



INDIA

**ART ICON
F N SOUZA:
ONE HUNDRED
YEARS OF
CONTROVERSY**

**ASHA PUTHLI:
THE 79-YEAR-OLD
MUSICIAN
MAKING
GLOBAL WAVES**

**GQ SPORT
AN INSIDE
LOOK AT THE
FIRST LUXURY
OLYMPICS**

**WHY IS
EVERYONE
SUDDENLY ON
STEROIDS?**



RISHABH REBORN

June - July



ON THE COVER

GQ

RISHABH PANT

RISHABH PANT

Photograph by Nishanth Radhakrishnan. Styled by Selman Fazil. Cardigan, T-shirt and shorts by **Marcelo Burlon County of Milan** at **The Collective**. Sandals by **Hermès**.

For our cover story on Rishabh Pant, see page 68.

Jacket and T-shirt by **Louis Vuitton**.

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For our Pride Month story, see page 46.

Tank top by **Zara**. Track pants by **Adidas Originals**.

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For our story on Maharaj Kumar Sahib Lakshyaraj Singh Mewar of Udaipur, see page 18.



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Season of Sport

AN INCREDIBLE 70-day season of sport is upon us, kicking off this month with the ICC Men's T20 World Cup in the United States and West Indies, then moving to the UEFA Euros, and culminating with the Paris Olympic Games at the end of July. India's gold medal dreams lie again with Neeraj Chopra, who will be hoping he can stay injury-free and defend his historic javelin title won at the Tokyo Olympiad in 2021. While Chopra remains a hot favourite, there are several other Indian athletes who are strong medal contenders. For this issue, we decided to spotlight the world's leading badminton doubles pair, Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Chirag Shetty, who are struggling with form at the moment, but could peak just at the time we need them to. The boys are known for their raucous, unbridled celebrations on court and have great personal chemistry, and it was a pleasure to bring them into the *GQ* universe. If they win, you read it here first.

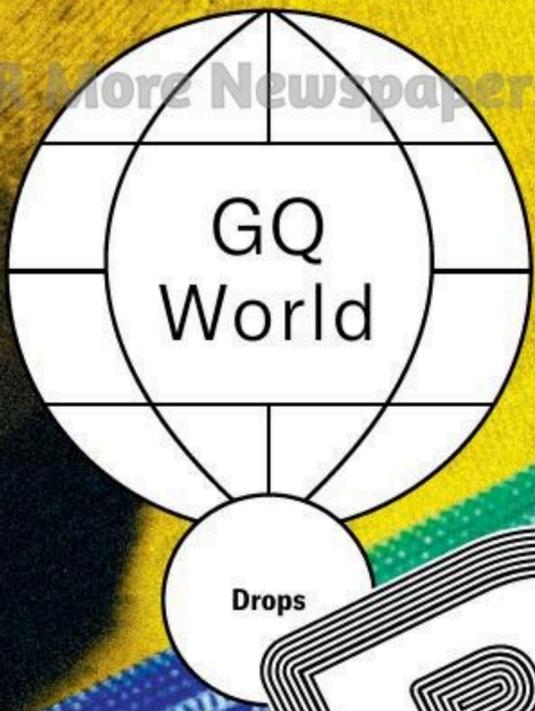
Football fans have had a great year so far, with the Premier League going down to the wire; upstarts Bayer Leverkusen incredibly winning the Bundesliga without losing a game; and unfancied Borussia Dortmund almost winning the Champions League. The Euros, hosted by Germany, are just around the corner, with Mbappe's France, Bellingham's England, and Kroos's Germany the favourites, though Italy, Spain, and the Netherlands are always threats. The dark horse is Croatia.

While the knock on cricket is that there are too many World Cups (one was held just late last year), there is no doubt that once the T20 World Cup kicks into gear, fans will be entranced. Superstars like Rohit Sharma and Virat Kohli will continue to dominate headlines, but it is Rishabh Pant who is arguably the most fascinating story of the tournament. In the early hours of 30 December 2022, Pant had a horrific car accident on the Delhi-Dehradun expressway that resulted in severe injuries, which could have easily been fatal. For this issue's cover story, Pant opened up to cricket writer Jamie Alter about details of the crash, its aftermath and his unlikely comeback. Pant has always been pugnacious and was one of the key architects of India's extraordinary 2021 Test series win in Australia. He has had a successful IPL and is now raring to go. It will come as no surprise, therefore, if this tournament belongs to him.

Instagram icon @chekurriengq

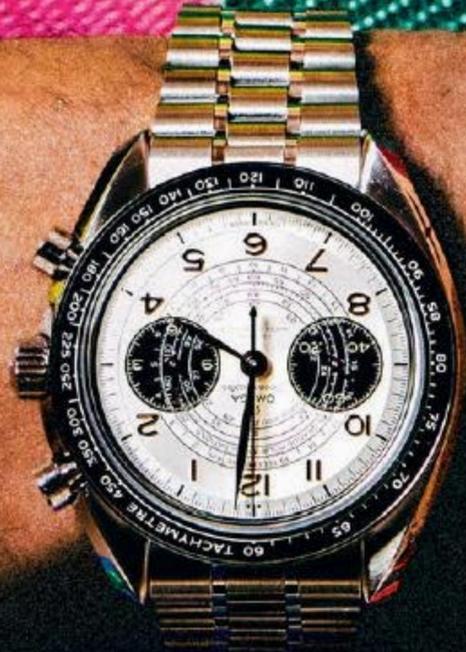


RISHABH PANT: PHOTOGRAPH, NISHANTH RADHAKRISHNAN; STYLING, SELMAN FAZIL



27 Ways to

BOSS UP



at the Beach All Summer

By YANG-YI GOH

GO FOR GOLD
Omega has served as the official Olympics timekeeper since 1932, and the venerable Swiss watchmaker is pulling out all the stops for the latest Summer Games: This special-edition spin on the retro-tinged Speedmaster Chronoscope has been outfitted with 18-carat-gold-alloy hands and hour markers, and the Paris 2024 logo embossed on the caseback.

Watch by **Omega**.
Sweater by **Ferragamo**. Lawn chair by **MoMA Design Store**.



RED-HOT HAUL-ALL
Just like the roomy, go-everywhere canvas tote you lug to the beach every summer—only levelled up in searing crimson **Bottega Veneta** intrecciato leather.

READY FOR THE PAPS
There are knit polos, and then there are *movie star* knit polos. This drapey, sensual **Givenchy Plage** shirt is unequivocally the latter.

MARINE LAYER
Best known for its delicate cashmere sweaters, **The Elder Statesman** has launched a new subcollection, *Interdimensional Surf*, focusing on wares—like this post-sesh-ready cardigan—that can take a serious beating.

SHADES THAT SHINE BACK
There's nothing wrong with seeing the world through rose-coloured glasses—especially when they're as swanky as these rimless, gold-arm **Fred** joints.

HALF-PIPE HOODIE
ERL's Venice Beach roots shine through loud and clear on this big, boxy sweatshirt: one half sun-drenched yellow, one half skate-or-die chequerboard, the whole thing crafted from plush terry cloth.

TIME-TESTED TRUNKS
Orlebar Brown's signature swim shorts—with their tailored cut and natty side tabs—have set the gold standard for almost two decades. As long as it keeps putting 'em out in fetching fabrics like this puckered pink candy stripe, it's in no danger of losing the crown.

GRIDIRON GRAILS
For its first-ever **Nike** collaboration, **Bode** dug the Astrograbber out of the Swoosh's archives and maxed out the vintage vibes, like this spin with creamy knit uppers and a quartet of kitschy charms.

HANG TEN
If you're in search of the shorts of the summer, look no further: **Miu Miu**'s retro two-toned boardies are it.

WINE AND SHINE
Quite literally the Champagne of sunscreens, this **Vacation** must-have is made using Chardonnay grapeseed oil to nourish, protect, and glisten up your skin all in a single swoop.

HEAVY METAL
These grommet-riddled **Burberry** trousers are so good, they're worth overcoming a debilitating case of trypophobia to wear.

LEAN BACK IN A THROWBACK
That classic aluminium folding chair your grandma used to sun herself in, recently revitalized by **MoMA Design Store** in a slew of fresh new hues.

NOTHIN' BUT NET
This open-weave **Hermès** leather carryall lets your stuff—and the exquisite craftsmanship—do the talking.



GOLDEN HOUR
 There's nothing on earth quite as dazzling as a blazing vermillion sunset—except maybe this **Rolex Day-Date 36** in 18-carat yellow gold with a carnelian dial and a diamond-encrusted bezel and hour markers.

Watch by **Rolex**. Hoodie by **ERL**. Shorts by **CDLP**. Towel by **OAS**. Sunglasses by **Fred**. Bracelet by **Marie Lichtenberg**. Bag by **Palm Heights**.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY BOWEN FERNIE
STYLED BY HALEY GILBREATH

GET BUCKETS
The crochet-hat wave is still rolling strong, because **Fendi** says so.

KEY LIME VIBE
If anyone knows a thing or two about pulling together a scintillating heat wave fit, it's Gigi Hadid—and the model turned designer poured all that expertise directly into this citrusy knit tank from her **Guest In Residence** label.

A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S SEAM
Yes, you still need a sweater on standby in the depths of summer—ideally one as airy and striking as this chunky, loose-knit **Canali** jacket.

CRACK ONE OPEN
The compact, handsome **Fieldbar** cooler holds just enough drinks for you and a pal—and keeps them ice cold for a staggering 50 hours.

SAVE YOUR NECK
A silk scarf, like this painterly **Giorgio Armani** number, will supercharge a classic summer-shorts-and-tee combo.

SCI-FI SUNNIES
Dior's latest frames don't merely look like something out of *The Fifth Element*—they're genuinely futuristic, with an intricate open-work architecture crafted by cutting-edge 3D printers.

FIRST-CLASS BUTTON-UP
If you've got this swanky **Loro Piana** camp shirt on, that's a pretty sure-fire sign you're in for one hell of a vacation.

TOTALLY TUBULAR
You, a frosty brew, this **Business & Pleasure Co.** pool float, and the copy of *GQ* you're currently reading. Need we say more?

THIGHS GONE WILD
Fair warning: The second you stroll up poolside in **CDLP**'s barely there leopard-print trunks, all eyes will be firmly on you.

SUMMERY SCENT
Louis Vuitton's latest fragrance, *Lovers*, marks men's creative director **Pharrell Williams**'s first-ever foray into the scent game. It's a bright and spirited mix of galbanum, cedarwood, sandalwood, and amber that's designed to elicit the feeling of sunshine grazing your skin.

GRANITA FOR YOUR FEET
The Italian hiking gods at **Diemme** are known for their Dolomite-besting boots; these breezy, sorbet-toned slip-ons prove they know how to kick back by the Adriatic too.

GET SOME COLOUR
A freaky beach fit deserves a freaky beach towel—and this swirling, hypnotic **OAS** spread hits all the right notes.

PSYCHEDELIC PANTS
Pucci's flowy, silky bottoms—complete with a herd of unicorns galloping amid the twisty print—are an LSD trip you can wear.

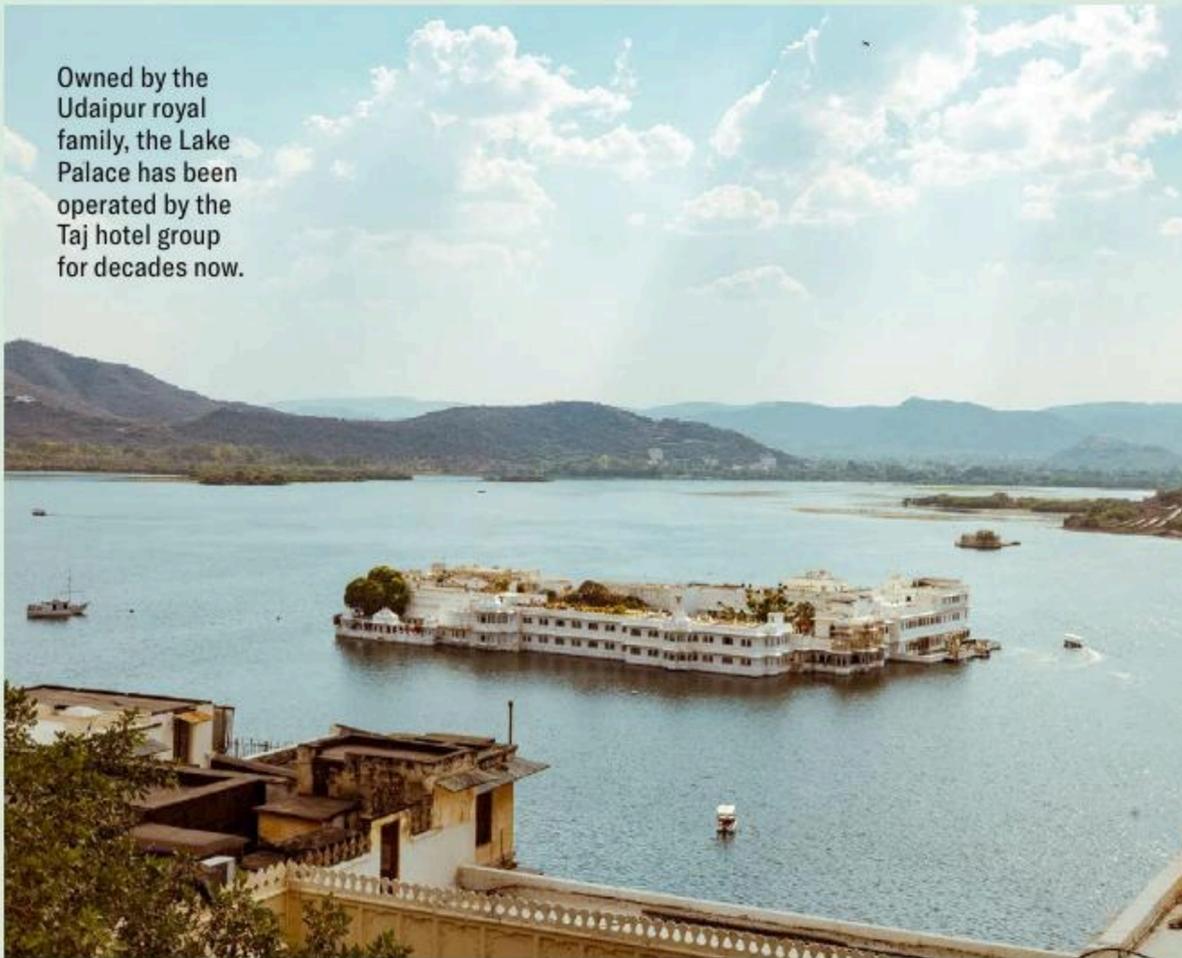
FIELDBAR AND LOUIS VUITTON: COURTESY OF THE BRANDS.



Burning Bright

Lakshyaraj Singh Mewar of Udaipur is the scion of one of the world's oldest royal dynasties. He is also an excellent barista and has a penchant for miniature cars and trains.

By PRIYA KUMARI RANA



Owned by the Udaipur royal family, the Lake Palace has been operated by the Taj hotel group for decades now.

IT'S A HOT SUMMER DAY at Udaipur's three-kilometre-long, four-century-old royal palace complex set against Lake Pichola. It houses luxury hotels like the Shiv Niwas Palace and Taj Fateh Prakash Palace; the royal family's residence, Shambhu Niwas; and the sprawling City Palace, made with white marble and granite, with its labyrinth of rooms with glass-covered walls. We move from one carved and delicately arched room, from the faded miniature-painting-strewn rooms of the formidable Sisodia rulers of Mewar at the City Palace—now a museum swarming with European tourists—to the palatial, double-storey living room-bar of the Shiv Niwas with a large Venetian crystal chandelier crowning it. Beneath a gigantic 1901 Raja Ravi Varma painting of his ancestor—the fierce Rajput king Maharana Pratap in full battle regalia—Maharaj Kumar Sahib Lakshyaraj Singhji Mewar of Udaipur, dressed in a black achkan, with a rani pink *paag* (turban) decorated with a diamond *sirpech*, and pink *pagarkis* (shoes), is looking down tenderly at the upturned face of his five-year-old son, Bhanwar Baojiraj Sahib Haritraj Singh Mewar.

What we have here is one of the world's oldest unbroken royal dynasties that goes back 1,500 years, whose present-day descendants live in a world surrounded by grandeur, but with feet firmly on the ground and eyes on the future. Prince Lakshyaraj—son of Shriji Arvind Singh Mewar, the pioneering head of the royal family of Mewar who founded the HRH Group of Hotels—is a public figure, an Instagram sensation, a Guinness World Record-holding philanthropist (helmed the largest clothing donation drive for the underprivileged: 329,250 pieces; the most number of trees planted in the least amount of time: 4,035 in one minute), a hotelier (he's now the executive director of the HRH Group of Hotels), an educationist, a TEDx speaker and more. A person whose interests are so varied—he's even got an honorary doctorate in literature from the Government of Rajasthan and is working towards a PhD in stress management—that one wonders what drives him. There's a public persona, which is revered by denizens of Udaipur and Rajasthan, and then there's the private identity: a parent, a collector of miniature toys, and a barista who whips up delicious coffee.

As an Instagram personality with a million followers, the prince's profile has reels of him going for Hanuman Janmotsav at a city temple and the Holika Dahan ceremony inside City Palace, with people thronging the road to meet him. They can be seen touching his feet, showering him and his wife, Princess Nivrutti, and their children, Bhanwar Baisa Mohlakshika Kumari, Bhanwar Baisa Praneshwari, and little Haritraj, with adulation. Despite this, he remains down to earth. "*Akad jo hai, woh murda logon main hoti hai; zinda logon main vinamrata honi chahiye,*" he says. "You stiffen up once you die, so remain humble and tender while alive. If there's one person I owe this to, it's my mum."

How does he feel about the love that's showered upon him and his family? "Who doesn't like to receive love?" he shoots back. "I love it; it makes me feel fantastic. But when there are thousands of people wanting to meet you, bowing down, wanting to touch your feet, it can make you feel





A trained barista, Lakshyaraj prepares coffee for his friends and visitors on his Italian-made Astoria machine in his private office pantry.

His schoolboy passion for cricket was inculcated at Mayo, where three generations of his family have represented the school. During his stint as president of the Udaipur District Cricket Association, he has nurtured local talent like Ashok Menaria, who went on to captain Team India at the Under-19 World Cup in 2010, and even lifted the Ranji Trophy for Rajasthan twice in a row. "Today, I run an academy where hundreds of children come to play, and this is a great source of joy and strength," he says.

He remembers great discipline at home. "My dad would wake up at 6am every day and be in his office no matter what," he says. "Mum would also wake up early and do her puja. Father didn't need to say anything. *Baap ki aankhen kaafi hoti hain*; he just had to look at you a few times to get you to follow the rules."

Another facet of Lakshyaraj's life is his fondness for dinky cars; radio-controlled model aeroplanes; and die-cast cars, trains, and ships in various scales and models. Proof of his passion lies at the entrance of his private office:

awkward. You want to hold people back, but you can't stop everyone. If 20 people want to touch your feet, how many can one hold? They get upset and hurt if you do."

This adulation comes from centuries of respect for the maharanas of Mewar, one of India's most famous royal lines. "I can't deny the fact that I am a part of this family and have this lineage, for which there is great admiration," says Lakshyaraj.

Royalty is a Quality

What does the word "royal" mean to him? "I once went to a cloth shop in the city," he says. "I love local shops, materials, and clothes (he's also a brand ambassador for textile company Arvind). The shopkeeper kept throwing open roll after roll of fabric. After 8 to 10 rolls, he opened one and said you won't find a more 'royal' cloth. So this word defines attributes of quality, integrity, honesty. It can define anyone who wants to rise above pettiness and possess these qualities."

While he was a student at Mayo College, Ajmer, he was known as a shy kid, something he says he tried to "fix" by broadening his horizons, going away to study at the Blue Mountains International Hotel Management School in Australia, where he trained to be an expert barista. He makes coffee for his friends and visitors at his private office pantry, where he's been known to whip up his favourite dishes. As a true-blue Mewari, his heart leans towards laal maas, dal baati, and jungli maas, motivated by his father who used to cook every evening.

We're treated to a cup of coffee (a single shot espresso for me) prepared by Lakshyaraj on his Italian-made Astoria machine, using Di Lorenzo coffee that his friend in Australia sends him twice a month. "I was a full barista, which I did for extra cash as a student in Sydney," he says.





“Udaipur achieved this status over the last 50 years, thanks to father and grandfather. ... My idea was to infuse what I could from an international perspective.”

—Lakshyaraj Singh Mewar



Lakshyaraj with his children. Of all the hats he's worn, the prince says that being a parent is the greatest one.

a chandelier in the shape of a car, made up of dinky cars. From his office pantry, Lakshyaraj takes us into a small room that houses a double-decker miniature train set, complete with a working mini train that glides along a track, tiny humans, vintage and modern cars, cows, baby sheep, windmills, houses, trees, cherry blossoms, a steel bridge, a cable car, grassy landscape, and a train station with the sign “Mewar Railways”. “This is an imaginary city I’ve created,” he says of the mix-and-match pieces of different scales—like HO, OO, Z, and N—with a smaller scale train on top. “Most are from KMI Modellbau, a German company that specializes in custom-made pieces. It took them six years to deliver this set. The idea is to put my models in a museum. Mewar has always been known for its miniatures—look at the Mewar school of painting. So the penny dropped; I guess I’ve always been attracted to miniatures.”

For Lakshyaraj, returning home from Australia to work at his family’s hospitality empire was always on the cards. “It was already world-class,” he says. “Udaipur achieved this status over the last 50 years, thanks to father and grandfather. Hospitality is in the DNA of every Indian. Anyone who comes to our doorstep is treated with respect, offered tea or food. But change is constant. In hospitality, trends evolve. The idea was to infuse what I could from an international perspective.”

“We’re at a consolidating phase right now,” he says, “We have three properties we’re managing, and would love to build more. But we’d love to have experts like the Taj group run the place. It’s a matter of honour that with our 50-year relationship (the Lake Palace is a Taj-run property), I am now the face of the Taj hotels.”

Yet, of all the hats he’s worn in his young life, Lakshyaraj says there’s one which is the greatest—being a parent. He wishes his children carry the family legacy forward, but it’s not in his control. “They should be great human beings,” he says. “They should excel in what they wish to do, and believe in what they’re doing.” ❖



TAG Heuer's New Formula 1 Is Fuelled by Nostalgia

The iconic '80s sports watch is back with an upscale refresh thanks to Kith. By CAM WOLF

THE ORIGINAL TAG Heuer Formula 1 watch collection was a massive commercial hit. During the 1980s and '90s, when it was in production, it was released in over 20 different colours and came accessibly priced, at about \$130 to \$390. It was an ideal starter watch, or an easy graduation gift for any style-minded kid, and came in a mini 28-mm size, perfect for a young person's wrist. The rugged plastic or stainless steel cases and rubber straps made it an even more fitting choice for someone not looking for a precious timepiece. Three million of these pop-coloured watches were sold in the 10 years that they were made, making them a crucial star in the millennial-memory universe.

That universe is exactly where Ronnie Fieg, founder of the nostalgia-fuelled streetwear powerhouse Kith, does his best work. His latest shrewd move is to revamp the Formula 1 for the modern collector—and for the hordes of hype-crazed fans he's amassed since launching Kith in 2011. This is Fieg doing what Fieg does best—turning a beloved product from his youth into a modern status

symbol. He's done it with sneakers, streetwear, and even cereal. And his new collaboration with TAG Heuer is almost guaranteed to be another success. "This is as important to me as any [luxury] watch because of what it means to the market, what it means to the wide spectrum of watch lovers, and who it can cater to at its price point," Fieg said. The Kith Formula 1 collection will revamp the watch in 10 new colourways, all of them heavily indebted to the originals. The updated version will feature an adult-size 35-mm case; pinstriped and clean dials stamped with Kith's slogan Just Us; and will retain the original's toothy daisy-shaped bezel and pop hues. The size isn't all that's been increased for 2024, though. The new watches are priced at \$1,550 (₹1.3 lakh), an adult-size budget too. "It's up to par with what TAG is making today," Fieg explained.

The partnership started, as so many great things do, over dinner. On one fortuitous occasion, Fieg had been seated next to Frédéric Arnault, then the CEO of TAG Heuer. Never one to miss an opportunity to keep Kith at the centre of the conversation, Fieg turned to Arnault and espoused his adoration for the

Formula 1, the watch from his childhood. "Having one of those meant a lot in the '90s, and this was the watch that I wanted," Fieg said. Later that night, he even dug out an old photo of himself as a teenager with a *Boy Meets World* kind of hairdo and a red-and-black Formula 1 on his wrist to show Arnault. The pitch came at a golden moment, just as the Formula 1 was having a surge of renewed interest in the watch community, with collectors rushing to eBay to buy them—or digging long-forgotten examples out of storage. A comeback was already on the minds of TAG Heuer's executives. At an event in March of last year, Nicholas Biebuyck, TAG Heuer's heritage director, joked, "Oh, no, of course we're not bringing back a watch that everyone is talking about right now!" Fieg's childhood memory synced perfectly with the brand's plans; and shortly after his dinner with Arnault, an official partnership was formed.

The new Formula 1 collection is a triumph for a heritage brand making the best use of its history to be appealing in the new world of watches, balancing tradition with the tastes of 2024. This is a watch that beckons aspiring collectors into the world of luxury Swiss watches while maintaining the luxury Swiss standards that more established aficionados will expect. That part is not lost on Fieg, who said, "It does widen the spectrum to bring new people into the game, for sure." ❖

TAG Heuer and Kith's new Formula 1 maintains the colourful verve of the original, but has been upgraded with premium materials and a pinstriped dial.



Craving a members-only restaurant experience? ZZ's Club, left, has you covered. How about a nightclub with David Lynch-ian flair? Take a peek inside Silencio, below.



How New York's

Social Life Went Members-Only

A new wave of private restaurants, workspaces, wellness centres, and nightclubs has taken New York City by storm. Emily Sundberg gets inside most of them—and helps us understand why so many young New Yorkers are gleefully shelling out membership dues.





BEFORE I BEGIN THIS

B

story, I must disclose that much of it was written within the lacquered mahogany walls of Casa Cipriani New York, the 115-year-old ferry terminal turned members' club next to where the Staten Island Ferry comes into Manhattan. My spot was a corner couch in front of the crackling fireplace, not because the club was a subject of this story but because I'm a member there and I like to watch the buzzing traffic of private helicopters and boats in the harbour. I would tell you about the characters I see in the Jazz Café on Thursday nights (often in sunglasses at 10pm), and what I hear in the sauna on Tuesday afternoons (this town's private schools are nuts)—I swear, sometimes it's a full-Scorsese fever dream—but I can't, because writing about the club's members, along with baseball hats and photography, is not permitted.

I am not alone in warming up to the members-only experience. Since the waning of the pandemic, private clubs have proliferated in New York City. It is not a new phenomenon in major urban areas around the world, but this is the crest of a whole new wave of options in a city that has not regarded club membership as a signifier for cool in quite some time. Good for a Christmas party or a cocktail with your dad's friend? Sure. But not cool. Even as nouveau members-only clubs, like Soho House, thrived in places like London (where it was founded) and Berlin and Mexico City and Bangkok, the sparkle of New York's location came and went, due to the influx of bad start-up ideas and Allbirds sneakers. Now, though? Soho House's cachet is back up, with three locations in the city. And pay-for-play social life is having its day. There are start-up clubs, eating clubs, coworking clubs, office clubs that become dance clubs, old blue blood clubs looking for new life, et cetera, et cetera. What happened?

First, obviously, the pandemic. Office life went away, restaurants and bars closed—I don't need to explain the pandemic to you. But the long-tail effect in New York was not a hollowing out of Manhattan, as some predicted, but rather some real memory loss

for how to hang out organically with friends, coworkers, and strangers. Into the breach stepped a slew of new clubs. As I started to get a taste of these clubs—the VC-backed, the university-backed, the birthright-backed—I started to realize that many new young members weren't joining to connect over some shared value, but just to *connect*, period. It was easy, in the throes of COVID, to imagine that the absolute last thing that would ever return to New York City was a club where people would congregate to work. And yet here I am, by my new money fireplace.

Another big reason people are joining, it seems, is that, in 2024, it's harder than ever to keep a secret in New York. If there's an off-menu order that only regulars know about, some food writer is bound to divulge it for paid subscribers on Substack. Good luck having an affair without showing up in the background of your girlfriend's favourite influencer's Instagram story. And if you think you can go to a party at your buddy's place without Find My Friends blowing the location, think again. Which leaves you with two options: Take all of your meetings in the back of a yellow cab, or join a photo-free club. In other words, many people seem willing to go to desperate lengths to retain the rush of privacy.

Members' clubs—golf, yacht, university—are nothing new for middle-aged New Yorkers with cash to spend. What's new is the idea that private clubs, as opposed to Carrie Bradshaw-approved velvet-rope bars, are places for people who are under 40, single, and possibly not even New Yorkers, to spend their Friday nights. It's like the Cadillac salesman says to Don Draper in *Mad Men*: This is the car that shows everyone you've arrived. Maybe some of these prospective members haven't entirely arrived yet (the bonus still needs to hit the bank account, the shares still need to be cashed in), but they want to look like they have. After all, a few grand a year in membership fees is less than a Rolex, less than a Cadillac. As these clubs, new and renewing, cast their nets wider for members, will they catch what they're looking for? And will the prospective members find sex, connection, and community all under the guise of private networking? These are the questions I ask myself while lying under a red-light therapy panel in the empty gym at Casa Cipriani.

This winter and spring, I visited all the clubs I could. I learned of: swimming naked with the boss, priests shooting guns, \$200,000 (₹1.6 crore) initiation fees, real Warhols, fake names, taxidermy, and all the spicy rigatoni money can buy. Private clubs are weird, it turns out. But the rooms where photos were banned were often the most fun to look at. And beyond the many locked doors and many velvet curtains was an answer to whether club life is a fad confined to this strange period of city living, or if we're in it for the long run.

IN ORDER TO BETTER understand the present of New York City club-dom, I figured I'd start in the past.

The burger was pretty good at the New York Athletic Club, which was founded in 1868 and has varying membership rates based on age and "heritage". The friend I joined there didn't use my real name on the guest list, to assure their membership wouldn't be affected by the story. After downing a few Negronis in the company of barely-drinking-age men in Patagonia vests, we decided to explore the building, which truly smelled like chlorine and cash. This involved feeling around the walls in the dark for light switches, which then illuminated empty ballrooms and stately portraits of past NYAC presidents. Labels in the elevator indicated what activity each of the 24 floors were dedicated to—squash, judo, cards, swimming. Outside the elevators on each floor, there were stacks of pamphlets reminding members and guests of the dress code. My consensus was that the buzzing halls of NYAC were filled with people who love beer, hate halter tops, and want to flex Central Park vistas to their buddies.

I understood the universal appeal of having a Tom Collins with a view and signing a bill with a number, but I also understood that NYAC was not for everyone. It was the quintessential members-only club for trust-fund-clad analysts who like watching basketball while discussing Montauk share houses. The best of these concrete-jungle country clubs would endure—even among young New Yorkers—but the worst might fail long-term to attract new members to spend big money on...what exactly? A really nice apartment you can't live in? Dubious of the pitch from some of the blue blood clubs, I called the youngest person I knew who might be in their thrall.

"The funny thing about the Racquet and Tennis Club" that friend told me, "is that you have to wear a tie in the front door but you have to swim in the nude." The funny thing to me about the all-male Racquet and Tennis Club, which all of my sources said is the hardest door to get into, is how many people have seen their bosses naked. I learned more: about the Doubles Club, on Fifth Avenue near the park, which apparently still serves mayo salads and gelatin towers that look straight out of the '70s—and whose application, I'm told, still must be handwritten. I learned about the Links Club, which is apparently exactly what it sounds like: old guys talking about golf. They're old school, but they're survivors.

Next up was Core: New York, described by the *Times* as "New Age" in 2005. Though it belongs to the present century, Core lives beside Soho House as a sort of in-between era of NYC club-dom—the Gen X of NYC clubs—emerging well before the current wave, but enduring through the 2008 recession and the pandemic. Core was founded by CEO Jennie Enterprise, and takes up an expansive 60,000 square feet and four floors of Fifth Avenue. One of the most noteworthy features of the club, besides the 39-seat screening room and the 11 luxurious suites on-site, is the full-floor Dangene spa (run by Dangene Enterprise, wife of Jennie). Smiling practitioners closed each door as I passed through on a recent visit.

I think I'd buy anything Jennie Enterprise tried to sell me—she's charming, blond, insanely driven, and looks like she was born to wear The Row sweaters over her shoulders. She built her first business as a teenager on Shelter Island—not a lemonade stand, but a tennis camp started with \$150 (₹12,500), which turned into \$10,000 (₹8,35,000) by the end of the summer. "I started to realize that this sort of sense of incrementalism is very important," Enterprise said. "You have to be able to execute an ambitious vision by being an incrementalist, right?" Totally, I said. Enterprise told me the club, which has initiation fees that run from \$15,000 to \$100,000 (₹12,53,000 to ₹83,52,000), prides itself on curating a global community of people obsessed with "culture" and "changing the world." The membership skews a little older, but Enterprise assured me: "We are absolutely interested in infusing and



oxygenating the entire community everywhere with young leaders."

In this way, the New York Athletic Club and Core appear to be finding ways to replenish their memberships. Other older clubs, it's harder to say. People join the Yale Club because they want to eat the same BLT that their ancestors have been enjoying for a century; people join New York's hottest restaurant club when they want tuna that was caught in Japan yesterday. To me, demand for the former seems limited. Demand for the latter, I'd find out, is infinite.

OVER THE PAST decade, the folks at Major Food Group have opened restaurants that are in such high demand on a nightly basis that they struggle to accommodate their V-est of VIPs. No matter how much care they take with the reservation book at Carbone (in New York, in Miami, in Las Vegas, et al.), they're always pissing off somebody who's important to them. The solution? ZZ's Club. Which includes the signature Japanese restaurant, ZZ's, and the upstairs Carbone Privato. There are precedents globally, but there's never been anything quite like ZZ's Club and the spate of other members-only restaurants that have popped up in New York recently.

The ZZ's in New York (there's one in Miami, too), which opened in late 2023, is located in a far-away land called Hudson Yards and takes up 25,000 square feet over two floors. Every detail in the club was designed by Ken Fulk, who has also worked on Instagram cofounder Kevin Systrom's house on Lake Tahoe and an "anonymous billionaire's" private jet. There is an original Warhol, seafood flown in daily from Tokyo, and ornately decorated rooms upstairs



"We're the first private club ever to have something called a Culinary Concierge. With as little as 48-hours' notice, we can reimagine a diner's favorite meal from when they were a child or make their mother's chicken soup recipe."

—MARIO CARBONE, ZZ'S CLUB

that were described to me on my tour as exhibiting "Medici opulence".

The food was great. I ate more Kobe beef in those two hours than I had in my first 29 years, and the surprising pours of Champagne every 30 minutes resulted in the hangover I'm experiencing as I write this. I learned from a ZZ's Club member who approached our table that the club replaced the Tavern by WS, a restaurant for wine aficionados that the *Times*' Pete Wells once called "better than it should be". But, get this—that member, who works at Goldman and

CORE: NEW YORK
This survivor of the early '00s caters to a crowd that's more interested in spa life than night life.

lives in the West Village, was grandfathered into ZZ's because he was previously storing his wine at the Tavern. Besides Mr. Goldman, I saw a C-list MTV reality show star and an A+++ list stand-up comedian on my night.

Maybe you don't want to spend \$3,000 (around ₹2,50,600) a year to chase daddies around the carpeted floors of one of the new social clubs on offer but *would* like to spend \$30,000 (around ₹25,05,00) (initiation for two, plus \$10,000—around ₹8,35,000—a year) at ZZ's Club to have Mario Carbone replay a fantasy of your *actual* daddy and the lamb chops he used to grill. "We're the first private club ever to have something called a Culinary Concierge," Carbone told me. "With as little as 48-hours' notice, we can reimagine a diner's favourite meal from when they were a child or make their mother's chicken soup recipe."

Before I left, I asked Carbone and his business partner Jeff Zalaznick how they researched the project to make sure there was a market for this kind of place. "We did what we always do," Carbone said. "Spent a lot of time eating and drinking in private members' spaces." Reinspired, I did, too.

TIRO A SEGNO, the oldest Italian-heritage organization in the US, opened on MacDougal Street in 1888, and permits what most rooms in New York don't: firing guns. (The club's name literally means "target shooting.") When members tell me about Tiro a Segno's food, they focus on garlic and red sauce (there's apparently no menu); when they talk about the room, it's on the remarkably casual shooting range in the basement. I called a friend's dad's best friend (of course, he's a member), and when I asked his thoughts on the guns, he said: "You need some of that stuff in the city, whether you believe in it or not." When I asked if you had to be of Italian descent to join, he said: "It would be nice to have some Italian roots, a DNA test or something...but anyone can join." Other people I met who'd visited the club whispered of



NYPD officers, priests, and sex workers who take selfies with firearms. When I called the phone number on the club's site to ask some more questions, the woman who answered put me on hold with music playing. When she got back on the line she said, "You said GQ magazine? I'm sorry, he said we can't because we're a members' club." I never found out who "he" was, but it sounds like a couple of New York's most talked about clubs were inspired by "him" and his club.

Scott Sartiano, co-owner of the downtown social club Zero Bond, said he'd be interested in buying Tiro a Segno one day. When we sat down recently on the fourth floor of his club on Bond Street, Sartiano couldn't have been aware of the ways he shaped my early 20s. When I was a freshman at the Fashion Institute of

Technology, 1 Oak, Up & Down, The Darby—all cofounded by Sartiano—were an extension of my Manhattan campus. The nightlife in the early 2010s felt pure, fast, and endless. Some of the nights I laughed the hardest were in bathrooms of 1 Oak with French skaters or finance guys, hiding from other college students who were only there to hook up with rappers or roll on Molly while dancing to Tiësto—and nobody's phone ever died! I couldn't tell you where to find a room like that in the city today.

By the time I'd graduated in 2016, the sparkly buckets of New York nightlife, served on ice, had melted. I often think about an April 2020 episode of the *Red Scare* podcast where actress and model Hari Nef (who happened to be an Up & Down hostess before appearing in *The Idol* and *Barbie*) described what made

ZZ'S CLUB
Can't get into Carbone or any of Major Food Group's other buzzy restaurants? You can always join ZZ's Club—and have your table guaranteed.

OPPOSITE PAGE: ARTWORK COURTESY OF THE ANDY WARHOL FOUNDATION FOR THE VISUAL ARTS, INC./ARTISTS RIGHTS SOCIETY (ARS), NEW YORK.

“I noticed young kids were kind of feeling differently about [clubbing], and the price of what you’re paying for went up, but the quality didn’t change. Getting jammed in a nightclub is not their thing anymore, which goes for all my friends, whether they’re 25 or 65.”

—SCOTT SARTIANO, ZERO BOND

the scene dim. “There stopped being secrets in New York after Instagram,” she said. “As soon as something was good, it was not only documented for clout; the clout was also always tied into an economic buy-in.... Eventually, you get something that is so watered down and divorced from its original state...even though it’s more accessible.”

There’s a strange storm brewing in New York right now: Late millennials who don’t want to grow up (usually men) are in rooms with Gen Z’ers who are growing up too fast (usually women). Is this a tale as old as time? Yes, I’m sure any Strokes concert had the same demographic breakdown. But now people are paying to join clubs that just *hand* them this experience—flirtation, sex, the performance of networking, status masquerading as power. And that’s just in the nightclubs. The city’s restaurant experience was killed by Resy. The city’s bar party scene was ruined by 9 a.m. Pilates classes. And then there’s the phones....

I raised this sense of a very different post-COVID landscape to Sartiano, who pivoted his focus from nightclubs to members’ clubs in 2020. Zero Bond, which has hosted everyone from Elon Musk to Taylor Swift over the past four years, describes itself as the piece you’ve been missing to perfectly complement your life living in the city. “I noticed young kids were kind of

feeling differently about [clubbing], and the price of what you’re paying for went up, but the quality didn’t change,” Sartiano told me. “You were going to the same nightclub with the same sound system, the same furniture, same drinks, but the price went up 3x.” Sophisticated people (or those who identified as such), he continued, had no interest in waiting in lines outside of a club, let alone having Grey Goose poured in their mouth by a club promoter. “Getting jammed in a nightclub is not their thing anymore, which goes for all my friends, whether they’re 25 or 65. There was a huge demand in the market, and there was no supply.”

Sartiano is skilled at manufacturing “fun” for those who would rather pay someone to tell them how to live. Who want a sexy cool experience created for them rather than sought out and found. Some of the best nights I’ve had in New York have been because of happy accidents—staying too late at a restaurant and drinking after hours with the staff, giving someone my number in the sauna at the Wall Street baths, telling a joke to a group of women who were about to get up.

Another thing I noticed about these clubs crafted by the never-age generation of Gen X’ers is that the clubs don’t really end up being for the under-40 crowd—they’re better characterized as for the under-55s. Or in club years, the 34-year-olds who think

they’re 25, the 44-year-olds who think they’re 27, and the 55-year-olds who are certain they’re 30.

When I asked Sartiano how many members Zero Bond has, he stared directly at me and calmly responded, “Just the right amount.”

Being a member here grants you access to this space and the people who are interested in the same things you are—exclusivity, privacy, culture, diversity (these words came up constantly while reporting on this story). He said there were “over 10,000 applications, and I don’t exaggerate my numbers.” This is in part because the \$3,850 (around ₹3,21,600) a year is on par with an Equinox membership. “I know I could charge more than anything if I wanted to, and succeed. I judge it based on how hard it is to get in here.”

“Look,” he continued, “there are a few things here that I’m really proud of. One is our art program.” By which he means the works he commissioned for decorating the place. I glimpsed the wall of sneakers created by a conceptual art collective in front of the club’s library (which appeared to have only Assouline coffee-table books) and framed prints of women in thongs in the Baccarat-crystal-filled Tasting Room, and I nodded along. I tried to picture Kim Kardashian and Pete Davidson sitting in this room on their second date. “The second,” he said, “is that we’ve had three couples who have met at orientation-member meetings get married. Or two married and one engaged.”

The third? “If you google ‘Zero Bond,’ I think there’ve been three instances in three and a half years of things being written of what supposedly went on inside. One of the three was partially accurate, and the other two were totally made up. And I’m so proud of that because it shows how much my members care and how they follow the rules. Because what’s gone on here is nothing I’ve ever seen in all my years.”

“I think they all respect Zero Bond,” Sartiano said, “and what it brings to their lives in a way that far exceeds hospitality.” Someone like Eric Adams, who has held court often at Zero Bond since being elected New York City’s

ZZ’S CLUB

Every detail in the club was designed by Ken Fulk. There is an original Warhol, seafood flown in daily from Tokyo, and ornately decorated rooms.





mayor in 2021, can live life at the club like it's pre-TikTok 2012—outside the gaze of cameras, possibly even with recent bachelor (and occasional Zero Bond guest) Tom Brady.

I asked Sartiano for an example of what someone has to do to get kicked out. He said, "Ask someone for a photo."

THIS WAS GETTING exhausting. Whipping around the city all day, doing the Lord's work. Good thing Casa Cipriani is encouraging of members taking naps beside the fireplace. I had to press onward.

A members' club in Bushwick (a new borough has entered the conversation!), called 154 Scott, opened recently in the SAA (Scott Avenue Associates) Building. "Bushwick is one of the last neighbourhoods in New York where there is a genuine feeling of serendipity, where you could literally stumble upon anything," the club's creative director Gabriella Khalil told me. "Members' clubs are a moniker that are commonly used right now—but ultimately, SAA is founded on community."

Khalil and her husband also run the Instagram-famous Palm Heights hotel on Grand Cayman and the almost-Erewhon market on Canal Street, Happier Grocery, and the new Financial District "vertical neighbourhood transforming space" WSA. WSA, a converted finance, insurance, and real estate office that now houses downtown creative businesses, is a throwback to *Working Girl*-era Wall Street-office grandeur. When I asked the team at 154 Scott the price of a membership, they said you have to

apply to find out. The most information you'll find online about them is that they're hiring a scrub therapist and a sommelier.

Where else? Oh! Silencio. Shhh. The club closest in energy to Sartiano's past projects (nightclubs) is down a narrow staircase on 57th Street. If you're thinking, That must be named after the theatre in *Mulholland Drive*, you'd be correct. The club's original Paris location was designed by David Lynch; the New York location was designed by Harry Nuriev, and takes inspiration from Lynch's *Twin Peaks*. On a recent night, the crowd was Dimes Square meets skater meets hip-hop meets "If you know, you know" older art world people. The thick red velvet lining the walls makes it a sexier option for those looking to spend money on a members' club, and although it's open to the public (albeit with a tough door), 1,200 euros (₹1,08,000) a year gets you exclusive and priority access to Silencio locations worldwide and a coworking space in Paris.

Aman New York, which opened in 2022, can't stay out of recent headlines. One of its full-floor condos sold this year for \$61 million, the hotel rooms are among the city's most expensive—\$1,950 (₹1,63,000) a night to start—and it has a members' club with a \$200,000 (around ₹1.6 crore) initiation fee. Members of Aman Club New York were the most skittish group I spoke to for this story—they did *not* want to even think about jeopardizing their memberships. So I went to the next best source: a friend who has

been a few times. I asked him to set the scene for me.

"When I walk in with my friend," he texted me, "everyone knows his name. I've entered without him before and it's all a bit drier. You go up in an elevator to a massive floor with high ceilings. There's an outdoor area for smoking and they bring you cigars and little snacks. The olives are fire, actually. And some wasabi peas and nuts. They're refilling shit constantly. Definitely more men than women. The men range from bankers to Long Islanders—I mean that, unfortunately, in a derogatory way." This is where I tell you all I'm from Long Island. "The food is solid but unspectacular. And there's a jazz club that is actually amazing, with a total of five people in the crowd. So it actually felt like a personal show." It's sad to think about a trumpet player absolutely shredding to a crowd of five, but if these places are supporting New York's jazz musicians? That's a type of patronage I can get behind.

Around the corner from Soho House, in the Meatpacking District, is the home of a not-yet-open club called Chez Margaux. Chez Margaux's website breaks down the membership fees (\$1,800—around ₹1,50,000—a year if you're 31 or under, \$2,600—around ₹2,17,173 if you're over), and guides visitors through watercolour illustrations and copy that personify Margaux (the club) as someone who "owns you before you ever knew you were for sale." The primary selling point of Chez Margaux is a restaurant by Jean-Georges Vongerichten.

SAA
From the team behind Palm Heights—a hybrid workspace, play space, yoga space members' club.

Michael Cayre, the landlord of the building, is the landlord of Soho House and Casa Cipriani. From what I've learned, where the general public of Manhattan sees just an empty building, Cayre sees a pile of cash.

All of these clubs have their acolytes and detractors, each solving for a different, somehow previously unmet need of New Yorkers. But will any last long-term? New shiny things come and go. But there's one club, due to open later this year, that most people I spoke with are convinced might stick.

I'M TALKING ABOUT the East Coast location of San Vicente Bungalows, which is taking over the historic Jane Hotel property. SVB—not to be confused with the Silicon Valley Bank—prides itself on attracting a community of “extraordinary individuals”, including 3,000 board-vetted members, from (supposedly) Steven Spielberg to Elon Musk. The success of the original LA edition, from hotelier Jeff Klein, accounts for the fact that there are rumoured to be 10,000 people on a waitlist for a club no one has seen yet.

Despite gossip being the glue that holds members' clubs together, it's strictly prohibited at the San Vicente Bungalows. Also prohibited are: taking photos, posting photos, smoking marijuana, and discussing what you “witness” at the club. The warm welcome I got as the guest of a member at the LA location recently was two green stickers—one for the front camera of my phone, one for the back. I know more than one person who has been kicked out for taking photos on-site (a member told me that the security cameras are heavily used). A club wants to be as private as its most secretive member. But really, it's only as private as its least secretive member.

How the West Village's Jane Hotel—once known for its velvet couches, Italian-disco dance parties, taxidermy, and my first kiss with a Harvard student (who took a plane to New York with his final club for the night)—will be transformed is the burning question on the minds of the club-inclined. “The only reason I might join is based on what the space looks like,” a designer in New York told me. Rose Uniacke (whose client list includes the Beckhams, and whose husband, David Heyman, is the producer behind all eight *Harry Potter* films) is responsible for the interiors.

The opening date has slid back three or four times since I started reporting, and in a recent email, Klein

told me, “We hope to open in August or September of 2024!” When I asked the team for more information, the following response was one of the many prompt, polite rejections I received: “We are due to open our doors in 2024 however we do not do any press. Wishing you all the best moving forward.” As these evasive emails piled up, I became a student of their butler-ish, at times ominous, copy.

San Vicente Bungalows West Village, in particular, represents the untested future of clubs in New York—a future fuelled by the creative-celebrity culture that dominates so much of social media right now. Spaces like it are appealing to people who like to talk about money and be seen spending it—but who also want to feel like they had to earn their way in through their profession or lifestyle. Though privacy, privilege, and exclusivity are the thing you're paying for anywhere, this kind of club is about being marked as a person of note in the high-end, bicoastal creative class. The Raya of IRL clubs. The blue check mark of memberships.

WHEN YOU FINALLY do arrive, we can assume you've also left something else behind. After applying for the club, after sitting through interviews with strangers who are paid to quantify how interesting you are and to measure how much cool you can bring to a room—then what do you get? Gloved hands and glimmering smiles hiding the contempt of someone who knows they'd never be in the same room as you outside of their uniform? A social fortress filled with one hundred other people who have nowhere better to be on a Friday night? Delivery on a promise that you'll always get inside the door? I learned that, for many, that's enough.

But there have to be members who look out the window on the drive

home at night and think about the city's other doors—the thrill of sneaking into a suite at Yankee Stadium, or going to an old bar with new friends who are down to slip a stranger their number, or taking shots and singing “Happy Birthday” to the manager at their regular restaurant after closing time. Resurfacing from the pandemic, we found we'd grown apart. Even now, it often feels as though we're relearning how to connect. Some got rich (or richer), and are willing to crack open their purses and wallets to fast-forward through the boring parties, the loneliness, the uncertainty and discovery of finding solid footing. The unmarked doors are the most tempting to try to slip through. Not knowing who or what is behind them is part of why we all still live in New York.

I heard the word *no* a lot more than *yes* while sourcing for this story. The institutions worked as designed: I didn't belong there. All the responses taught me that these clubs fill voids, most commonly an almost juvenile yearning for friends under the guise of the word *community*. We've still got a long way to go before we reach peak club. A new West Village restaurant called Frog Club is costuming as a members-only club by putting stickers on diners' phone cameras and limiting reservations to a word-of-mouth email address. And Sporty and Rich, an activewear brand that recently opened a store in SoHo, sells \$190 (₹15,900) sweatshirts for those who want to signal that they're members of Sporty and Rich Country Club, which doesn't even exist. But then again, San Vicente Bungalows West Village doesn't exist yet either, and it still (supposedly) has 10,000 people refreshing their inbox, waiting for acceptance. ❖

EMILY SUNDBERG lives in New York and writes the “Feed Me” Substack.

SAA

You have to apply to find out the price of a membership. The most information you'll find online is that they're hiring a scrub therapist.



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**INTO
THE**

AUTON

Rounding up all the key developments in the world of cars in 2024 thus far. BY PARTH CHARAN



OVERS

THESE PAGES: BACKGROUND AND ICONS, GETTY IMAGES; MERCEDES-BENZ EQG, COURTESY OF THE BRAND.

With the rise of artificial intelligence (AI), advancements in battery technology, and restructuring of local policies, the rapidly transforming world of automobiles is awash with new developments, locally and globally. As the world moves towards clean energy, vehicle-to-vehicle connectivity, and autonomous driving, the car, as we've known it, is an anachronism; one whose reimagined form is turning into a reality sooner than we think.



THE BUZZ ON THE STREET



BATTERY-POWERED G

Same old form, all-new lithium-ion guts—that's basically what Mercedes-Benz's new poster child for electric mobility is about. The iconic G-Wagen—that square-jawed, military-derived vestige of the '70s—is ready to power through the next few decades, with all its right angles intact and an all-new electric powertrain that produces 580bhp. The new G 580 generously assigns a motor to power each of its wheels, allowing it to quite literally break ground by doing an about turn from a standstill. The G 580 is easily the biggest EV flex from a legacy carmaker, showcasing how electric technology makes everything better. It renounces the throaty growl of the G 63 AMG, for a three-tonne block of lightning that has four gearboxes, wheels that turn in opposite directions, a 0-100kph time of 4.2 seconds, and all the other credentials that ensure it'll never be outgunned by a petrol SUV—as long as there's a charging station nearby.





AUDI'S BEST IS YET TO COME

Another heavyweight EV in the legacy establishment arsenal is the Audi Q6 e-tron, which was unveiled globally in March. Audi's first "born-electric" SUV, the Q6 e-tron gets an all-new, built-from-scratch Premium Platform Electric that allows it to be lighter, with greater range and advanced driver assistance system (ADAS) capabilities, incorporating machine learning and more effective thermal insulation. The Q6 e-tron gets a steering frame directly bolted on the car's subframe, making it more dynamic. Even the battery pack modules are now completely redesigned, featuring only 12 modules, with each containing 15 cylindrical pouches. It's neater, more energy-efficient, and less vulnerable to temperature extremes. The Q6 e-tron also ditches Audi's slightly outdated interiors for a dual-screen, curved panel digital touch-enabled unit along with a heads-up display that projects virtual models of obstructions in real time. Due to arrive in India mid-2025, the Q6 e-tron gets a battery pack no larger than 100kWh and now makes 66 per cent more torque from the same amount of lithium-ion, a massive generational leap for Audi.



BYD SURGES AHEAD

BYD has leaped ahead as the world's largest-selling EV maker, thanks to its total dominance in home country China, presently the world's largest EV market. As a result of its total control over the battery-production process—something Tesla still relies on suppliers for—BYD has surreptitiously risen to the top with predatory pricing that its German and American rivals simply cannot match. BYD knocking on the doors of European markets has left legacy carmakers revising their EV strategy. Mercedes-Benz announced that it would continue making internal combustion engine-powered (ICE) cars well beyond its previously stated 2030 deadline and Audi has promised to introduce a brand new Euro 7-compliant range of ICE and hybrid vehicles by the end of 2026.

& FYI

With full control over the battery supply chain, China—the world's largest EV market—is able to offer some of the best and least-expensive EVs in the world.



MARUTI SUZUKI'S MAIDEN EV GETS DELAYED

One of the country's most anticipated EVs, the upcoming Maruti Suzuki eVX will witness a delay in arrival, owing to complications concerning battery supply and software issues. The carmaker, having been historically reticent about electric vehicles, finally decided to take the plunge last year, announcing a Grand Vitara-based EV expected to be priced around ₹21 lakh-₹25 lakh. Although originally scheduled to arrive in 2024, the launch has now been delayed to at least February 2025.



EASTERN WINDS BLOWING

Tesla may be the most awaited foreign EV maker, but it's far from the only one looking to set up a base in India. VinFast, a Vietnamese EV company, has already started to work on its Indian factory in the port city of Thoothukudi, Tamil Nadu. VinFast is one of many new-age EV brands taking a crack at new energy mobility and has the third-highest EV market capitalization after Tesla and Toyota. Having committed an investment of \$500 million, VinFast could very well bring in imported models like the VF6, VF7, and VF8 to the country, before its India-based plant begins rolling out locally assembled models. Set to tackle the more premium end of the EV market, VinFast's cars are priced around ₹30 lakh and will feature Level 2 ADAS, fast-charging capabilities, massive screens and more.



APPLE PULLS THE PLUG

In a shock move, Apple has decided to permanently pull the plug on its autonomous electric car project. After a decade-long, multi-billion-dollar offensive to rival Tesla, the brand has decided to kill Project Titan, channelling its special projects group's efforts to work on artificial intelligence instead. The move comes at a time when electric vehicle sales in the US are at a record low, and the subject of fully autonomous driving is under intense legal scrutiny. For now, generative AI is to be the brand's main focus.

TESLA...ARRIVETH?

While his "will he, won't he?" routine continues to baffle EV enthusiasts in the country, India has rolled out the red carpet for Elon Musk and Tesla. New policies incentivizing foreign EV makers to manufacture in India would enable them to import up to 8,000 units per year priced \$35,000 (over ₹29 lakh) or more for five years at a reduced import duty of 15 per cent instead of the current 70 per cent. The only requirement? A commitment to an investment of \$500 million in India for local manufacturing. With Chinese brands, including BYD, not eligible for the concessions, the coast is clear for a Tesla takeover. Although Musk postponed his India visit at the last minute back in April, all arrows point towards a massive investment from Tesla, rumoured to be in excess of \$2 billion.



THESE PAGES: AUDI AND BYD: SEAL, COURTESY OF THE BRANDS; TESLA: FACTORY, VINFAST V7 AND BACKGROUND, GETTY IMAGES; VIETNAM MAP AND TRAFFIC SIGNAL, ADOBE PHOTO STOCK IMAGES.



HYBRIDS RESURGENT

With EV sales shrinking in top markets like the United States, hybrids are making a major comeback, even in India where the policy framework towards hybrids is yet to prove amenable.

MORE HYBRIDS IN THE OFFING

With an official proposal to lower the GST bracket on hybrid vehicles—from 28 per cent to 12 per cent—doing the rounds, more hybrids are making their way to India in light of EV sales slowing down. On the budget end of the spectrum are cars like the upcoming Maruti Suzuki Swift Hybrid, while the Toyota Land Cruiser Prado and Lamborghini Urus SE are on the performance end. At present, hybrids attract the same GST as a regular petrol or diesel model, which is a shame, because they have a much smaller carbon footprint, do not use outrageously large batteries (which require excessive mining), and aren't accompanied by range anxiety.

LEXUS LM 350H

Is there anything more luxurious than having an aircraft lounge for a mode of road-based conveyance? Yes, and it's called the Lexus LM 350h, which takes the sybaritic delights offered by the already luxurious Toyota Vellfire and dials it up by a factor of 10. The LM 350h, although powered by the same 2.5-litre turbo-petrol hybrid as the Vellfire, comes in an optional four-seater set-up and features a 48-inch display for rear passengers, vanity mirrors, fold-out trays, massaging seats, and a refrigerator. It also gets a new infrared matrix sensor constantly monitoring the temperature of the face, chest, and thighs of the rear occupants and uses that data to automatically set the cabin temperature to optimal levels. Why fly private if you can go anywhere in absolute luxury and lower your carbon footprint?



AI TAKEOVER

Autonomous driving is still a pipe dream as far as most parts of the world are concerned. However, the race to develop a fully autonomous vehicle is gathering steam. Earlier this year, Mercedes-Benz became the first car brand in the US to receive certification for Level 3 autonomous driving, beating Tesla in its own game. Tesla, which has been under legal scrutiny in the US over its full self-driving (FSD) system, liability, and data security, has turned its attention to China instead. Musk made an unplanned visit to Beijing on 28 April, clearing hurdles pertaining to data security in China and seeking to transfer real-time FSD data collected in China back to home base. Level 3 autonomous driving allows the driver to engage in non-driving tasks while still being required to stay in the driver's seat and ready to take control of the vehicle at any moment. FSD, however, seeks to develop ADAS to a level that requires no human intervention.



NEW BATTERY CHEMISTRIES

When it comes to batteries, be it for consumer electronics or EVs, the most persistent bugbear appears to be the need for frequent recharging, on a personal level, and excessive mining of lithium and cobalt, on a global one. Breakthroughs in new battery technology, however, paint a hopeful image. Both solid-state batteries and lithium-sulphur batteries promise higher energy density, faster charging rates, and a significantly reduced risk of thermal runaway, AKA spontaneous combustion. With solid-state batteries set to debut internationally by 2025, the world is likely to see a long-term easing of supply chain woes and reduced dependence on vast quantities of lithium and cobalt, with smaller batteries offering greater range.



A HYDROGEN-POWERED CONTINGENCY PLAN

In the present-day automotive landscape, EVs outnumber hydrogen-powered vehicles by a huge margin, but certain brands are continuing to actively work on hydrogen fuel cell EVs (FCEVs). This includes Toyota, Honda, Hyundai, Land Rover, and Mercedes-Benz, who are keeping the lights on in the FCEV corner of the R&D section. At present, prohibitive costs of producing renewable hydrogen and the energy density of lithium-ion batteries have stymied the growth of the FCEV space. However, quick refuelling, longer ranges, and the renewability of hydrogen all collectively point to a future where hydrogen is the most sustainable form of e-fuel—and FCEVs, the norm.

BMW XM

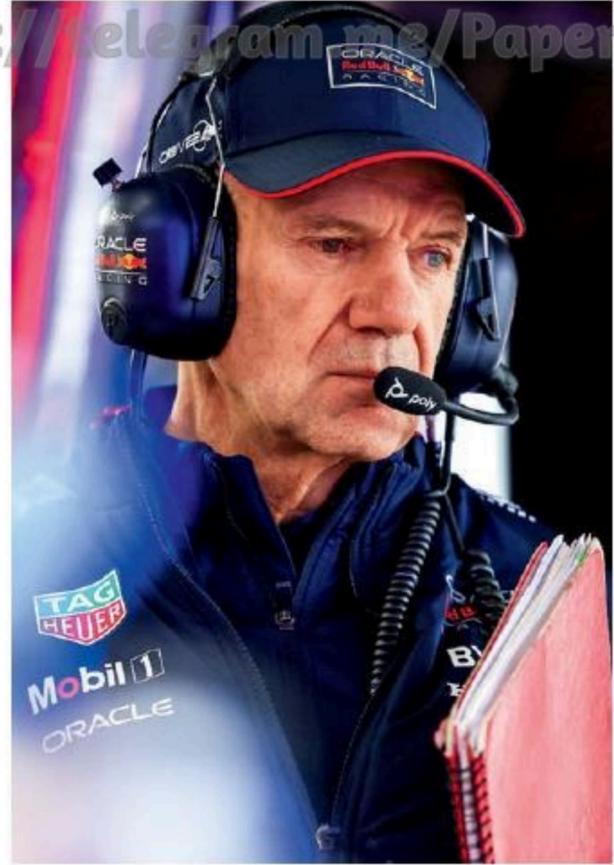
With its larger-than-life grille, tank-like build, and go-anywhere capabilities, there's no denying the XM's appeal. Said appeal is further enhanced by the fact that this otherworldly SUV, which sits atop the BMW SUV pyramid, combines prehistoric V8 power with plug-in hybrid technology. Built from scratch by BMW's in-house M division, the XM reimagines what peak sustainable luxury would look like in SUV form. The result is a massive three-tonne, 4.4-litre-V8-packing SUV that delivers a claimed fuel economy of an impossible-to-fathom 61 kilometres per litre. Thanks, in part, to the presence of a 25.7kWh lithium-ion battery—which can be charged on the go, or via an AC charger—allowing you to coast on electric power alone, albeit for a very short distance. The XM works best when the electric motor and the engine are working in tandem to produce 487bhp and 650Nm of torque. The new poster car for hybrid mobility in India? Perhaps. Is there any other way to see it?

& FYI

In the US, Toyota and Honda are witnessing record hybrid sales.



THESE PAGES: BMW XM AND LEXUS LM350MH. COURTESY OF THE BRANDS. ICONS: GETTY IMAGES.



READY, SET, GO! F1 TO SEE SEISMIC SHIFT NEXT SEASON

SHOCK WAVES IN F1

Unless you've been fixing the undercarriage of a 1960s-era British sportster all this time, you may have noticed that the world of Formula 1 is undergoing a tectonic shift. Seven-time world champion Lewis Hamilton announced his move to Scuderia Ferrari next year, weeks prior to the 2024 season's inaugural race, leaving mouths agape. Ending what has been one of the most successful alliances in the world of F1, the 39-year-old Brit is ditching Mercedes-AMG's languishing silver arrow for the upcoming SF-25 as he enters what looks like his final stint in F1. The move, having delighted many Ferrari and Hamilton fans, also leaves the future of one Carlos Sainz Jr in the lurch. Sainz, for his part—having bagged a win at the Australian GP—intends to go out in style. With Red Bull, Mercedes, Stake F1, Alpine, and Williams all having a spot open next year, a top talent like Sainz has plenty of options.

RED FLAGS FOR RED BULL

Controversies surrounding team principal Christian Horner have fomented plenty of unrest in the Red Bull garage, resulting in the shocking departure of the team's chief technical officer Adrian Newey (pictured). One of the most revered figures in F1 history, Newey's Midas touch and technical genius turned a once fledgling team into one of the most successful in F1, with Newey's cars having won the Milton Keynes-based team six constructors' championships. While rumours are swirling that Newey's heading to Scuderia Ferrari, his genius remains in high demand across the paddock for obvious reasons. No matter where he goes, it's apparent that Red Bull's dominance on the F1 circuits may well be a thing of the past.





A WHOLE LOT OF RACES

Liberty Media is ensuring that every member of every team truly earns their paycheque, having added a whopping 24 races to the calendar this year. Many experts and racers, including reigning world champion Max Verstappen, have commented that a 24-race calendar is simply not sustainable. With three venues in the US at places like Miami and Las Vegas, new venues in the Middle East, and returning classics in Europe, there's plenty of bang for the buck for those subscribing to F1 TV. For the racers, however, especially those at the back of the grid, it's a laborious grind—one that all racers feel could devalue the sport, especially at a time when global viewership is in decline.

BHARAT GP RETURNS?

Despite the last-minute visa snafu, India's maiden MotoGP race went off relatively smoothly, with Dorna Sports adding the Buddh International Circuit to this year's MotoGP calendar as well. Except now the 2024 Bharat GP stands cancelled. At least until March 2025, when it is set to return. Better weather conditions and a new airport coming up in Jewar, UP, point to a better crowd turnout, which in turn means more GP races in India.

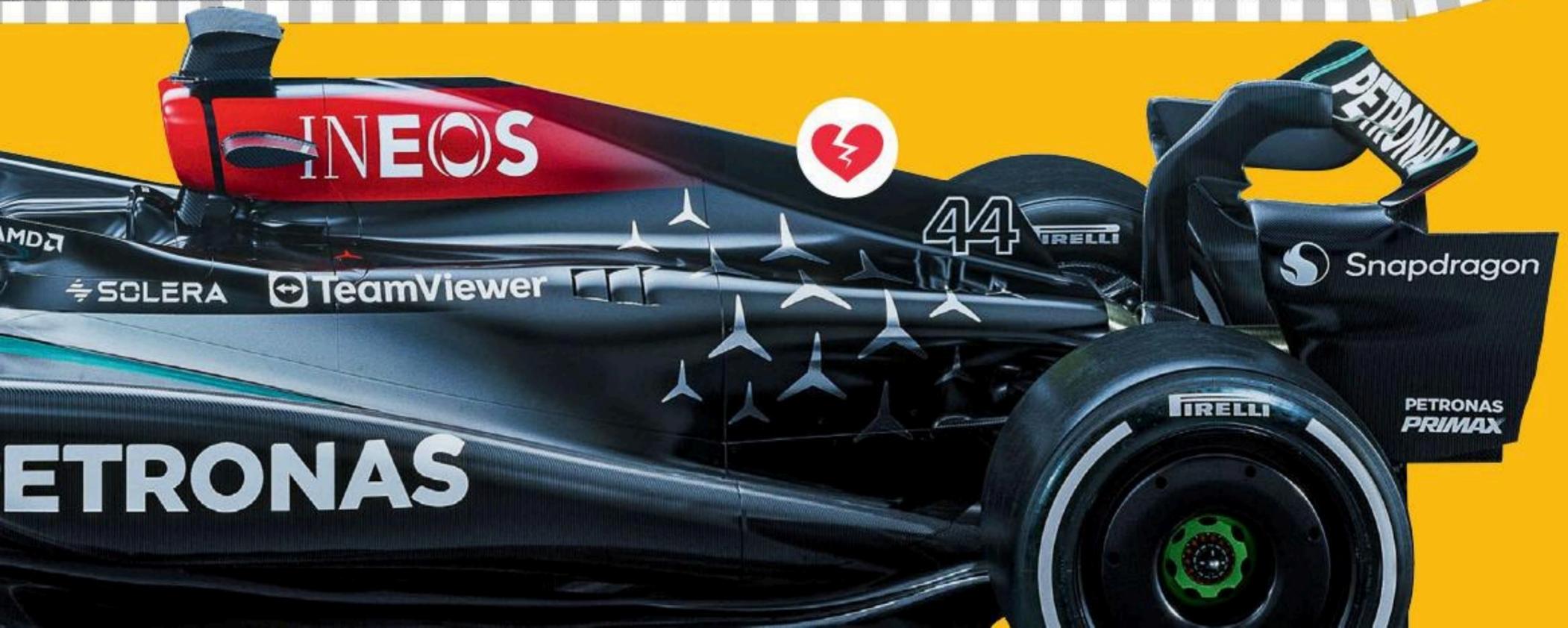


THESE PAGES: MERCEDES-AMG F1 CAR COURTESY OF THE BRAND; BEST QUALITY IMAGES



MOVING UP

The year 2023 may have been a lacklustre one for Formula 2 racer Kush Maini, who made the switch from Campos Racing to Invicta Racing in 2024, but the 23-year-old Indian has managed to crack the top five in the constructors' standings by April this year. All that while also being signed on as a development driver for BWT Alpine F1. Testing a Formula 1 car brings Maini closer to his dream of securing an F1 seat, although it would take considerably more podium finishes in this year's F2 season to turn that into a reality.





The Rise of Flavoured Whisky



By carrying dominant traces of ingredients like honey, citrus, apple, cinnamon, cherry and vanilla, these blends smoothen the usquebaugh's bite. By SANJANA RAY

THERE WAS A time when the idea of whisky in the flavour of honey, cinnamon, apple or peanut butter would have made a purist cringe. In fact, a push back against flavoured whiskies—deemed a “fad” by traditionalists—was the norm up until the 2020s, when, post pandemic, the demand for new and experimental spirits accelerated.

It's simple, really. Cooped up at home, courtesy of a worldwide lockdown, consumers had to play mixologist themselves. With the internet at their disposal, these individuals upped their drinking game, from taking their single malts neat to whipping up an assortment of sweet cocktails: Rob Roys, mint juleps, sweet Manhattans and hot toddies. By the time the world reopened and bars started filling up again, a new trend had set firmly in place: a preference for fruitier and flavoured beverages. For the whisky industry in particular, the change proved monumental.

A recent study by Custom Market Insights estimates that the global flavoured whisky market will reach an approximate \$105 billion by 2032, at a CAGR of 6.2 per cent between 2023 and 2032. This is after the 14.6 per cent jump it witnessed in the years between 2021 and 2023. The lucrative nature of this niche category didn't escape notice, with American and Canadian whiskies having long jumped on board and even the more venerable Irish and Scotch brands throwing their hat in the ring. The release and subsequent success of Jameson Cold Brew and Ballantine's Brasil, for instance, strengthened their resolve to experiment.

There's cultural significance to the rise of flavoured whiskies across the world. Traditionally, whisky was seen appealing to individuals who favoured a drink with a fiery sting. A spirit designed for an evolved palette. The flavoured dram, however, recognizes that the idea of masculinity itself is fast evolving. By carrying dominant traces of pleasing ingredients like honey, citrus, apple, cinnamon, cherry and vanilla, these blends take the bite out of the usquebaugh and make it more appealing, and accessible, to a diverse range of consumers.

Who are these consumers? It's a mixed bag of first-time whisky drinkers and those seeking out a new experience. The former group is primarily composed of a younger generation, most of whom belong to Gen Z. They already drink 20 per cent less than millennials, but when they do, they opt for



beverages with light and fruity flavours. The target base veers more towards tipplers with an affinity for cocktails and shots, over collectors and connoisseurs who prefer to sip and savour the raw texture of the liquor. As for the more flexible seasoned drinkers, the desire to experiment with flavoured variants is born out of curiosity.

Flavoured whiskies are also designed as an “in between” drink for fans of other spirits wishing to embark on their whisky journey. “Flavoured whiskies are transitional in nature—somewhere between a vodka and a smoky, spicy or peated dram,” says Yangdup Lama, entrepreneur, author and mixologist, who cofounded Delhi's Sidecar, judged India's best bar of 2024.

In India, the trend of flavoured whiskies shot up last year, with popular brands like Jack Daniel's Tennessee Honey and Fireball Cinnamon Whisky lining the walls in upscale bars and local wine stores in metropolitan cities. A representative at Seasons Wines, a retailer in Mumbai's upscale Versova neighbourhood confirms selling about 20 to 30 bottles of flavoured whiskies in a single day.

Rohan Jelkie, brand advocacy head at Suntory Global Spirits, says that the introduction of the Jim Beam Orange and Honey variants in India in 2023 marked a significant milestone for the company, allowing them to expand their target base of bourbon enthusiasts. “The curiosity around flavoured whiskies and a growing taste for unique blends are driving prominence, which will continue to grow when we look at the future of spirits,” he says.

Despite having its global moment, Indian brands are yet to jump on the trend of flavoured whiskies. Home-grown single malts like Indri, Rampur and Godawan have been on a winning streak, bagging awards at reputed international competitions, but are yet to produce (strictly) flavoured iterations of their famous whiskies. Considering there's a growing consumer base for these expressions, they would do well to capitalize on the rising demand, at a time when even the conservative (in whisky) Scots have a foot in the door.

Until then, the handful of bottles available in the market—which include limited editions like Glenmorangie's A Tale of Cake—remain unchallenged and the picks of the season. ❖

Going for Gold

Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Chirag Shetty—or Sat-Chi as they’re better known—have had three successful years, winning badminton titles along the way, and breaking records and dry spells for the country. Now, they’re heading into the 2024 Olympics with the enthusiasm, energy, and experience it takes to bring home the gold.

By ARUN JANARDHAN

PHOTOGRAPH BY MANASI SAWANT
STYLED BY OJAS KOLVANKAR

On Chirag and Satwik: Blazer, shirt, trousers, and tie by **SDS by Kushal Shah**. Shoes by **Aldo**. Wristwatch, belt, socks, stylist’s own.

HIRAG TALKS OFF-COURT,
I talk only on-court.”

C

Followed by laughter.

This is the first time Satwiksairaj Rankireddy has spoken since the interview began. His silence might suggest that the 23-year-old, with a boyish smile and monstrous smashes, is shy. But the response comes quickly and spontaneously, proving the opposite is, in fact, true. The boy from Amalapuram, Andhra Pradesh, sometimes lets the older partner, Mumbai's Chirag Shetty, take the lead. One listens quietly while the other speaks, but on court, they're expressive. They're not really fire and ice, but more of a blazing flame versus a simmer. The Will Smith to the Martin Lawrence—if you are a *Bad Boys* fan. The shirt-ripper versus the dancer—actually, make that dancers.

The duo is also among the top doubles teams in men's badminton—recently ranked number one—winner of multiple titles, and one of India's hottest prospects for a medal at the Paris Olympics this year. Rankireddy and Shetty are in-your-face, fearless, explosive, and have given the genteel sport of badminton—made famous by the monk-like Prakash Padukone and the spiritual Pullela Gopichand—a bit of a shake-up.

The last two years have seen their ascension accelerated, from being steady performers internationally to world-beaters. There were three titles in 2022 and a Thomas Cup team triumph, the country's first in 70-plus years of the competition, catalysed by the duo's energetic performances. This was followed by three more titles last year, as well as a first-ever badminton gold medal in the Asian Games and the first medal for India after 58 years at the Badminton Asia Championships.

This year has begun with two finals and a French Open title, their second after 2022, played at the same venue as the upcoming Olympic Games. The affinity for Paris is one of the reasons why the duo is a medal contender.

“Paris has always been good for us,” says Rankireddy, when he finally does talk. “The Olympics is going to be completely different, really fun, and exciting for us. A lot of people are expecting a lot...but we want to go there, be with the team, meet new athletes and experience it all.

“And give our 100 per cent, of course,” he adds quickly. “I mean, more than 100 per cent. The last time (Tokyo 2020, where they got eliminated in the group stage), we played our first Olympics, we didn't have much experience playing on the bigger stage. But I think we have it now.”

The bigger stage does not really shake Rankireddy-Shetty, whose attitude

on court now has more swagger than stagger. Gopichand, whose centre they train at in Hyderabad, says the current crop of players is representative of how young Indians are generally fearless, not intimidated abroad, and wholly confident in their abilities.

“We get the feeling we can do it,” adds the 26-year-old Shetty. “I mean, if we've won titles in so many places across the world, we should be able to win anywhere, right? We now have that confidence.

“It's how we handle the pressure, how we play on our bad days... Everybody wins on their good days. It's how you overcome your bad days and win those scratchy matches; that's what stands out for us.”

The Thomas Cup team event was a pivotal landmark for the duo in 2022. In a post-pandemic world, India won a competition that it has always historically struggled in, by all accounts due to the lack of a steady doubles combination.

The win changed the way Indians are perceived in international competitions—as many players, including HS Prannoy and K Srikanth, have said—earning them more respect. For Shetty, the event also gave birth to the very football-esque, and rather un-badminton-like, celebration of ripping his shirt off.

What started on a whim is now a routine. “Routine, that's a good one,” he says, chuckling. “I was in a different zone altogether at the Thomas Cup and it came... it was quite abrupt. I never really planned it. I was so charged up that I had to take something off. Luckily, it was just my T-shirt. From then on, it became a ritual every time I won a match or tournament.”

Did he do it for the *GQ* shoot as well? “They would have sold a few more copies if they had asked me to do that,” Shetty jokes.

Sometimes there is also a celebratory dance. “Gangnam Style” at the Korean Open or an attempt at “Naatu Naatu”, the Oscar-winning track. Music and dance played a significant role in how the India

“Everybody wins on their good days. It's how you overcome your bad days and win those scratchy matches; that's what stands out for us.”

—CHIRAG SHETTY



The last two years have seen their ascension accelerated, from being steady performers internationally to world-beaters.

squad at the Thomas Cup bonded—it continues to be a common thread between the two. Shetty with his Hindi or English songs, old or new depending on his mood; Rankireddy with Hindi or Telugu ones, largely the latter, enjoying softer melodies and not “*josh*” songs, he clarifies.

Before they practise more celebratory moves, they still have more wins to rack up. Big titles like the All England Open Badminton Championships and BWF World Championships have eluded them. Paris will provide some answers between 27 July and 5 August—nothing checks the success box like an Olympic medal.

They continue to work on their defensive game, which has required improvement, since both are naturally attacking players; last year, Rankireddy struck a record-breaking hit by a male player at a speed of 565 kilometres per hour. Danish coach Mathias Boe, who has been instrumental in transforming the two, gets credit for knocking them back into sync whenever they are discordant on court.

One thing they don't need help with is communication. Shetty understands Telugu now, while conversation on court is mostly in Hindi to keep their opponents in the dark. They've been playing together for six long years; they don't really have to say much to each other to be understood.

They also understand why Satwiksairaj Rankireddy-Chirag Shetty had to be shortened to Sat-Chi.

“Initially, I didn't like it, but I think people are used to it now, so we can't really object,” concedes Rankireddy.

“For the longest time, they used multiple names. Finally, they've settled on Sat-Chi,” adds Shetty.

“It has a nice ring to it.”

“Yeah, it's fine. Sat-Chi is fine.” ❦

CORE

INTEREST

In a GQ exclusive, three transgender men talk about their relationship with fitness.

BY SALONI DHRUV
PHOTOGRAPHS BY HUNAR DAGA
STYLED BY OJAS KOLVANKAR



Human anatomy acts as a powerful canvas for self-exploration and resilience, particularly for transgender men. In this photo essay, we delve into the lives of three individuals who reveal the transformative influence of fitness and exercise in their quest to affirm their identity.

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THIS PAGE

TOP
Tank top
Zara
Shorts
LineOutLine
Trainers
Christian Louboutin

ABOVE AND RIGHT
Sneakers
Christian Louboutin
Shorts
his own

OPPOSITE PAGE
Tank top
Zara
Track pants
Adidas Originals

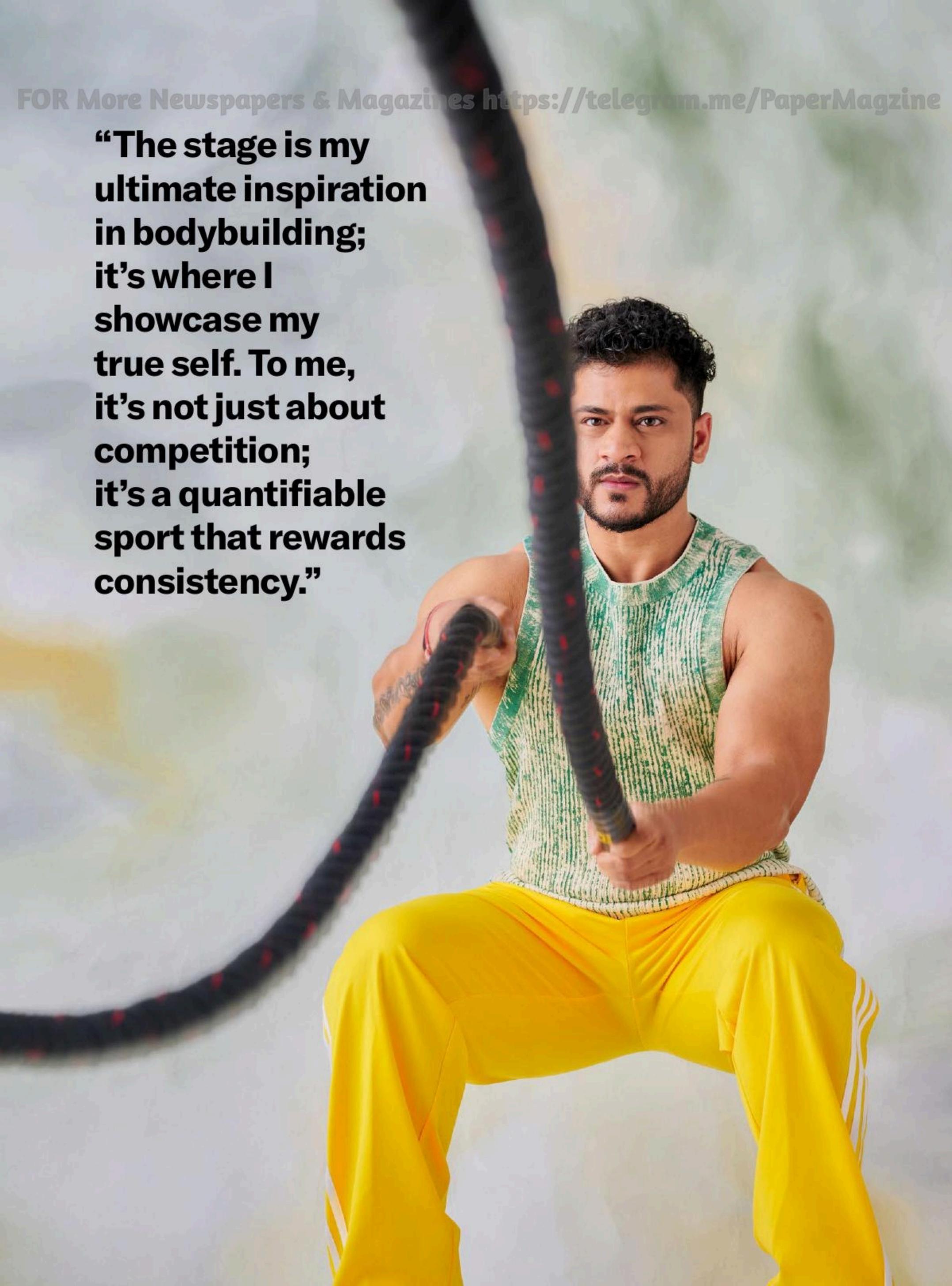
ARYAN PASHA, 32

BODYBUILDER AND ACTIVIST

In 2018, Aryan Pasha made history by becoming India's first transgender man to win a prize at Musclemania India, a significant achievement in the world of bodybuilding. The 32-year-old, who has dedicated a decade to sculpting his physique, secured the runner-up spot in the Men's Physique (short) category. "Working out has made me feel much more confident in my own body. The time I spend in the gym is only for myself, it's my therapy," shares Pasha. The Delhi-based athlete maintains a demanding workout routine that is intensive, committing to daily gym visits with rigorous weight training five days a week besides daily cardio sessions. "The stage is my ultimate inspiration in bodybuilding; it's where I showcase my true self. To me, it's not just about competition; it's a quantifiable sport that rewards consistency," he affirms. Bodybuilding transcends mere profession for Pasha, serving as an extension of his activism. His aim is to foster better understanding between the transgender community and society at large, and address prevalent myths surrounding the LGBTQ+ community. "When you're in the thick of it, your appearance becomes irrelevant. It's your actions that count; everyone deserves equal opportunities regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity."

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“The stage is my ultimate inspiration in bodybuilding; it’s where I showcase my true self. To me, it’s not just about competition; it’s a quantifiable sport that rewards consistency.”



THESE PAGES

Trousers and
waist belt

LineOutLine

Sneakers

Onitsuka Tiger

OPENING PAGES

Tank top

Shivan & Narresh

LUCKY NEOG, 28

**DOCUMENTARY FILMMAKER AND
FILM PRODUCER**

Six years into his hormonal transition journey, Lucky Neog wants to ensure that his body evolves beyond mere aesthetics. "I'm not fixated on attaining abs. My fitness aspiration is to engage in activities without feeling breathless," says the New Delhi-based filmmaker. Starting with home workouts tailored to his body weight, Neog gradually incorporated walking and running into his routine. He prefers exercises that rely on intuitive body movements over weightlifting. "Exercising with a binder was incredibly challenging. Looking back, I marvel at how I managed to breathe during those workouts," he shares, recalling moments of discomfort while covering his chest with a jacket during gym workouts. Although he's content with his current physique—defined and confident—he acknowledges days when self-doubt creeps in. Neog now approaches his fitness journey with mindfulness, prioritizing his health and mental wellbeing. The 28-year-old aims to inspire transgender men who turn to fitness after their operations by advocating for self-love and patience instead of pushing to extremes. "It's about progress, not perfection. After all, what is perfection?"



“Exercising with a binder was incredibly challenging. Looking back, I marvel at how I managed to breathe during those workouts.”





NAKSHATRA RAJPUT, 26

ASSOCIATE, SUPPLY CHAIN MANAGEMENT

For Nakshatra Rajput, hitting the gym is more than just physical exercise—it's a journey of self-discovery. "I've learned a lot about myself, from discipline to consistency," says the 26-year-old. "It's pushed me to test my own limits without the fear of failure." Rajput challenges the stereotype that bodybuilding is solely about showcasing muscle mass. "The misconception is that it's all about getting big and showing off," he says firmly. His own experience validates his belief; he can lift double his body weight, and even earned a gold medal in a state-level powerlifting competition last year in Delhi. Rajput is most inspired by his father, a former wrestler, and views Aryan Pasha as a trailblazer for transgender representation in bodybuilding. Looking ahead, he plans to intensify his training regimen to prepare for competitive opportunities. This means hitting the gym six days a week, targeting different muscle groups each session. Despite the punishing gym schedule, he manages to squeeze in outdoor activities, like running and cricket, as a part of his workout routine.



THIS PAGE
ABOVE
Shorts
Adidas

ABOVE LEFT
Track pants
His own

OPPOSITE PAGE
Tank top
Adidas
Socks
Stylist's own

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**“I’ve learned a lot about myself,
from discipline to consistency.
It’s pushed me to test my own limits
without the fear of failure.”**

REDEMPTION SONG

FRANCIS NEWTON SOUZA

He was condemned, celebrated and copied. Exploring the life and legacy of India's most controversial artist a century after his birth.

BY VIVEK MENEZES



Souza in studio. *Opposite page:* Souza's grandson Solomon, an acclaimed muralist, painted this portrait of the great artist for this special GQ India story on the last piece of canvas he inherited from his grandfather.

ON 12 APRIL, exactly one hundred years from the day he was born in his mother's family home in the tiny North Goa village of Saligao, in what was then still the Estado da Índia of Portugal, an unlikely spontaneous gathering of relatives, friends, and fans of the late great Francis Newton Souza gathered in the 90-year-old Saligao Institute clubhouse. It was an unexpectedly joyous event, replete with laughter and music, and a wonderful cake decorated by Keren Souza-Kohn and Solomon Souza, the artist's daughter and grandson—gifted artists themselves—who had flown in from Jerusalem because “how could we miss out being here today?” Libia “Libby” Lobo Sardesai—the renowned anti-colonial freedom fighter who grew up with Souza at Crawford Market in Mumbai, and herself turned 100 in May—was a lively, luminous presence, as was Dayanita Singh, who has achieved greater international renown than any other living Indian artist, and has her own deep-rooted creative connection with Saligao. I was there, too, to honour my friend and mentor from New York in the 1990s—we had bonded deep across our age differences—and couldn't help but marvel at the contrast with Souza's funeral at Sewri in 2002, where he was laid to rest without any family present, amidst a handful of hangers-on the artist had conspicuously loathed.

That terrible ending to an outstanding life in art is why the palpable sincerity in the Saligao Institute came across as pure relief, like a weight lifted off my shoulders. In thinking about this unexpected feeling, I realized it was because this was the first time in many years that I was hearing Souza being spoken about in a manner that did not feel fraudulent or exploitative, or focused solely on big money and new auction records. It was certainly true



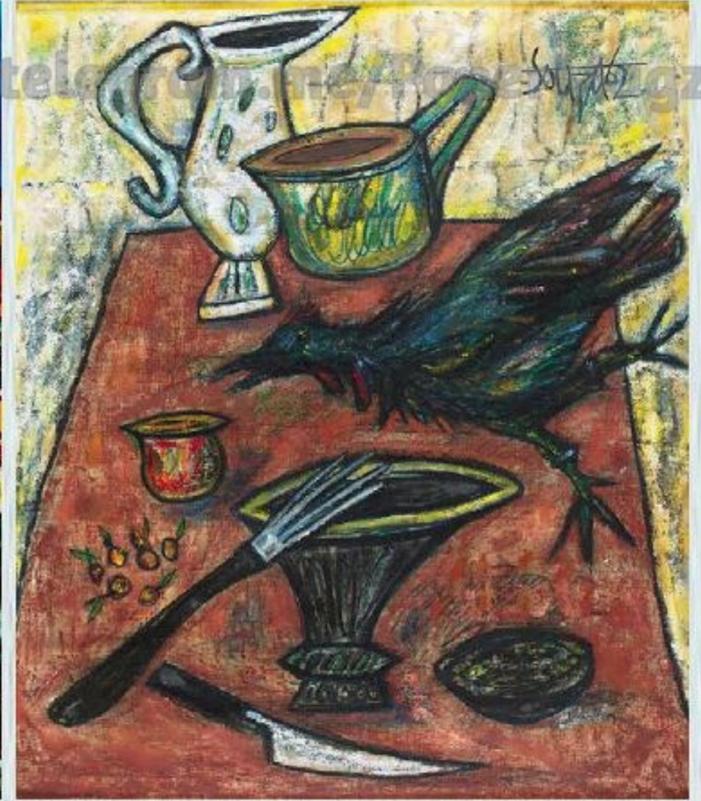
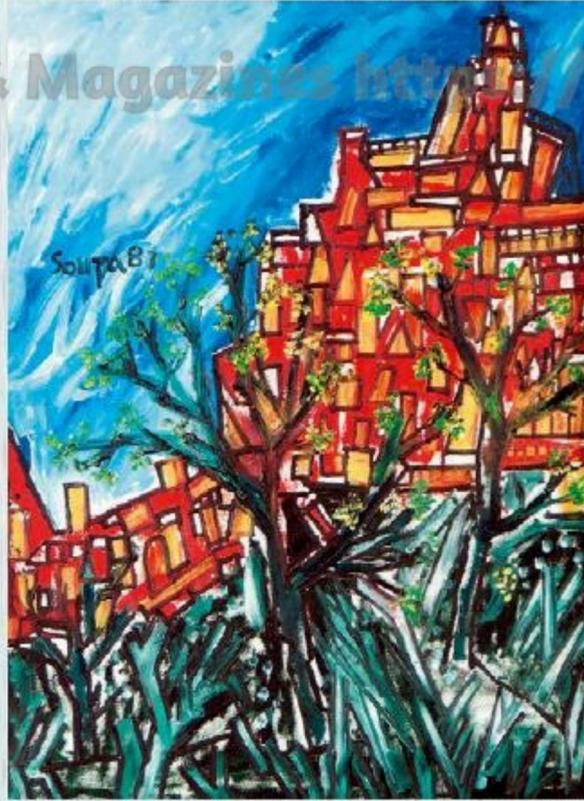
Solomon 24

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Souza 56



This page: Untitled, oil on paper, 1956, F.N. Souza. Opposite page, left: Untitled (Seated on a Blue Armchair), oil on fabric/pasted on canvas, 1962, F.N. Souza. Opposite page, right: A Still Life of Kitchen Implements and a Chicken on a Table, 1962, F.N. Souza.



Looking back across the expanse of an entire century, it is clear that Souza was a genuine savant, seemingly born with an impactful line, possessed with the uncanny power to affect, attract or repulse people with his art.

that all around us, in his home state and other locations, there were centenary commemorations in the depressingly familiar pattern of mainstreaming fakes for a marketplace that doesn't know the difference. But here, just metres away from the old house where he first drew breath, there was a genuine flicker of hope that Souza's legacy was finally being adequately addressed.

"I was born in Goa in 1924," wrote Souza in *Words & Lines*, the slender, singular, and impactful manifesto of drawings and essays published by Villiers in London in 1959. "My grandmother and grandfather were both chronic drunkards [but] my father, as a reaction to their bibulousness, never touched any other liquid but water. He became a chronic teetotaler. On his wedding day the toast wine was poured over his head, since he would not drink it. But it is said that the progeny of bibulous progenitors are highly imaginative people. By atavism, it seems, the visions of a tipsy grandfather, pink elephants and the rest of the menagerie are transferred to the grandchildren, who see similar visions without being tipsy. You've only to see my paintings to know whether this is right or wrong."

Looking back across the expanse of an entire century, it is clear that Souza was a genuine savant, seemingly born with an impactful line, possessed with the uncanny power to affect, attract or repulse people with his art. But the circumstances of his birth in a tiny Indian village in the 1920s were decidedly unpromising, and those initial prospects grew even worse when his father died when the artist-to-be was still in infancy: "My mother, only twenty-three at the time, became a widow, with two kiddies and debts and mortgages. In the following year, my sister died too. My mother, my aunts, my grandmother and all my relatives mourned bitterly, saying God should have taken away the boy and left the girl: she was so beautiful, so intelligent for her age, so loving. As for me, I was a rickety child with a running nose and running ears, and scared of every adult and every other child. Better had I died. Would have saved me a lot of trouble. I would not have

had to bear an artist's tormented soul, create art in a country that despises her artists and is ignorant about her heritage."

Those lines ring true even today, despite the soaring prices of his paintings—earlier this year, Souza's *The Lovers* (1960) was auctioned for just under \$5 million at Christie's in New York—because scholarship and proper understanding has never kept up with those ever-bigger valuations. The prices keep going up, but not respect. Fake paintings have flooded the marketplace in a pattern that was already evident towards the end of the artist's life at the turn of the new millennium—immediately after the first overseas auctions boosted prices to mere thousands of dollars—and the incipient fraudulence made him absolutely furious. In his seething 1997 open letter addressed to *Art India* magazine, Souza wrote: "There are people who will knowingly buy the fakes, because they are cheaper than the originals, and put them up on their walls. And the 'cocktail party' guests are impressed by the 'art collection' of the works of 'famous modern Indian painters'! Status symbols indeed! How will the gullible guests guess that the 'paintings' are all fakes put up there by their nouveau riche hosts in order to boast about their art acquisition? And such persons who actually buy cheap fakes are against exposing the dealers who sell them. Get it? Art is a world of beauty and a lot of garbage goes with it. The garbage has to be carted off and dumped. Or else it is going to stink!"

I WAS LUCKY to get to know Souza in the 1990s in New York City, in what really does seem like another era altogether. The hoopla we now associate with India's art marketplace was non-existent, although Sotheby's had begun to include a few modern paintings in its annual sales of Islamic and Indian art. Even then, the highest prices rarely went beyond \$10,000 (around ₹8,35,000), while "The Progressives", now hyped by the art marketplace, continued to live in decidedly penurious circumstances. It's almost impossible to for most people to comprehend now, but at that time, Gaitonde,

Raza and Tyeb Mehta paintings were valued less than a scooter or motorcycle, and many other “more respectable” artists—Anjolie Ela Menon comes to mind—commanded far higher prices from the tiny base of Indian collectors in a handful of cities.

Although still in my early 20s, I became interested while on assignment in Mumbai for commandant Jacques-Yves Cousteau, the legendary French oceanographer and filmmaker, who was my first employer. Like most Indians of my background, I had grown up knowing very little about modern and contemporary art from my own country, but then came an opportunity to learn all about the great artists of the West by assiduously tramping through museums across the United States and Europe. I still recall the shock—and distinct shame at my ignorance—when I saw Ram Kumar’s abstract landscapes on display at Pundole Art Gallery in Flora Fountain in Mumbai in 1994. It was a dumbfounding experience: I was blown away to realize there were Indian artists who had produced masterpieces every bit as wonderful and important as those at the Museum of Modern Art in New York and the Musée d’Orsay in Paris. What’s more, their prices remained so low that even an essentially unschooled 20-something chump like myself could acquire them. That is when I immediately started reading up about the Progressive Artists’ Group, and learned about the so-called “enfant terrible” Francis Newton Souza.

We are collectively piecing together the puzzle only now, but it has been evident for some time that one of the most unlikely success stories in art history, anywhere in the world, was written by a band of misfits during and after the Second World War in pre-independence Bombay. In those years of foment and free-for-all, many of the restless young artists of the city were galvanized by the presence of Jewish refugees from Germany and Austria, who offered respite from the relentlessly colonial art education on offer at the Sir JJ School of Art. Rudi von Leyden, Walter Langhammer, and Emmanuel Schlesinger encouraged disruptive modernist experimentation—precisely what has become so prized at 21st-century auctions—even while the public never quite caught on. This cohort of working-class strivers would embark on an unending, no-holds-barred assault on middle-class and middlebrow sensibilities.

Looking back, some years later, Souza wrote: “I had begun to notice that the JJ School of Art turned out an awful number of bad artists year after year, and the Bombay Art Society showed awful crap in its Annual Exhibitions, which comprised the amateur efforts of some *memsahibs* in India who were pampered by British imperialism. Hence their pretty-pretty paintings together with the work of several artists coming out of the art school had no directions, no goal, no inspiration, no energy—regardless of the style or method they chose to work in. It then occurred to me to form a group to give ourselves an incentive. Ganging up in a collective ego is stronger than a single ego. It is easier for a mob to carry out a lynching; and in this case, we found it necessary to lynch the kind of art inculcated by the JJ School of Art and exhibited at the Bombay Art Society.”

Examine the very first photographs of the now-famous modernist artists the young Goan assembled around him at the cusp of India’s independence in 1947, and it is almost funny to compare this unprepossessing bunch of decidedly subaltern mavericks—Husain was painting signboards, Ara was a houseboy, Souza never graduated high school or college—to the bombastic rhetoric of their statement of purpose: “Today we paint with absolute freedom for content and techniques almost anarchic; save that we are governed by one or two sound elemental and eternal laws, of aesthetic order, plastic coordination and colour composition. We have no pretensions of making vapid revivals of any school or movement in art. We have studied the various schools of painting and sculpture to arrive at a vigorous synthesis.”

To talk like this—and to attack the reigning gurus of Indian modernism of the times in the “Bengal School” as Souza often did—was truly courageous, and the record shows these brash cohorts suffered for their bravado. In her excellent 2011 book *The Making of Modern Indian Art: The Progressives*, art historian Yashodhara Dalmia recalls: “That modernism itself, with its alienness and ‘ugliness,’ was viewed with suspicion even by the educated middle class is quite evident”. She quotes Husain: “Some of the professors at the JJ School of Art used to tell the students, ‘Don’t mix with these fellows. They are destroying Indian art. Behind them are three foreigners and they are destroying everything.’” And senior artist Madhav Satwalekar: “I certainly would welcome progress. But the present turn does not strike me as progress. I would even call it degradation. An artist cannot be happy when he paints like the primitives and the cave man. He should not ridicule civilization. He must be its most shining and brilliant light, to inspire, to uplift, to lead to a better world.”

In the wake of the independence movement, those kinds of vapid social realist aesthetics and ideals gained purchase, with Souza and his Progressives treated as aberrant or even un-Indian. They became increasingly restive, as Raza recalled many years later: “What we had in common besides our youth and lack of means was that we hoped for a better understanding of art. We had a sense of searching and we fought the material world. There was at our meetings and discussions a great fraternal feeling, a certain warmth and lively exchange of ideas. We criticized each other’s work as surely as we eulogized about it. This was a time when there was no modern art in our country and a period of artistic confusion.” In 1950, he became the first of the group to head to Paris to attend the *École nationale supérieure des Beaux-Arts*, but Souza had already departed for London a few months earlier on the P&O liner *SS Canton*.

“It’s all very well to talk in metaphors about having one’s roots in one’s own country,” mused Souza in 1961, after he had rocketed to fame and something genuinely resembling good fortune in post-war London (albeit frittered away very soon after), “but roots need water from clouds forming over distant seas, and from rivers having sources in different lands.” By now, the survivor from Saligao had unmade and remade his life several times over: After migrating with the help and support of Maria Figueiredo, his first wife, first collector and expert seamstress—who worked tirelessly to keep him supplied with paints and canvases—he left her (and their young daughter) for Liselotte Kohn, an actress from Prague who had barely survived the Holocaust, with whom he built a new life (and had three daughters, including Keren Souza-Kohn) in the famously bohemian London scene where he first became known for “Nirvana of a Maggot”, published in the seminal *Encounter* magazine in 1955 by the poet Stephen Spender, who also bought a painting and showed it to Peter Watson of the Institute of Contemporary Arts.

This was the big break in Souza’s life, because Watson—whose first reaction was, rather typically, “this is not Indian art”—included three of the struggling artist’s works in an exhibition along with the celebrities Francis Bacon, Graham Sutherland and Henry Moore. All sold, which got the attention of the tastemaker Victor Musgrave, and several solo exhibitions at Gallery One followed. It’s interesting to note that criticism and understanding of the artist and his works lagged behind his fame even then, as the great John Berger wrote in *The New Statesman* in 1955: “How much Souza’s pictures derive from Western art and how much from the hieratic temple traditions of his country, I cannot say. Analysis breaks down and intuition takes over. It is obvious that he is a superb designer and an excellent draughtsman. But I find it quite impossible to assess his work comparatively. Because he straddles several traditions but serves none.”

Waves of desis have awakened to the fact their own country has terrific modern art. The Progressives are the real deal, and, very crudely put, Souza is our Picasso.

PRECISELY 40 YEARS after Berger wrote that assessment, I walked into Souza's little walk-up apartment near Lincoln Centre in Manhattan, in an indelible moment of awakening that has never left me. Each wall was lined from top to bottom with his artworks—magnificent canvases and oils on board from the 1950s onwards, and innumerable works on paper that were piled in sheafs atop every available surface. By now, on the trail of the Progressives for roughly three years, I was able to recognize their sheer quality, and it felt distinctly like entering Aladdin's cave. But there was also poignancy and pain in the mix, because the artist was living in near-decrepit chaos, literally waist-deep in hundreds and hundreds of paintings and drawings that only he was convinced were an extraordinary treasure. His meteoric rise in London had been followed by an equally dramatic descent into ignominy and reclusion, after he abandoned his second family and got married for a third time, rather scandalously, to 16-year-old Barbara Zinkant. This was followed by another big move to America, where he was never able to engineer any professional impact and his personal life fell into self-inflicted shambles. Souza went so far out of fashion that his artworks essentially held no value.

What caused this accident of history? How did it happen that museums and collectors lost sight of Souza, and ignored his spectacular oeuvre when it was still available for a relative pittance? Part of the answer may be in the uncompromising paintings themselves, with their raw beauty that makes it impossible to turn away or ignore their searing impact. In 1969, a few weeks after he delivered a lecture on Indian art at The Cooper Union in New York, the artist theorized resentfully: "I have come to the conclusion as to why [my art] has been so neglected is partly that it has offended and still offends the sensibilities of sexually impotent people, and the so-called puritans who have been repelled by the symbolically powerful sexual portent of Indian art in general. The other part of the cause for neglect, I believe, is due to the fact that the variety and quantity of the Art of India is so overwhelming that few scholars have been able to handle the vast and incredible production with the technique of mass media."

My own analysis is somewhat different. To my mind, the artworks of Souza—and also Vasudeo Gaitonde, another Progressive with ancestral roots in North Goa—resist easy categorization and commodification in ways that have confounded Indian collectors since the moment they first emerged after independence. Too "Western" for ostensibly nationalist canon-builders at home, and wrongly classified as "derivative" by the entire herd of critics and curators in the West, they were lost in between commercially viable categories right until the very end of the artists' lives, when Indian art suddenly rocketed to big valuations (albeit still far behind other developing Asian arenas like China and Japan) due



Solomon Souza pays tribute to his heritage through his giant murals of Goan icons across India's smallest state.

to the interest of newly globalized non-resident Indians. In the same exact manner that my eyes were opened 30 years ago, waves of desis have awakened to the fact their own country has terrific modern and contemporary art, and artists to equal anyone fêted in the West. Gathering the wherewithal to ignore the blinkered "nationalist" tastemaking of the usual suspects at home, they have compared like to like, blockbuster painting to blockbuster painting, and come to the obvious conclusion. The Progressives are the real deal, and, very crudely put, Souza is our Picasso.

There is another highly significant parallel phenomenon at work in 2024, which Souza himself would have never been able to predict. Across the decades and despite the complicated family history of abandonment and loss, the artist's daughter, Keren, kept the faith, and only further burnished her filial love and loyalty to his legacy. That singular devotion has borne fruit in the person of her son Solomon, another savant in the Souza lineage. He has made an outsized reputation for himself as a spectacular muralist in Israel, the UK, the US, and also back in Goa, where he starred at the Serendipity Arts Festival in 2019, as part of a group exhibition called *Mundo Goa*, under my curation. The 30-year-old, however, inherited more than just talent: He also got some of his grandfather's old blank canvases, and the stunning portrait accompanying this essay is painted on the last one in his possession. It has taken 100 long years to get here, but it's perfectly clear that art history is finally on the right track. ❧

NEW YORKERS

Great

BRICK

AND

MORTAR

Shopping

REVIVAL

The clothes are glorious. The vibes are immaculate. And the options are endless. We visited five of the city's buzziest shops for a look at the summer's best new threads worn by their stylish staffs, and to find out what's driving the return of NYC street retail.

BY MAX BERLINGER
PHOTOGRAPHS
BY MARIE TOMANOVA



Bode

NEIGHBOURHOOD: Lower East Side

FOUNDED: 2016

OWNED BY: Emily Adams Bode Aujla

BRANDS: All things Bode, including the new Bode Rec. line of sportswear, home, and children's

VIBE: Wes Anderson meets Willa Cather



THERE WAS SOME talk of late, albeit in hushed tones, that New York isn't a great city to shop in—or at least isn't as great as it used to be. That the city's great shopping institutions like Barneys, Jeffrey, Opening Ceremony, and Totokaelo have been bulldozed in favour of chopped salad bars, bank chains, and jumbo-size drug stores. That the pandemic somehow sucked the wind out of the sails of a robust and lively retail scene, and that no boutique can compete with the reigning e-comm titans. But spend an afternoon shopping in New York this summer and you'll discover why this notion is flat-out wrong.

Now, is shopping in New York different today from what it once was, even just two or three years ago? Yes, absolutely. How could it not be? The city is in a constant state of reinvention, like a snake shedding its skin, and the way it shops is in a constant state of flux. Shopping in New York today is less about worshipping at the few great temples of retail, and more like visiting an archipelago of many small islands scattered across the city, each with its own particular language, customs, rhythms, and quirks. Indeed, its own culture. Walk through its front door and you'll be transported into a distinct world.

I thought of this recently as I stopped off at the earth-toned sliver of a shop, Colbo, to speak with Eldar Hadad; my mission was to discuss the store, which she runs with her business partner Tal Silberstein, but it was hard to pin her down as she worked the sales floor and greeted customers who were, as often as not, friends.

Hadad, Silberstein, and their two other cofounders flung open their doors on a bustling stretch of Orchard Street in the Lower East Side in 2021, and it was, almost instantly, a hit. What they sell is by no means revolutionary: The pair offer up a smattering of culty menswear brands—Adish, Kartik Research, Hed Mayner, Satta among them—plus a rack or two of discerningly chosen vintage items, with an emphasis on '90s finds from Dries Van Noten, DKNY, and Armani. But the Colbo experience is way more lively and dynamic than what you'd expect from a typical multi-brand boutique.

"It's hard for me to call it a store," said Silberstein, who has wanted his own shop since he was a child. "For me it's so much more than that, it's my vision of life, it's a creative expression of myself."

The day I dropped in, the space was thrumming: guys huddled, holding roomy trousers or embroidered shirt jackets, outside the two dressing rooms while others queued up for coffee or iced chai doled out by a tattooed barista. A DJ was spinning music in the front, where plain white benches and wood-block stools were crammed with chattering customers. Outside, a chef from Japan was serving warm chicken curry and dal at a makeshift stove top, part of a party for a collaborative capsule collection the store was launching with the brand Ernie Palo, from Tokyo. On the sidewalk in front of the store, a bottleneck of pedestrians was swelling from the skateboard competition that had shut down the adjacent block. The crowds gravitated toward Colbo to see what the fuss was about, lured by the sound of music and the smell of food. The whole thing had an incredibly cosy, neighbourhoody vibe—you were destined to see a friend, or make one. Hadad, wearing all black and with a tangle of thick dark hair, was running back and forth in the shop, stopping to greet friends with a winking, if frazzled, smile or discreetly tucking behind the check-out to enter a discount.

At Colbo—which comes from a Hebrew word that means "a store with everything in it"—events are critical to what Hadad and Silberstein are building. They were a foundational piece of what the two imagined a shop could offer in New York City right now.

"We wanted rotating events, exhibits, pop-ups, stuff like that. To work with people and get their communities involved and turn them into our community," Silberstein said. "To sit at the intersection of fashion, art, music, hanging out, coffee, all those things I've done in my life."

"There's these moments," he continued, "that I'll walk into the shop and there will be 10 people shopping; someone's buying something, someone's drinking a coffee, the music is nice.... I'm like, I've been dreaming of this since I was a kid."

There is no better way to feel part of New York's essence, its ineffable electric charge, than to set out on foot and go shopping. It was a mild spring day, and the stores were freshly stocked with new arrivals, and display windows were filled with signs of the coming summer season, like relaxed pleated shorts, linen shirts, fisherman sandals, and bucket hats. To go shopping on a warm, cloudless day in New York—not for something in particular, necessarily, but to let the very act of searching be your objective—is to partake in one of the city's great pleasures. It's a reminder to stay curious and receptive. That shopping

←←

PREVIOUS PAGE
FROM LEFT
ON KEVIN MALONEY
Jacket, pants,
and shoes
Bode

ON KIVVI ROBERTS
All clothing and
accessories
Bode

ON DALTON YOUNG
Shirt, shorts,
and sneakers
Bode Rec. and Nike
Socks
Bode

ON LUIS DIAZ
All clothing
and shoes
Bode

ON SANG KIM
All clothing
and shoes
Bode

All other clothing
and accessories,
subjects' own

→

OPPOSITE PAGE
CLOCKWISE FROM
TOP LEFT
ON LEO ZEPEDA
Vest, jacket,
and shorts
**Engineered
Garments**

Hat
**NNY x Western
Hydrodynamic
Research**

ON JAMES DONOVAN
Vest
South2 West8

Shirt and shorts
**Engineered
Garments**

ON TAKUYA
YAMAMOTO
Jacket, vest,
and shorts
**Engineered
Garments**

Shirt
Needles
Hat
Ecua-Andino

ON WINSTON
TOLLIVER
Jacket
Needles
T-shirt
**Engineered
Garments**

ON MIKI SAKURADA
Dress, shirt, and skirt
**Engineered
Garments x FWK**

Pants
Needles
Shoes
Birkenstock

Hat
**Engineered
Garments**

ON ERI SHOJI
Jacket (at waist)
and vest
**Engineered
Garments**

Shirt and pants
Rhodolirion
Shoes
Norda

ON YODAI
All clothing
**Engineered
Garments**

Shoes
**The Piper Sandal
Company**

ON TEDDY
PICHARDO
Jacket, shirt, pants,
and belt
Needles

Sneakers
**Engineered
Garments x Superga**

Tie
**Engineered
Garments**

Hat
South2 West8

All other clothing
and accessories,
subjects' own

Nepenthes New York

NEIGHBOURHOOD: Garment District
FOUNDED: 2010
OWNED BY: Daiki Suzuki
BRANDS: Needles, Engineered Garments, South2 West8, plus shoes from New Balance, Hoka, Alden, Trickers, and more
VIBE: Industrial showroom with a whiff of the American Southwest by way of Japan



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PREVIOUS PAGE: BOBE; HAIR: FRANCIS RODRIGUEZ AT THE WALL GROUP; MAKEUP: CHRISTIAN BRICENO AT THE WALL GROUP.
THESE PAGES: NEPENTHES; HAIR: AYUMI YAMAMOTO USING KERASTASE; MAKEUP: MAGDALENA MAJOR USING AUGUSTINUS BADER.

isn't so much about acquiring objects as it is about connecting with people. The humbling experience of a person showing you something they think is cool, and hoping you might feel the same. Shopping is, at its core, a conversation, an act of communion. And in New York, you're communing with the coolest, smartest, and freakiest people in the world.

Nowhere is this thrilling reminder of what shopping can be more evident than in the recent crop of small-to-midsize boutiques that reflect a shaggier, folksier, and funkier snapshot of post-pandemic life, of a city still enamoured with moving forward, dedicated to discovery, obsessed with the new.

Isaac Hindin-Miller, a DJ and content creator who has a popular "Best of..." interview series on his @isaaclikes_ Instagram page asking tapped-in urbanites their favourite neighbourhood haunts, has seen a notable shift of late. "A lot of stores have opened over

the last 12 months, and way more young people are starting brands and taking a crack at the retail game, which is exciting to me," he said. "It feels like the energy of my youth when people were way more willing to just try it out." His favourite area to peruse, as it happens, is Orchard Street—from new multi-brand shops like Colbo to flagships for smaller brands like Sandy Liang and Awake to carefully curated resale from Desert Vintage, it's all there. "I see a real community being built around my favourite stores," he added. "They're places where people want to go and hang out rather than just shop.... The clash between seen-it-all natives and rose-lensed transplants and billionaires and rats creates an incredible tension."

Or, as the journalist and critic Jon Caramanica put it: "It's important to remember that even on its worst day, New York is the best American city for shopping." Caramanica should know—he covered shopping for *The New York Times*, helping to write its Critical Shopper column. "It will always be the bellwether of interesting stuff, the first mover. Those big multi-brand stores, that were like a one-stop shop, now I think you have to try a little harder. It's not being served up to

- ↓
- FROM LEFT
ON KRIS KIM
Dress and shoes
Lemaire
- ON VINNY SIMEONE
Shirt
The Row
- Shorts
Comme des Garçons Homme Plus
- Sneakers
Nike ACG
- ON WASHAOU DAVIS
Shirt and shorts
Camiel Fortgens
- Shoes
Magliano
- ON JOHN NUNEZ
Shirt
Auralee
- Jeans
Camiel Fortgens
- Shoes
The Row
- ON DOMINIC JIMENEZ
Shirt
Cecile Bahnsen
- Skirt
Ter et Bantine
- Shoes
Le Monde Beryl
- ON NOAH CONDIFF
Shirt
Stein

- Pants
Yohji Yamamoto Pour Homme
- Shoes
The Row
- ON REUBEN PERRIN
Shirt and shoes
The Row
- Shorts
Comme des Garçons Homme Plus
- ON DA KIM
Shirt
Casey Casey
- T-shirt
Dries Van Noten
- Pants
Lemaire
- Shoes
The Row
-
- OPPOSITE PAGE
FROM LEFT
ON JAKE LEVY
Jacket
Junya Watanabe Man
- Tank top
Lemaire
- Shorts
Prada
- Shoes
Comme des Garçons Homme Plus x Kids Love Gaité
- Socks
Comme des Garçons

La Garçonne

NEIGHBOURHOOD: Tribeca
FOUNDED: 2005 online, physical shop in 2014
OWNED BY: Kris Kim
BRANDS: Dries Van Noten, Lemaire, Casey Casey, Margaret Howell, The Row, Auralee, Yohji Yamamoto
VIBE: Evocative urbane minimalism



Dover Street Market New York

NEIGHBOURHOOD: Murray Hill
FOUNDED: 2013 (the original, in London, opened in 2004)

OWNED BY: Comme des Garçons

BRANDS: All Comme des Garçons labels, Junya Watanabe, Prada, Miu Miu, Rick Owens, Margiela, Supreme, Stüssy, Evan Kinori, Craig Green, Sacai, Willy Chavarria, Our Legacy, Lemaire, and more

VIBE: An arts and crafts store on psychedelics

you on a platter. But I also think that the general IQ of a person who's interested in good menswear is higher now."

He pointed to the store Antithesis, in Nolita. "A store like that would not have existed in New York five or ten years ago, but now you have just enough people who are interested in Japanese stuff like Acronym or unusual European streetwear that isn't carried anywhere else." In other words, the menswear scene has atomized, so how could the retail scene not adjust accordingly? "You lost two or three big umbrella places, but what has popped up is 10 or 15 different, diverse approaches to high-end shopping."

Still, with the boom of boutiques in downtown Manhattan, plus the exploding vintage market and the inventive ways people are shopping in the city—from itinerant racks of carefully selected secondhand goods on street corners to closet sales from celebrities (Chloë Sevigny has hosted one) to underground menswear types (the guys from the men's fashion podcast *Throwing Fits* hosted one), shopping in New York, according to Caramanica, still offers up plenty of thrills.

One Saturday afternoon not so long ago, I found myself at Dover Street Market, the seven-storey store that has become the de facto godfather of New York's retail scene by offering everything from sleek runway labels to streetwear standbys to the most emerging oddball newcomers. It's a place that, despite being a multinational department store owned by Comme des Garçons, has retained a distinct and powerful sense of community. "There's often a value placed on thinking logically, but we're always thinking emotionally," Drew Romero, the store's menswear buyer, told me one Saturday afternoon as we stalked the floors, oohing and aahing like dweebs at the latest Undercover arrivals; discussed how good Stüssy was right now; and bemoaned the recent news that Dries Van Noten was retiring. "The emphasis on emotion, on creativity, on energy, is what keeps us moving forward," Romero, in a threadbare cropped vintage tee and slouchy Margiela jeans, said. "It's not about the quick sale or selling out of a sneaker; sometimes we bring something in because it's an amazing item."



Invoking the word *emotion* when it comes to sneakers and sweaters might make one grimace, but spend a few hours at DSM and you get his point. How else do you explain the strange rush you get from seeing a CdG Homme Plus jacket that resembles a pair of drawn curtains (putting your torso at centre stage) or a Prada canvas barn coat (women's, not that it matters) so perfect that had Hamilton Carhartt seen it, he'd have packed up and called it a day? ("It just blew minds," Romero marvelled.) Each craggy corner and tucked-away rack is filled with Easter eggs like this. Vintage Cartiers and Rolexes in a glass case on the ground level, wonderfully fitting Supreme chinos on the top floor, the swaggering drama of oversized Willy Chavarria Dickies-style shirts and trousers tucked away in the basement. It's a wonder how the shop doesn't buckle under the weight of its own ambition. Still, it's a stimuli overload of the finest degree—at turns dizzying, confounding, and energizing—an inspirational pilgrimage worthy of an afternoon, if not a full day (take a seat at Rose

ON DREW ROMERO
Sweater

The Row

Shorts

Comme des Garçons

Subject's own shoes

Comme des Garçons Homme Plus

ON ANGELICA ROSARIO

Shirt

Comme des Garçons

Jeans

Junya Watanabe Man

ON RASHAAD ANDERSON

Jacket

Comme des Garçons Homme Plus

Shorts

Noir Kei Ninomiya

Sneakers

Comme des Garçons Shirt x Asics

Socks

Comme des Garçons

ON MARGEAUX COHEN

Hoodie

Comme des Garçons Girl

Skirt

Prada

Shoes

Rick Owens

Headband

Shushu/tong

ON MICHAEL MORAN

Shirt and shoes

Comme des Garçons Homme

Hat accessory

Malcolm Ransome

THESE PAGES

All other clothing

and accessories,

subjects' own

Colbo

NEIGHBOURHOOD: Lower East Side

FOUNDED: 2021

OWNED BY: Tal Silberstein, Eldar Hadad, Ryan Dougherty, Daniel Reitten

BRANDS: Hed Mayner, Camiel Fortgens, Yoko Sakamoto, Sillage, Kartik Research, Porter Yoshida, Cawley, plus a wide selection of '90s-ish vintage

VIBE: Laid-back Middle Eastern coffee shop

Bakery for provisions should you find your blood sugar lagging).

Now contrast that with La Garçonne, on a cobblestone street in Tribeca. Compared to DSM's unruly sprawl, La Garçonne is a laser-focused selection presented simply and thoughtfully. The store, founded by Kris Kim as an e-commerce venture way back in 2005, opened a physical storefront a decade ago and just relaunched menswear two years ago after a long sabbatical. The space conjures a classic downtown loft plus a touch of dreamy zen, with white-painted brick walls, sun streaming in through industrial skylights at photo-friendly angles, and oversized Noguchi lamps hovering overhead. The curation, meanwhile, emphasises labels that are rooted in a certain romance and pragmatism: The Row, Lemaire, Auralee, and Margaret Howell are the standouts, and Yohji Yamamoto was added this spring.

"New York is the best place to do this," Kim told me. "It's tough, but if you're focused, you know who you're catering to, and you work hard, this is the place to do it, because people will appreciate it. The interest level in this type of design is high here."

Reuben Perin, the store's menswear buyer, noted that a shop like this could only exist here because the neighbourhood has such a discerning crowd. Clients don't want just *stuff*, they want the very *best* stuff, stuff that's considered and that has a story behind it. Here you'll find a knowledgeable shopper but one that wants to be surprised, not merely catered to. Perin also shyly said that New York offers something unique and necessary for a shop like La Garçonne: customers with ample money and good taste.

"I mean, we get guys who will come in and know exactly what they want, and will be like, *Oh, I love Camiel Fortgens*, and they'll know what he made this season," he said, picking up slim leather slippers from The Row (a bestseller at just under a grand) and then admiring a pair of roomy shorts he's been eyeing from Sacai with a backside that looks like a pleated skirt. "Guys are nerdy like that, in the best way. They're investigators. But we also get guys who just appreciate nice things but need information and need a more handheld approach, which I love."

Or take Nepenthes, just four kilometres due north but, aesthetically speaking, a world away. Located on a grubby block in

the Garment District, just off Times Square, it's the storefront of the company that oversees the beloved brands Engineered Garments, Needles, and South2 West8, all of which engage in the spirited conversation happening between American and Japanese fashion. The Engineered Garments design

offices were once housed upstairs, and the place retains its workshop vibes: white walls, industrial overhead lighting, and racks and racks of merchandise. Indeed, the shop supplies a very deep offering from each of these labels, while upstairs is reserved mostly for collaborations (which recently included an upcycled sailcloth parka and a tote bag made with Western Hydrodynamic Research and Mafia Bags) and one of the best shoe selections in the city.

It's there where I chatted with James Donovan, who quit his job in corporate finance to take on Nepenthes's press communications and, in his spare time, work the sales floor. He told me how the store, due to its location, mostly attracts destination shoppers, or those very familiar with the brands, and not as many casual passersby, were it located in, say, SoHo. Indeed, the day I went, the clientele seemed to be dressed, sometimes to a T, by one of the brands, and more than a few spoke in foreign languages. Several visitors checked their phones on the sidewalk before entering, as if making sure they'd found the magical X that marks the spot they'd long been searching for. In some cases, maybe they had.

These fans come to Nepenthes not just to shop but to talk shop. The clothes here are replete with idiosyncratic construction details and made from obsessively sourced textiles, and it's the type of clothing that builds something akin to its own subculture. Consider this its clubhouse. Donovan noted that guys can be obsessive, and he's spent great lengths of time talking with customers about the reason the hem of a shirt was left unfinished or how, exactly, a wobbly seam was constructed, or how to style a baggy pair of cargo pants.

The city is teeming with purveyors like these, from the functional and elegant camping gear at Hatchet Outdoor Supply Co. in Brooklyn Heights to the

minimalist sportswear and relaxed tailoring at the subterranean menswear haven C'H'C'M in NoHo, each shop with its own unique personality and worldview. More important, these are places run by real people, who have a passion for clothing, for how things look and how they feel on the body. As a fellow clothes person, you enter knowing that you've found your tribe. They care about things like craftsmanship and storytelling, obsess over how a certain type of cotton absorbs indigo dye, say, or the way an extra inch of trouser rise can yield a pair that might, just might, change the trajectory of your life. Not only that, they'll talk to you about clothes, go deep on the details, match your enthusiasm. They're people who enjoy connoisseurship, learning and then sharing what they've found.

It reminds me of the way that at Bode, a dark-wood-panelled jewel box just a stone's throw from the lively scene at Colbo, the salespeople jump at the chance to talk about founder Emily Adams Bode Aujla's vision. When I mentioned that I loved the lacy edging at the hem and yoke of a boxy shirt, the

young moustachioed staff person told me it was actually based on an antique tablecloth. Bode Aujla's whole thing is working with older textiles, re-creating things from history, and, in the act, imbuing her clothes with a certain reverence for the past—not nostalgia, per se, but a wistful remembrance. But casual browsers don't need to know all that to appreciate the latest spring arrivals in the shop, like that boxy shirt made from old tablecloths. I liked how it fit—a little wide and slightly cropped so it hit me right at the waist. I liked that the lace showed just a little bit of unexpected skin; it would be airy in the warmer months and—dare I say it?—a little sexy. I liked the idea that it evoked a sense of domesticity. I also liked thinking about Bode Aujla coming across a tablecloth somewhere in her travels, maybe at an estate sale in Alabama or a flea market in Kentucky, and getting excited, suddenly a creative spark ignited.

And when I left the store with that shirt tucked into its bag and stepped out into the waning afternoon light, the sounds and smells of the city surrounding me, I felt that same spark, too. ❖

MAX BERLINGER is a freelance writer based in Brooklyn.

- OPPOSITE PAGE
FROM LEFT
ON RYAN DOUGHERTY
Shirt
Hed Mayner
Pants
Colbo
ON MIA ROTHROCK
Shirt and shorts
Colbo
ON ELДАР HADAD
Shirt and pants
Colbo
ON TAL SILBERSTEIN
Shirt, pants, and hat
Colbo
Sunglasses
Tejesta
ON ANGELIQUE
DES FRANCS
Shirt
Ernie Palo
Pants
Colbo
Belt
Yoko Sakamoto
ON BRANDON DENT
T-shirt
**Southern
Manufacturing**
Jeans
Levi's Vintage
Hat
Camiel Fortgens
All other clothing
and accessories,
subjects' own

colbo

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THE

REGULARS OF RISHABH VIRKI

Just 18 months after a life-threatening car accident, the star cricketer has made the most improbable comeback.



BY JAMIE ALTER
PHOTOGRAPHS BY NISHANTH RADHAKRISHNAN
STYLED BY SELMAN FAZIL

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Rishabh Pant pauses for a couple of seconds as his left knee braces to carry his body weight up a set of stairs on the set of the shoot. It's a movement no one would usually notice—except that the person we're describing is star cricketer Pant, who's been to hell and back since 30 December 2022 when he suffered a horrific accident near Roorkee on the Delhi–Dehradun expressway. The 26-year-old has undergone knee ligament surgery as well as plastic surgery after being left with facial injuries following the collision, which in his own words left him wondering if he would ever walk, forget playing cricket.

I'M DRAWN TOWARDS the moment. I look for traces of discomfort on his face even though I know that Pant has kept wickets for 253 overs during IPL 2024. Those couple of seconds in which he steadies himself before putting his weight on his left knee, simultaneously acknowledging the helping hand that one of the crew members extends, but does not accept, while crinkling his eyes in an endearing and naturally deflective manner, is what Pant 2.0 is all about.

He has been given a second lease on life, and cricket, and after enduring the toughest phase of his 26 years trying to get back onto the cricket, Pant is trying to enjoy every single aspect of a second chance.

I ask him what it is about cricket that he missed the most during those initial months of torture, lying in hospital beds on sleepless nights and screaming in pain at the ceiling. The din of a packed stadium chanting his name? The joy of feeling bat on ball? The sound of a cricket ball thudding into the wicketkeeper's glove near the ears? A split-second stumping off a wrist-spinner's googly? The joy of celebrating a century, arms aloft and looking skywards in memory of his father?

Before I can finish, Pant, smiling somewhat sheepishly, brushes me off. "Sixes. Hitting sixes. More sixes than before."

An apt reply, I suppose, from a maverick batsman whose ability to smash the ball beyond the boundary earmarked him as one to watch out for in age-level cricket, and whose first scoring shot in Tests was a six.

Across his 13 matches for the Delhi Capitals in IPL 2024, Pant proved his fitness behind the stumps. He claimed 16 dismissals and scored 446 runs with a strike-rate of 155.40, the most for his franchise, and hit 25 sixes. Was the comeback exactly how he expected it to be?

"It's close to what I wanted," says Pant. "I wanted to hit the maximum number of sixes. It was a small

target that I set, since that was something that I did before as well. I didn't get to where I wanted, but I am satisfied."

I remind him that with 25 sixes he did pretty good as far as his goal was, but he chuckles and dismisses that as "okay-okay".

The reason is that he's an extremely self-critical cricketer. "I am never satisfied, no matter what I do," he says. "That's my way of staying grounded. Not to think about what I've already done. Others might want to repeat the same things, but not me. On a personal level, I'm okay with what I achieved in this IPL but I know I could have done better. I have higher things to achieve, and I am taking it one day at a time."

Days are what Pant remembers most vividly since the time he suffered that accident, and days are what he ticked off, one by one, target by target, milestone by milestone, during his comeback. And days, for an individual who hadn't given much thought to them before the incident, are what he is thankful for now. Because his life changed one fateful day.

DURING THE EARLY hours of 30 December 2022, Pant was on his way from New Delhi to visit his mother in his hometown of Roorkee in Uttarakhand, when his SUV crashed into a road divider. Miraculously, while his vehicle went up in flames, Pant escaped from the wreckage with assistance from onlookers. The immediate damage was a grossly twisted right knee and shattered ligaments, leaving Pant in an initial fog of pain and bewilderment.

"At that moment, my first thought was 'I'm dead'. That was my first reaction. I accepted that I was about to die. *There's no chance that I'm going to survive this,*" he says. "Everything hurt, it was all a blur. I don't know why, but generally when you get hurt or hit by something, you try to save your head, right? Your natural reaction is to put your hands around your head.

“I MIGHT HAVE HURT SOME PEOPLE AROUND ME, ESPECIALLY MY FAMILY. THEY WANTED THE BEST FOR ME AT THAT TIME BUT IT WAS A TIME WHEN I FELT LIKE I NEEDED TO BE LEFT ALONE.”

I did the same thing and that’s probably what helped me negate serious head injuries. I got hurt, badly, but it could have been worse.”

After he managed to get himself out of his car, Pant says he looked down at his right leg which he describes as being bent at a 90-degree angle. In that moment of pain and shock, he found the clarity to ask one of his rescuers to help him with something.

“He said, ‘Sure, what can I do?’ I told him, ‘*Bhaiyya*, just hold my leg and I will do the rest.’ And so, he held my leg and I snapped it back into place. It was all very instinctive and fast. I think that was just survival instinct, in the sense that I was not thinking too much about what would happen later, but rather reacting on the spot. That’s how I’ve been in life. Later, one of the doctors told me that was one of the best things I could have done in that immediate situation. To have that kind of clarity, in such a horrible moment, that’s why I am so grateful to God.”

Then there were the endless days in hospitals, first in Dehradun and then Mumbai, as doctors and nurses and various officials came and went in what he remembers as just peripheral noise. “Those first few days, I can tell you that there was not a single thought in my mind. I was blank and numb with pain. Just immense pain,” says Pant. “All the thoughts about life and what was ahead, that was only after a month or maybe 40–50 days. Until then it was unbearable pain, even with all those painkillers. I can tell you that those first two months were horrific.”

Pant trails off here, before getting back to speaking about the physical grind.

“The most difficult part of the rehab and recovery phase was doing the same thing every single day and giving 100 percent each time,” he says. “Rehab, physiotherapy, rehab—the schedule was monotonous. Along with that, dealing with the mental challenges, particularly when progress seemed slow or stagnant. It was frustrating at times to not see immediate results despite putting in the hard work. Overcoming this required a lot of mental strength, patience, and the support of my family, friends and coaches at the NCA, who constantly encouraged me and kept my spirits high. And, of course, to top it all, not being able to do what you love the most, what you live for, playing cricket. That hurt the most.”

In those dark times of pain and doubt, what kept Pant going was the belief that he would once again play cricket for India one day. His sources of inspiration were not memories of past achievements as such, but simply the chance to do what he’d dreamed of doing since his formative years.

“I just wanted to play for my country again. That’s my whole life’s mission, right? Playing for India. My whole thought process is how to win matches for my country. To feel the kind of love and support shown by so many people when I was away, that was just amazing. Later, when I started to travel, at airports and hotels, countless people would stop me and ask me how I was, or whether I was in pain. Simple questions like these, when you see that kind of love from unknown people, it just tells you how much they love you. And genuine love. These interactions pushed me further, every time.”

And yet, as much as he appreciated the love and support from the outer world, there were times when Pant begrudgingly distanced those that love and care for him.

“During the initial period after the accident, I spent a lot of time alone. Generally, when you’re with people, you have to give them space as well. Whatever they’re doing, you have to support them,” he says. “But I was not in a very comfortable zone, mentally. I was in immense pain, day in and day out. I suddenly learned to be happy by myself, which was new to me. I didn’t want to please anyone. And for that, I might have hurt some people around me, especially my family and close relatives. They wanted the best for me at that time but it was a time when I felt like I needed to be left alone.”

During his rehabilitation, Pant says he received messages or calls from every Indian cricketer he has played with. Be it to check in on his recovery and well-being or just to say hello, or send a word of support—the support from his peers was a source of motivation. But he singles out one piece of advice from former India pace bowler turned Gujarat Titans bowling coach Ashish Nehra as motivational.

“He said, ‘Do whatever makes you happy.’ Very simple, but deep. I realized more than halfway through my recovery, that what he said was important. He’s someone who dealt with so many injuries and setbacks, but

→
OPPOSITE PAGE
Jacket
Dhruv Kapoor
T-shirt
Almost Gods

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“RESPONSIBILITY
ISN'T JUST ABOUT
WHAT YOU DO
ON THE FIELD
BUT ALSO HOW
YOU MANAGE
YOURSELF OFF IT.
GETTING BACK
TO FITNESS,
STAYING
DISCIPLINED AND
GIVING MYSELF
TIME TO REFLECT
WAS ESSENTIAL.”

he fought to play for India again, and so I realized that he probably understood where I was. He knew that those simple words could really help a guy who's in a lot of pain. Those words motivated me."

I ask him what he remembers of the time when he started physiotherapy—the first movement of his legs, about walking, the first small steps.

"It wasn't even walking. It was just sitting on a bed, putting my leg down. Then, after about 15 days, with some support, I was able to stand up," he says. "I couldn't do it on my own, so I had people helping me. Once that process began, I was just so busy. Walking was not even on my mind, because I could not even stand for 30 seconds. It was exhausting. Just to be able to stand for 15–20 seconds, and I felt as if I'd played a Test match! Those are the moments when I came closest to doubting whether I could ever make it back. I mean, here I could not stand for 15 seconds, and I had plans of playing cricket again."

Pant's progress was tracked on social media, winning hearts and garnering countless likes, shares and reposts, but behind the cosmetic narrative was one man's drive to prove to himself that he had it in him.

"After the accident, one of the first things I told myself when I was able to think clearly was that I need to work harder," says Pant. "Before, when I was playing day in and day out, there generally wasn't enough time for me to do much else. It was just match to match, practice to practice session. During rehab, the one constant thought was that whenever I get back onto the field, I should be better than what I was before. Physically, mentally and in every aspect of the game. Day by day, it was about dragging myself to that level."

When he finally did make it to a practice net for his first at-bat against a cricket ball, Pant says the experience was like nothing he'd ever imagined. In a good way and bad.

"I think I just about muddled that first ball I faced," he says with a grin. "I was jittery, even though it was just at the nets. But let me tell you something, even back then, in those initial few moments, I was already practicing for the 2023 ODI World Cup. The team was pushing for it, but my body couldn't take the pain at the time. I wasn't ready to accept it; I picked myself up and began batting for longer periods in the nets, and that sense of amazement resumed."

ON 4 APRIL 2023, Pant made his first public appearance since his accident at the Arun Jaitley Stadium in New Delhi for the Capitals' IPL match against the Gujarat Titans. In a loose-fitting white tee, black jeans and sunglasses, one hand clutching a walking stick and a bandaged thumb on the other, he waved to the spectators and his franchise's dugout, on top of which a DC jersey with his name had been hung.

As he got out of his car and was ushered into his home ground by familiar franchise and Delhi cricket administrators, Pant smiled and shook hands but inside, he was in a very unfamiliar mood. "It was a different emotion, since it was my first appearance since

the accident. It was my first exposure to cricket and crowds since then and before I showed up there, I was really scared of meeting people," he says. "I had doubts about how I would face them, and had other random thoughts, but I wanted to support my team. But when I got to the ground and saw the kind of appreciation and response the fans were giving, it was just incredible. Things like that really helped motivate me further. I am very thankful for days like that."

Another day that Pant will never forget is 23 March 2024. After almost 15 months away from the sport he has loved from childhood and the reason for his existence, Pant stepped onto the field in little-known Mullanpur, on the outskirts of Chandigarh, for his first cricket match since December 2022. That was the day he had been training for, dreaming of, planning for months.

Pant initially downplays the emotions he felt that day, simply terming it "an amazing feeling", but the glimmer in his dancing eyes says far more. I prod him, and he admits it was a special day. "That feeling, all that noise.... A feeling like none other, to be honest," he says. "I just told myself to be on the ground, nothing else. Once I was on the ground, I just didn't want to leave it. And I still don't want to. Only I know how difficult it was being away from cricket for so long. This is all I've known, it's all I've done my whole life. Cricket is my lifestyle, from the basics to where I am now, and then to have it suddenly taken away. It was tough, man, so stepping back onto the field...unforgettable."

On 30 April, the BCCI selectors announced India's 15-man squad for the T20 World Cup. Pant had made the cut, at the time having scored 398 runs for DC at an average of 44 and a batting strike-rate of 158, to go with 14 dismissals behind the stumps to be the IPL's most successful wicketkeeper-batter.

On that day, Pant allowed himself some internal celebration while trying to stay grounded, because before he could think about the T20 World Cup, he had to get himself ready for the IPL.

"The first goal was to reach the IPL, to my fullest fitness. I wanted to be able to keep wickets, bat and then captain the team. Everything. Obviously, not a lot of people believed that I could do it, or that it would happen in this way," he says. "I told myself to keep it simple, to do whatever I could do from my side. Once I began practicing for the IPL, every day I was on the ground, that made a massive difference because it doesn't matter how much you practice off the field. Honestly, I didn't get enough time to practice. I probably kept wickets for four or five sessions before the IPL. That's it. Batting-wise, I would say 15 sessions. That's all I had. Now when I look back at that amount of time, and what I've managed to achieve, I'd say it's been an amazing start."

All this while, Pant has matched eyes with me as he's answered, not a word out of place. On that last line, Pant allows himself a smile as he fleetingly looks at himself in the mirror, as the stylist for this cover

←
OPPOSITE PAGE
Cardigan, T-shirt,
and shorts
Marcelo Burlon
County of Milan
at **The Collective**
Sandals
Hermès
Bracelet
(throughout)
His own

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THESE PAGES
Jacket, T-shirt,
and joggers
Almost Gods

shoot coifs his thick hair. It's not vanity, but the look of a man who was so sure of what he wanted to achieve when he began the arduous journey of rehabilitation at the NCA a few months after his accident.

The accident has given Pant a couple of perspective changes—on life and cricket. The first is gratitude, a word he uses in a measured tone as his eyes drop from my gaze to the floor below, unblinkingly, before he sits himself upright. “I’ve started to appreciate things more than before. The small things, like brushing your teeth, going for a walk. We take it for granted, right? It’s normal. But then when something like that [the accident] happens to you, you start seeing things differently. My understanding of life changed, and I became more grateful for what I have. That’s the biggest change.

“I never had a doubt that I would return. I just told myself to come back better than before. Fitter, mentally tougher, more motivated and with a better understanding of the game. After what happened, I didn’t want to come back in the same way as before. I wanted to come back better than that. Whatever I could at any given time during my recovery, I tried that. I had to push myself each day, since that was the only way I believed I could achieve my goals.”

Pant has plenty of goals to achieve, but by returning to the IPL and ticking all the boxes for a Team India selection, and thus making it to the T20 World Cup, less than a year and a half from that potentially life-changing accident, he has, at 26, proven to himself that anything is possible.

Which, Pant is keen to point out for other sports-people who might endure difficult times much as he did, can prove inspirational.

“I think the biggest takeaway could be not to give up,” he says, “Responsibility isn’t just about what you do on the field but also how you manage yourself off it. Getting back to fitness, staying disciplined and giving myself time to reflect was essential.

“Injuries and setbacks are part of an athlete’s journey, but what defines you is how you respond to them. The journey back can be long and tough, requiring immense mental strength and a positive attitude. Perseverance is key. You need to believe in yourself, stay patient, and keep working hard. Success is not always immediate, but with dedication, you can overcome challenges and come back stronger.” ❖

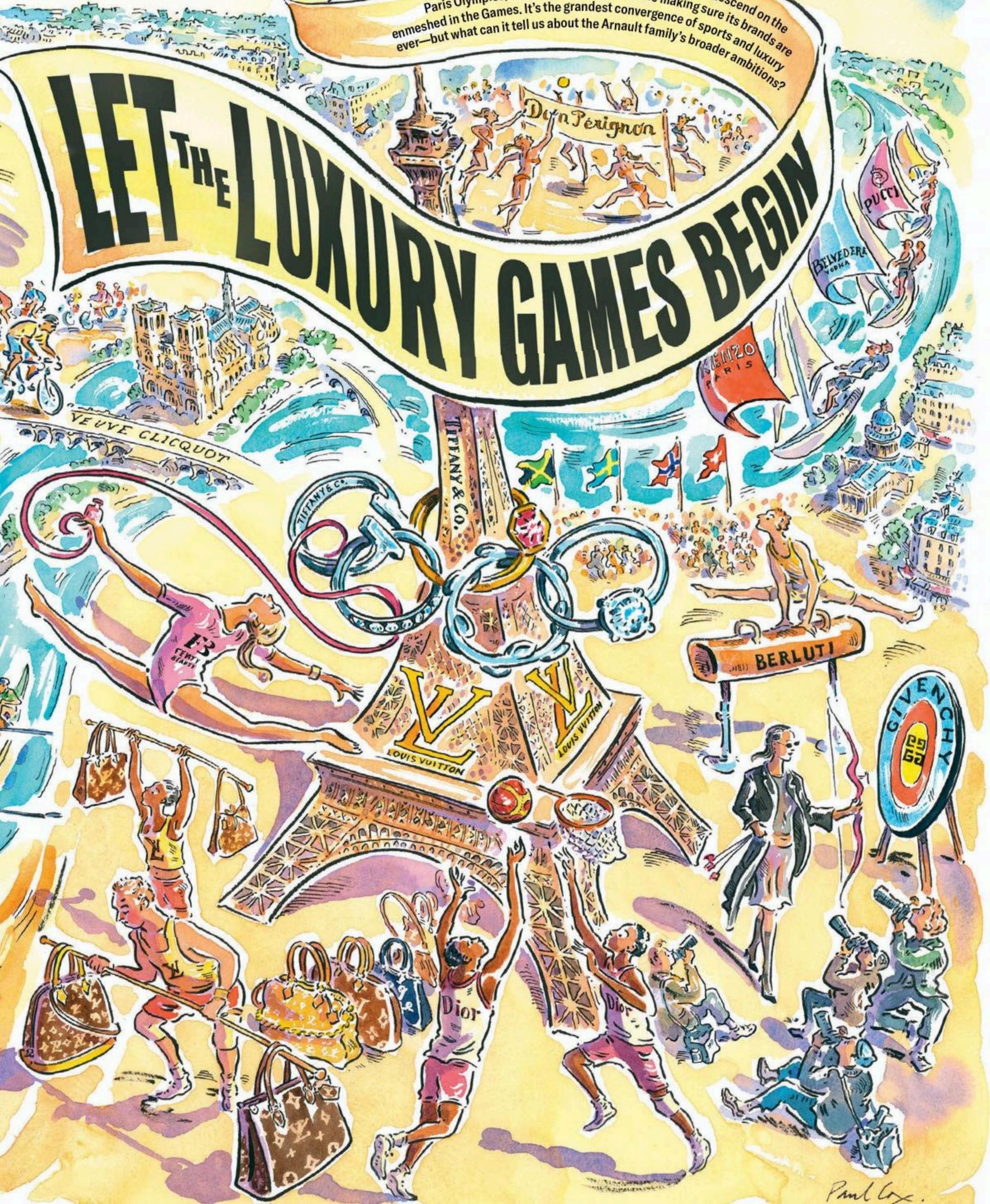


ILLUSTRATION BY PAUL COX

BY TOM LAMONT

This summer, as athletes and fans descend on the Paris Olympics, LVMH is spending a fortune making sure its brands are enmeshed in the Games. It's the grandest convergence of sports and luxury ever—but what can it tell us about the Arnault family's broader ambitions?

LET THE LUXURY GAMES BEGIN



Paul Cox

Paris, that most presentable of capitals, is being polished before it hosts the Summer Games. Around the Champs-Élysées, where some of the benches date to the 1850s, the seats are getting a new layer of paint before an estimated 15 million visitors arrive to scuff them up again. High on the steps of the National Assembly, I watch as workers fuss with temporary statues of Olympians, lowering them into place with cranes. France no longer has a monarch or a royal family, but some say it gets close in the form of Bernard Arnault, owner of the luxury-goods conglomerate LVMH, and his five children, each of whom oversee a part of their father's empire. The Arnaults and LVMH are closely involved in the coming Games, major sponsors who mean to tempt those millions of visitors (and upwards of a billion more viewing on TV) with fine handbags and belts, fragrances, and jewels, a whiff of LVMH's trademark savoir faire. A former editor of *Vogue* France, Carine Roitfeld, has agreed to collaborate with LVMH and the Arnaults, designing tuxedos for opening night. Just outside Paris, in a private workshop run by Louis Vuitton, one of LVMH's luxury brands, artisans are making trunks to house the tournament's medals.

A gentle *bock-bock-bock* of mallet on wood serves as a hypnotic soundtrack to the work. It's late in March: less than four months to go before the Games begin. Despite the deadline, production is measured and stately. Wearing smocks or cardigans, wielding slide rules, chisels, scalpels, hairdryers, and rattling boxes of tacks, the artisans here have the cool of craftspeople who've been asked to respond to all sorts of whims over time. Vuitton became an immortal name in France through the manufacture of brass-cornered trunks, trunks adapted to meet the demands and dreams of wealthy customers, trunks designed to cradle: handbags, watch collections, writing desks, even the World Cup. During the tour, I'm told they won't build anything for the storage of corpses (they're sometimes asked to) or for weapons (except for the occasional hunting rifle), but there have been trunks designed to become walk-in golf lockers, trunks that contain foldaway beds.



The trunk being built this day for the medals will be tall and wardrobe-like, clad in monogrammed canvas, its interior lined with black leather. Passing into the part of the workshop where it's being made, I'm met by smells of wood chip, glue—and over at the workbench where they will sew on the fat leather handles...is that honey? Someone explains. The thread they're using is slathered by hand with beeswax. I watch the slow assembly of a single padded drawer, inside which a set of gold, silver, and bronze medals will rest. The padding looks as comfortable as my seat on the inbound Paris train. As for the medals themselves, they were made to designs drawn up by an LVMH-owned jeweller, Chaumet, each to contain a lug of iron extracted from the Eiffel Tower.

All of this is exceptional, this convergence of luxury and a sprawling, sweaty event like the Olympics. At Tokyo 2020, medals were carried about on recycled trays that strongly resembled those molded plastic dishes for coins you find on public buses. When Princess Anne unveiled the medals for London 2012, she did so out of a tired-looking briefcase. Olympic sponsors tend to have a utilitarian flavour: banks, beers, e-commerce, pharma, sportswear. One sponsor of Beijing 2008 was the State Grid. Paris 2024 has felt different from the start. Last year, when LVMH announced what was termed a “creative partnership” with the Paris Games, the news was presented by Bernard Arnault's son, Antoine, who stood in front of very tall windows with an unimpeded view of the Eiffel Tower behind him, the Parisian sky sulky and dramatic.

In the very busy months since, LVMH has lent in-house talent to vivify these Olympic and Paralympic Games—while also reportedly contributing around \$160 million to the organizers' budget. Every Olympics ends up telling a story about their host nation, whether by intention or not. Beijing 2008 was China's fist on the table: We're here, we matter. London 2012 was about the British tremulously (and, as it turned out, fatefully) rediscovering a jingoistic pride long subdued. Under the stewardship of LVMH and the Arnaults, we can expect Paris 2024 to live in history as the better-dressed Olympics, the cork-popping, leather-lined, beeswax-scented Olympics. But what will LVMH and the Arnaults receive in return for the loan of their eye, their taste, that industrious *bock-bock-bock* of their artisans? With the opening ceremony fast

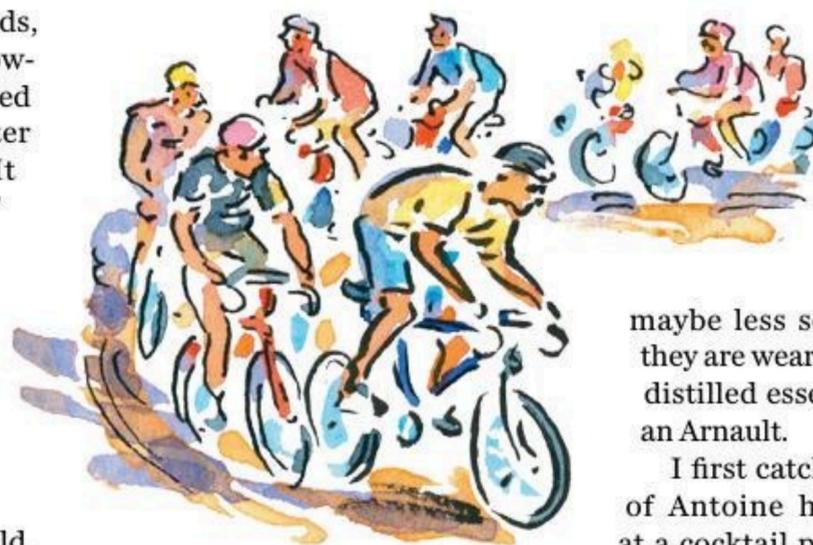
approaching, I have coaxed my way close to the company in order to see some of the workings of its Olympics operation. I want to understand what happens when the particular sensibilities of high-end retail and high-end sport come together with a crunch. Of course, there have been flirtations between these two distinct worlds in the past. Back at the 1992 Barcelona Summer Games, for instance, the designer Issey Miyake helped kit out Lithuanian athletes in pleated silver tracksuits. Later, at the 2002 Salt Lake City Winter Games, Eiko Ishioka outfitted competitors from numerous nations. Ralph Lauren has helped equip the American team since 2008. But never has the collision between coveted luxury goods and enviable athletic talent been so pronounced. Nor, perhaps, has it ever been more intriguing.

ROITFELD CAME INTO this clueless, she tells me. Never a flag-waving patriot, the magazine editor turned stylist says she was invited to an appointment with LVMH and one of its brands, Berluti, without knowing she was being eyed as a possible outfitter of Team France. “It was like a blind date,” says Roitfeld, who decided to put aside a general distaste for uniforms and lend her help. She came up with an idea for a navy tuxedo jacket that athletes of any size could wear over an open-necked shirt. She explains that there is an element that’s fundamental to the French mode of dress (indeed, the French mode of being) known as *décontracté*, which, as Roitfeld translates it, is a brilliant paradox: “Not too much. Not enough.”

Cool and dishevelled herself in a boxy white T-shirt, half sitting, half lying on a couch as she talks, Roitfeld shows me a photo of some smiling young athletes wearing the finished suits and shoes. Their lapels are vertically striped with the red, white, and blue of the tricolour flag, but otherwise these fencers, boxers, and climbers could be bound for sundown cocktails instead of a grand sporting extravaganza. Roitfeld says that throughout her creative process she kept Antoine in mind as a model Parisian, someone whose vibe she hoped to capture in the finished uniform. “You have to think about someone,” she says, “and I thought about the chic of Antoine.” Come the opening ceremonies, members of Team France will know they are being dressed by LVMH, and,



Bernard Arnault, chairman of LVMH, flanked by his son Antoine (left), who’s leading the company’s Olympic initiative, and Tony Estanguet, president of the Paris Olympics.



maybe less so, that they are wearing the distilled essence of an Arnault.

I first catch sight of Antoine himself at a cocktail party. A behind-closed-doors event, it is staged in one of the many buildings around the capital that is owned or occupied by LVMH. A set of medals has been lent by Olympic organizers so that staff can get a closer look. Jazz plays. Glasses of LVMH’s own Moët are passed around. Scented candles, Vuitton-made, burn at a rate of what I estimate to be a buck a minute. Antoine, “very long and very skinny,” as Roitfeld describes her friend, has a bowl of dark hair and wide, sympathetic eyebrows. I watch him circulate before he steps away to lean on an antique pool table, quietly rehearsing the lines of a speech.

Antoine often acts as spokesperson on behalf of the larger family: 75-year-old figurehead Bernard and siblings Delphine, the 49-year-old CEO of Dior, and Alexandre, 32, Frédéric, 28, and Jean, 25, who occupy senior positions at Tiffany & Co., LVMH, and Louis Vuitton Watches, respectively. As well as overseeing the Olympics partnership, the 47-year-old Antoine has various senior

roles around the corporation, including running the family holding company Christian Dior SE. According to LVMH’s 2023 annual report, the family cumulatively controls over 48 per cent of the company’s capital. By all appearances, Bernard has been careful about dividing the empire; as he gets older, an understated succession drama, more regal and royal than acid and Roy-ish, has been brewing. Nevertheless, the children are said to work together with remarkable comity. On an earnings call in 2022, when Bernard was asked by an investor if he had plans to retire, he told an oblique joke about his friend Roger Federer. The gap between their tennis games, Bernard implied, might close a little if he had more time to practise. But no. Most informed observers do not seem to expect Bernard to step down anytime soon.

At the cocktail party, an aide lowers the volume on the jazz. Before he speaks, Antoine has a moment by himself with the Olympic medals, pulling out grey spectacles from his pocket and inspecting them closely. He nods in apparent satisfaction. There’s applause as he gets up on a low stage to speak. Officially, this is an LVMH event, but we all know we are guests of Antoine and the Arnaults. The company is the family; the family is the company; “indivisible”, as the French newspaper *Le Monde* has put it, of Bernard and his corporation. Antoine commends the Games, which he describes as powerful and strong,

immune, he seems to suggest, to a certain type of negativity, what he calls “this very French mindset of wanting to look at everything that could go wrong.” As he speaks of LVMH’s countering culture of positivity, of a company in constant forward motion, I think of its history—its scarcely believable financial successes over the past 20 or 30 years.

Back in 1984, Bernard was only another anonymous entrepreneur when he bought a conglomerate that included the textile group Boussac Saint-Frères, which at the time owned Christian Dior. With stunning chutzpah, he soon wrested control of other luxury brands, including the merged firms of Louis Vuitton and Moët Hennessy. Under the acronymic embrace of LVMH, Louis Vuitton became unstoppably profitable over subsequent decades, thanks in part to China’s growing affluent middle class. The pandemic over these last few years, ruinous in so many ways, gave the whole luxury industry a queasy charge. People spent a lot of money on luxury goods, including on goods from Louis Vuitton. By 2023, that brand had grown to account for something

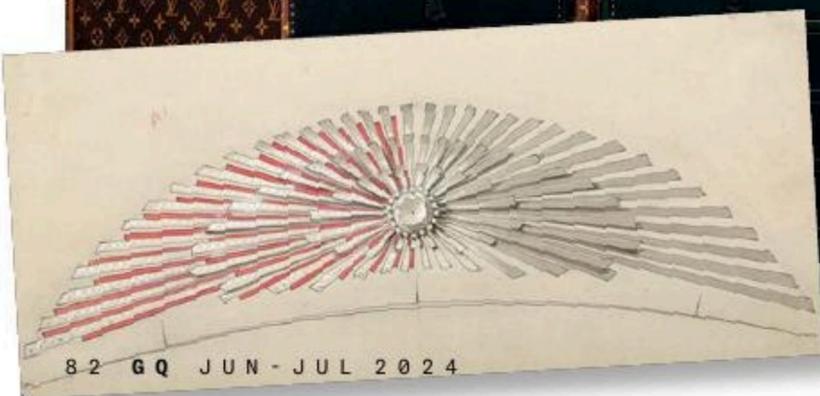
like half of LVMH’s earnings, according to the *Financial Times*. The same year, it was reported that LVMH had become the first European company to be valued at \$500 billion. In charge of a preposterously valuable company, Bernard has become a sort of de facto head of state. In March of this year, he was awarded the highest honour available in France, the Grand-Croix de la Légion d’Honneur. Around the same time, he was enshrined by *Forbes* as the richest person in the world, his personal fortune estimated at over \$200 billion.

What role could LVMH’s embrace of an Olympics play in the future of his soaring company, and in the legacy that Bernard leaves for himself in Paris? About a decade ago, he endowed Paris with an art museum, the Fondation Louis Vuitton, and stuffed it with masterpieces and site-specific commissions from the likes of Ellsworth Kelly and Katharina Grosse. Nearby, LVMH’s renovation of a new cultural centre is underway. “I’m not sure he has an ego,” I’m told by a former LVMH executive who worked with Bernard and his family for many years. “What makes me think he wants to

be durable in history is that he’s invested in art.... It’s invaluable. It’s everlasting. And in the end, these people, maybe deep inside, they want not themselves but their achievements to be invaluable and everlasting.”

It would seem the deal to help fund an Olympics is far more ambitious than some personal vanity play. LVMH has grown to awesome, continental significance by expanding rather than narrowing its focus—a surprising and perhaps even revolutionary shift given that the luxury business has long been presumed to run on exclusivity. It’s an effort carefully overseen by a CEO with an exacting eye for detail and a proven track record for anticipating the shape and movement of the global luxury business that he helped create. One former executive speaks of Bernard as someone who will visit boutiques to inspect the arrangement of stock on the shelves, a CEO who keeps an eye on ad campaigns (“the narrative, the mood”), and who comes across as above all else a determined pioneer of expansion. “For the last five or six years, Mr. Arnault’s vision has been to diversify LVMH into categories where experiences matter: hospitality,

In fashioning the medals for the Paris Games, designers at Chaumet drew inspiration from tiaras and bracelets the brand had created decades ago. To house the finished product, artisans at Louis Vuitton built bespoke trunks.



“We’re not trying to make these Games luxurious or elegant, we’re trying to make them creative,” Antoine Arnault says. “Creativity and experience are the cornerstones.”

restaurants, cafés, art galleries, culture—and, recently, sports.”

ON A HELLISHLY crammed weekday this spring, Antoine offers me his own perspective on the Olympics project. He answers my questions about the Games via email between a quarterly earnings announcement, an annual shareholders meeting, and the public unveiling of those team tuxedos that were designed with him in mind. These are busy days for the family, but the Arnaults have always inspired respect for the efficient way they get things done. They are mathematicians, musicians, tennis players, metaphorical jugglers. The younger siblings, Alexandre and Frédéric, like their father, graduated from France’s selective *École Polytechnique*, while Jean received degrees from MIT and Imperial College London. About this “wonder family,” as they were once called by *Paris Match*, you sense that if they really, really put their mind to it, they could enter the discus or the rhythmic gymnastic competitions this summer and place.

I ask Antoine about a particularly difficult juggle. As an important sponsor of the Paris Games, LVMH will be promoting rare and expensive luxury goods—goods that by design are not for everyone—at an event that prides itself on being closed to no one. Antoine says this way of thinking is stereotypical, by which I infer,



he means wrong: “On the contrary, I believe that our sector and the Olympics have a lot in common. Not everyone can purchase a handbag from one of our [boutiques]. However, many people dream of owning one. The same goes for the Olympics. Not everyone can run the 100 metre in less than 10 seconds. However, many people dream of such a feat.”

Elite competitors have to be attentive to detail, he says. They have to be passionate pursuers of excellence. Naturally, LVMH wouldn’t mind being associated in people’s minds with those values. I ask Antoine if he feels an affinity with the competitors themselves. After all, the Arnaults are often praised for their strong work ethic, their intensity of focus. One former executive at LVMH tells me of the family:

“Everything they do is so precisely prepared and usually superbly executed.” Antoine told a reporter at *Vogue* earlier this year that being a part of a prominent family means never being allowed to make mistakes. Any Olympian, trying to peak for one minute or one hour in the middle of a four-year cycle, must empathize.

“It would be presumptuous to offer [the athletes] advice,” says Antoine, who sees clear parallels between Olympic

competitors and many of the experts his family employs, the craftspeople such as those I watched at work on the Louis Vuitton assembly line.

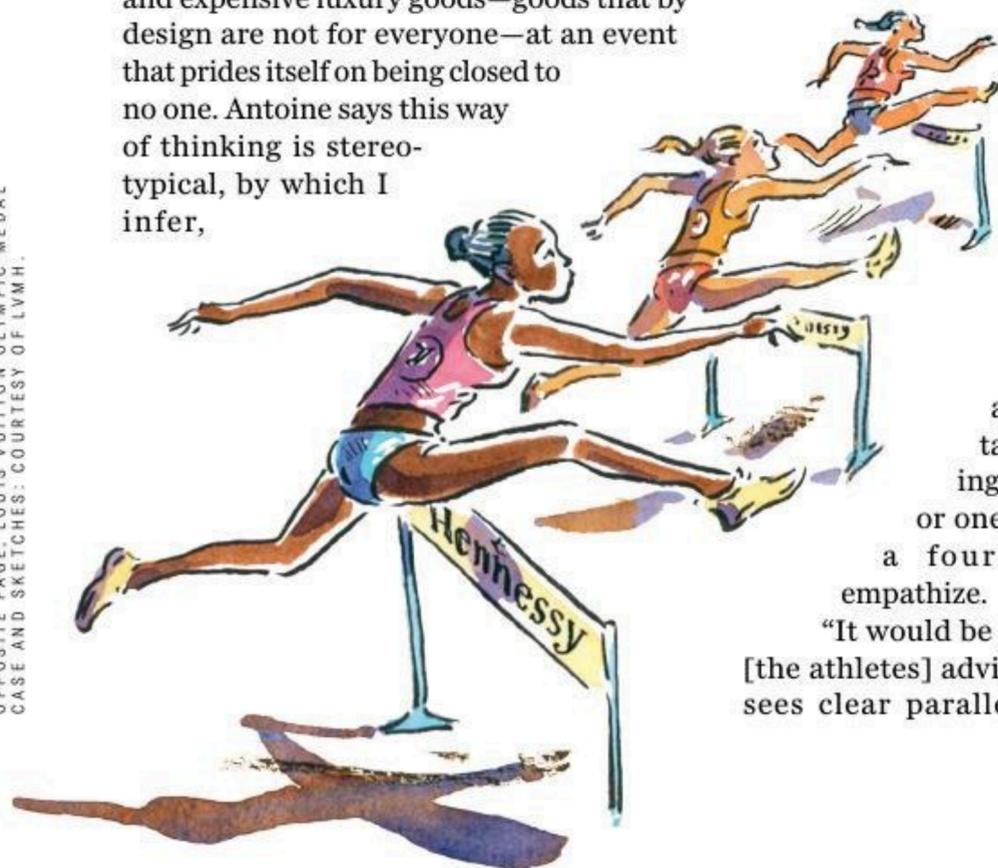
There was a master sewer I met. He’d spent 40 years at Vuitton: Like a magician, he could thread a needle without looking, without even using the needle’s eye; he just ran its sharp tip through the middle of the thread in one brisk, blind motion. Antoine describes dexterity like this as “excellence of movement, after hundreds and thousands of repetitions”, an Olympian-level feat. “We’re not trying to make these Games luxurious or elegant, we’re trying to make them creative and bring our expertise to bear,” he says. “Creativity and experience are the cornerstones.” Of course, there will be your standard sponsor’s perks, chief among them opportunities for advertising at captive audiences. “We had to be able to offer products like Champagne. But this partnership goes much further.”

Last year, in a story about the family, *The Wall Street Journal* offered some insight into how the Arnaults make decisions, noting that they do so together as a unit, at a monthly lunch at LVMH headquarters. Dad brings a list of discussion topics on his iPad. The kids take turns to give their views. The lunch lasts exactly 90 minutes. So the *Journal* wrote. I ask Antoine if he can remember the meeting when the idea for a partnership with the Olympics first arose for discussion. “We did not just wake up one morning thinking of Paris 2024,” he says, pointing out that his family supported the city’s initial hosting bid almost a decade ago. “Admittedly, we weren’t in the news at the time, but we were an early supporter.” Still: LVMH didn’t reveal itself as a main sponsor until this time last year. “People were waiting for us to unveil our partnership as the [most] internationally recognized French company, and I understand that.” They took their time, he says, to get the terms of the partnership right.

There is a greening statue of Napoleon on the Place Vendôme that seems to be lifting



OPPOSITE PAGE: LOUIS VUITTON OLYMPIC MEDAL CASE AND SKETCHES: COURTESY OF LVMH.



its left foot toward the LVMH boutiques that dominate the southeast corner of this tiled shopping square. It looks to me as if the Little Corporal is ready to hop off his column and wander over to browse the bags and wallets in Louis Vuitton, the purses and raincoats in Dior.... These two jewels of an empire, Vuitton and Dior, seem to me to act as lures to bring shoppers across the square toward lesser known sellers that are also owned by LVMH, including Chaumet, the jeweller. A former executive at LVMH believes that during tenancy deals with shopping malls around the world, the enormous appeal of brands like Louis Vuitton and Dior can act as powerful bargaining tools. Another former executive tells me that while a brand like Vuitton might help other brands in the group secure better locations, the dynamic is more like a wolf pack, coordinating, sharing intelligence. LVMH's partnership with Paris 2024 has, it would seem, elements of this



opening day, when millions are expected to visit, and billions more watch on from home.

Antoine concludes that the coming Games “will not be a poster for our brands,” nothing as garish as that. Instead, he insists, “They will be a showcase for our savoir faire.”

PARISIANS GROW UP with a sense of savoir faire in their bones. Or so I'm assured by Roitfeld, who explains, “When you are Parisian you always live with savoir faire, we have savoir faire everywhere, in the architecture, in the painting, in the fashion, you know?” The phrase refers to an almost cosmic sense of poise. But

boy, does a spectacle like the Olympics have a way of testing poise. Roitfeld has been a witness to the bubbling anxiety. “Parisians are very angry, because the city is going to be more and more diffi-

weeks; but the promise was so ambitious, organizers recently conceded, that if the river is still too dirty, the swimming bit of the triathlon might be postponed or even abandoned.

Despite the influx of visitors, there isn't blanket optimism about the fortunes of the city's retailers this summer. One former executive at the group tells me he doesn't expect to see a big increase in sales resulting from Olympic crowds. On an earnings call in April, an analyst at HSBC asked the CFO of LVMH, Jean-Jacques Guiony, about the impact the Games might have on sales. “It's not a major boost to the business,” Guiony said of the Olympics. According to reporting in *Le Monde*, Guiony's colleague at LVMH, the secretary-general Marc-Antoine Jamet, became upset when the city decided to pedestrianize the Rue de Rivoli: a decision that prevents coaches full of tourists from pulling up right outside an LVMH-owned department store.

As a powerful corporate player in the French economy, LVMH can sometimes make appeals to the French public when it feels misunderstood, even unduly criticized. After protesters briefly invaded

“We are a family of entrepreneurs,” Antoine opportunities.” He explains that this summer's nothing as garish as that. Instead, “they

strategy. Vuitton will hand-manufacture the trunks, including those that contain the Olympic torches. Dior is supposedly lending grace to the opening ceremony. Following behind these superbrands, it is the lower-profile Chaumet that will forge the medals. It's Berluti bringing the tuxedos. Select collaborators from LVMH's cosmetics retailer, Sephora, will carry the torch on its miles-long journey up to the French capital. “That's the power of LVMH,” I'm told by one former executive, who believes that the superbrands nourish the less well-known brands in the portfolio. I mention how conspicuous LVMH's presence is in Paris, even at the level of the bus stop ad. The executive laughs and says, seemingly joking but not joking, that Paris bus stops are “like a subsidiary of LVMH.” Or, as, Christian Billinger, an investor in LVMH, puts it to me: “The city is tattooed with this company. And Paris is a city that doesn't like digital pollution, doesn't like branding, doesn't embrace corporatism. Which makes LVMH's presence even more remarkable.” There will only be more of that presence come Olympics

cult to live in.”

I asked the master stitcher on the Vuitton assembly line whether he would be attending any of the Olympic events as a spectator. He replied he would try to leave the city instead. One former executive at LVMH tells me he will also flee before the Games begin, leaving Paris earlier this summer than he usually does. Just under half of Parisians, polled last fall, feel hostile to what's coming.

Hosting the Summer Games in a busy, buzzing, living city will always be a difficult trick to pull off. Through July and August, great chunks of central Paris will shut to normal traffic. Prices will roughly double on the ageing Metro. Earlier this year, staff at the Eiffel Tower went on strike, closing the capital's crowning attraction for almost a week. Some perceived it as a warning shot. The government has since offered bonuses to state employees who agree to keep working through the crucial months of an Olympic summer.

The River Seine was meant to be rid of its floating waste and toxins so that Olympic triathletes could dive in on the opening

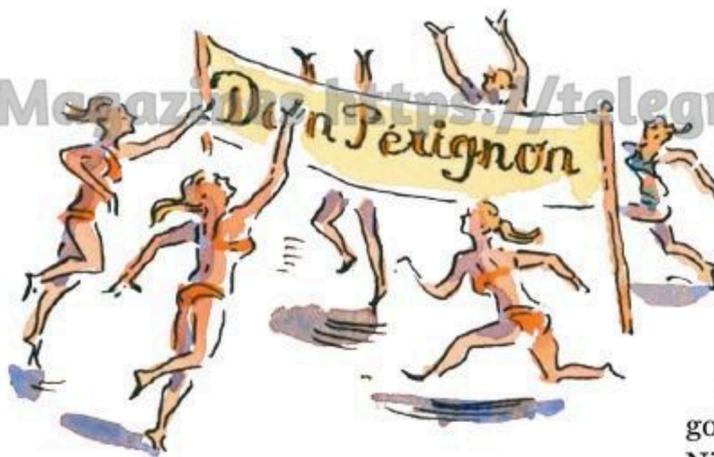
LVMH's headquarters last year, an ad ran that summer in a French newspaper, pointing out how many people were employed by the luxury industry. At the cocktail party I attended, Antoine used his speech to push back against some of the criticism levelled at his family's company. He quoted a paragraph from the newspaper *Mediapart* (“I can't help myself,” he said) in which it was pointed out that LVMH, in its patronage of individual French athletes, had picked only the best of the best. But what was LVMH expected to do, asked Antoine, associate itself “aux derniers de la course,” with those who finish last in the race?

The French are conditioned by history to feel especially keenly the difference between those finishing last and those winning the race. It will test all of the Arnaults' savoir faire to get this part of the gambit right. I ask Antoine whether he thinks LVMH's very public involvement in an egalitarian-minded event like the Olympics will help soothe tensions in his country, particularly around wealth inequality. “LVMH is one of France's top private employers, both

directly and indirectly,” he says, going on to talk about the corporation’s reputation at home and abroad as a signifier of innovation and entrepreneurial spirit. “Along with many others, we are helping to ensure that [these] Games take place in the best possible conditions, with great pride and joy. That’s all that matters.”

Something else might be accomplished, too. Nick Kostov, a *Wall Street Journal* reporter who works the luxury beat from the paper’s Parisian bureau, has become a leading Arnault-ologist. “Luxury firms do not typically get involved in the Olympics,” he points out. “But there is a super-important reason why LVMH is involving itself. Because they need to show they are good, corporate contributors.”

BESIDE THE CORPORATE HQ on Avenue Montaigne, inside a structure of white stone that’s occupied by Dior, there is a discreet private apartment—the Suite Dior—that customers can move into for days at a time, shopping after-hours if they wish to. Nearby, at the Pont Neuf, LVMH reportedly spent millions last summer transforming the



entry for consumers at different levels. There are expensive things to buy, but also there are less rarefied ways to engage with the brands; from a tube of lipstick to a bite of lunch.

At the north end of the Pont Neuf, the company has opened a Louis Vuitton café. Across the road, there’s an LVMH-owned hotel. Sandwiched in between is the Samaritaine, a vast art deco department store that had been in disrepair for years before LVMH took it on as a salvage project. The Samaritaine sells products of all kinds—from brands inside and outside the LVMH family. But it’s the goods made by the LVMH brands that appear to me to occupy the choicest real estate, in sight of stair bends and in places of heavy footfall. During my visit, I noticed a clever funnel-

that strategy yet, and both rivals and boosters of this company, industry commentators and investors, will be observing the implications closely.

Billinger, the LVMH investor, sees “an excursion into what you would expect from a fast-moving consumer goods company. Are they evolving into a Nike, almost?” He poses a hypothetical risk that I put to Antoine. Are Dior and Vuitton at risk of overexposure this summer? “We are a family of entrepreneurs,” Antoine answers, smoothly. “Where you see risks, we see opportunities.”

From the roller coaster in the leisure park, I can see the Eiffel Tower, under which athletes will soon muster for beach volleyball. Later, I cross over the cobbles of the Place de la Concorde, where BMX’ers will soon jump tricks and basketball players will dunk on one another, three-v-three. I follow the curve of the Seine that will soon test runners in the middle phase of the marathon. It is a city getting ready, a city that has been and will keep being shaped by one family of entrepreneurs. I walk the length of the Champs-Élysées, passing number 101, a large Louis Vuitton boutique over which flies a tricolour

Arnault tells me. “Where you see risks, we see Paris Olympics “will not be a poster for our brands,” will be a showcase for our savoir faire.”

bridge into the elaborate stage for Pharrell Williams’s debut show as head of menswear at Louis Vuitton—a show attended by, among others, Zendaya, Lewis Hamilton, LeBron James, Rihanna, and Beyoncé and Jay-Z. The bedroom within a boutique. The busy bridge turned invite-only for a night. These are the misty upper peaks of LVMH’s massive empire, experiences that even exceed the reach of plenty of wealthy customers. Under other ownership this might have been the entire business model, speaking to and selling to the elite. A number of LVMH’s rivals in the luxury-goods game seem to do just that. However, the Arnaults have adopted a different strategy in recent years, and one of the reasons LVMH has grown lately is that it has opened up various points of

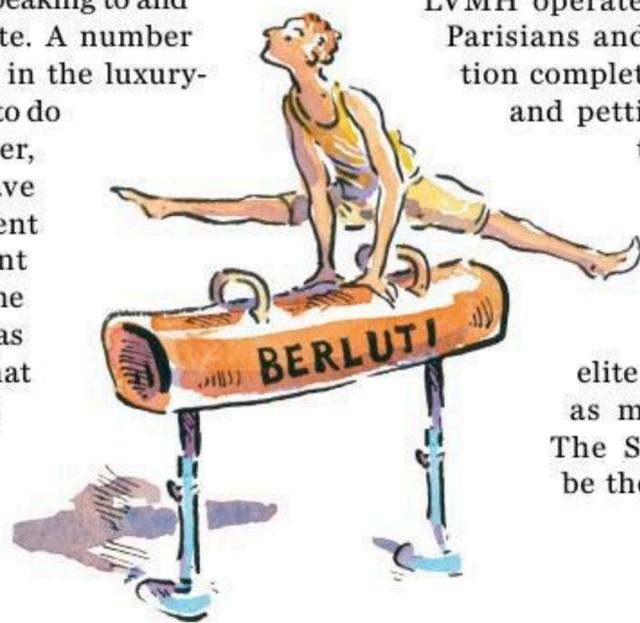
ling that tends to go on in these boutiques, the expensive belt or wallet near the door, the more expensive shoe or purse further in, the lovelier, pricier garment further still. As LVMH has grown, so has the wider end of its funnel. LVMH recently launched 22 Montaigne Entertainment, its foray in the film, TV, and audio business. And soon, the Olympics, perhaps the widest the funnel has opened yet.

On a sunny afternoon, I arrive to the northwest outskirts of Paris, where LVMH operates a leisure park for Parisians and tourists, an attraction complete with roller coaster and petting zoo. The suggestion seems to be that the luxury brands under this conglomerate’s stewardship should no longer be regarded as elite or off-limits, instead, as mainstream entities. The Summer Games will be the grandest display of

flag adapted to include the brand’s famous monogram, and I end up at a couple of giant landmarks at the boulevard’s western tip. One is l’Arc de Triomphe, an established wonder of the world. The other is shinier, newer, somehow just as mesmerizing: a new Louis Vuitton structure being built at number 103.

While construction of the mysterious new project is underway, the site has been shrouded in imitation canvas and brass to make it resemble a massive Vuitton trunk. Silvery L’s and V’s on the side have been scaled to the size of phone booths. The corner pieces are taller than the tourists who step away to get the thing in one picture. Come July and August, you’ll certainly see the trunk in aerial shots of the city. It is the Arnaults’ final, most brilliant coup of an Olympic summer, a rising luxury box, wide as a block, an invitation and an invocation to partake. ❖

TOM LAMONT is a frequent contributor to *GQ* and author of the novel ‘Going Home,’ which will be published next year by Knopf.



DISCO MYSTIC



Asha Puthli was the quintessential creative multihyphenate before the term was invented. Now, unexpectedly, the 79-year-old musician is making a big comeback with new music, collabs, and a Glastonbury performance.

BY BHANUJ KAPPAL



IT'S NOON on a weekday, but Asha Puthli is still in bed when she answers my Zoom call. She's in her nightgown, her hair tied up in a small knot at the front, gently rubbing the sleep out of her eyes. She had a late night, she explains, and is running on four hours of sleep. For a moment, she looks like any other 79-year-old, a little tired and a little groggy. Then she turns on the charm with a thousand-watt smile. "I did my Sardarji hairdo for you, especially," she jokes, delightfully droll. "My little *munda* look."

Over 50 years ago, Puthli moved from Mumbai to New York armed with a dance scholarship, a demo tape of Indo jazz fusion compositions, and dreams of being a jazz singer. On the strength of her prodigious vocal talent, endless gumption, and bagfuls of roguish charm, she achieved that and more. Through the 1970s and early 1980s, she put out a string of records that ranged from avant-garde jazz to glam, pop, and soul, all infused with a sense of cosmic spirituality and playful whimsy. A regular fixture at Andy Warhol's Studio 54, she was a fashion icon, dressed by Michael Volland and Manolo Blahnik and photographed by Richard Avedon and



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Asha Puthli
photographed in
New York City
in 1970.



Francesco Scavullo. She starred in films by Ismail Merchant, James Ivory and Bruno Corbucci, became besties with trans actress Holly Woodlawn—immortalized in the Lou Reed hit “Walk on the Wild Side”—and inspired the sartorial and performance style of Debbie Harry.

Despite strong sales in Europe, Puthli’s music never quite made it into the American mainstream. She retreated into semi-retirement in the 1980s, burnt out from constant clashes with a music industry that wasn’t quite ready yet for a brown-skinned diva. But her music stayed in rotation, gaining cult status amongst crate-diggers and underground dance music fans. In the 1990s and early noughties, her music was sampled by hip-hop stars like The Notorious B.I.G. and 50 Cent, finding its way to a new set of listeners.

Over the last few years—partly thanks to nods from a younger generation of South Asian artists like Imaad Shah and Raveena Aurora—her music is finally getting the critical reappraisal it deserves. In 2021, British independent label Mr Bongo reissued her iconic 1976 album *The Devil is Loose*, a masterpiece of sensual soul and cosmic disco, and followed it up a year later with a 20-track anthology. Last year, LA label Naya Beat—whose cofounder, Raghav Mani, is now also her manager—put out *Disco Mystic: Select Remixes Volume 1*, a six-track EP of Asha Puthli remixes by contemporary dance music artists. Now, at the ripe old age of 79, Puthli is gearing up to hit the road for her first world tour in 40 years, which will include stops at

the 1950s). After school, they sent her to study home economics at Baroda’s MS University, “so they could prepare me to be a good wife and a good career woman”.

But Puthli had other ideas. She spent the Baroda years exploring India with then-boyfriend Vivan Sundaram and friends such as Bhupen Khakhar, once travelling from Nepal to Kanyakumari in the back of a truck. There were other trips to Kerala (where she remembers being fascinated by the traditional recite-and-dance art form Ottanthullal) and Adivasi villages in Tamil Nadu. “I love the tribal life,” she says. “I always call it my Margaret Mead days.”

By the time she moved back home, having fallen in love with jazz as a teenager, thanks to radio broadcasts from Voice of America, she decided she wanted to be a jazz singer. Mumbai had a small but thriving jazz scene at the time, with bands playing in trendy restaurants like Volga, Bombelli’s, and Venice. She’d occasionally perform at these clubs, singing with her back to the audience—partly because, hard as it is to believe now, she was shy, and partly so that her parents wouldn’t find out. Ved Mehta—long-time writer for *The New Yorker*—happened to catch her singing impromptu with Braz Gonsalves’s band, writing about it for the magazine and in his 1970 book *Portrait of India*. He called her a “beautiful, mercurial girl”, writing: “Asha goes up and sweetly sings several songs, each more imaginatively than the last.”

Puthli wrote to all the big American universities, hoping to travel

“It’s one of those unbelievable things,” says Puthli, who will be one of the oldest artists ever to play at Glastonbury. “I’m so thrilled because I know the audiences are very young there and they are very appreciative of music.”

the We Out Here, Rising, and Glastonbury festivals (the latter was announced, coincidentally, five minutes into our conversation).

“It’s one of those unbelievable things,” says Puthli, who will be one of the oldest artists ever to play at Glastonbury. “I’m so thrilled because I know the audiences are very young there and they’re very appreciative of music. I’m doing all these exciting things to prepare—exercise, meditation, water therapy, resistance pool.”

BORN IN MUMBAI in 1945, Puthli spent her early years in Matunga’s RP Masani Road, better known as Hollywood Lane. The entire Kapoor clan lived in a building down the road—she affectionately refers to Prithviraj Kapoor as Papaji—and so did KL Saigal and his brother, among many other stars from the silver screen. A little bit of that movie magic must have rubbed onto a young Puthli, who would stand at the window and serenade passers-by. “Papaji used to hear me singing loudly every time he took a walk,” she remembers. “Once, he came home and told my mother that I was very talented and I should be in films. But after he left, my mother said, ‘Absolutely not, don’t even think of getting into movies.’”

Like many Indians of the time, Puthli’s parents—who fought in the Indian independence movement and owned Bombay Woollen Mills—believed that performing for money was déclassé. They encouraged her to learn music—first Indian classical, then operatic singing—but hoped she would opt for a career in law or the IAS, following in the footsteps of family, like her aunts Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay (a prominent social reformer) and Sulochana Sheti (who founded the Little Angels’ School in Mumbai’s Sion area in

to the US and study jazz. But few universities even had a jazz department back then, let alone scholarships for international students. That disappointment didn’t blunt her determination, and eventually the universe offered a way. The story of how Puthli made it to New York is something out of a novel, with its series of fortuitous coincidences (“But of course, there are no coincidences,” she declares). When American modern dancer Martha Graham’s dance company came to India on tour, Puthli—who had learnt Bharatanatyam and Odissi—managed to talk her way backstage and bag an audition in New York for the modern jazz dance course at the Martha Graham School.

But this was still socialist India, and it wasn’t easy to travel abroad. Puthli didn’t even have a passport, notoriously difficult to get in those days. “It was a real catch-22,” she says. “I couldn’t get the scholarship unless I went to America to audition, and I couldn’t get to America without a scholarship.”

Then, one random day, she was ferrying a friend from the neighbourhood to work, in the little Vauxhall car her father had bought her as a graduation present. The neighbour was an air stewardess with British Airways—then called the British Overseas Airways Corporation (BOAC)—and they were interviewing for future hires that day. The general manager took one look at Puthli and offered her a job. “And then he dangled the carrot,” she says. “He said we’ll get you a passport in two weeks, and then we’ll send you to London for two months of training. I couldn’t ask for anything better!”

Puthli said yes, and spent much of the next year working on BOAC flights to London, Singapore, Rome, and Beirut. Along the way, she

“Ornette, Warhol, and I got along so well because all three thought outside the box,” Puthli says. “We all believed in an artistic landscape where democracy reigns, where every artist is important.”

managed to make it to New York and aced her dance audition, winning a one-year scholarship at the Martha Graham School. On her last jaunt, a “request trip” to Singapore, she managed to get hit by a motorbike, land up in a studio with local band The Surfers for an EP on EMI Records, miss her flight home, and get escorted to the next flight to India by angry BOAC officials. “They came for me the day I was recording, but I hid in the bathroom,” she says. “I had to go the next day, but at least I completed the record.”

Puthli landed in New York in 1969, picked up at the airport by a friend she had made in Kathmandu who lived out of a Volkswagen truck and—she later found out—used to smuggle hashish and marijuana into the States stuffed in toy yaks and painted beads (a story, like so many Puthli stories, that I’d love to get into if not for the limits of print space and reader attention). She knew of only one name in the music business, the legendary producer and talent scout John H Hammond. For six months, she kept sending her tape to his office, but with no reply.

Then serendipity struck again. Hammond was sitting at the Century Club in Manhattan, reading Ved Mehta’s book *Portrait of India*, when Mehta walked in. Hammond introduced himself and asked Mehta about the jazz singer he’d written about. When he found out that Puthli had been in New York for six months already, he passed on his number. She turned up at his office with her demo tape.

In the interim, in another classic Puthli move, she ensured a longer stay in the US by walking up to a man outside the Museum of Modern Art and asking him to marry her. The man—Marc Goldschmidt—said yes, and the two would eventually have a son before their divorce in 1981. Six months after moving to New York, Puthli had finagled herself a path to permanent residency, and a meeting with the man who had launched the careers of Billie Holiday, Bob Dylan, and Bruce Springsteen.

“He played the tape and I’ll never forget it because he clutched his heart and he swayed,” she says. “And I thought, oh, my God. Finally, I get the meeting, and I think he’s going to die on me. But all he said was ‘marvellous.’”

Hammond, who was in an honorary position at CBS Records at the time, produced a single with Puthli, but the company’s president Clive Davis wouldn’t put it out, because he didn’t see a market for jazz with Indian classical influences. Hammond then sent her to record with Peter Ivers’s blues band (she sang on a cover of Marvin Gaye’s “Ain’t That Peculiar”) and with free jazz pioneer Ornette Coleman. The saxophonist’s loosely structured, mutating improvisations were a formidable challenge for a budding singer. He’d never had a vocalist on his albums before, and had already tried out plenty of singers to no success. But Puthli was more than up to the task.

“A lot of people usually ask me how I was able to do that and I always tell them it’s because as a young girl, I used to do yoga, and I think it’s because of that meditation,” she says. “I just had to focus on my inner self and just make sure that wherever I heard the sound or an opening or a possibility, to go along, still creating, still being in rhythm with the rest of the people.”

Puthli’s vocals would appear on two tracks off Coleman’s 1972 Afro-futurist, disco-presaging album *Science Fiction*, earning her the prestigious DownBeat Critics Poll award for best female jazz musician

alongside Ella Fitzgerald and Dee Dee Bridgewater. At the same time, Puthli started branching out into fashion and film. She ran into Andy Warhol at a bookstore, where the artist was going around from person to person, asking them questions and recording their responses on a tape recorder. “He put the microphone too close to my mouth, and I said, ‘I’m not that kind of girl,’” she says. “I think I used stronger words than I’m telling you, because you’re a publication. And he laughed. He always had a good sense of humour. And he always liked anyone who talked about sex, on a personal level.”

Enamoured by her supreme self-confidence and unapologetic eccentricity, Warhol struck up a strong friendship with Puthli. The two would hang out at bohemian hotspot Max’s Kansas City, Warhol’s Factory, and later, Studio 54. “Ornette, Andy Warhol, and I, we got along so well because all three thought outside the box,” she says. “We all believed in an artistic landscape where democracy reigns, where every artist is important and can participate.”

Soon, Puthli was a regular fixture in the New York nightlife scene, hanging out with artists and musicians one night, and dining with the socialite crowd the next. Her penchant for pithy one-liners made her a favourite of both the celebrities and the press—“They’d ask me if I was royalty and I’d say, ‘Oh don’t be ridiculous. I’m not royalty, I’m divinity.’” Her avant-garde fashion style also made waves—“I’d wear pillowcases paired with thrift store stuff, mostly out of necessity.” She played a lead role in Merchant Ivory’s *Savages*, having met the filmmakers in Mumbai when they were shooting their 1969 film *The Guru*, in which she makes a brief appearance. Indian authorities found the nudity in the film so scandalous that they banned it.

“I was so tired of everyone making such a brouhaha over my bosom because that’s what you see, my bosom, not anything else,” she remembers. “But my parents were so embarrassed. I feel sorry for what I put them through. But there was so much love in the family. And when you have love, there’s forgiveness.”

But CBS, it turns out, didn’t want to put out a jazz record by an Indian artist. They asked her to change her name to Anne Powers, to make her more palatable for a white audience, but she refused. “They felt that there would be a cognitive dissonance, people would hear my name and think of temple bells and bhajans,” she says. “They had no idea how to market me.”

Puthli grew increasingly frustrated, regularly butting heads with CBS executives. When CBS in England offered her a record deal, after watching her sing on a UK TV show where she was promoting *Savages*, she jumped ship to London. She worked with Elton John collaborator Del Newman on her self-titled debut album, blending sexuality and spirituality on songs that channelled everything—glam, pop, soul, and rock music. The album became a surprise hit in Germany, and sold well all over Europe.

Then, another hitch. Puthli never had a work visa for the UK, and the label hadn’t thought to check. When the UK tightened immigration rules in the wake of the exodus of Indian immigrants from Idi Amin’s Uganda, CBS suspended her contract. They packed her off to Germany, where she worked on her second album, before returning to America to give birth to her son. “I used to say it took me three countries, four producers, and one and a half years to finish this album, and my son only took nine months and one producer.”

It was on her 1976 studio album *The Devil is Loose*—produced

by Dieter Zimmermann—that Puthli’s cosmic sound fully came together. One critic called it “a masterpiece of snakey, spaced-out soul and pre-mainstream disco”, with Puthli singing about earthly temptations and outer space aliens in a croon that was at once seductive and spiritual, sexy and otherworldly. The album received critical acclaim, with the *New York Times*’ Robert Palmer writing that “if American CBS continues to ignore her, the company will be making a mistake”. But CBS did continue to ignore her, and *The Devil is Loose*, like her earlier solo albums, never released in the States.

Puthli continued to record and release albums, through the ’70s and into the early ’80s, experimenting with sexual funk-throb on 1979 cut “1001 Nights of Love (Reprise)”, and political rock on 1980’s “I’m Gonna Kill It Tonight”, a track about the victimization of women. But by the mid-1980s, recently divorced and with a young son, she was burnt out from “running around like a lunatic on this impossible thing”.

“So I sort of said, fuck this shit, you know—threw in the towel and gave up,” she says. “I had given up my luxurious life in India to come to New York because I wanted my independence—of thought, soul, spirit, creativity. But my big disappointment after arriving

here was that the doors were not as open as I thought they would be. I remained an outsider.”

PUTHLI MOVED TO Palm Beach, Florida, occasionally emerging to record the odd song or collaboration. In the 1990s, samples of her music started appearing in a bunch of hip-hop songs, such as “The World Is Filled” by The Notorious B.I.G., Carl Thomas, and Too Short. At first, she just didn’t believe it. When her son, Jannu Goldschmidt—who now works in film and television—told her he’d heard her music on a Notorious B.I.G. cut, she told him that’s impossible. But it turned out Jannu was right. Puthli ended up suing the label for royalties, eventually settling out of court.

There were other—properly licensed—samples, too, in songs by The Pharcyde, G-Unit, Kool G Rap, and Action Bronson, among others. But it wasn’t till she started seeing her name dropped by South Asian artists like Imaad Shah and experimental R&B singer Raveena Aurora in interviews that she began seriously considering a return to the limelight. In 2017, she travelled to Mumbai for a discussion and performance hosted by the Red Bull Music Academy, performing—backed by Shah’s band Madboy/Mink—to a crowd of 20-something hipsters who hadn’t even been born when she was at her peak. It was her first Mumbai show since 1972.

On reading an interview where Aurora called her a key influence, she rang the young artist up, striking up a new friendship and eventually appearing on a track off the Aurora’s 2022 album *Asha’s Awakening* (the title is also a nod to Puthli). Since then, she’s got plenty of co-signs from other South Asian musicians, including raga-meets-synth producer Arushi Jain, experimental indie musician Nabihah Iqbal, and Illinois-based violinist and vocalist Chandra Gangavarapu. In Puthli, they see a pioneer, someone who blazed the trails they are now following.

“The way we see Björk or FKA twigs as experimental pioneers today, that’s how I look at Asha for the 1970s,” Aurora told *Bandcamp Daily*. “She’s one of the first examples I saw in the West of a South Asian woman who embodies an ethereal but also fuck-everything attitude. She was very comfortable pushing boundaries.”

Puthli is gratified that her music continues to inspire, and talks about the younger audiences like a doting grandmother. “You feel it was all worth it, all the ups and downs,” she says. “Just to see these young people who are entering a market that is finally more open to them. I think if you can touch the soul of even one person with your music, or inspire them, it’s still worth it. I’m so happy. I love them all.”

All this new attention has given Puthli a renewed sense of vitality and urgency. She’s writing a book about her life—she tantalizes me with hints of even more audacious stories she hasn’t told me—and there’s also a documentary in the works. She wants to follow up this year’s world tour with an Indian tour later this year, including a special homecoming gig in Mumbai with a three-hour set that charts her decades-long career.

“Bombay was my oyster, my beloved city,” she says of her hometown. “Old Bombay had a welcoming charm about it. Mumbai now is an intimidating megacity. I often worry about the overbuilding, the strangling infrastructure and the air pollution levels. It makes me sad and nostalgic for a bygone era. That being said, the city still retains a certain magical quality.”

Puthli is also headed back to the studio, with one single due in June, and other collaborations in the pipeline. As we wrap up our conversation, I ask her how she feels about this second wind, if returning to the road after a four-decade break presents any anxieties or challenges. “Of course it’s challenging, but that’s what life is about,” she signs off, with characteristic élan. “All of us, we always constantly need a challenge. Otherwise, what is there?” ❖



WHY IS EVERYONE ON

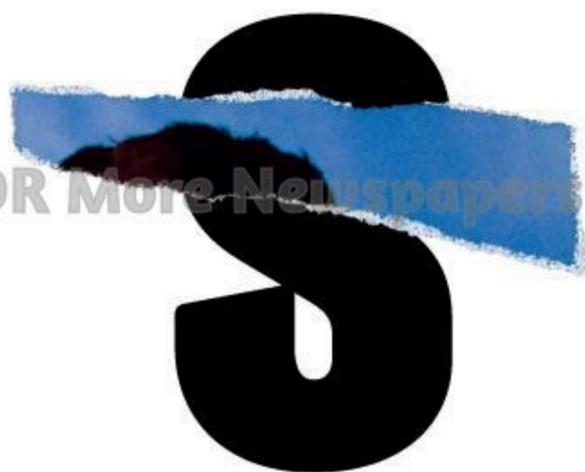


STEROIDS NOW?



Suddenly, steroids and a slew of other performance enhancers are moving out of the shadows and into the fitness routines of a new category of enthusiastic user. Across the Internet and in gyms, how did body-modifying drug use become so ubiquitous, so effective, so...normal? And can it really be a good thing?

By **ROSECRANS BALDWIN**



SOMEONE IN YOUR life is using performance-enhancing drugs. I feel comfortable making that bet because I recently discovered how many people in my life are using performance-enhancing drugs. Maybe your dad scored human growth hormone at an “anti-aging” clinic. Maybe the woman you met on Hinge just ordered her first “peptide stack”. It’s definitely the middle-aged white dude at work who calls you brother, who takes beta blockers before presentations—the same guy who texted you about T, testosterone, AKA test, because he copped a vial off a friend and *bro*, things were *wild*, he felt *crazy*, like he could reply to a thousand emails while running through a wall. *Brother, you need to check this shit out asap.*

My curiosity about this sudden ubiquity helps explain how I came to meet Nick, 33, a handsome white guy, comprehensively tattooed, dressed in a workwear jacket and nice jeans. Nick looks like somebody you’d meet in an expensive coffee shop. It’s a look that doesn’t suggest, to most eyes, somebody who at times injected himself daily with steroids. Somebody who used to deal them and even “cooked” them in his kitchen. Somebody who once injected himself, *Pulp Fiction*-style, straight in the chest.

A decade ago, Nick lived with his parents in Southern California and had a day job doing manual labour; going to the gym was his escape. “Training was the only thing I could really do,” he said. “I was kind of a vegetable other than when I was in the gym.”

At the time, he struggled with erections, on account, he thinks, of antidepressants. A doctor tested his blood and found he had low testosterone. He tried adjusting his diet to boost his levels: fermented cod-liver oil, Brazil nuts, butter from grass-fed cows. Then the doctor prescribed testosterone replacement therapy (TRT). Before long, Nick was giving himself intramuscular injections, which seemed to do the trick: He felt more energized, more motivated, and he enjoyed how his body changed. The appeal of getting bigger had rattled around in his head for years. “I remember one of my first girlfriends mentioned I looked skinny,” he recalled. “Out of high school, I was 120, 130 pounds (54–58 kg) at fifteen. It stuck in my head, she mentioned I’d look crazy at 160 (72 kg).” *Crazy*, meaning hot. Then, through a gym buddy, Nick heard about SARMs—selective androgen receptor modulators. At the time, they were a relatively new class of experimental drugs,

Today’s users, like T.B., represent a new breed of hormone enthusiasts. “Used correctly, [testosterone] makes everything better,” he said.

alleged to foster the benefits of anabolic steroids, like muscle building, but with fewer potential negative side effects. So he ordered some online.

Soon, with training and dieting, using testosterone and SARMs, Nick acquired a 28-inch waist and a 40-inch chest. He felt athletic, he felt strong. In the gym, he could squat 400 pounds (181 kg) for multiple repetitions, he said, and he could bench-press close to the same amount. Plus, he loved how he looked.

We were sitting outside a coffee shop in eastern Los Angeles. I asked Nick—who requested that I not use his real name; other anonymous subjects will be referred to by initials—if he could show me a picture from that period. He frowned and stared across the street. He said he’d deleted all the photos, he couldn’t look at them; looking at them made him depressed. Because, regrettably, he didn’t stop there. “I think in finance, they say one of the hardest things to master is ‘the art of enough,’” he said. “Steroid use, it’s the same.”

The use of performance-enhancing drugs, AKA PEDs, remains something of a shadow world—but it may not remain so for long. Consider the shifting landscape of what’s now edging toward the mainstream in health care. Cannabis as a cancer therapy. Psychiatrists testing out psychedelics. MDMA being studied for use in treating PTSD. The gap between our society’s embrace of once-taboo ideas and its faith in institutional medicine is widening—and personally, I laugh anytime I catch a drug commercial telling me to consult my doctor, because who the hell has a doctor anymore? For many, medicine is no longer a visit to the physician’s office but a dip into YouTube, a scroll through TikTok, maybe a quick Zoom with a tele-med nurse practitioner, or a visit to the nearest urgent care.

And in that aperture, the use and abuse of PEDs appear to be flourishing. Potential upsides in some cases: muscle growth, quicker recovery, more energy. Potential downsides in some cases: cardiovascular disease, liver damage, fertility collapse. Also, for men, maybe a dash of testicular atrophy—it became a meme in my reporting notebook, after a number of men who had used steroids said their balls had miniaturized to the size of peas, of Raisinets, tinkling around in their un-shrunk sacks.

But maybe it’s worth it. This is an age, we

are told, when anyone can have any body they want. Take a pill, stab a shot, try a “cycle”. It’s the age of Ozempic. The age of ordering a latte with a splash of collagen. Body optimization, body modification, whatever you want to call it, is no longer something that other people are doing, but rather something maybe *you* should be doing. Have you spent any time on social media lately? Have you felt: *I’m getting left behind?*

I asked around my own friend circle this spring and discovered a gamut of boosting, occurring out of sight. Chris, 41, spends about a thousand dollars (about ₹83,500) a month on a prescribed regimen of supplements—including dehydroepiandrosterone, an endogenous steroid hormone precursor—that requires him to pack syringes when he travels. “I don’t want to live forever,” he said. “I’m just trying to feel as good as possible.” Another friend, Jane, 33, got a prescription for peptides after she heard about them on a podcast—her stack includes sermorelin, a growth-hormone-releasing factor—and she also has begun traveling with needles. “I’m always scared TSA (Transportation Security Administration, US) is going to be like, *What the fuck is all this?*, so I carry a doctor’s letter.” M.D., 37, got into lifting weights two years ago, and in only his second session at a gym the trainer suggested that if he was willing to get on “gear”, i.e., steroids, he could meet his goals much faster. The overture was casual, nonchalant—unnervingly so. “It was really scary!” M.D. said.

Fear, however, isn’t always the response this crazed moment inspires. Curiosity, feverishness, impatience, confusion are also common feelings. Both online and off, drug use that once was a secret sneak for rule-breaking pro athletes—things like growth hormone, SARMs, anabolic-androgenic steroids—is being reframed and introduced to a wider set of users, whose motivations aren’t linked to sports. We’re talking about day traders and data managers. People who don’t intend to enter a bodybuilding competition but who want to feel more in control of how they look—who are eager to become the human lab-slash-gym rat of their dreams.

This age of bodily actualization is not without hazards. Nick said that one time, a day after injecting, a golf-ball-size lump appeared under his skin. He’d tried a new spot on his left quad, using inch-long needles. He took a hot shower and mashed the glob with his knuckles. Soon, he felt faint. Racing heartbeat, shortness of breath. Minutes later, in the kitchen, his legs locked up and he couldn’t walk. He lay on the floor, wrapped himself in a blanket, and stayed there for hours—freezing cold, sweating like crazy, panicking. An EMT friend later told him he’d likely been suffering from septic shock. Still, the next day he was spiking himself in the chest.

Seemingly every day a new compound, a new stack of dietary supplements, a new



performance trend hits the internet. So, yes, someone in your life is using performance-enhancing drugs—I would bet on it. And what's also possible, perhaps more foreboding, depending on what they're taking, is that the individual doesn't know exactly what it'll mean for them in the long run. Victoria Felkar, who studies the industry as a researcher in women's health and steroid hormones, told me something I heard a lot while interviewing users and experts: "This world is like the Wild West."

MULTIPLE FORUMS EXIST online for PED fans to offer tips and query dangers. The jargon can be intimidating for a newbie but quickly absorbed. PEDs can be taken in "cycles" and potentially "blasted"; and multiple PEDs used together form a "stack". To make one's own "gear", or steroids, means to "cook" them, and to inject oneself with the finished product is to "pin". "Freak", endearingly, is a label worn with pride.

The forums—which are loaded with young and middle-aged men uploading anonymous pictures from the gym—are full of stories about gains and losses but also problems at the office, or struggles with hair loss. Often, should a young member contemplate their first cycle, more seasoned dudes will offer advice, exhort them to self-educate, maybe read the book *Anabolics*, by William Llewellyn, currently in its 11th edition. Generally speaking, the conversations are candid and detailed. Discussion doesn't shy away from the risks, whether acne or liver disease—as the bodybuilder slogan goes: *Live large, die large, leave a giant coffin*—which seems to inspire a striving for harm-reduction. Learning about PEDs used to mean a locker-room conversation between a couple of powerlifters. Today, and possibly for better, considering the amount of information shared online, it's an all-night protein-shake klatch about the good, bad, and ugly in getting jacked.

One problem, though: Anabolic steroids and testosterone are Schedule III controlled substances. The possession of, say, a single vial of testosterone without a prescription is a criminal act. Also, what's often not understood is the potential side effects that some of these compounds, particularly newer compounds being sold online, have on human users—sometimes in the short term and especially in the long term. A generation ago, before Congress criminalized steroids in 1990, anabolic users could score drugs that had been diverted from facilities monitored by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA). Unlike today, when newer, less studied compounds



hit social media from who knows where, with nothing but flushed enthusiasm.

In the course of many conversations with people who've ventured into this vast community, I was surprised by the variety of motivations. A.B., a 23-year-old who lives in California, told me that he did his first cycle at 19 with testosterone and "loved every second of it". (Arnold Schwarzenegger fashioned his routine around testosterone and the steroid Dianabol, he admitted last year.) At the time, A.B. didn't like his job and had endured a bad breakup. "The gym was the only thing keeping me going," he said. Today, he's no longer using, partly because he found a new job he loves. "If things were worse, I'd probably hop back on to cope, if I felt like I was at rock bottom," he admitted.

Performance-enhancing drugs as a way to pick yourself up when you're feeling low—for some people, it's a thing.

T.B., 49, who also lives in California, said that for him, "used correctly, [testosterone] makes everything better". He took testosterone under a doctor's supervision, and reported improved sleep, increased metabolism, less soreness. As for downsides, he noticed his moods and emotions could shift unpredictably—and during periods when he stopped using, he felt fatigued and gained weight. Also, "your balls will shrink up," he said, echoing a number of other conversations. "Not crazy, but you'll notice a change." There really was a lot of talk about testicles.

D.C., a 23-year-old who lives in rural West Virginia, said he didn't have any difficulty scoring drugs. He started using when he was 18 or 19 and had done about half a dozen cycles since then, only with testosterone. "If you walk into Planet Fitness, [you're] probably going to have a tough time. If you walk into the old-school, powerlifting gym that's half run-down, just about any dude you ask will have some."

I asked if he'd consulted with a medical professional. He said he'd discussed it with a nurse practitioner. "Their answer is always not to use," he said. "Not exactly helpful when I'm ignoring that."

One of the users I spoke to was a physician himself—M.B., a 41-year-old from Missouri, who told me he started using at 32. He had since tried many compounds, including human growth hormone

and insulin (the latter he acquired over the counter in a chain retailer where it's commonly sold in most states. Nick said he obtained insulin similarly: "It's probably the most dangerous anabolic you can take, and it's the easiest anabolic you can get. It's ridiculous").

"As a medical professional, I understand the risk-reward balance of almost all modern pharmaceuticals," M.B. said. "Biologically speaking, there is no free lunch." I asked if he was out about his PED use to colleagues. Only his wife, coaches, and a few training partners knew, M.B. said. "At this point, unless my health markers change entirely, I'm unlikely to stop. I live a clean lifestyle—no tobacco, alcohol, excessive caffeine, or fast food. This is my single vice."

Multiple guys said they were bothered by the persistent stereotypes of PED users as meatheads, as aggro dudes prone to so-called roid rage—it just didn't square with the people they had befriended. "There are doctors, engineers, government officials, nurses, software engineers, attorneys, small-business owners, accountants," a 32-year-old named J.R. told me. He lives in North Carolina and serves as an administrator in one of the forums. "There are devoted husbands and committed fathers. There are men more well-versed in organic chemistry and scientific literature than most of the people I went to college with."

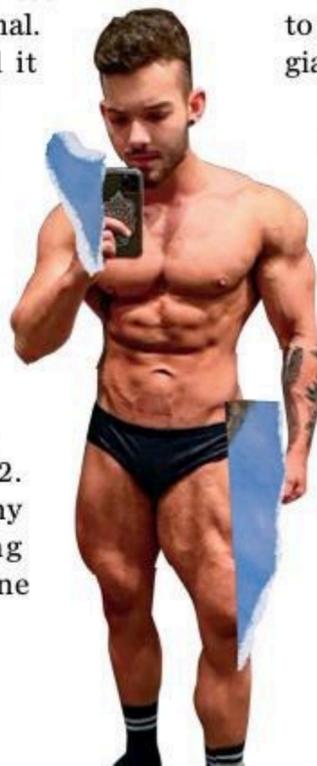
Another assumption or cliché that proved unfounded: that PED users, particularly steroid users, are homophobic straight dudes. Plenty of LGBTQ+ people use PEDs, and there's a lot of sympathy for the trans community; after all, one way to support trans people is to defend an individual's right to alter their body with hormones. Alex Tilinca is a 23-year-old trans man from Long Island. He trains mostly trans men, including trans men interested in competitive bodybuilding. "It's a sport where hormones are involved—it's a natural equalizer," he said. "And people are really receptive to trans guys in the competitive bodybuilding world." For his own journey, Tilinca had found the gym to be an accepting place to hang out. "All the big guys, they were the ones that supported me. They knew I was trans. They helped me learn how to train properly. They're sincerely gentle giants, honestly."

IF YOU'RE WONDERING, *But why now?* ask yourself when you last visited the gym and didn't spot at least one smartphone poised on a machine, filming a workout. Rick Collins, an attorney who specializes in laws around steroids and supplements, put it succinctly: "Social media put steroids on steroids."

On Instagram, well-known steroid users like the Liver King flex their pecs for millions of followers. On TikTok, professed testosterone user and 70-year-old presidential candidate Robert F. Kennedy

E.O., left, is on TRT but previously used anabolics to get huge. "A lot of men are attracted to trying to fix a hole in their ego," he said.

Alex Tilinca, right, found the world of bodybuilding accepting of trans men like him. "It's a sport where hormones are involved—it's a natural equalizer," he said.



“THE AMOUNT OF PRO ATHLETES AND ACTORS THAT HAVE SLID INTO MY DMS, ASKING FOR INPUT ON CYCLES THEY’RE ON—IT WOULD BE A MIND-BLOWING THING FOR PEOPLE TO SEE,” SAYS KENNETH BOULET, WHO’S KNOWN ONLINE FOR HIS INTERVIEWS WITH FITNESS INFLUENCERS.

Jr. does pull-ups. The platforms are super apps for performance enhancement: places where the curious can be inspired by (edited) photos, introduced to (sketchy) regimes, and directed where to (illegally) purchase them, before finally sharing topless mirror selfies, to display their boost-gotten gains.

Perhaps *performance-enhancing drugs*, as a term, is itself outdated—and the reason why some experts have already begun to adopt the phrase *performance-and-image enhancing*.

Of course, given stigmas that still exist, not to mention the risk of jail time, plenty of people who use PEDs don’t admit to using them—especially if they have tons of followers and their income increases by acquiring more. Kenneth Boulet, known as Kenny KO, has built a following based in part on attending fitness exhibitions and asking influencers, on camera, whether their physiques are artificially enhanced—that is, whether they are, in the parlance, “natty or not”. (In May, TikTok had over 20,000 videos posted with the hashtag “natty or not”.) Boulet used steroids in his 20s while training to be a firefighter. Now he’s trying to discourage use by fostering honesty about which influencers are juicing. “They’re taking crazy cycles, saying they’re natural,” Boulet said with exasperation, though he admitted to understanding the appeal. “The feeling when you’re on a cycle is amazing. That’s the addictive part,” he told me, “but it’s not maintainable”.

He said he hoped to spread awareness and help young people realize they shouldn’t compare themselves to what they see online. “There’s nothing more I dislike than a message from a 16-year-old wanting to hop on their first cycle because they saw their favourite influencer, and they’re thinking of hopping on tren,” Boulet said, referring to trenbolone, an anabolic that’s used to enlarge beef cattle.

His message, he admitted, could be misunderstood. “The amount of pro athletes and actors that have slid into my DMs, asking for input on cycles they’re on—it would be a mind-blowing thing for people to see.”

Hollywood has long been loaded with chiselled male bodies—and with actors who were quietly supplementing—but it’s never been easier for actors to get ripped. In the 2023 book *MCU: The Reign of Marvel Studios*, a professor of physical therapy at the University of Southern California estimated that 50 per cent to 75 per cent of Marvel stars use some form of

PED. A television actor told me—we spoke in March before watching *Love Lies Bleeding*, the recent Kristen Stewart film that, like 2022’s *Bros*, uses roid rage for a storyline—that he took creatine to prepare for shirtless scenes, and he’d heard that some castmates used T. “There’s no drug testing in movies,” Lars Wallin, a West Hollywood trainer who works with stars, told me. “The simplest thing to do, to stop this whole trend, is to enforce drug testing on movie shoots, and have actors be fired if they’re found positive.” Then again, who in the industry would be incentivized to do such a thing?

Last December, *Reacher*’s Alan Ritchson broke the code of silence. “For me, it’s a long game. I want to do *Reacher* for 15 years,” he told *Men’s Health UK*. Apparently, the work to get big and cut for the show’s first season had “ravaged” his body, resulting in a shoulder injury. “I don’t want to have to have surgery after every season, and testosterone helps.”

V.S. IS IN his 30s but was 19 when he first got curious. “College is a time where you’re comparing yourself to everyone else,” he told me. “I was always a tiny guy. I thought it would be cool if I could reverse that for once.” He ordered several compounds online, and soon he was bigger, more cut, receiving compliments from strangers. He compared it to playing *Grand Theft Auto* with cheat codes—once you’d experienced the game with codes, why would you go back? V.S.’s PED career lasted eight years. Today he lives in Florida, is on TRT, and may be for life—a notion he struggles to accept. “It’s like, how much of a loser am I going to feel, when I have a wife and kids, and we’re trying to go to Puerto Rico, and Daddy has to pack his needles?”

In the world of PEDs, young users often think their dabbling will be temporary, with short-term consequences; unfortunately, the drugs don’t always work that way. For instance, men who use steroids frequently suppress their body’s own production of testosterone—sometimes persistently. A strength-and-conditioning coach in Ohio told me, “Once you make that leap, odds are good that it’s gonna be for life.”

“The first time you do steroids, you’re kind of finished,” V.S. said. “There’s no turning back from that point.” These days, V.S. works with a doctor named Thomas

O’Connor, who specializes in helping patients who use or previously used PEDs, and shares information online as the Anabolic Doc. His choice of specialty was informed by his own experience. “I’m a 60-year-old dude,” he said. “I did steroids in my 20s. By the time I was in my 30s, I was shut down, and I’ve been on testosterone ever since. I do not give a blessing on steroids.”

O’Connor said he’d had more than 500 patients on dialysis, and had seen dozens of patients commit suicide. He ticked through potential health outcomes for steroid users, like coronary disease and depression. “And it’s not just steroids. You have SARMs, peptides, growth factors, secretagogues, IGF-1, insulin, clenbuterol—I can go on and on.” In terms of a typical patient, more and more, he said, he saw young men, including teenagers. “They’re regular dudes who have a desire to get ripped. The drugs work, and now they’re widely accessible with the internet. It’s been normalized because of accessibility.”

Many of O’Connor’s clients got into PEDs long before they became more commonplace. E.O., 42, is a client who works in finance in New England and is on TRT. When he was in his late 20s, he felt burned out by obligations: raising a family, stress at work. He started supplementing with testosterone and eventually fell into what he described as the “more-is-better trap”—experimenting with anabolics, on top of T, to get huge. Odd things started to happen; not necessarily bad things. Women approached him in the grocery store and squeezed his arm. At investor conferences, he was mistaken for security. Today, still quite big, he saw insecurity in a lot of users’ motivations. “I think it’s a personality thing,” he said. “I think a lot of men are attracted to trying to fix a hole in their ego.”

Others were chasing a long-lost feeling, said Jessica Cho, a doctor who runs an integrative medicine practice in Los Angeles. She told me the question she hears from new patients is often the same: *Can you make me feel like I’m 18 again?* “One of the biggest fights I have with patients is men wanting more testosterone,” she said. “They abuse it and then they give it to their friends. I cannot tame them. I make them sign a waiver saying if you abuse this outside my office, you’re taken off. This is the one area in my whole practice where everything is about compliance.”

What patients sometimes fail to grasp, she

says, is that testosterone doesn't operate in isolation; the endocrine system is similar to an orchestra, where hormones work together for balance, not cacophony. She mentioned she also saw a lot of renal issues in men from consuming too much protein and too many supplements. "They're taking crazy amounts of supplements and their kidneys are getting knocked out."

Researchers in the Netherlands have linked steroid use to left ventricular hypertrophy and impaired systolic and diastolic function. Steroid use has been connected to mood and anxiety disorders. In 2022, *The Washington Post* documented more than two dozen bodybuilders who died young. Meanwhile, multiple experts told me there's a general lack of education around PEDs in the medical establishment. On top of that, there simply isn't enough good empirical data, extensive medical trials, for a typical physician to consult. Which perhaps leaves the average user—especially a new, optimization-focused user, roaming around this nouveau Wild West—more open to "bro science" and harm.

REPORTING THIS STORY, I heard gnarly anecdotes of people getting conned, guys pinning themselves with bunk gear. And I heard from people with no complaints, who loved their peptides, loved their T. And I ran into anecdote after anecdote filled with dysmorphia and pain. What can we expect with normalization? Ideally, more education, more accurate information, and, in a utopian world, an adult could make an informed decision about using PEDs with medical oversight. But right now, unless the laws change, that's not the case. One night, after a series of interviews, I turned to my wife and said, "I think this may be the saddest story I've ever done."

Despite the warnings from doctors, the embrace of PEDs is a party that appears to be only growing. Next year, if organizers prevail in their plans, one of the wilder experiments in normalization will get underway: the Enhanced Games. The inaugural event is being planned with support from, among others, the billionaire biohacker Peter Thiel. Its model is an Olympics-style competition—including swimming, weightlifting, track and field—wherein contestants will be permitted to supplement, provided they juice under medical supervision. Basically: a celebration of transparency around augmentation.

"The Olympics inspires hope and competence in the world, but it's broken and dysfunctional on so many levels," Enhanced Games founder Aron D'Souza told me. He cited a 2017 study commissioned by the World Anti-Doping Agency that surveyed more than 2,000 athletes at a pair of international sporting events and estimated past-year doping in 43.6 per cent of participants at one of them, 57.1 per cent at the other. In a statement to *GQ*, the International Olympic Committee noted that it has a "zero-tolerance policy to

combat cheating and hold accountable anyone responsible for using or providing doping products."

Nonetheless, to the extent that PED use does occur in competitive sports, the Enhanced Games want to pull it out of the shadows. "Any normalization helps," Christian Angermayer, D'Souza's cofounder, said. He pointed to society's acceptance of certain substances over others, despite health outcomes for users and potential harm to others—the risks of drinking alcohol, say, compared to using things like anabolic steroids. (Booze has been associated with significantly worse effects.)

Kenneth Boulet, who no longer uses steroids, works to encourage honesty about usage with his social media series "Natty or Not".

Borrowing their term, I asked if they themselves enhanced, and if so, how? Angermayer said he used a personalized stack of PEDs under strict medical guidance and supervision. D'Souza said he was considering starting but planned to wait until the Enhanced Games' medical safety protocols were finalized.

Nick's experiences, as a former user, demonstrated how much medical oversight might have helped.

His initial DIY use of SARMs had been an egress into rougher stuff. At first it was Masteron and Equipoise, purchased from a creepy gym bro. But something was wrong with the drugs; postinjection, he developed large lumps under his skin. "I couldn't go over speed bumps in my car without wincing." Homemade steroids are a combination of a hormone powder, alcohol, and a carrier oil, where the powder gets dissolved and heated into a solution. Nick suspected the drugs he'd bought weren't prepared properly. "If you don't cook steroids long enough, they don't transition from powder into liquid," he explained. "It means your gear is 'crashed'."

Still, Nick stuck with them and gradually added other compounds. He rattled off some of the drugs he tried during his career with such familiarity, they sounded like underground hardcore bands. Anavar, D-Bol, NPP. At times, depending on the compound, he was shooting every day, a thousand-plus milligrams per week. And he grew muscle, lots of it—and he also grew paranoid, and felt extremely lethargic outside the gym. And yet: "The second you touch a weight, you're a god. I was gaining 20, 40 pounds (nine to 18 kgs) on my bench press every two to three weeks. It was madness."

Meanwhile, one of the drugs turned his sweat yellow (also his semen). His hairline

receded and he switched to a mohawk. "This is the progression of bodybuilders: full hair, mohawk, bald." Plus, he experienced such bad acne, he started going to a tanning salon multiple times a week, mainly to roast his back.

Eventually, Nick started making his own gear—partly to save money but also to make money. A single bottle of steroids cost him about six dollars (Rs 500) to produce, and he could sell it for \$50 to \$90 (₹4,000–₹7,500). Unfortunately, cooking wasn't easy—the first batch bubbled over in the kitchen. By that point, in his mid-to-late 20s, he'd moved to Los Angeles, and a friend told him about a guy in Hollywood who'd cook on order, if you supplied the raw hormone powders. Nick met him, paid him, handed over the goods. A week later, "the dude rolled up to Starbucks with close to a thousand bottles of gear in a trash bag. So I'm going down Sunset Boulevard in broad daylight, bottles rolling around, *clank, clank, clank*. I'm walking to my car with a life sentence on my back, probably."

Nick said he discovered he didn't have the temperament to be a dealer. He gave away gear for free, plus he was using his own supply. And soon he hit his lowest point, when he was lying on the kitchen floor. "I had probably \$20,000 to \$30,000 (₹1,60,000–₹2,50,000) worth of steroids cooked, ready for distribution. I had raw powders in the home from China. I had 911 dialed, but I kept thinking about the consequences of what might happen, just the shame for my family."

Today, Nick takes a variety of peptides. He's on TRT and believes he will be for life—mainly because when he's gone off T before, "you have zero will to live. You don't want to eat, you don't want to fuck. You don't want to do anything." He enjoyed exploring new ways of being active: dance, rock climbing, jujitsu. "I still think being buff is cool, but a lot of those guys can't do shit. Also, you can't wear cool clothes," he said, laughing. "It's a rule. The bigger you get, the dumber the clothes."

I asked what his advice would be for young people contemplating PEDs. His response was immediate: "Get into therapy". I thought he was talking about hormone therapy, but no: psychological therapy. "Get into therapy, and take it as a challenge to learn to love the body you have. Get into therapy, be in therapy once a week for a good year, and work hard. It's just like the gym: You get out what you put in," he said. "It sounds so cliché and corny. I used to spit when I would hear shit like that. I thought there was something honourable in hating yourself enough to change your body."

Nick's voice was clear, steady, and despondent. "I had to find a way to love myself through almost dying," he said. "I just hope that one young person [reading this] will stop early and coast forever." ❖



ROSECRANSBALDWIN is a frequent contributor to *GQ* and the bestselling author of *Everything Now: Lessons From the City-State of Los Angeles*.

The
Year
of
the

Retro



Nostalgia will do strange things to you – and when watches are involved, those effects go wild. For years, brands like Cartier, Longines, Rolex and Audemars Piguet have reintroduced models that help reinforce their most precious assets of all – identity and heritage – while highlighting how their artisanal skills and technical innovations have evolved. This year, horology has gone madder than ever for its retro and vintage forefathers, with almost every big name dabbling in the archives in the hope of creating a future classic.

Tudor Black Bay 58 GMT

If we had to phone a friend about vintage grails, Bob's Watches founder Paul Altieri would be on speed dial. "I really like the case size and vintage gilt text, not to mention the 'Coke' bezel, which we weren't expecting from Tudor," says Altieri about the new Black Bay 58 GMT. "It makes me think of the fuchsia bezels on some late-'60s Rolex GMT-Masters."

THEY LOOK LIKE VINTAGE GRAILS FROM THE DEPTHS OF THE ARCHIVES—BUT FROM LOUIS VUITTON TO TUDOR, THE 24 MOST COVETED RELEASES OF 2024 ARE ALL BRAND NEW.

BY MIKE CHRISTENSEN
PHOTOGRAPHS BY THOMAS CHÉNÉ AND PEDRO AGUILAR



TAG Heuer New Carrera Skipper Gold

Maybe the hype around TAG Heuer's 1968 Carrera Skipper is more art than science, but people sure do go crazy for its tricolour subdial. Bringing a new version back last year was step one of a rather good plan, and this rose gold beauty is the next step no one saw coming.

Watch

**JAEGER-LECOULTRE
DUOMETRE
CHRONOGRAPH
MOON PLATINUM**

Having made its debut in 2007, the Duometre takes a whole lot of inspiration from something far older: an 1881 pocket watch. This year, it's got a masterful renovation, with JLC cooking up a way to combine moon phase and chronograph complications in glorious harmony.



Chopard Alpine Eagle XL Chrono Titanium

Taking cues from an '80s classic by the name of St Moritz, the Alpine Eagle has really started flying after its rebirth in 2019. Chopard is known for its material classification, so it makes sense for it to add a version in grade-five titanium. In our book, this is now the sportiest version of the brand's sportiest sports watch.

HERMÈS CUT

A sure-fire way to get men interested in a watch these days is to imply that it's aimed at women. Breitling did so with its Victoria Beckham collab, and now Hermès has with its new Cut collection. "The clarity of design, its sizing, and its fit remind me so much of the way a vintage 36mm Rolex Explorer wears—but with a real freshness," says Hodinkee's Danny Milton. "It's a great modern sports watch—for everyone."



**SEIKO PROSPEX 1965 REVIVAL DIVER'S
3-DAY 300M**

The clues are in the name, but if you need them spelled out: an entry-level Japanese dive watch from 1965 gets a welcome reissue. The freshness of this tide-grey dial is befitting of a special-edition watch that can dive down as far as 300m.

Similar to the Tambour's refresh last year, LV is giving its Escale a grand makeover for 2024. Compared with its predecessors, this is completely pared-back and has countless design nods to LV's iconic trunk: the applied gold indexes, the gold minute-marker studs, the leather strap and even the canvas-like dial texture. It's 39mm of rose gold and decidedly sleeker, too, thanks to the movements LV is crafting in its La Fabrique du Temps watchmaking facilities. Escale means "stopover" in French, but it appears more than ever that Vuitton is in the haute horology game for the long haul.





**BREITLING NAVITIMER
B12 CHRONOGRAPH 41
COSMONAUTE**

Breitling is busy spending 2024 celebrating 140 Years of Firsts. However, much like marketing jargon that sounds, it's impossible to overstate what the Navitimer and Cosmonaute models have done for aviation-leaning watchmaking over the years. With this 41mm hunk, that history lives on.



**BREMONT TERRA NOVA
38MM TIME ONLY**

New Bremont CEO Davide Cerrato has a sound effect buzzer on his phone that he presses whenever someone suggests a bad idea. He certainly didn't reach for it when the sketches for this rugged tool watch landed on his desk.



PIAGET POLO DATE

Anyone still reeling from Nestlé's callous discontinuation of the Caramac chocolate bar will be heartened to see its unexpected visual reincarnation in the undulating face of a new Polo in honour of Piaget's big 150. But with that limited to only 300 pieces, the rest of us stand more chance of copping this 42mm rose gold, brown-dial Date, which on a brown leather strap looks positively edible, too.



Rolex Cosmograph Daytona

Trust the Crown to juice up the world's most coveted sports watch, while still keeping it classy. As Altieri puts it, "The gem setting and use of black and white mother-of-pearl on the dial really sets this Daytona apart from previous generations."



AUDEMARS PIGUET ROYAL OAK SELFWINDING CHRONOGRAPH

Sometimes you just don't realise you need an AP Royal Oak featuring a smoked dial with that *grande tapisserie* patterned effect until you see one. Now you do. Especially as its been paired with a yellow gold for the first time.

VACHERON CONSTANTIN OVERSEAS DATE

One of the more conservative brands breaking 268 years of tradition to drop a totally new dial colour? Only at Watches & Wonders, the timepiece equivalent of Paris Fashion Week. "We developed a very subtle and delicate tone of green to match the elegance and refinement of the Overseas collection," says style and heritage director Christian Selmoni, who's been at Vacheron for 34 of those years. Exclusively pairing the colour with pink gold cases is a power move for the ages.



Cartier Santos de

“Maybe Cartier knows something we don’t,” says Dimepiece’s Brynn Wallner, after the French maison dropped a collection of chunky new editions of its oldest wristwatch (this brown-dialled one included) so soon after whipping up a frenzy for teeny-tiny watches. “They feel in direct opposition to the ’70s/’90s genderfluid trends we’re seeing across fashion that have seeped into the horological universe,” adds Wallner—and we’re guessing that is exactly Cartier’s intention.



IWC PORTUGIESER CHRONOGRAPH

As far as IWC CEO Christoph Grainger-Herr is concerned, “you’re basically getting all of the IWC DNA” in one watch with the Portugieser Chronograph. It’s as close as it comes to true faithfulness in a remake, with only minor tinkering (including a wonderfully updated movement) to the 1939 original. Grainger-Herr reckons it is “often the first, sometimes only, watch purchase” a person will ever make, so it makes sense that IWC remains so loyal to the original.



BLANCPAIN FIFTY FATHOMS 42MM

Real divers have only dreamed of wearing a Blancpain Fifty Fathoms in red gold at the bottom of the ocean. Now they can, as the OG of OG dive watches gets another refit—complete with a game-changing new clasp that clamps the watch to your wrist more securely than ever.

GRAND SEIKO GENBI VALLEY HI-BEAT LIMITED EDITION

Natural beauty. Japan's most revered watchmaker. It's precisely as the watch gods dictate. This time around, the masters at Grand Seiko have unveiled a dial pattern inspired by the view from the windows of its headquarters in Shizukuishi, Iwate Prefecture. It's the ninth upgrade to the heritage 1967 44GS model—and with an in-house high-beat 9SA5 movement inside, it's arguably the finest.

MONTBLANC ICED SEA AUTOMATIC DATE

Why have Montblanc's Iced Sea dive watches been such a success in the three years since they dropped? "Because its history and the characteristics of the watch make it unique," says Laurent Lecamp, Montblanc's global MD, who lives and breathes alpine life like few others. Deciding to put the glacier the brand is named after on the dial has worked a treat—and this bronze version is extra special.

LONGINES HYDROCONQUEST GMT 43MM

While most watch brands are downsizing their cases, Longines is sticking to its diving roots by upscaling the new HydroConquest—presumably to ensure no legibility is lost when hundreds of metres below sea level. Few things are more quintessentially elegant in Longines' locker than a dial in goldy-green—the colour it has played with more than most over the years.



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Parmigiani Fleurier Toric Magazine Petite Seconde Celadon Grey

Regardless of which side of the royal fence you sit on, few can contest King Charles' stellar choice in wristwear. He's worn a Parmigiani Fleurier Toric Chronograph since the early '00s (the brand has only been making watches since 1996), but the new Toric Petite Seconde—40.6mm of platinum beauty—might have him considering an upgrade. The small seconds subdial at six o'clock is where it gets its name, and a more pristine dial you'll rarely see.



GUCCI
INTERLOCKING G

Bringing a '70s banger back into the fold is a very polite way for Gucci's creative director Sabato De Sarno to say that the brand's watches now fall under his remit. While we'll miss Alessandro Michele's whimsical dials of bees and snakes, this sleek, slimline beauty has a whole other sex appeal.



PATEK PHILIPPE GOLDEN ELLIPSE

There aren't many chain bracelets kicking around this year, which is probably why Patek Philippe figured it appropriate to put a new, postmodern pink gold iteration on its uniquely shaped (and very slender) self-winding Golden Ellipse.



TISSOT PRX CHRONO VALJOUX

Meant as a tremendous compliment, this shouts "AP Royal Oak, but make it affordable" to anyone in the know. The dark green dial makes the deeply vintage aura of the PRX seem even more retro, while the date window in between four and five o'clock works a treat.



GERALD CHARLES
MASTERLINK

In 2007, four years before watch designer extraordinaire Gérald Genta left this world for horological heaven, he sketched out what today has been realised as Gerald Charles' new Masterlink. That integrated bracelet is millimetre-perfect and would put a smile on GG's face as big as the design feat at six o'clock.

THE

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He grew up listening to Ice Cube and Travis Scott, unless he was singing along to the corridos that immortalized larger-than-life Mexican legends. Now, the mullet-rocking superstar is fast becoming as famous as his rap idols—and as compelling as the folk heroes he used to sing about.

BY PAULA MEJÍA PHOTOGRAPHS BY MICHAEL SCHMELLING STYLED BY BRANDON TAN

THE





PREVIOUS PAGE

- Shirt
- Versace**
- Tank top
- Calvin Klein**
- Hat
- Emily Dawn Long**
- Earring
- (throughout)
- and necklace
- De Beers**
- Grills (throughout),
- his own

Pluma can't decide which tattoo—his second of the day, after an image of the Virgin Mary—he wants emblazoned on his shin. Initially, the wiry 24-year-old Mexican singer, rapper, and record label CEO settles on the cosmic Vivienne Westwood “Love” insignia, with Saturn (the planet) in place of the *o*. He eagerly pulls up the logo on his phone and shows it to Ganga, one of several tattoo artists who've joined him at his recording studio in California's Orange County. The location, wedged into a strip mall, a stone's throw from Disneyland, belies the unconventional things he's been up to here for the past few years.

Furrowing his brow, Peso asks a member of his team for a second opinion. “*Está perro*,” his friend concludes. It's cool.

But Peso isn't convinced. Seconds later, he's moved on from the designer logo, deciding instead on a tattoo of the Super Star icon from the Mario franchise. Ganga suggests that the star would look better somewhere else. Peso wordlessly drops his Celine sweats so Ganga can trace an outline of the symbol on his right thigh.

Before he's done, Peso has moved on to yet another idea: the Parental Advisory label. Seconds later, he throws out a spider as a fourth option. He already has an arachnid inked on his right hip bone, a nod to his boyhood love of the Tobey Maguire-era *Spider-Man* flicks. “What if they're running up and down my leg?” he asks the room.

This quality—an ambition verging on itchiness—has guided Peso, born Hassan Emilio Kabande Laija, through an extraordinary ascent that has kicked into overdrive this past year. He was YouTube's most viewed artist of 2023 in the US, beating out pop behemoths like Bad Bunny and Taylor Swift. His song with Eslabon Armado, “Ella Baila Sola,” became the first regional Mexican tune ever to crack the Billboard Top 10; blending traditional forms and modern sounds, he has helped *música Mexicana* go global. He's been criticized in some quarters for valorizing narco culture—but he's also received death threats from drug cartels. Somewhere in there, too, he won a Grammy.

Today, Peso is deep into refining his forthcoming album *Éxodo*, as well as a reworked live show to accompany its release. “It's going to be very raw. Real,” Peso says of his upcoming tour. “*Sin pelos en la lengua*,” he adds, a saying that roughly translates to: he will not be mincing words.

Given his brief but startling track record, both are more likely than not to be global smashes—but they're also table-setters for his next era. He's interested in being more than just the guy who makes the music: Double P Records, the independent label he co-owns with industry veteran George Prajin, is humming with new signings and upcoming releases. Peso believes there's a wealth of rising talent within *música Mexicana*, and he wants to serve as an alternative to what he sees as a too often predatory system (he serves as both CEO and head of A&R.) Double P will also function as an umbrella for other, less-music-focused pursuits—including potential Hollywood projects. The offices are under construction the day I visit, progress being made on a proper HQ: two new studios, a gym, conference rooms, the whole record-label deal.

His ambitions, in music and in life, surprise even those closest to him. “Sometimes I'm kind of at a loss at the knowledge that he possesses at such a young age, and also, he didn't have that much experience in the business, right?” says Prajin. “Sometimes I wonder if he's like an old soul,” he adds, with the reverence of an awed parent. “Like, if a former rock star got reincarnated in this kid.”

Initially, Peso hit the scene as a buzzy new voice singing *música Mexicana*—from one angle, a participant in the global pop diaspora that has minted superstars like his peers Junior H and Natanael Cano. But almost instantly, he seemed to strike an even deeper nerve. “We're a new generation who grew up listening to a lot of music—not just *música Mexicana*,” Peso tells me at the Double P offices, speaking primarily in Spanish. “And I think those of us Mexican artists who are at a good moment are all young, and I think that influences things a lot. Because more than anything, we have very mixed cultures,” adding that his generation's “blend of tastes” contributes to the appeal.

In some respects, it was only a matter of time before someone like him rose to superstardom. Back when





THESE PAGES

Hoodie and
sweatpants
Balenciaga

T-shirt
Connor McKnight

His own underwear
Skims

Watch
Hublot

Necklace (top)
De Beers

Necklaces (middle)
and ring
Chrome Hearts

Necklace (bottom)
Chopard

His own bracelet
Van Cleef & Arpels

Prajin worked as a record buyer throughout Southern California in the '90s, he was impressed by kids who “were coming in and buying Chalino Sánchez but also buying Notorious B.I.G.” when they shopped for music. That spurred Prajin to try and merge the two musical traditions together, setting up collaborations between rappers and banda groups. “But everything I did, as cool as it was, there was really not much success around it,” he says. That changed when he met Peso. “He told me he could rap, he told me he wanted to do reggaeton, he told me he wanted to do all these different genres. And I asked him, ‘Well, how do you want to do it?’” Prajin remembers. “He’s like, ‘Well, I definitely don’t want to do a beat that has a tuba, or anything like that.’ He’s like, ‘I want to do a rap song that’s a real rap song. And then I’ll do a regional song that’s a regional track, and I’ll do a reggaeton. I want to do each one in its own lane.’ And, honestly, he answered my 25-year puzzle.”

He’s done so in unique fashion. His outré music, floppy Edgar mullet, haute couture proclivities, and voice—somewhere between Tom Waits’s dive-bar croak and Kurt Cobain’s gravelly yelps—make him look like, and sound like, the future.

To that end, I tell Peso that I’d been struck by his regular use, in his songs, of the word *Rubicon*—that it seems like a compelling metaphor for the way he’s crossed boundaries. My take is a little much, it turns out: those specific references gesture toward the *Jeep* Rubicon, he explains. 4x4s aside, though, an undeniable transformation has played out in recent months. These days, Peso Pluma isn’t just a megastar of música Mexicana. He’s a global pop-culture juggernaut, occupying the über-rarefied echelon of multihyphenate fame that brings with it top-tier billing at Coachella, a flurry of TikTok explainers unpacking his every utterance, partnerships with the same icons who may have been plastered on his own teenage bedroom walls. His everyday outings prompt sensationalist tabloid headlines. It’s a lot.

“On two sides of the coin, I’m going to tell you, when there are bad moments I say, What the fuck did I do?” he admits, his Van Cleef & Arpels Alhambra bracelet jingling beside a custom number featuring a series of broken hearts. “But when there are good moments, I say, Thank God.”

Early at the studio, splayed face down on a fold-out bed, he scrolls absentmindedly through his Instagram DMs as Ganga inks him with the Virgin Mary. He keeps a steady playlist of *Éxodo* cuts and hip-hop bumping. At one point, he peels his face off the pillow and looks at me. “This is my life,” he says, wincing a bit as the tattoo gun whirs against his skin.

IF SOME OF Peso’s tattoos are celebrations, others appear prophetic. He had “All Eyez on Me” inked across his chest years before he blew up—a tribute to Tupac but also a manifestation. Peso firmly believes in the law of attraction. It’s not so much that he sensed this was going to happen as he willed it into existence.

Growing up in Guadalajara, Mexico, a restless young Peso relished going to family parties and quinceañeras, where he’d get to watch talented musicians shred on bajo sextos and accordions. Back then, he wanted to work in music in whatever capacity the business would have him. “If I get to do music, great. If I get to be a vocalist, great. If I have to be the one carrying around instruments, that’s also great,” he remembers thinking. “I just wanted to be involved in music.” One early job found him carting around instruments for his cousin’s band.

Jacket
Jacquemus
Tank top and pants
Rick Owens
Boots
Marsèll
Necklace
De Beers
Bracelet (on top)
Jacob & Co
Bracelet (on bottom)
David Yurman
His own guitar
Taylor Guitars





THIS PAGE

Shirt

Versace

Shorts

Louis Vuitton by Tyler, the Creator

Bracelet (on top)

Jacob & Co

Bracelet (on bottom)

David Yurman

OPPOSITE PAGE

Jacket and pants

Louis Vuitton by Tyler, the Creator

Tank top

Calvin Klein

Necklace

Jacob & Co

We're sitting on the lone couch in the mostly empty label offices. He's a little bleary-eyed, having stayed up until 6am vibing with a "very famous rapper" in the studio (he won't say who), and his voice is strained from a cold he hasn't quite shaken yet. A member of his team brings his lunch: takeout chicken Alfredo pasta, paired with a choice of orange Fanta or Mountain Dew Code Red. Peso picks up the Mountain Dew and examines it. "Does this have caffeine?" he asks out loud. He steers clear of stimulants, preferring a mellow weed high to carry him throughout the day.

At home, Peso's family often played corridos, narrative folk songs that celebrated cowboys, criminals, and folk heroes. They were partial to Chalino Sánchez, a near-mythic singer whose music had a profound effect on Peso. "Chalino Sánchez was a legend," he says between bites of pasta. Sánchez famously stoked controversy with both his creaky voice and the content of his songs: hair-raising tales of antiheroes, often operating outside the law. Once, when a dissatisfied fan shot at Sánchez during a gig, he fired back—and lived, despite sustaining a number of gunshot wounds. A few months later he died under mysterious circumstances following a show in Culiacán, the capital of the Mexican state of Sinaloa; it's thought that a note that Sánchez was passed and read to himself onstage that night promised his imminent murder.

These were some of the songs—the myths—Peso was raised on. "The significance of corridos in history is the story of a valiant man," Peso explains. "That's changed. These days it's not like that." Indeed, these days, the most popular, and most contentious, songs

in the genre are so-called narco corridos, songs written about, and sometimes commissioned by, drug traffickers, which gained popularity around the 1980s. Peso's modern-day corridos have made him immensely popular, but they've also had an isolating effect: officials from the Chilean government denounced him ahead of a scheduled concert there, stating that his performance would aid in the "normalization of narco culture in our country". He cancelled that show—and another in Tijuana, after receiving death threats from a drug cartel thought to be upset about lyrics praising the rival trafficker Joaquin "El Chapo" Guzmán.

But, he says, to assign corridos this sort of power is to misunderstand their appeal. "I feel that the art of this, of corridos, is that—and this is delicate subject to talk about, but you have to touch on it with transparency—because it's the reality of things," he says, drawing a distinction between the literal words he sings and how a listener interprets them. "There's a lot of things that aren't shown on TV, a lot of things that people don't know about. A corrido isn't just for a narco trafficker, or a delinquent, or a criminal. A corrido can be for a doctor, for a lawyer, for a student, for a friend." The tradition is so central to his self-conception, in fact, that during his blockbuster Coachella show this spring, he displayed images and clips of corrido musicians like Sánchez behind him onstage. He closed the set with a big-screen slideshow of his corrido forebears—ending with an image of himself.

As a kid, Peso also felt drawn to rappers like Drake, Ice Cube, and Travis Scott, riveted by how they told stories within their songs. "I didn't learn English in books and with teachers and in school," he says. "A lot of [rap] albums when I was a young kid were my way of wanting to understand English. To know what they were saying, what they were referring to with their vocabulary, the lingo they used."

Eventually, Peso says his friends nudged him to go onstage during those family parties, where full bands would jam to norteño songs and corridos live. "*Uno ya pedo pues uno se sube [al escenario], me entiendes?*" he says, grinning. Meaning that after a drink or two, you don't sweat the otherwise stomach-churning prospect of belting songs in front of friends and strangers. For these small but lively crowds, he sang popular Mexican songs. In Culiacán, Peso also happened to link up with his cousin, Tito Double P, a fellow burgeoning musician and songwriter. Tito then wrote what became Peso's first hit single, a collaboration with fellow vocalist Raúl Vega: "El Belicón", full of references to bazookas and sports cars. Accompanied by a full band, he and Vega boast about having a fleet of sports cars and going nowhere without a convoy. This provocative first jab telegraphed that he was going to do things a little differently.

For Peso, the disparate-seeming worlds of rap and corridos are psychically entwined. "Obviously, we see that they're two different styles and genres that come from different cultures and different countries and different languages," Peso says. "But at the end of the day, in hip-hop, in rap, just like in corridos, and other urbano music like reggaeton, it talks about reality. We're not promoting delinquency at all. We're only talking about things that happen in real life... It's about projecting that to people. That's why people identify so



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much with rap and hip-hop, and corridos: the originality, and the authenticity, that we're not lying to them. They know that it's real."

Peso's entrance couldn't have been better timed. Starting in the 2010s, corridos began splintering into distinct subgenres and picking up steam. It helped that Peso also possessed that innate Gen Z ability to continuously reinvent the wheel, which is necessary to hold people's fractured attention spans. Peso capitalized on his early success with a slew of collaborations while also riffing on corridos tumbados—songs that interspersed elements of urbano, trap, and other genres into the musical form—that had emerged in the zeitgeist from artists like Junior H and Natanael Cano. Everything happened at warp speed after that.

"There was already a movement happening," says Prajin, who, in addition to helping run Double P, serves as Peso's manager. "The difference is that here comes Peso Pluma, with his charisma and also his willingness to take the music outside of the box and take it to different regions, to different countries. Basically, he took what was happening with the corridos tumbados that everybody else started. But he connected that highway to the international highway."

Later, in the studio, with Ganga working away at Peso's new tattoo, the singer joins his producer Jesus Ivan Leal Reyes (AKA Parka) in singing corridos from generations past. Parka plays a twangy guitar as the two croon "Señor Talento" and "Nuestro Olvido". Parka then noodles the chords to "Descansa General", a song (famously covered by Sánchez) that describes the revolutionary general Pancho Villa's rise to power and eventual assassination. Peso introduces this one. "These are corridos, man, that they played during the Mexican Revolution, 1910," he announces to everyone in the studio. "This is a corrido about Pancho Villa. He was a Mexican revolutionary... He was a pimp, a mafioso. He would walk down the street with his guns, and with three girls by his side."

IN LATE-JANUARY 2023, Peso, bundled up in a Burberry hoodie, filmed a brief POV-style clip in Times Square. He was up on the big screens there for the first time, his song "PRC", with Natanael Cano, buzzing across the universe. While basking in it, Peso asked someone off camera: "Is Peter Parker from here?" Told that, yes, Spider-Man is from New York City, he bobbed his head with a contented nod, a colossal smile growing across his face. The video promptly went viral, and since then his fans have taken to calling him Spider-Man (he's also got the requisite chain depicting the Marvel character).

The video is wild to watch a year later. For one thing, it's impossible to imagine Peso roaming casually around Times Square now without getting mobbed. It's also striking how wide-eyed he appeared in the TikTok snippet. Even now, Peso still seems like he's getting used to being a celebrity. But his brash Peso Pluma persona provides relief—not unlike the way bashful Peter Parker becomes the Amazing Spider-Man. When his Peso Pluma mask is on, Peso says, he "doesn't give a fuck".

When he's not in Peso mode, he keeps things fairly low-key, with room for exceptions. "When I'm not working, I'm at the gym. When I'm not at the gym, I'm playing PlayStation," he says. "When I'm not playing

PlayStation... maybe I'll go to fucking Louis Vuitton and spend 50 racks."

I ask Prajin how he sees Peso adjusting to fame. "It's a contract: You become famous, you lose your privacy," he says. "You can be prepared for the cheers and sometimes even the money, but not with all the other collateral things that come with it. I think he always was confident that he was going to make it, but I don't think he ever expected it to be as hard in terms of your life."

By Peso's own admission, the past few months have been rough. He and his girlfriend, the Argentine musician Nicki Nicole, broke up squarely in the public eye. Shortly afterward, he cancelled a string of shows in South America—including the one that drew criticism from the Chilean government. He says he cancelled those dates because he needed vocal rest, and that the brief break has been restorative. "I had the opportunity to be calm, to give myself time, to give myself time to work on my album," he says. "To work on myself, to be well physically and emotionally." But in the next breath, Peso adds that "not stopping work is the healthiest thing for me, as an artist and as a person. Because my therapy and my catharsis, and how I vent, is through music."

Peso's real ambitions seem grander than merely chasing virality. He'll keep releasing music independently, and building out the record label. Prajin singles out his partner's ability to find artists who push música Mexicana forward—and have global potential. Peso insists that interest in the music is durable—not an accident of the algorithm. "I think we're living through a golden age of música Mexicana," Peso says. "We have to take advantage and support new talents that are emerging." But he's also batting around the prospect of a TV series about his life, and Prajin says Peso wants to start a fashion line, too.

It's enough to make a young man think great thoughts. These days, Peso practices Catholicism, and his faith is plainly visible: in his iPhone background (an image of the Virgin of Guadalupe), in the biblical undercurrents in his album titles, in his tattoos. *Éxodo*, of course, name-checks the story of Moses parting the Red Sea. "I think that's what's happening with Peso Pluma and the project," he tells me. "I think we managed to open this barrier that was impenetrable. They thought it would be impossible to do, no? And I think we did it."

"Impenetrable, how?" I ask.

"A lot of people, I think, didn't believe in our talent," he says. "I think they didn't believe in what we do...in that Mexicans are *chingones*, and we can compete with anyone they put alongside us," he says, using a phrase that translates roughly to "badasses".

When I leave the studio that night, Peso is still mulling over which tattoo will follow his Virgin Mary. But a few days later, he posts a snapshot of himself performing at Pa'l Norte, a festival in Monterrey, Mexico, and I notice the fresh black ink on his leg. He'd opted, it turns out, for the star: the power that allows Super Mario to surge through obstacles, rendering him immune to anything that hurtles into his path. ❖

PAULA MEJÍA is a writer and an editor living in Los Angeles. She wrote about Karol G's reggaeton disruptions in the April/May 2023 issue of GQ.

All clothing and boots

Saint Laurent by Anthony Vaccarello

Barbering by David Thomas using BaBylissPro. Skin by Hee Soo Kwon using Dior Backstage Face & Body Foundation. Tailoring by Yelena Travkina. Set design by James Rene. Produced by Emily O'Meara at JN Production.



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For more information, visit www.stonexindia.com

Conscious luxury architecture

Established in 2016, The Earth Home (TEHA), led by Principal Architect Adreesh Chakraborty, is an architecture and interior design studio specialising in premium projects across the subcontinent. The firm aims to create a future where humanity builds and thrives consciously with the planet, living harmoniously with its diverse life. Their mission emphasises creating with the earth, sun, and wind by designing shadows and comfort across seasons, creating with hedonism by designing desirable and pleasurable spaces, and creating to last by ensuring projects and products endure, minimising resource consumption. Their Rubik's Cube project in New Delhi, completed in 2020, integrates climatic design with double-height volumes and strategic zoning to optimise comfort and views of the surrounding foliage.

For more information, visit www.theearthhome.com or follow @theearthhome on Instagram



Transcending time and culture

Levi's 501® jeans, originating in 1873, have evolved over 151 years into an iconic fashion staple. Renowned for their timeless appeal and boundary-breaking style, they embody authentic, do-what-you-want fashion, making them one of the most recognisable and influential garments in history. 501® truly defines classic American style and effortless cool.

For more information, visit www.levi.in or visit the nearest Levi's store



Sophistication for every bath

Unveiling a sanctuary of serenity, Vitra and Tom Dixon present the Liquid Collection. Minimalism reigns supreme with soft curves and enduring white ceramics. Bold brassware in black or chrome adds definition, while innovative features like lighted mirrors redefine function, ensuring a bathroom that remains effortlessly stylish for years to come. From statement basins to discreet insets, Liquid offers a spectrum of options for a timeless bathroom experience.

For more information, visit www.vitra-india.com or follow @vitrabathrooms on Instagram



Artistic fragrances

Sevā Home's latest limited edition collection, Sevā Home X BOBO Calcutta, presents a collaboration with designer Ayushman Mitra. The collection includes a Candle (INR 7,800), a Diffuser (INR 8,100), and a Gift Set (INR 15,900). The fragrances boast a captivating blend of citrus, plum, agarwood, saffron, rose, jasmine, patchouli, sandalwood, oud, cypress, and musk notes, offering a sensory experience that is meticulously crafted to transform any space into a haven of positivity. CEO Arushi Agrawal sees it as merging art with home décor, while Ayushman Mitra emphasises community and positivity. Sevā Home's philanthropy includes conducting cataract surgeries with every tenth product purchased.

For more information, visit www.sevahome.in or visit their Flagship Pop-Up on the First Floor, Jio World Drive



Automatics with ceramic elegance

Titan introduces new watches in its Ceramic Fusion Automatics collection, where sophistication meets innovation. Focusing on automatics this year, Titan blends ceramic build and in-house automatic movement, showcasing their craftsmanship. The collection features durable, scratch-resistant, lightweight, and hypoallergenic ceramic, combined with proprietary automatic calibres, offering a fresh and sophisticated design.

For more information, visit www.titan.co.in or visit the nearest Titan store



The scented story

ScentAir, a curator for your shopping experiences enhances your retail therapy with bespoke scents, elevating luxury boutiques and avant-garde streetwear emporiums alike. With a mission to redefine environments and amplify brand experiences, ScentAir crafts custom fragrances tailored to each fashion destination. From the zesty allure of citrus infusing sportswear havens to the opulent musk adorning haute couture boutiques, these scents weave an unforgettable tapestry, lingering in memory and subtly influencing perceptions, from brands to buyers.

For more information, visit www.scentair.com

By MADS HORWATH

