She simply refused to accept the pre-cooked consensus decision, making her case with the expertise of a corporate lawyer (her job before entering politics in 2011). Faced with her refusal to back down, Scholz and Macron, representing countries with a combined population nearly 120 times Estonia's, buckled. EU ties with Russia have been frozen ever since.

Kallas keeps the shutters down about her life off-stage. A mildly interesting anecdote (easily found on the internet) about her first husband's family that she mentions during our meeting causes her team to insist anxiously that the interview was already over when she said it. She has a son with a former partner. They announced their break-up, Estonian-style, in simultaneous social media posts. She got remarried to a businessman, and gets cross about any discussion of his minority shareholding in a logistics company that had a contract moving an Estonian company's property out of Russia.

Kallas is an excellent dancer (waltz, not tango), and enjoys cooking Estonian forest mushrooms. She is visibly relieved when conversation turns to her main hobby, reading. Yale University historian Timothy Snyder, also visiting the conference, sets her eyes sparkling. She quotes extensively, from memory, from his works, from Plato, and from *Not One Inch*, the account of Nato enlargement. She read it on the beach in France, she explains. The thought that this might be a bit odd or seen as showing off does not cross her mind.

Although Kallas is lauded abroad, she is less popular at home. Her Reform party lost one of its two seats in the European parliament in the elections this month. The economy is flagging. Estonia's vaunted progress in innovation seems to some observers to have stalled.

Kallas brushes worries aside, insisting the downturn is temporary and a new wave of technological innovation is coming. Reform represents go-getting professionals, the winners of the past 30 years. Older, poorer and rural Estonians feel left out. For all her ability to wow foreign audiences, Kallas has a tin ear for her own people, says a veteran commentator in Tallinn. A leading politician in a neighbouring country compliments her effectiveness: "Great internationally, but it's all about her – not a team player."

The other parties in her coalition government would agree. "Always making such good speeches abroad," says a minister from another party. He then lapses into silence: a favourite Estonian conversational tactic. Kallas talks happily about how she starts her meetings bang on time. When her coalition partners turn up late, all the important decisions have been taken. That may be effective. It does not necessarily make her popular. Europeans will be lucky to have her in Brussels. Estonians will be delighted too. ■

What is a Frenchman who is champagne royalty...

Pierre-Emmanuel Taittinger is the 71-year-old party animal who once likened champagne to Viagra. Now he's about to launch a new wine, made from grapes grown in Kent. He talks to Sean O'Neill about hedonism, his love of England – and always having a half-bottle to hand

… doing in a vineyard in Kent?

Pierre-Emmanuel and Vitalie Taittinger at their vineyard in Kent, by Jooney Woodward. Opposite: Château de la Marquetterie in Pierry, near Epernay, the Taittinger HQ

Pierre-Emmanuel Taittinger is an energetic septuagenarian with raffish (slightly greying) locks, a sharp suit set off by a vivid green tie and more than a dollop of va-va-voom, of *je ne sais quoi*. He might just be the most French Frenchman you could ever meet.

He's a champagne grower, a champagne maker and a daily champagne drinker. "It is the wine of happiness," he smiles. He also has a reputation for liking good food and good times, although his reputation as an "exuberant playboy" (Le Monde) recently mired him in a very French scandal (of which more later).

We meet, however, not in the Taittinger mansion in Reims nor the family's Château de la Marquetterie but in the Garden of England, near the picturesque hilltop village of Chilham, with its castle, 15th-century church, tearoom and pubs.

Taittinger, honorary president of Taittinger champagne, and his daughter Vitalie, the actual president of the great champagne house, have been staying at the Woolpack pub where the beer garden has been especially decked out with Taittinger umbrellas. He has celebrated his 71st birthday here with dinner, red wine and a large cake before the party set out the next morning to visit the Kentish vineyard the Taittingers acquired nine years ago and which is gearing up to release its first wine.

Domaine Evremond, a few miles away, was a family fruit farm when Taittinger bought it in 2015, the first champagne house to acquire land in England. The apple trees are gone but the Gaskain family, which used to own the land, still work it, tending the 62 hectares under vines that are growing the classic champagne grapes of chardonnay, pinot noir and meunier.

As Evremond emerges from a "crazy dream" to a commercial reality there is palpable excitement.

Taittinger says he has only sampled two glasses of the new wine to date but professes it to be unique and "excellent".

Patrick McGrath, a wine merchant and old friend of Taittinger who persuaded the family to buy into his vision for Evremond, has only had one glass of the finished product. "I was very anxious when we tasted it, but I was very impressed. It's different," he says.

While the Taittingers seem stylishly relaxed, McGrath is full of urgency. He is the man on site dealing with the day-to-day pressures of making sure everything is ready and, of course, it is not ready yet.

There is no grand château at Domaine Evremond. The centre of operations is a temporary cabin where visitors are served Nescafé rather than fine wine. Plonked in the middle of the vineyards is the building site that will soon be the winery and visitor centre and where the big launch will be held in September.

Clearly visible around the construction site is the white chalk that is the main reason this land has been selected to produce fine sparkling wine. The chalk seam that runs through the Champagne region continues under the Channel to Kent and Sussex. The quality of the soil, combined with the march of climate change and the huge difference in land prices between Champagne and Kent, persuaded the Taittinger family that the "crazy idea" could make economic sense.

McGrath, 64, has overseen the steady planting of vines since 2017 and four "proper harvests". The first bottles of Domaine Evremond will be a blend of the small 2019 harvest and the bigger 2020 yield. The wine itself is being made by Taittinger's *chef de cave*, Alexandre Ponnavoy, who has been involved from the beginning.

"Alexandre started from scratch, which is personally very exciting for him because as a winemaker in champagne you never have the chance to create something from the base," says McGrath.

"He likes the fact that while the soil is predominantly chalk we also have flint. There's not very much flint in Champagne – the chalk and flint is special."

Taittinger describes the flinty edge as adding "a touch of electric spice". "When we decided to do it, we had no money to spare in Taittinger," he says. "I went to see the bank and said we are going to plant vineyards in England. They said, 'Pierre-Emmanuel, take care of Taittinger first.'"

But Taittinger, described on the family website as a "determined connoisseur, hedonist and humanist", saw an "alignment of the planets". Apart from the terroir, there was the fact that his grandfather, when mayor of Reims, had twinned the city with nearby Canterbury.

Taittinger has a long association with the UK. He spent several months at Stonyhurst, the Catholic independent school, and lived for a year with his young family in Chelsea after his father sent him to London for his first job in the wine industry.

"I love England. Can I say I am a bit of a monarchist? In my dreams I would adore to have another king or queen in France. It would be good for the business in Reims to have some more coronations in the cathedral. After all, we have had presidents, like De Gaulle or Pompidou, who behaved like kings.

"All the great games have been invented by the English, except maybe *gastronomie*. You invented consumption of red wine, bordeaux and burgundy, cognac, port, whisky. You invented rugby, football, poker, bridge. It's a fabulous country of leisure and pleasure.

"I am very European and I definitely consider that England is part of Europe; it's part of my heart. My Europe is the Europe of culture, the Europe of nations. I'm especially proud of Evremond because it shows that for us Brexit doesn't matter. It is above everything to produce something with a country that I love."

Taittinger with daughter Vitalie and son Clovis in Epernay

'I am very European and England is part of Europe. It's a land of leisure and pleasure'

Then there is the story of Charles de St Denis, Sieur de Saint-Évremond, the 17th-century soldier-poet who first brought the wines of the Champagne region (when they were still, rather than sparkling) to the court of Charles II. Saint-Évremond is buried at Poets' Corner in Westminster Abbey and the Latin inscription on his marble monument describes how he was invited to England where he "very happily cultivated philosophy and the useful arts of learning. He polished and enriched the French language by his writings, both in prose and verse. He deservedly gained the favour and bounty of the kings of England and the esteem and friendship of the nobility, and having reached beyond his 90th year, died 9 September 1703."

Taittinger's uncle wrote a book about Saint-Évremond and the family had already registered the name for a possible champagne before the idea of growing grapes in Kent was conceived.

"The name of Évremond is magic," says Taittinger. "It symbolises an extraordinary story between England and France. The only Frenchman buried in Poets' Corner, he brought the early wines of champagne to the royal court. He was a friend of Charles II and today we have Charles III."

PREVIOUS SPREAD AND THIS PAGE: VINCENT BOISOT/RIVA PRESS/CAMERA PRESS. HAIR AND MAKE-UP: CHRISTINA LOMAS AT DAVID ARTISTS USING CHANEL AND BALMAIN HAIR

The new wine enters a growing and competitive market, with the quantity and quality of English fizz constantly on the up.

The area of land in England under vines has grown by 74 per cent in five years. There are 3,230 hectares under vines, with another 600 hectares planted and soon to produce. The number of vineyards has reached 943 and there are 209 wineries in operation. Sparkling wine is by some distance the most popular product: 8.3 million bottles were produced in the UK in 2022, compared with 3.9 million bottles of still wine.

Britain also offers a huge market for champagne. Comité Champagne statistics show the UK imported 25.5 million bottles of champagne in 2022 (worth £550 million). Imports are down from around 34 million bottles in 2015 but are second only to the United States, which is just ahead on 26.9 million bottles.

By any measure Domaine Evremond, which will enter this market at around £50 per bottle (£3.20 of which will go direct to HM Treasury in duty), is something of a gamble. Yet Vitalie Taittinger, 44, insists caution is not one of her watchwords. "I never think about the risk. We are always working to realise the vision. If you are always thinking about the risk then you are doing nothing. For me it's a question of energy. Of course there are problems and it's complex, but at Taittinger we love to work with friends, and we love to have fun when we are working and I think this gives us that energy."

The passion for the business is evident in recent family history. In 2005 the wider Taittinger family sold its sprawling business empire – including the champagne house, prestige hotels and property – to Starwood, a US investment firm, for more than £1.7 billion. Pierre-Emmanuel Taittinger was horrified by the sale and immediately vowed to claim back what he considered the most important part of the business, the bit with the family name on the bottle.

The Taittingers' ownership of the champagne house dates back 90 years to when the family acquired the 300-year-old Forest-Fourneaux wine estate. Some of the cellars, however, are from Roman times and are still used to store the top champagnes.

"We were just a name; we became a brand," says Taittinger. "A brand known all over the world for its consistency and its excellence. When you open a bottle of Taittinger it is like when you drive a BMW or an Audi – it is sure."

In Ian Fleming's novels, Taittinger is James Bond's champagne of choice.

The honorary president is enraged that the sale of something so hard won and personal should ever have happened. "I saw this family losing its energy, its creativity. When you are old you want to restrict yourself and this family sold the group for no reason. They sold this group just because they were tired.

"I decided to buy it back. Not for me, but because I thought it was a disaster after such a great history to abandon our customers, to abandon our employees, to abandon the wine growers of Champagne. For me it was a disaster to abandon what my name was made for."

Taittinger took his plan to a local banker in Reims and persuaded him, with a mix of charm and obstinacy, to finance the repurchase of the champagne business. In 2006 he acquired it for about £500 million.

He was, he tells me, inspired by the story of his uncle Michel who, aged 20 in June 1940, lost his life commanding a small unit in the defence of the last French supply line across the Seine against advancing German tanks.

A posthumous dispatch describing the battle told how, "When ordered to surrender, and with the village in ruins and just a handful of men still beside him, he refused to bow down to force."

Taittinger says, "What we have done in buying back Taittinger is another patriotic act, a kind of economic resistance. We said, 'No – we are maintaining Taittinger in Champagne.'"

Once he had secured the buyback, Taittinger invited Vitalie and his son, Clovis, to join him in the business. He appointed a small team of eight, all significantly younger than him, to join his management team. "What I decided when I took over was not to repeat the mistake of becoming too old," says Taittinger. "We needed a new generation. I am more proud of my transition plan than of buying back the business. For most businesses and entrepreneurs, the most important part should be the transition to the next generation. A lot of them are creating huge empires but missing the transition and when we miss the transition we see a company going down."

Aged 65, Taittinger stepped down as president to be replaced by his daughter. His son became one of two managing directors. All three of the top executives have to agree on major business decisions.

Reclaiming the house means, Vitalie says, that the family must do its utmost to maintain quality. "We are travelling all over the world and our name is on the bottle. If the champagne is not good we have two problems: one, we are drinking something that's not good; and two, people can complain directly. So it is super-important that the champagne is just perfect. We can travel and be totally at ease."

Her father agrees and says he is all too aware that for most people champagne is a boutique product. The region produces around 300 million bottles per year while worldwide sparkling wine production is around 2.5 billion bottles (some 640 million of which are prosecco).

"Uncle Claude always said, champagne is something that people drink maybe twice a year," says Taittinger. "We should never forget that. Our champagne still carries our name, the family name, so we have to make it very good. It is an assurance for all our customers."

Taittinger – the name, the brand and the man – took something of a battering last year, however, when a lurid court case led to Pierre-Emmanuel's former mistress being convicted of harassment and given a one-year suspended prison sentence.

Taittinger had gone to police in 2017 to report a campaign of harassment against him by the woman, a former accountant who is said to have been his mistress from 2011-14. She made a series of lascivious allegations in court involving heavy champagne consumption and visits to Paris's libertine sex clubs, which his lawyer said the judges clearly did not believe. The court heard she confronted him at the family home in Reims then chased him with a knife threatening to cut off his penis.

Taittinger, who was described by Le Monde in 2021 as a "slightly Rabelaisian party animal", was said by his lawyer to have been "profoundly affected morally and psychologically" by the situation.

He makes one oblique reference to "facing problems, like all of us", but otherwise the subject is ruled firmly off the table when we speak.

He seems chastened. In the past he has compared champagne to Viagra, pointing out that a mistress of Louis XV said it made the king "a much better lover". In 2016 he told the Irish Times he was "paid to drink, paid to eat and make love sometimes and drink wonderful champagne".

Now his language is altogether more cautious: "I take care with journalists. Our work is to drink, to eat, to have fun and we are paid for that."

His pursuits are perhaps a little less libertine than in the past. He has not long returned from a ten-day walking holiday in Brittany and is keen to get back home across the channel when our meeting is over because he wants to watch PSG in the Champions League semi-final.

His most precious pleasure is to drink champagne every day, and not always Taittinger (he's an admirer of Pol Roger in particular). "Champagne is a ceremony, above everything," he says. "For me champagne must always be drunk in a flute and never in a wine glass. It is above a wine. It's like a bow tie in life, a butterfly."

I tell him I once made a new year's resolution to drink champagne (or often crémant) at least once a week.

"Another resolution, especially when you are older," he replies, "is to always have a half-bottle in the fridge. My grandmother, who died at 103 years old, always had a half-bottle to hand." ■

30 DAYS FROM
£7,290*
per person

Grand Tour of India

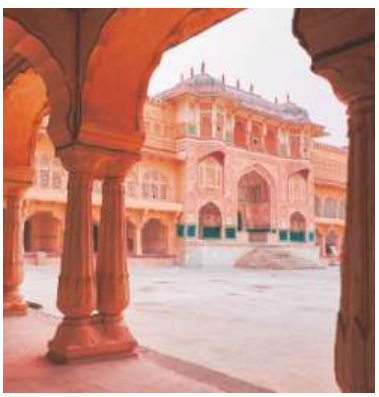
Departures | October 2024 to October 2025

Become acquainted with one of the most vibrant countries in the world, India! Embark on a journey from the deserts of Rajasthan in the north, to the backwaters of Kerala in the south, to experience this land of extraordinary contrasts.

Fly overnight to Delhi and enjoy leisure time upon arrival. Explore Old Delhi, visiting the Red Fort, Jama Masjid, India Gate, Parliament House, Gandhi Smriti, and Qutub Minar. Fly to Varanasi to visit Sarnath, where Buddha delivered his first sermon, then cruise the Ganges at sunrise and witness a puja ceremony. Fly to Khajuraho to see its intricately carved temples and enjoy a cultural dance display. Travel to Orchha, then Jhansi to board the Shatabdi Express train to Agra and visit the Taj Mahal, a marble inlay workshop, and Agra Fort. Explore Fatehpur Sikri en route to Ranthambore National Park for safaris. In Jaipur, visit the City Palace, Jantar Mantar, Hawa Mahal, and Amber Fort.

Travel to Pushkar for its sacred lake and Brahma Temple, followed by a camel cart ride, then visit Khimsar and stay in a 15th-century fortress. In Jaisalmer, visit Sunset Point, the fort, Badal Vilas Palace, Patwon Ki Haveli, and Sam Sand Dunes. In Jodhpur, explore Mehrangarh Fort, Umaid Bhawan Palace, the spice market, and Bishnoi village. Drive to Udaipur via Ranakpur, visiting Fateh Sagar Lake, the Folk Museum, Mewar Art Gallery, Sahelion Ki Bari Garden, City Palace, and Lake Pichola. Fly to Aurangabad to visit the Ajanta and Ellora Caves, then fly to Mumbai to tour the Gateway to India, Marine Drive, Chowpatty Beach, Mani Bhavan, Dhobi Ghat, Crawford Market, and Flora Fountain.

In Kochi, visit the Dutch Palace, Fort Kochi, Chinese fishing nets, and colorful markets, followed by a Kathakali dance performance. Cruise the backwaters on a houseboat, then travel to Kovalam. Explore Trivandrum's attractions before flying back to the UK.



Price Includes

- International flights and current taxes
- Domestic transportation
- Three-star plus to four-star accommodation
- 28 breakfasts, 26 lunches and 27 dinners
- Touring with Guides and entrance fees
- Visa fees for UK passport holders
- Exclusive free pre-night hotel with breakfast and transfers for Times readers

What we love

Witness an exuberant performance of the traditional dance-drama that is Kathakali. As Kerala's best-known performing art, it is an extravagant retelling of Hindu epics complete with colourful costumes and elaborate make up.

Scan the QR code with your camera app to view more details.

CALL TODAY ON
0808 304 3344
thetimes.co.uk/ww-grandtourindia
QUOTE TIMES-ON^

Our trusted partner Wendy Wu Tours | ABTA Travel with confidence

*Prices correct at time of going to press. Prices listed are based on two sharing a twin/double room. Prices are correct at time of publication, and subject to confirmation at time of booking. Operated by and subject to the booking conditions of Wendy Wu, ABTA W7994 ATOL 6639, a company wholly independent of News UK.

Pout! BEST SPF50 SUNSCREENS

By Nadine Baggott

I get it. We are a generation who hate using sunscreen. We were raised on thick, silvery, gunky ointments and we loathe the thought of daily application before we can enjoy the summer sun. But I promise you the latest formulations are lighter and easier to apply than ever.

1 THE SUN SERUM

Beauty of Joseon Ginseng Moist Sun Serum SPF50+ *(£17.50; superdrug.com)*

I am going to let you in on a beauty insider secret: the Koreans have mastered sun protection in the lightest formulations that perform like skincare products. This is perfection. It feels like a serum, is packed with niacinamide vitamin B3 to help tackle pigmentation, but has a high protection factor. It is the ideal first step on summer days, but remember the two-finger rule – your face requires enough suncream to make two finger-length strips of lotion – or top up with SPF in your foundation.

2 THE SUPER SPRAY

Garnier Ambre Solaire Sensitive Advanced Invisible Protection Mist SPF50+ *(£8; boots.com)*

There is no better value-for-money, easy to use on the run, dry-touch SPF mist than this. An absolute summer essential for hard-to-reach bits and no-nonsense protection. Just remember to spray each area three times to get full protection.

3 THE GORGEOUS GEL

Eucerin Oil Control Dry Touch Sun Gel-Cream SPF50+ *(£18.99; superdrug.com)*

This not only feels lightweight and hydrating, but it is also oil-free and sits well under make-up. It is fragrance free, so suitable for sensitive skin, and works well over facial hair, so men have no excuse not to wear SPF.

4 THE BEST BUDGET BUY

Altruist Dermatologist Sunscreen SPF50 *(£30.25; altruistsun.com)*

This is the family buy that won't break the bank, and if you have two sun-seeking children and an SPF-dodging partner, this bumper one litre pump bottle is for you. Created by a British dermatologist who was fed up with overpriced sunscreens,

this is light, easy to apply and sinks in within seconds. There is even a 250ml spray, £12.50, for catching exposed children on the run. Be sure to check out this brand – it is brilliant.

5 THE OILY SKIN SAVER

La Roche-Posay Anthelios Oil Correct SPF50+ *(£31.50; boots.com)*

This is expensive, but if you hate using suncream because it leaves your skin shiny and causes you to break out in spots, then it is worth every penny. It goes on like a milk, but quickly dries to a flattering matt finish that is perfect for anyone with oily skin.

6 THE DREAM FORMULA

Bioré UV Aqua Watery Essence SPF50 *(£15.99; superdrug.com)*

I have tried a lot of sunscreens in my job and nothing beats this gel-cream emulsion from a range you might dismiss as being all about tackling teenage spots. (It isn't – it's a top Japanese skin brand.) Unfragranced and hydrating, this replaces my summer moisturiser because it is just as good and it also protects. Genius.

7 THE NO-STING EYE CREAM

Hello Sunday SPF50 The One For Your Eyes *(£18; hellosundayspf.com)*

I know what you're thinking. Why do I need a separate SPF for my eyes? Well, if you suffer from the dreaded burn and sting of sunscreen sweating into your eyes, then you know why. This product is great and reasonably priced too. It also has an immediate soft-focus brightening effect because of the mineral sunscreen particles.

8 THE TOP-UP TREAT

Bondi Sands Face SPF50+ Sunscreen Mist *(£9.99; boots.com)*

Did you know you are supposed to top up your SPF every two hours? (Sweating and rubbing are most often to blame alongside swimming if you are on holiday.) While that's inconvenient on your body it can be nigh on impossible for your face if you wear make-up. Enter the new-generation face mists such as this one, which are dry-touch, fragrance free and can be applied over make-up without disturbing it.

9 THE HANDY STICK

Boots Soltan Active 8hr Protect Suncare Stick SPF50+ *(£6; boots.com)*

Don't dismiss own-label sunscreens. Brands such as Soltan are excellent. This handy stick works on lips and ears, noses and knees – anywhere you need a top-up on the go.

10 THE INVISIBLE ONE

Avène Ultra Fluid Invisible SPF50 *(£21; boots.com)*

This is my favourite launch of the year so far for the face. No eye sting, sits under make-up without pilling, unfragranced, hydrating, but never cloying. It really could be the only product you need all summer long.

While I am here, why do we pay VAT on sunscreens when they are not a cosmetic luxury but a medical necessity to prevent skin cancer? If you want to know more, search VAT Burn online to learn about the campaign to end VAT on sunscreens. It was started by the SNP MP and melanoma survivor Amy Callaghan. ■

Find @nadinebaggott on Instagram and YouTube where she answers all your beauty and skincare concerns

BETH STUDENBERG/LICKERISH SYNDICATION, ELISABETH HOFF

‘A seriously wonderful neighbourhood restaurant which lacks, to be perfect, only a neighbourhood’

TOM JACKSON

Joséphine Bouchon

At last, Joséphine Bouchon by Claude Bosi. I knew it would be good. Everyone said it would be good. And everyone, for once, was not wrong. Get your smartphone, book it for the next available evening, then come back and read my whiffle if you can be bothered.

For I delayed and delayed my own visit, stupidly, depriving myself of the pleasure for far too long. Partly because Claude’s previous two openings, Socca in Mayfair and Brooklands at the Peninsula hotel, had been a bit chichi for me, a bit international uberwank, and partly because of distance. Hassle. Transport. I knew I would like Joséphine more than the other two, for it is named after Claude’s grandma (it’s always the grandma with chefs, never the family cat or a dancing girl from Monte Carlo they just can’t get out of their mind) and offers a roster of the great Lyonnais bistro standards of his youth, which I knew he would do better than anybody (though few, these days, even try). But getting there, darling. Getting there.

Fulham is a shlep. It’s an hour by car, which means either not drinking (which is far from the point of a Lyonnais bouchon) and spending two hours of your evening staring at tail lights, or £100+ in cabs. The Tube is a nightmare and I can’t cycle that far. So I just didn’t go. In the end, I found a nice overground route from Gospel Oak to West Brompton (chuggety-chuggety in evening sunlight) followed by a mile or so’s walk via the Boltons, admiring the deserted streets (supercars all stored underground, between the swimming pool and the servants’ bunkers) and the majesty of the gleaming £50 million mansions, self-evidently offshore-owned, empty but for the occasional pair of lonely Filipina eyes staring from a high window, wondering if they’ll ever meet their employer, or be found if they die.

The silent, deathly wealthy neighbourhood made me think of when Henry Harris closed Racine in Knightsbridge in 2015 (to reopen it years later in Clerkenwell as Bouchon Racine), saying something like, “There is no one round here that understands this kind of cooking any more.” And we all knew what and whom he meant.

Who, then, would be in Joséphine Bouchon? The local landowners aren’t in residence, nor ever intend to be, the staff can’t afford it and the ladies in the shopping streets are way, way too thin to be interested in *la cuisine bourgeoise*. So who? Who?

The answer is *tout le monde*, darling. *Tout le* goddam *monde*. It’s a vibe in there, it really is: cream walls accented with dark woodwork, dark wooden chairs drawn up to white linen napery, shaded chandeliers providing a soft amber glow, shaded sconces, scores of framed pictures, very eclectic, hung close, huggermugger, like an energetic conversation, and people of all ages, many races, dressed up respectably but not party-smart, chattering away,

Joséphine Bouchon
315 Fulham Road, London SW10 (josephinebouchon.com)
Cooking 10
Service 10
Neighbourhood 7
Score 9
Price Set menu £24.50/£29.50 for two or three courses, but north of £100/head for an à la carte blowout.

reaching for the house wine bottles from which they are charged by the rulered inch, and the sliced baguette and salty French butter.

And near a corner, though not quite in the corner, Ian Brunskill, associate editor of The Times, my good friend and joint-oldest colleague (along with a few others – all of us vying to be the last survivor). He'll silently take the measure of the place, not me. For he is a man of parts, is Brunskill. A Germanist who has nonetheless read Proust in French from start to finish more than once, a cricket lover and Chelsea FC season ticket holder (for he used to live round here), an opera buff, a reader and a writer, a committed wine man (if he mulls *À la recherche* as seriously as he mulls a restaurant wine list, it's a miracle he finished it even once), an eater and a traveller and a mucker of my long-ago predecessor Jonathan Meades, a man not easily impressed by surfaces and one who, famously, does not gladly suffer fools. Except a couple of times a year when he has dinner with me.

I was greeted by Will Smith (not that one), whom I first met when he was running Arbutus back in the day (2006? 2007?), still wearing the floral Agnès B shirt he had on in Soho during the second Blair administration, and the same infectious smile. There was another *homme sérieux d'un certain âge* in the *équipe* as well. It gave a sense of intellectual heft that I admired.

And so did the menu: cuisses de grenouilles à l'ail (£19), soupe à l'oignon (£9), terrine de campagne, cornichons (£16), soufflé au Saint-Félicien (£9.50)... But for us the three starters were self-selecting: quenelle de brochet (£18), oeuf mollet en gelée (£8.50), poireaux vinaigrette (£7.50). We were drinking £9 glasses of good, crisp unoaked chardonnay called Terres Dorées by Jean-Paul Brun while we chose these, because Brunskill was in the mood for white beaujolais, and one always goes with a Brunskill mood.

It was the same grape for our first bottle, but with some oak on, for the sake of the food, a Saint-Romain (£95) by the famous Alain Gras (famous, that is, if you read Michelin restaurant wine lists with anything like Brunskill's application) and, boy, did it enjoy the company of the quenelle. The pike mousse was as light as a meringue, wobbly as a blancmange, egg and air and the gentlest savour of the sea. It hovered on its rich, intense, langoustiney sauce Nantua like an île flottante. You don't see it much any more, but it's hard to imagine it was ever done better than this.

Oeuf en gelée, on the other hand, has made a comeback at Maison François in St James's, where Matthew Ryle adds cubes of ox tongue and many herbs, serves it in a perfect dome and lets the egg run. Here it is the more traditional upended ramekin shape, looks like a crème caramel, and the yolk is more of a gel. Leeks vinaigrette are back in vogue but most often with plenty of green left on, in the lazy hipster manner, stringy, needing a steak knife to cut, threatening always to choke you to death and served inexplicably with the ash of the tops. These were white like asparagus, melty soft and blanketed with a thick, sharp, creamy emulsion and chopped chives. Both of these beautifully framed by gorgeous scalloped white plates with a red margin and an italic J.

Now, Brunners and I had both fantasised about the ris de veau on our way here, and nobody wants to see grown men fight over main courses (and anyway, Ian is probably a black belt in some forgotten Nepalese martial art), so we split a portion (£45) as an intermezzo at the suggestion of the house. The gland was the size and shape of a toddler's fist, very faintly crisp at the edge but then properly gooey throughout – I think of the pancreas as the "arse-brain" of the calf – topped with crinkly morels and the usual sticky stock reduction. Firmer than the quenelle but from the same textural palette, our meal stiffening as we ourselves loosened up.

For we had moved on to a carafe of Julien Sunier Fleurie (£55), red beaujolais now, from a list that Ian said later was "thoughtfully chosen, and quite carefully limited, on some principle I couldn't quite put my finger on. There was lots of Hermitage and some Cornas, some of it interesting, not all of it foolishly priced. But in the end, beaujolais seemed the only thing to drink with food like that."

And then we shared a whole rabbit à la moutarde for two/three (£65), jointed into a lovely earthenware oval dish under a clingy sauce sharp with mustard, the saddle and thighs tumbling with the liver and kidneys and heart, which were cooked through, firm and nutty, delicious. And an immaculate gratin dauphinois (£18), the potatoes fully bonded into the cream so the whole could be sliced like a cake, but retaining a hint of bite, the top browned, and then greened with chopped curly parsley. It could have served four or even six. It was not much smaller than central Lyons.

The salade du saison (£7) was a crunchy little pot of Batavia and one of the curly reds, we had a very sharp lemon meringue tart (£8), a nougat glacé (£8) and, from the very generous house, some glasses of a poire William made by somebody's father, from what I recall of that part of the evening, which is not much.

We spent some money, as you can see, but there are very reasonable routes around this menu, not least via the house wine and menu du canut (£24.50/£29.50). Joséphine Bouchon is a seriously wonderful neighbourhood restaurant which lacks, to be perfect, only a neighbourhood. ■

Halo | Capsule |

At last.
A cordless vacuum with

REAL OOMPH!

The only Ultra-Light cordless with the power and capacity of a full-size corded.

The Telegraph
10/10. 'Best Robust Vacuum Cleaner.'

techradar
★★★★★
"Halo Capsule X **trounces most of the competition...**"

Good Housekeeping Institute APPROVED 2024
"This vacuum **scored 100%** in all our tests."

Which? Best Buy
"The Halo is **nothing short of fantastic** at cleaning."

30 day risk-free trial

Best of British Design

Cordless is a great idea, the ability to move about the home freely without the restraint of a cord or the weight of a heavy vacuum. Except, up until now, bagless vacuums share a common problem with frequently clogged filters and blockages that can impact your vacuums performance.

The Halo Capsule is different.

Thanks to its advanced engineering and unique carbon fibre construction, the multi award-winning Halo weighs just 2.6kg and is the only ultra-light weight cordless with the power and capacity of a full-size corded upright. It won't quit on you halfway through cleaning either. The Halo keeps on going for up to 60 minutes* before needing to recharge.

Halo's unique 1.6 litre dust pouch means you can clean for longer and it's 10 X more hygienic and straightforward to empty**. Plus, there's no more scrubbing filters and worrying about clogging. Just powerful, hassle-free cleaning.

Halo. Excellence. Simplified.

SAVE £132!
JUST £199.99
While stocks last

40% OFF!
OFFER ENDS 30th JUNE 2024
✔ 2-Year Warranty
✔ Fast FREE Delivery


Capsule Vacuum


6 Dust Pouches


Wall Dock


Crevice Tool


Upholstery & Dusting Combo Tool


Power Floor Tool

SAVE £132.98
Total RRP £332.97
JUST £199.99

PLUS FREE FLEX HOSE Worth £29.99
Use code **TM22**

AS SEEN ON TV

To order your Capsule: Call, visit or scan the QR code

0800 915 3667 **halocapsule.com**

2 year manufacturer's warranty including battery. When compared to other UK market available large capacity cordless vacuums based on independent tests to IEC62886-2:2016 Sec 5.3. *Run times quoted may vary depending on surfaces cleaned. **Hygienic emptying measured to IEC62885-2:2016 Sec.5.11 Filtration efficiency and dust re-emission of the dry vacuum cleaner - Modified for cordless samples. Halo Capsule vs Leading Bagless competitor in Independent tests Free Delivery to UK mainland addresses (including Highlands). Halo Appliances Ltd. Warwickshire, England.

EXCLUSIVE OFFER!

WAS ~~£89~~ NOW £59

LUXURY *Pima* NIGHTWEAR

Cecilia Nightdress
S503 ~~£89~~
OFFER PRICE £59

Rafaela Nightdress
Baby Pink

SAVE £30 *plus* FREE P&P

Rafaela Nightdress
S502 ~~£89~~
OFFER PRICE £59

Sizes: S, M, L, XL, 2XL. Length of L: 46"
100% Peruvian Pima Cotton, machine washable at 30°c. Both nightdresses available in these colours:

Cornflower · *White* · *Baby Blue* · *Baby Pink*

Cecilia Nightdress
Cornflower

Spirit of the Andes brings you beautiful artisan-made clothing crafted from the finest Baby Alpaca and Pima fibres. The softness and hypoallergenic properties of Pima Cotton make it the ideal luxury fabric for nightwear. Warming in winter and cooling in summer, our Peruvian Pima Cotton is the best in the world!

90 DAY FREE RETURNS

SPIRIT OF THE ANDES

Scan me!

To order yours, or to receive a **FREE** Spirit of the Andes catalogue call **01908 991 069** quoting **TMM36** or visit **www.spiritoftheandes.co.uk/tmm36**

For **OFFER PRICE & FREE P&P** enter code **TMM36** at checkout. **Offer expires 22.7.24**
6 Fernfield Farm, Little Horwood, Buckinghamshire, MK17 0PR

REQUEST OUR BROCHURE TODAY!

PRIME OAK
EST.1999

THE FINEST OAK FRAMED BUILDINGS

COMPLIMENTARY DESIGN CONSULTATION

01384 296611 **PRIMEOAK.CO.UK**

‘It was **like a miracle** for me’

Former hypnotherapist and charity worker Lee Adley, tells of her experience with Cool Joints+

‘I went to see a friend in Weston-super-Mare and we decided to visit a large retail park in Somerset.

‘Whilst walking around I thought my knee was about to give way’ she remembers.

‘The next time my friend saw me she said ah yes, you’ve a really bad knee so you won’t be able to walk very far will you?’

‘But that’s where she was wrong. After the outing I saw an advertisement for Cool Joints+ and decided to give it a try.

‘After just a week of taking it was like a miracle for me. That was around five years ago and I’ve never looked back.

‘Honestly, I think it’s just amazing and recommend it to all my friends.’

Cool Joints+ contains a highly absorbable combination of sunflower lecithin and Boswellia serrata, a natural extract from the Indian frankincense tree that can help to keep joints cool and comfortable. It also contains manganese*, which contributes to the normal formation of connective tissue and maintenance of bone.

Dr Miriam Ferrer PhD, head of product development at FutureYou Cambridge, the company that created Cool Joints+, explains: ‘Boswellic acids are poorly absorbed by the body, so we have combined them with lecithin phospholipids which increases absorption by up to four times compared with other standard extracts.’

Lee continues, ‘I’m 76 and work three to four days a week at a local hospice shop. It’s an old bingo hall so I walk around five miles every shift. I’m always on the move. It’s great exercise. I take Cool Joints+ every day - I wouldn’t be without it’

‘I take **Cool Joints+** every day - I wouldn’t be without it.’

Manganese contributes to the normal function of connective tissue.

Trial **Cool Joints+** for just £5

Leading Cambridge company offeringscientifically proven joint supplements for £5.

FutureYou Cambridge, the nutraceutical company known for its highly-researched nutritional supplements, is offering the first box of its health supplement, Cool Joints+, to new customers for just £5.

Happy customers have been taking to Trustpilot, the independent online review platform, to confirm the products effectiveness.

‘I take this everyday in the morning... Absolutely so delighted. I can actually do 10,000 steps now where I couldn’t even walk around the block.’ said one five star reviewer.

‘Very good product. Does what it says on the packet.’ says another.

‘I take this everyday in the morning... Absolutely so delighted. I can actually do 10,000 steps now where I couldn’t even walk around the block.’

HOW TO CLAIM YOUR £5 PACK

To claim your £5 28 day Cool Joints+ subscription trial pack worth £20, visit

FutureYouOffers.co.uk

or freephone

0800 808 5740

quoting code

CJT38

Your first box costs £5 (inc. free delivery). Subsequent subscription orders will cost £20 and be delivered every 28 days. You can amend, pause or cancel your subscription at any time, without obligation.

Developed in Cambridge

Science you can trust

Letterbox Friendly

100% satisfaction, guaranteed

Award-winning Customer Care

Trustpilot EXCELLENT Over 11,000 reviews

FutureYou CAMBRIDGE

***Cool Joints+ contains Boswellia serrata RESIN which helps to keep joints cool and comfortable [on hold claim ID:4000] and manganese, which contributes to the normal formation of connective tissue.** Introductory offer valid for new UK customers only. Offer expires 31st July 2024. Cancel any time, without obligation. See FutureYouHealth.com/CJT38 for full terms and conditions.

HOTTER®

Made for *every*
summer *getaway*

Metallic Multi
Leather

Mink Metallic
Nubuck

SAVE
£40

DENALI

Soft, contoured insoles make this sandal a dream to wear, whilst touch close straps allow for adjustability during those summer days.

NOW £49

ORDER TODAY AND SAVE £40 with code **DEN40F**

Call 01695 79 79 79 Mon - Sun (24hrs) or visit hotter.com

This offer entitles the customer to purchase Denali at £49, a saving of £40 off RRP when code DEN40F is applied at checkout. This offer cannot be used in conjunction with any other offer or promotion, and is subject to availability. A minimum spend of £30 is required to qualify for this promotion. Offer valid until 22nd July 2024. We reserve the right to amend or withdraw this offer without notice or liability. For full T&C's, visit hotter.com/terms

Beta male
Robert Crampton

‘My handmade cards take ages and are always highly shoddy. I sense a gap in the market’

DAN KENNEDY

It was the E8 Art & Craft Trail in Hackney a couple of weeks ago: a sort of more self-conscious and fashionable east-London hipster version of Open Gardens. My wife was keen to see the art and other people’s houses. I felt similarly, possibly more so, but I was also in it for the steps: 25,000 by journey’s end. Result!

As for the art, I’m emphatically not saying, “I could do that!” Because I couldn’t. At this level, way below the rarefied nonsense of the Turner prize, most work displays evidence of an actual talent for drawing, painting, photography, pottery etc, which I lack. But given the absence of any absurd “concept” frivolity like a pile of bricks or a stepladder with a grapefruit on it, I sense a gap in the market – a gap waiting to be filled by a traditional no-nonsense charlatan. So this is me announcing that I’m going to throw my smock in the ring to get on the E8 Art & Craft Trail next year.

It’s early stages but, yeah, since you ask, there are a few crafty, arty, makey, silly and most of all crappy projects I’ve been working on.

For birthdays and Christmas, I like to assemble a handmade card for my wife and children. They take me ages, these tokens of marital and paternal devotion, yet they are always outstandingly shoddy. I get a sheet of card and fold it. Then I decorate the front, back and inside with stickers, drawings, symbols, bubbly writing and, er, strips of electrical tape.

The electrical tape is my signature material, my leitmotif, if you will. I am in fact the founder, and as far as I know the sole adherent to date, of what I call “the Tape-ism school”. The Tape-ism school specialises in buying rolls of vividly coloured electrical tape at Tony’s hardware shop, gnawing them into varying lengths and sticking them none too precisely on poorly constructed homemade greetings cards. Mounted in a wacky frame, these cards could, I think, form part of a sensationally bogus exhibition.

As could the packed lunch box I prepare every night for the following day. I have little cubes of Red Leicester in one compartment, blueberries in another, almonds and walnuts in a third. In the main bit there will be a tomato, some raw spinach, half a carrot and a satsuma. (It’s not so much a lunch box, really, more a snack box.) The lid is see-through.

“Blimey,” I say as I stow it in the fridge, “I really am eating the rainbow! Especially orange!” It’s a thing of beauty, my lunch box. Fnar, fnar.

I intend to display my lunch box, suitably filled, alongside another identical lunch box, only this one will be empty to symbolise world hunger.

I’m also keen to create another installation, a more ambitious one, using my Second World War toy soldiers, of which I have close to 1,000. Yeah, I know the Chapman brothers did this ages ago, after Goya, but their work got melted in that fire at the Momart warehouse and, besides, there’s nothing new under the sun. Like the Chapmans, I’ll make my scenario shocking, like letting the Japanese win, or something. I’ll call it *Imagine if...* Or maybe *The Futility of War, No 17*.

At intervals during my open day, I’ll drop a cushion on the assembled troops, like when Banksy auto-shredded *Girl with Balloon* seconds after selling it at auction for more than a million quid. I’ll have to set them all up again, but that’s the fun part of playing with soldiers.

Another venture – still at the design level but I’m moving towards possibly maybe almost certainly not thinking about a scale model – is what I’m calling *The Grudge-o-Tron*. I envisage it will resemble Alan Turing’s early “Bombe” devices that helped decipher German Enigma messages at Bletchley Park. Or perhaps something Caractacus Potts might cobble together in *Chitty Chitty Bang Bang*. Gloriously amateurish, devilishly useful.

I have a very long memory, going back half a century, for slights, criticism, mockery and other unpleasantness, real and imagined, directed at yours truly. *The Grudge-o-Tron* will help me keep track of all these grievances. I simply feed in the offence, the perpetrator, the date and any aggravating factors such as whether my masculinity, courage or intelligence were impugned and, hey presto, *The Grudge-o-Tron* will crunch the numbers and pop out the verdict on the scale and nature of the vengeance I intend to devote my retirement to enacting. Invaluable!

I’ve considered revisiting the orgiastic scenes I used to create with Barbies and Action Men 20 years ago, after the kids had gone to bed. In these puritanical times, however, such decadence would probably get me arrested. Best keep it clean. ■

robert.crampton@thetimes.co.uk

TUI

Live Happy

Clubs for kids. Bliss for parents.

Book Happy with TUI-owned hotels designed for the whole family.

OYSTER PERPETUAL GMT-MASTER II

ROLEX
CERTIFIED
PRE-OWNED

ROLEX CERTIFIED PRE-OWNED

Because they are built to last, Rolex watches often live several lives. And because they may be worn on new wrists, Rolex now offers the opportunity to purchase from its Official Retailers timepieces that have lived a previous life and are certified and guaranteed by the brand. These certified pre-owned watches benefit from the exacting quality criteria inherent to all Rolex products. And from a two-year international guarantee, valid from their date of resale in the Rolex network.
Every Rolex tells a story. The next chapter is yours to write.

#Perpetual

Prestons

WILMSLOW | GUILDFORD | LEEDS | NORWICH

PRESTONSDIAMONDS.CO.UK

ROLEX