



Fortune Telling
Deconstructing the price of a luxury watch
D2

OFF DUTY

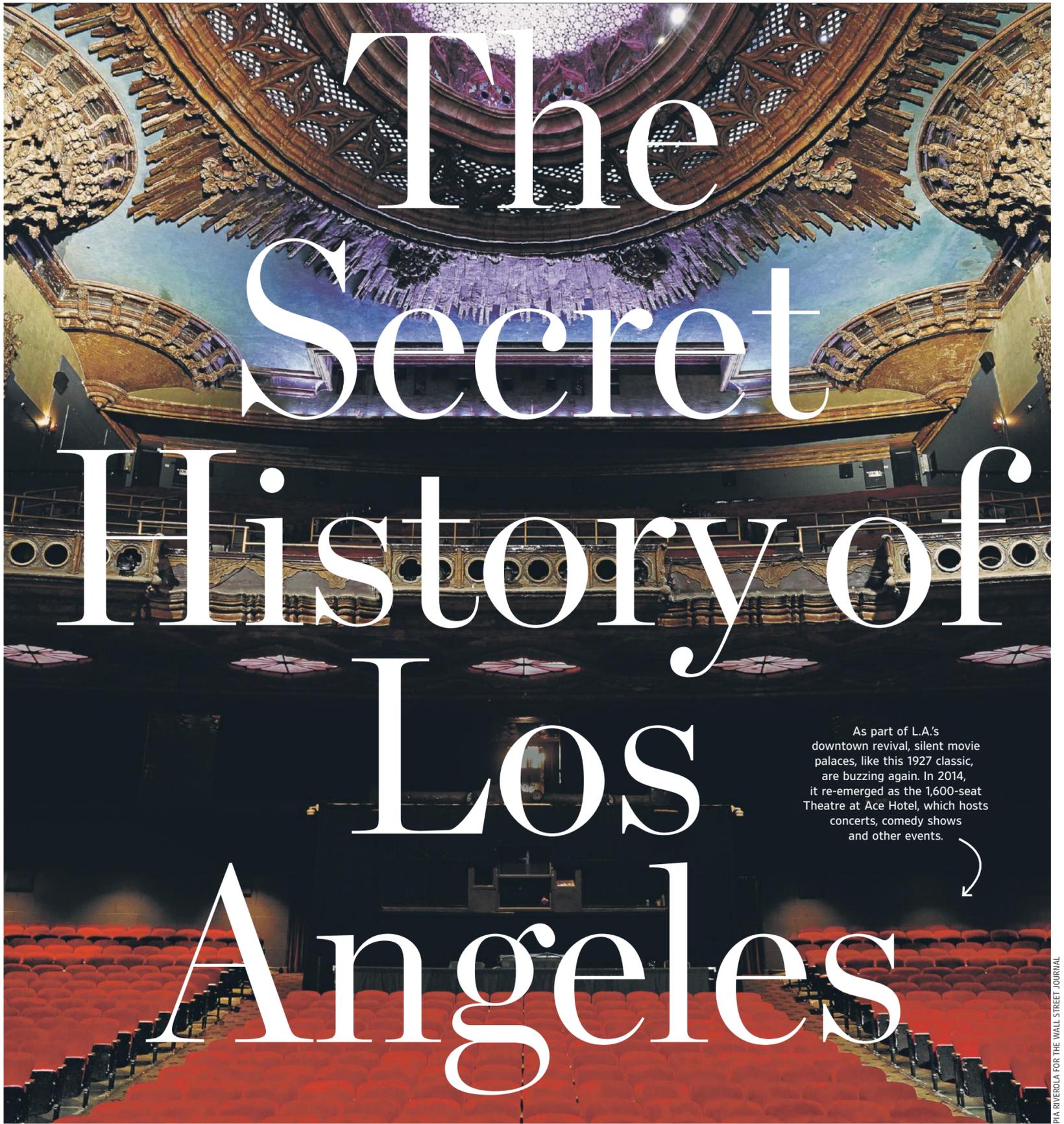
Neither Large Nor Charged
Lincoln's smaller SUV is, notably, not electric
D10



FASHION | FOOD | DESIGN | TRAVEL | GEAR

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

**** Saturday/Sunday, February 29 - March 1, 2020 | D1



As part of L.A.'s downtown revival, silent movie palaces, like this 1927 classic, are buzzing again. In 2014, it re-emerged as the 1,600-seat Theatre at Ace Hotel, which hosts concerts, comedy shows and other events.

The Secret History of Los Angeles

Most visitors might smirk at the idea of 'old' in a city obsessed with reinvention. But L.A.'s romanticized past is in vogue, with the newest hot spots housed in reborn relics. Here, an urban explorer's guide

By TONY PERROTTET

THE MOST ECCENTRIC historical trail in Los Angeles County starts on a quiet suburban road above Pasadena. A 3-mile steep climb, past chaparral and wildflowers, leads to the ruined foundations of Echo Mountain House, a 70-room resort opened in 1894, complete with a Swiss-style chalet and astronomical observatory. On a recent Sunday morning, I clamored over the site's cracked stone steps and found rusting train tracks

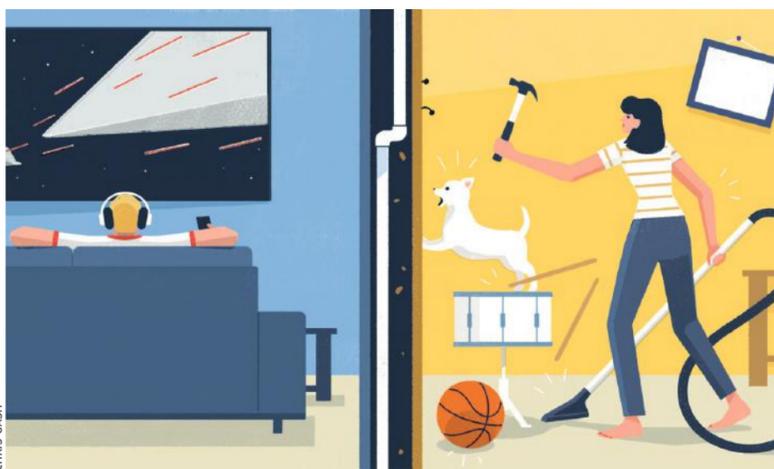
and giant cogs in the underbrush, remains of a cable railway that once brought Gilded Age holiday-makers in top hats and bustle dresses to these heights.

It was a vision of California that I, for one, had rarely considered. Los Angeles was famously dubbed "a city without a past" by urban geographer Michael Dear a quarter-century ago. It's an illusion that Hollywood has fostered: Thanks to the pervasiveness of film noir, even most Angelenos believe that their metropolis sprang from the desert some time around the 1940s. But L.A. was

founded in 1781 by Spanish colonists, and it's been through a string of colorful incarnations. Echo Mountain House was part of its first heyday, when SoCal, bathed in sunshine and filled with fruit groves, was promoted by railway companies as "America's Italy" and Pasadena became a winning winter destination for rich Easterners. In 1900, the hotel burned to the ground, like most of the old Europhile resorts, but a little research revealed that L.A. is still littered with survivors from forgotten eras. So I decided to spend a week playing

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Inside



Let the Right Sounds In

By MATTHEW KITCHEN

I MADE THE DECISION around hour five. That's five hours of hearing Aerosmith's "Dream On" bleed through my walls *on repeat*, blasted so loudly from my neighbor's system that Steven Tyler's screech drowned out my already-cranked-to-eleven TV. Around hour five it dawned on me: To prepare for a weekend of binge-watching, it might be wise to invest in some noise-canceling headphones. Now, a few months later, I rarely watch shows any other way.

Please turn to page D10

These choice headphones let you tune out racket and tune into a solo TV evening



THE GREAT AMERICAN NOVELTY BELT

Finding a replacement for the tired funky-sock look is a cinch **D2**



SIT RIGHT

Find a couch that suits you with counsel from our sofa psychologist **D6**



OXTAILS, YOU WIN

Recipes to make hearty stews and ragùs with an underappreciated cut of meat **D9**



OM AWAY FROM HOME

Wake up replenished at Guatemala's Lake Atitlan, a new-age destination **D5**

PIA RIVEROLA FOR THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

STYLE & FASHION



Complications
The more a watch has, the more wallet-gouging it'll be.

Marketing
A high price tag offsets costly ads and celebrity endorsement.

Materials
Precious metals don't up a watch's price as much as you'd think.

R&D
Brands can devote years to perfecting a costly watch's design.

UNCOMMON CENTS Analyzing a watch's price can be as complicated as the timepiece itself. Watch, \$40,400, jaeger-lecoultre.com

hours. Ask George Mayer, a watch buyer at Pennsylvania's Govberg Jewelers. During a trip to the Geneva factory of Vacheron Constantin, whose watches often cost in the low five figures, Mr. Mayer met a worker who specialized in making minuscule screws that go inside a watch. The worker finished 1½ screws by hand a day.

Each hour of handiwork is reflected in the price. Swatch sells the Sistem51, an automatic watch with a movement that Mr. Wind said is not far off from a Rolex's. Because the

Time is one of the biggest factors when setting a watch's price.

Swatch is made by machine, it retails from \$150, versus the thousands commanded by a handmade Rolex. Things get more complicated when accounting for complications, such as a date dial or a chronograph timer. Mr. Wind said watchmakers can dedicate an entire year to making a hyper-intricate grand complication timepiece.

Labor constitutes a big part of a watch's cost, and fastidious fabricators don't come cheap. William Rohr of Massena Lab, a design studio that collaborates with independent watchmakers, speculated that a good watchmaker in Switzerland makes about \$100,000 a year.

Other pricing factors are intangible. It can take years of research to perfect a movement's flow, a case's ideal weight or the optimal way to fit each component together beneath the dial. A lofty sticker price recoups such development expenses.

Marketing inflates costs too. Rolex buys ads during the Oscars. Companies shell out for celebrity spokespeople like Daniel Craig (Omega) and Chris Hemsworth (Tag Heuer). Bremont is the official timekeeper of England Rugby, and Tissot does the same for the NBA. All these schemes can add up to multimillion-dollar investments.

Finally, there's the brand name. "You're paying for that status symbol and name recognition," said Mr. Rohr. People know Rolex, they want Rolex and they're willing to drop top dollar for a watch with those five letters on the face. The good news: Buying from a prestige name like Patek Philippe, Jaeger-LeCoultre or IWC Schaffhausen means that, down the line, you can sell that ticker and earn back at least a small slice of the fortune you plunked down.

Time Is (a Lot of) Money

Why is one watch \$60 and another \$60,000? Here's exactly what your pretty pennies are paying for

By JACOB GALLAGHER

MOST LUXURY wristwatches are similar in size; they (should) all tell the time. Yet their costs vary as widely as the prices of contemporary art. A stainless steel Rolex Submariner will set you back \$7,900, but a pink gold Roger Dubuis Excalibur rings in at \$76,000. Aside from the material differences, what factors determine such watches' retail value?

Here, we're discussing mechanical timepieces—those that run on a windable mechanism. Timex's \$65 battery-powered Weekender is an ex-

cellent watch—it's good looking and keeps the time. But with its electric mechanism and machine production, relatively few elements play into its cost. Meanwhile, a high-priced mechanical ticker, typically handmade in Switzerland, can be dauntingly complex; each cog, complication and marketing scheme contributes to its pulse-quickening price tag.

Material certainly plays a part. For example, an 18-karat white-gold Rolex Cosmograph Daytona goes for \$41,300 while a stainless-steel model of the same watch is \$13,150. However, the degree to which a watch's material proportionately hikes up the price is less significant than you might think. Currently, 18-

karat white gold sells for around \$40 per gram. So for a \$40,000 white-gold watch weighing 200 grams, roughly \$8,000 of its price could be attributed to material if its entire weight were gold, which it's not. Stainless steel can be sourced at around \$2.65 per kilogram, so for the steel version of our hypothetical watch—which might cost \$14,000—the metal could run the watchmaker less than a dollar. These estimates don't factor in watch companies' ability to buy metal in bulk at below-market-value prices.

Given a watch's compact nature, "the raw materials in general are not that expensive," said Eric Wind, the owner of high-end watch dealer

Wind Vintage in Palm Beach, Fla. Often, he said, a watch's material is milled using a swift CNC (computer numerical control) machine, which makes constructing the shell one of a build's least time-consuming tasks.

Which brings us to the time required to craft a mechanical watch, perhaps the biggest consideration in setting its price. There are "thousands of individual little parts," said Paul Altieri, founder and CEO of Bob's Watches, an online shop based in Newport Beach, Calif, that sells watches by Rolex, Patek Philippe and Cartier.

Crafting those minute components and piecing them together takes an extraordinary number of

Cartoon socks are as tired as a "Simpsons" rerun. Swap yours for a busy belt, like Stussy's orange ribbon option. Woven Belt, \$45, stussy.com

The diamond motif on this Bottega Veneta belt offers a quieter take on an argyle sock's geometry. Leather Belt, \$580, bottegaveneta.com

Outdoorsy types with a drawer full of burly camp socks might like Alyx's belt with its tough clip buckle. 1017 Alyx 9SM Belt, \$295, nordstrom.com

For the man who doesn't fear color, Anderson's woven belt is a chipper upgrade from the trite striped sock. Anderson's Belt, \$170, Todd Snyder, 917-242-3482

What Fresh Belt Is This?

Funky socks have lost their mojo. Make way for a longer and leaner novelty accessory

THROUGHOUT the 2010s, so-called funky socks were the ultimate expression of style irreverence. They provided office-friendly pops of color and sartorial screams much the way that screeching suspenders did in the '80s. But as socks splashed with chevrons, polka dots and stripes achieved true ubiquity, they abruptly lost their panache. In 2020, they're a rote, tired wink—no longer a reliable way to assert confidence.

But when a sock drawer closes, a closet door opens, its back hung with offbeat belts, the accessory most likely to succeed the funky sock. "We've had more and more interest in specialty belts beyond the straightforward brown and black leather," said Ian Clegg, manager at Frank Clegg Leatherwork, his family's company in Fall River, Mass. Mr. Clegg bought eight new belt-making machines to increase the factory's output and product range. "I have slowly seen the shift, and right now is an exciting time to be in the [belt] space," he added earnestly.

No longer reserved for WASPs (devotees of belts bearing needlepoint whales), or cowboys (whose shiny buckles could blind a bull), funky belts are multiplying, increasing the odds you'll find one to suit your style. Stussy's orange nylon option

offers a streetwear spin on the preppy ribbon belt, while Bottega Veneta's woven calf-skin style exudes sophistication but is still passably conservative.

Miles Fisher, the Los Angeles-based founder of coffee company Bixby Roasting Co., has several traditional Argentine polo belts made of hand-sewn leather and finished with colorful saddlery thread. According to Mr. Fisher, men with "tastefully discreet style" favor such accessories. Prince William has been photographed wearing similar designs.

"A belt...holds together a man's ensemble at his center point," said Mr. Fisher. It follows that picking the wrong one could figuratively make your look fall apart. Err on the side of caution whether testing out a funky belt at work or less riskily on the weekend. Keep the rest of your outfit minimal and monotone, making the belt your one piece of flair.

Mr. Fisher also advised a quick visualization exercise. Before investing in a charismatic belt, "think of several outfits it will work with—casual with jeans, smarted up with slacks and a jacket..." In other words, buy a versatile model that will carry you—and your pants—until the next waggishly irreverent men's fad arrives.

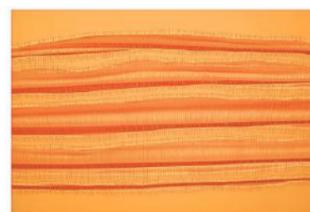
—Todd Plummer

STYLE & FASHION

20 ODD QUESTIONS

Pierpaolo Piccioli

Before his fall fashion show, the Valentino designer talks Marcello Mastroianni and Miranda Priestly



THE CREATIVE director of 60-year-old Italian brand Maison Valentino doesn't relish talking about himself. "Fashion is my voice," explained Pierpaolo Piccioli, "so I hope to deliver my thoughts and my values through fashion."

For the past 12 years that he's been at the helm of the luxury house (until 2016 with a partner, Maria Grazia Chiuri), Mr. Piccioli's designs have communicated loud and clear. From the flashy success of his streetwear-inspired sneakers to the museum-caliber couture gowns he creates, his work has a restless, perfectionist quality. In the lead-up to this weekend's womenswear show in Paris, he's been even busier than usual: sitting front row at the Prada show; dining with French President Emmanuel Macron; and launching Valentino's Le Blanc collection of customizable white poplin shirts in select stores.

In the midst of all this glamour and industriousness, he stays grounded thanks to his wife, Simona, and children: Benedetta, 23; Pietro, 21; and Stella, 14. They live in the coastal town, Nettuno, where he grew up, and he commutes each day to work in Rome. "I understand that people look at me as the creative director of Valentino," he said, "but I see myself as the same kid of long ago when I was by the seaside dreaming of fashion and everything was very far for me."

When I begin a collection, I always: look at the same books that I see in different ways: a collection of Piero della Francesca's paintings; one about the mathematicians of the Italian renaissance; books about London in the 1970s and the punk scene of that period; and "Lettere Luterane" by Pier Paolo Pasolini.

I'm listening to: Billie Eilish. I feel that she's a real talent. Sometimes in this moment everything is about fame and being famous. I think that being talented is the most important thing.

I start each day with: black espresso first, then a shower, but in the first hour I'm very silent. I have breakfast with my family before going out: one more coffee, a glass of cold milk, orange jam and a biscuit. I like home-made things. I don't like brands.

My favorite restaurant in Rome is: Pierluigi, which I like because of the fish, but also because it's intimate. I like places where I already know everyone and I feel like it's home.

My wellness routine is to do: SMS, a kind of gymnastics you do with your body weight. But I smoke—I try to balance my pack of cigarettes a day with my gym.

I sketch my designs with: very tough pencils, ivory watercolor paper and a glass of water. Sometimes I like to use water in my

BRAVO RAGAZZO Clockwise from above: Pierpaolo Piccioli in his Rome office; a 1960 photograph by Paolo di Paolo of film director and writer Pier Paolo Pasolini; Valentino Climbers sneakers; Billie Eilish wearing Valentino in January; orange jam; Jeanne Moreau in the 1961 film 'La Notte'; a painting by Sidival Fila.

drawings. With a bit of cigarette ash it becomes gray, and I use that as a watercolor.

The late Vogue Italia editor Franca Sozzani always told me: if you work seriously, you don't need to take yourself seriously. And if you don't work seriously, you need to be serious.

My most recent collaboration was with: Paolo di Paolo, who is a 94-year-old photographer. He came to Paris to take a reportage of my collection, and he hadn't taken pictures for 50 years.

The pictures on my office wall include: one of David Bowie and John Lennon, men that changed the way of being men; pictures of Pier Paolo Pasolini taken by Paolo di Paolo; a

painting by my friend, the Franciscan monk Sidival Fila; a photo of Anna Magnani. There's a big neon with part of the poetry of [Pier] Paolo Pasolini which says "Non vogliamo essere subito già così senza sogni" [We don't want to be without dreams already].

My favorite films are: classic Italian ones from the 1960s. I love all the Antonioni pictures, Pasolini, Fellini. "La Notte" is one of my favorite movies ever because the message is in the movie itself. It's what I like to do with my job. I don't like to explain my job. I feel that when you see the collection you understand which values I believe.

My dog is named after Miranda Priestly because: my family loves the movie ["The Devil Wears Prada"]. I have a beautiful picture of Miranda and Anna Wintour together. Fashion can look tough, but I feel that it's made of people that are humans at the very end. In that movie you can laugh but you can also see humans.

The last gift I bought for my wife was: a necklace I designed with "Simona" written in front, with my initials, our kids' initials, and our dog's initials, and the necklace had little white diamonds with a red heart.

I love to look at: Brâncuși sculptures and Japanese art, but I don't need to have that in the house. I can go to the museum and see the beauty. I need people, not stuff, in my life.

When I was a teenager I shopped at: the vintage market because I couldn't afford brands. But the first [designer] thing I bought, with a lot of effort, was a suit by Romeo Gigli. It was a gray wool suit with a lean silhouette, like Marcello Mastroianni's.

Every day, I wear: sneakers. At the moment, I wear Valentino Climbers sneakers in white or yellow, and it's the only color that is in my wardrobe. All the rest is black. My trousers and sweater are from Valentino, and sometimes I change my shirts with Raf Simons or Undercover. Recently I've worn coats from the collaboration with Undercover. It was blue and red in the collection and they made a black one for me.

My tattoos depict: the initials of my children. Another tattoo is a heart with the initial of my wife and the third one is a huge, colorful tiger on my leg, but that's kind of private.

—Edited from an interview by Rory Satran



A coat from Valentino's Fall 2019 collaboration with Undercover

CULT FOLLOWING



True Bloom

A tropical scent inspired by Hawaii, the widely beloved **Kai Perfume Oil by Gaye Straza** accomplishes the olfactory feat of smelling like a real gardenia

History When creating Kai Fragrance, its California-born founder Gaye Straza channeled the Hawaiian beaches where she spent summers as a child. This perfume oil, whose moniker is a Hawaiian name that means "sea," is described as gardenia wrapped in exotic white flowers like pikake and jasmine. It launched in 1999.

Claims Gardenia realism in fragrance is rare. Capturing the flower's scent is a challenge few brands have achieved. Kai, however, is the "Holy Grail of gardenia," said Franco Wright,

co-founder of fragrance retailers Luckyscent.com and Scent Bar. "The smell is nearly identical. It has the uncanny ability to represent true gardenia in a natural, dewy, buttery way."

Fans Mary J. Blige, Mila Kunis

Cult Moment "If it were cool to walk around with gardenia duct-taped to each nostril I would," wrote Kai's most unlikely fan, Tommy Lee, the former Mötley Crüe drummer (and gardenia obsessive), in his 2004 autobiography "Tommyland." —*Fiorella Valdesolo*



#TheoryForGood

Theory

Conscious by design.

ADVENTURE & TRAVEL

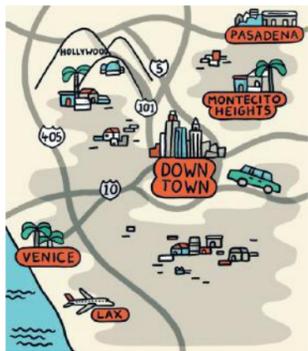
What's New
In Old L.A.

Continued from page D1

urban archaeologist, tracking down antique remains.

Today, Pasadena is still filled with early 20th-century oddities such as the Gamble House, an Arts and Crafts confection from 1908, built by an heir of the Procter & Gamble company. Used as Doc's home in 1985's "Back to the Future," the house is open for guided tours. Other landmarks exist in ghostly form. On the site of the late 19th-century Raymond Hotel, where the entire staff used to be shipped over from New England every season, I found the party still going at the original caretaker's cottage, now a cozy restaurant called the Raymond 1886 that serves retro cocktails with its hamachi crudo. But the most complete immersion in the elegance of the era was the palatial Langham Huntington hotel. First built in 1907, it still feels like the Western version of Downtown Abbey, with expansive gardens, patios serving high tea, ballrooms and antique redwood bridge across a pond. The nearby Huntington Library, meanwhile, remains a robber baron's dream, a 1903 mansion filled with rare books and artworks.

The idea of L.A. as a slice of Italy had its most literal and loopy expression by the Pacific. Few of the sun worshipers converging on Venice Beach today recall that it began life in 1905 as a theatrical real-estate development, complete with artificial canals, gondolas and mock-Renaissance palazzos. Today, eerie traces remain: I wandered a couple of blocks from the boardwalk to visit the last half dozen canals, whose traffic-free serenity still give them an otherworldly air. The more

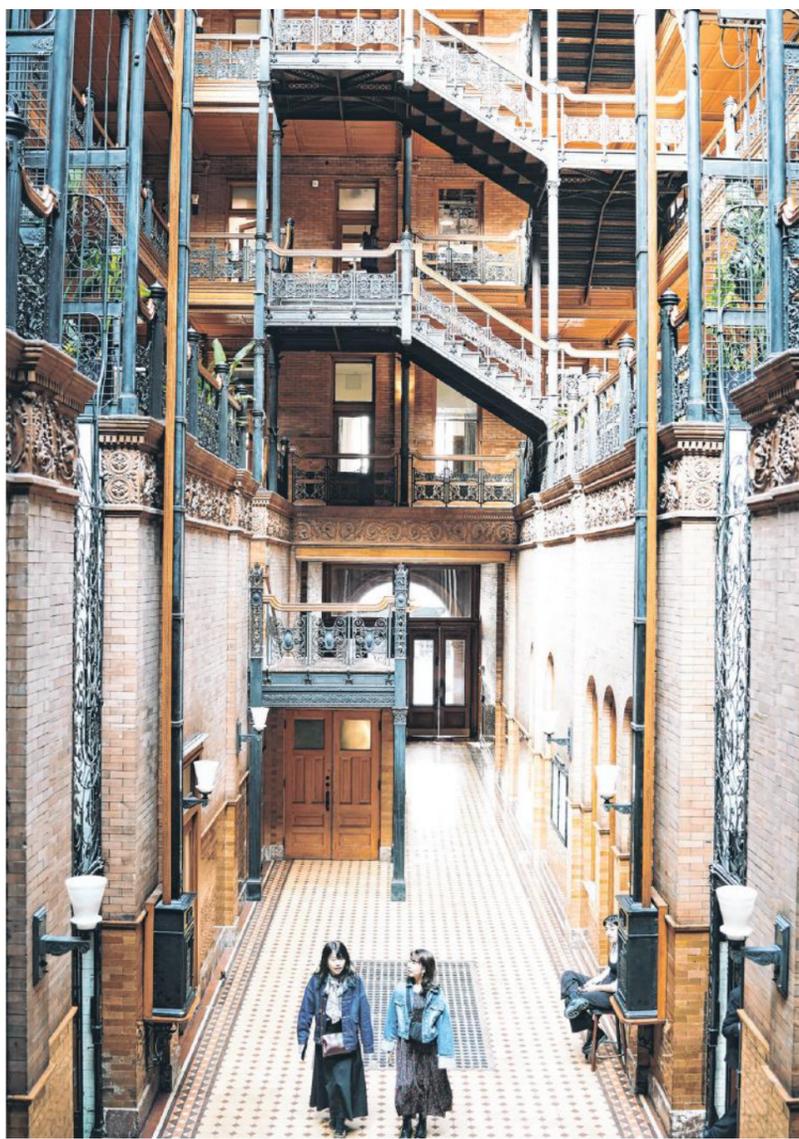


Venice Beach began life in 1905 as a real-estate development, complete with gondolas and mock-Renaissance palazzos.

bohemian residents now decorate their bungalows with pink flamingos and, instead of gondolas, paddle about in pedal-driven swans. Back by the beachfront, meanwhile, you can wander the last of the old colonnades, where carved portraits of Italian nobles frown down on the skateboarders.

For even older relics, I pulled off the roaring 110 freeway in Montecito Heights to visit El Alisal, a rustic chateau open to visitors on weekends. Built from roughly 1897 to 1910 with stones salvaged from the nearby Arroyo Seco, it was the handiwork of a once-famous writer named Charles F. Lummis, a wildly eccentric Harvard buddy of Teddy Roosevelt. The mansion was fastidiously decorated with artifacts gathered by Lummis in a long career of promoting California's Native American and Hispanic heritages, when he would shock Anglo Angelenos by wearing Mexican ponchos and Navajo jewelry. (Most of his collection is now housed in the Autry Museum of the American West.) His vision of L.A. as a decidedly non-Italian outpost would soon be echoed on the silver screen: In 1910, D.W. Griffith relocated his studio from New York to film the first movie ever shot in L.A., a silent Western "In Old California," in a farming village called Hollywood.

Another rich concentration of offbeat sites lies downtown. I stopped first at the Bradbury Building, an 1893 office block (also open to visitors) whose skylit interior soars like a modern cathedral, and whose wealth of ornate décor was featured in the climactic scenes of 1982's "Blade Runner." Today, it is matched for beauty by the many leftovers of the 1920s Jazz Age, when L.A. was booming and the commercial district was filled with glamorous hotels, bars and movie palaces. Downtown L.A. fell into



REMAINS OF THE HEYDAYS Clockwise from top left: The Bradbury Building, among the oldest commercial structures in downtown Los Angeles, dates back to 1893; the Hoxton hotel, which opened last year in the 1924 L.A. Transit Authority's building; Pasadena's 1908 Gamble House; the canals of Venice Beach.

THE NOSTALGIA FACTORY / FOR A QUICK TOUR THROUGH DIFFERENT ERAS OF LOS ANGELES'S PAST, BINGE THESE SEVEN FILMS

Long before "Once Upon a Time In...Hollywood," filmmakers have been turning their lenses on the history of L.A. But be mindful: The depictions tend to be heavy on atmosphere and light on fact

1800s The dusty Spanish colonial Pueblo de Nuestra Señora la Reina de los Ángeles (aka L.A.) is the setting for the silent *Mark of Zorro* (1919), starring Douglas Fairbanks as the masked vigilante standing up for the oppressed—the start of an epic franchise.

1920s Peter Bogdanovich's *The Cat's Meow* (2001), pictured above, tackles one of



the great scandals of L.A.'s raucous Jazz Age, the mysterious death of legendary Hollywood film producer Thomas Ince on the yacht of magnate William Randolph Hearst. At the heart of the film (and the scandal): a love triangle with silent film star Charlie Chaplin and Hearst's consort Marion Davies.

1930s Set in 1938, Roman Polanski's haunting classic *Chinatown* (1974) has become the accepted popular vision of the water swindle that allowed L.A. to expand from an agricultural backwater to a major city. But, far from a docudrama, it is (very) loosely based on events related to the 1913 L.A. aqueduct and farmer resistance in the 1920s.

1940s The stylish *Devil in a Blue Dress* (1995) reworks a Walter Mosley novel to capture L.A.'s simmering post-war racial tensions as amateur detective "Easy" Rawlins (Denzel Washington) follows a murder trail

around L.A. sites from Malibu to South Central and the Hollywood Hills.

1950s Based on a James Ellroy thriller, *LA Confidential* (1990), pictured below, set scenes at surviving sites like Boardner's bar and Formosa Cafe, and invokes real-life incidents like the 1951 "Bloody



Christmas" scandal, when drunken LAPD officers savagely beat jail inmates, mostly Mexican-American, after a holiday party.

1960s *The Doors* (1991), Oliver Stone's uneven biopic, lushly evokes Venice Beach hippie culture and features such classic music venues as the Whiskey a Go Go.

1970s A delirious vision of '70s porn industry, Paul Thomas Anderson's *Boogie Nights* (1997) uses sun-splashed poolside locations and glamorous retro interiors. (For Dirk Diggler and his crew, the '80s turn out to be way less fun.)

sorry decay after World War II, but in recent years architects have realized that its bones—or its "architectural stock"—remain intact, with Beaux-Arts high rises from the first decades of the 20th century that can easily go unnoticed if you only keep your eyes fixed on the gritty (and often unlovely) street level. The renovations in the so-called Historic Core of downtown (see his-toriccore.bid for a map) have been led by stylish new hotels, which blend their history with contemporary design and exude an energy closer to nightclubs.

I whiled away hours bouncing from one thronged rooftop pool and bar to the next—the Ace, the No-

Mad, the Figueroa, the Hoxton and Soho Warehouse—sipping cocktails during oyster happy hours at dusk and taking photos of cinematic urban vistas. After dark, I explored such venerable institutions as Cole's, L.A.'s oldest saloon (est. 1908) and among the originators of the beloved French Dip sandwich, and the multilevel Clifton's Republic (est. 1931), with a restaurant in a faux-forest canopy and a speakeasy-style Polynesian tiki bar. Other nights, I delved into L.A.'s arsenal of silent movie palaces, newly revived, including the former United Artists Theater opened by Mary Pickford and Hollywood cohorts in 1927. Now the Theatre at Ace Hotel

(and open to non-guests), its lavish interior, dripping with Gothic gilt, makes an amusing complement to of-the-moment acts like musician Kurt Vile and comedy duo Tim and Eric. Just as visually arresting is the Mayan theater around the corner, which also opened in 1927. Designed to evoke ancient Mesoamerica, it now hosts some classic L.A. events, including the cult Lucha VaVOOM, a mix of Mexican lucha libre and burlesque.

But old and new L.A. came together most seamlessly on my last night downtown, when I went to the Pacific Dining Car, a 24-hour steakhouse set in a train carriage, which first started serving in 1921.

At first, when I sank into the plush velvet booth, I felt like a tuxedoed scion riding the rails to the Echo Mountain House. The atmosphere seemed heavy with old-school decorum. But then a group of guests strode in who were definitely not from the past: Marilyn Manson and his band. They were followed by a string of fashion models and actor Nicolas Cage. I ended up at the bar chatting with one of the Manson entourage, along with an amiable assortment of screenwriters, agents and musicians. "America's Italy," I thought, has come a long way.

► For more on visiting L.A. landmarks, see wsj.com/news/life-arts/travel.

ADVENTURE & TRAVEL

Chakra and Awe

In serious need of a change of scenery, a skeptical traveler heads to Guatemala's Lake Atitlán, a quirky yogi haven



By Alex Ulam

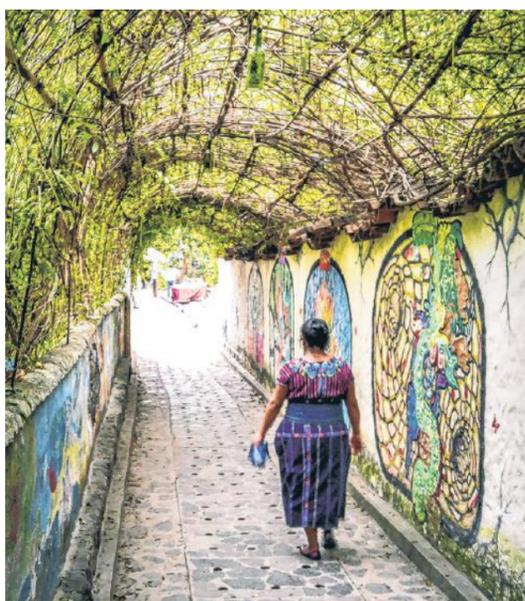
I TRAVELED to San Marcos La Laguna last month on the recommendation of my friend Tucker Robbins, a furniture designer and twinkly-eyed denizen of the occult world. Tucker first visited the town, on the shores of Guatemala's Lake Atitlán, in 1989, when onion fields and avocado trees dominated what's now the downtown. He returns periodically to soak up what he refers to as a "unique vortex of energies."

Lake Atitlán, the deepest lake in Central America, has become a magnet for travelers on journeys of self-discovery. Many are drawn by a burgeoning New Age wellness industry centered in San Marcos (as the town is more commonly called), which has become a pilgrimage stop on a circuit that includes Kathmandu in Nepal and Ubud in Bali. I regard with skepticism all things marketed as "spiritual," but back home in New York City, I was on the heels of a divorce and in the midst of a midlife crisis. A week away, in a relatively remote town surrounded by nature, practicing yoga and eating fresh mangoes seemed a potential antidote.

And so, on a sunny January morning, after a night in the historic city of Antigua, I found myself headed toward Lake Atitlán in a dented bus with squealing brakes. It was crammed with budget tourists and Mayan women attired in colorful embroidered dresses. Sitting next to me was Martha Cleary, a cheery woman in her 60s dressed in a baseball cap and jeans, who was traveling with a group of middle-aged followers of Andy Lee Graham, founder of the website hobotraveler.com. Ms. Cleary

Linger long enough and you will inevitably overhear conversations about 'breathwork.'

told me that Mr. Graham promoted a lifestyle where one could live comfortably on \$600 to \$1,200 a month in culturally interesting places of great natural beauty. "He says [Lake Atitlán] is one of the top places in the world," she said, "What am I doing in the States paying my mortgage and having possessions?" Ms. Cleary and her companions were merely flirting with going rogue. San Marcos, I later learned, also



plays host to a number of vagabonds on indefinite vacations. I disembarked at the town dock from one of the small ferryboats that ply the lake's frequently rough waters and walked up the downtown's main drag, a narrow pedestrian path bordered by stucco walls. Overhead was a trellis of vines and purple bougainvillea. Several Mayan women

unmarked dirt and stone paths via Google Maps and arrived at a compound with a hand-carved wood door that led to a giant treehouse-like structure. It melded into the surrounding jungle with ivy-covered walls and awnings supported by branches.

Perhaps because long days of reiki, yoga and meditation tire out most tourists, there is little nightlife in San Marcos and bars close at 10 p.m. My first night, I ended up at Vida Cocina Creativa, a half-enclosed restaurant with a thatch ceiling, bamboo walls and a soft breeze blowing off the pitch-black lake outside. A small crowd was listening to a lively trio of horns and guitar belting out Latin fusion music. A man sitting at the bar, wearing clothes embroidered with geometric Mayan patterns spoke animatedly with a young tattooed woman with thick eyeliner who could pass for Johnny Depp's character in "Pirates of the Caribbean." Dressed in a flowing shirt with a multitude of silver bangles and

GREATER CRATER From top: Lake Atitlán, a volcanic crater and the deepest lake in Central America; the pedestrian-only main drag in San Marcos La Laguna, on the lake's western shore.

rings, she would periodically jump off her bar stool and wildly dance around.

The next morning, Tucker picked me up for the hotel and we set off for a morning swim at the nature preserve. A steep hilly expanse, it's stitched with trails that lead to outdoor fireplaces, which serve as altars where Shamans perform ceremonies. On the lake shore, a small group of young tourists screamed with glee as they took turns jumping into the water from a wood dock. We sunned ourselves on large rocks and I looked out at a hump-shaped volcano across the lake believed to have inspired Antoine de Saint-Exupéry's fantastical drawing of a boa constrictor swallowing an elephant in his book "The Little Prince."

Linger long enough in San Marcos and you inevitably

will overhear conversations about "breathwork," chakras, or even past incarnations.

Another afternoon, I left the cloistered world of San Marcos's downtown and hiked up into the hills toward the Yoga Forest, one of the renowned retreats around San Marcos. My journey took me past a dense settlement of shacks where locals lived, built from cinder block and corrugated metal, with sooty courtyards. The paved path ended abruptly, and I found myself on a dirt trail walking past trees being strangled by vines. There was an eerie calm. I felt I was being watched. Perhaps I was. Later in the week, I learned that a tourist who resisted a mugging in the area was slashed with a machete.

I ended up at vertiginous stone steps with a railing that led to my destination

shrouded in trees above. I arrived at a wood platform where a group mostly made up of women in their 20s and 30s in loosefitting yoga clothes was milling about writing in journals and talking in subdued tones. My yoga class took place on a second platform jutting out from a cliff face, its thatched ceiling soaring and conical-shaped. The instructor, an itinerant teacher with a European accent, demonstrated poses while lecturing me and my fellow classmates about romantic relationships and how certain postures benefit particular internal organs. I listened for a bit, then got distracted by the view of the sparkling lake below. I never actually experienced the spiritual vortex Tucker described, but a week at Lake Atitlán was just the jolt I needed.

FROM TOP: ALAMY; GETTY IMAGES; ERIC MENCHER; MATTHEW COOK (MAP)

THE LOWDOWN / RETREATING TO SAN MARCOS LA LAGUNA, GUATEMALA



Lush Atitlan, a treehouse like structure, offers 12 guest rooms

Getting There Fly into Guatemala City. A taxi or ride-share to San Marcos La Laguna can take about four hours depending on traffic and cost about \$100. Break up the trip by staying in picturesque Antigua, a 45-minute cab ride from the airport. From Antigua, it is about three to four

hours via a \$15 shuttle bus to Panajachel, where frequent inexpensive ferries run to San Marcos. The ferry trip takes about 40 minutes. Afternoon waves on the lake can be quite rough.

Staying There Lush Atitlan hotel is set in a serene jungle setting

on the edge of town. The owner worked with local artisans and craftspeople to design and furnish the hotel (from \$50 a night, lushatitlan.com). Some guests might never leave the jungle compound at La Paz, which offers yoga classes, meditation sessions and an excellent vege-

tarian restaurant. Several single rooms and three two-story adobe bungalows are decorated with local art (from about \$40 per night, lapazatitlan.com)

Eating There Konojel, a nonprofit dedicated to battling malnutrition in Guatemala, operates a restaurant serving traditional Mayan cuisine on the town's main path (konojel.org). Across the path from Konojel is Circles Cafe Bakery, known for its banana bread and array of coffee drinks, smoothies and vegetarian entrees (facebook.com/circles-cafebakery). Among the few places in town serving red meat is Vida Cocina Creativa, which overlooks the lake. The restaurant bar hosts live music (facebook.com/Vidaatitlan).

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DESIGN & DECORATING

Your Sofa Soul Mate

By HILARY ROBERTSON

AN UNOFFICIAL, unpaid interior decorator to friends, colleagues and occasionally strangers, I am often asked to advise on the acquisition of sofas, arguably the most anxiety-inducing furniture buy. My credentials: many years designing sets that furniture brands photograph to showcase next season's merchandise. I trawl design fairs, consume niche interiors magazines, write books about other people's interiors. There is not a micro-trend, leg nuance or upholstery style that escapes the reach of my sofa board on Pinterest. My antique-dealer husband, on the other hand, reviles anything new, which explains how—after seven happy years with a couch whose only drawback was its crumb-catching tufts—we recently ended up with a 1964 metal-framed Hauss-

After living with a tufted couch that captured crumbs, then one whose loose cushions looked sloppy, a design pro seeks her happily-ever-after seat

NO-SLOUCH COUCH The author loved Menu's uncomplicated Offset sofa. To test its comfort, she traveled from Brooklyn to Copenhagen's Audo hotel. She was not disappointed. \$3,895, lumens.com



Any attempt to relax prompted one or more of the 12 separate cushions to slither out of the frame.

mann sofa that we'd never sat on. Once this midcentury beauty was installed in our half-brownstone's living room, it became apparent there'd be no sprawling on it; any attempt to relax sent one or more of the 12 separate cushions slithering out of the frame. After considering replacing the pillows with less slovenly filling (as costly as a new sofa), we admitted defeat.

My head had been turned by the Offset (right), a sofa by Danish brand Menu. Norm Architects designed the piece as an experiment in marrying architecture and hominess, something I feel its blocky build with rounded corners achieves. Its style, it turns out, fits one of the furniture trends that a friend, Sebastian Brauer, sees in the offing. The vice president of product design at my sometime employer Crate & Barrel characterized the coming look as

"a casual yet polished and luxe sensibility defined by softer and organic lines."

At around \$4,000, the Offset was over my ideal budget of \$3,000, but it would let me steer clear of all my sofa bete noires: visible legs (in so many designs, an afterthought), decorative tufting and, worst of all, multiple floating seat cushions that inevitably look unkempt. I could cope with its back cushions, a trade-off that, when removed, turned the sofa into a twin-size bed for naps and overnight guests. The Offset's bench—springs double-wrapped with foam—and skinny razor arms cut a chic, discreet silhouette. I saw the Offset adapting stylishly to all my fantasy future homes: the loft, the palazzo, the 15th-century attic.

The catch: There was no sample to test in the U.S. I had asked industry friend and sometime collaborator Alex Bates, former creative director of West Elm, her opinion on tightly upholstered sofas. She deemed them "less about lounging and more about transitory spaces." Think dentists' waiting rooms. Personally, I could live on a cushion on the floor if it was pretty, but I had a husband and 17-year-old son to think about. I tacked a side trip to Copenhagen onto a work sojourn in London. A couple of Offsets reside at the Audo, Copenhagen's hybrid of hotel, co-working space and showroom for Menu designs.

In my hotel room, I hurled myself onto the Offset with the enthusiasm of a sleep-deprived economy flier. I was very satisfied. (It proved more comfortable than the bed). The upholstery, Kvadrat's Maple linen blend, has a soft pile to it. This aligned with Mr. Brauer's declaration that more textural bouclés, chenilles and corduroy were trending as sofa materials. Crisply upholstered without any annoying seat-cushion separation, the Offset seemed the ideal candidate for my living room.

Over the next two days I confirmed my decision by dashing in and out of the many excellent design stores the city has to offer, where I was able to sit on many attractive sofas I had only seen in pictures. I was not swayed.

Five Ideal Sofas for Five Types of Sitter

THERE ARE MULTITUDES of sofas to choose from. I've narrowed the field to those with solid seats because I've come to believe that multiple cushions only look good between your attempt to plump them and the first time anyone sits down. Life is just too short.

Although some regard solid-seated sofas as less comfortable, design veteran and sometime collaborator of mine Alex Baxter noted that "there are some tight-seat sofas that have been constructed for look and comfort. I have a bias toward eight-way hand-tied seats" (a technique that is considered a gold standard of upholstery).

In my decades working for furniture brands, including CB2, represented here, I've concluded that sofa shoppers can be roughly categorized into these five types. Here are suggestions for each personality.

THE AESTHETE



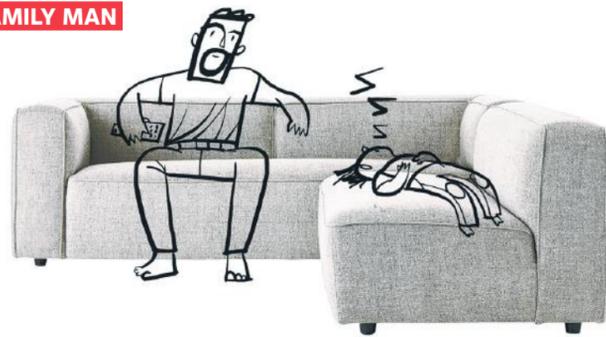
When the Aesthete searches for a sofa, she is already imagining herself perching fetchingly on it for a magazine photo-shoot—or at least an Instagram post. This Vladimir Kagan-inspired couch provides the ideal graceful backdrop. Granted, the sculptural curve and sloping arms make it harder to stretch out on, but overnight guests will not be crashing here, and the aesthete is happy to wait until bedtime to recline. For this shopper, a striking figure trumps all else. Diamond Celine Curved 99" Sofa, \$2,199, wayfair.com

THE TREND MONITOR



The Trend Monitor has had her very informed eye on channeled upholstery since spying the pink ladyfinger chairs India Mahdavi installed in her endlessly re-'grammed Sketch tea room/cocktail lounge in London's hip Mayfair neighborhood. The persimmon velvet on this Deco-inspired sofa (too sumptuous to spoil by wearing platform boots) fits snugly into the palette of earthy rusts, olives and corals so au courant in 2020. Modshop Monaco Sofa \$3,495, modshop1.com

THE FAMILY MAN



This couch might not be the Family Man's (or Woman's) dream seat. But it's the workhorse he sensibly chooses during the child-centric phase of his life. Sectionals can accommodate a crowd but rarely keep their shape. This uncommonly tailored two-piece, with its clean lines and minimum of demanding cushions and toy-swallowing cavities, promises to be robust enough for skirmishes. Also available in sensibly darker upholstery. Lenyx Stone 2-Piece Sectional, from \$2,298 www.cb2.com

THE PRAGMATIST



Aware of all the complexities of sofa-buying, the Pragmatist seeks a piece that is well-made, well-proportioned and stylish—but not madly so, so that it can evolve with her interior choices. Her practicality includes a price modest enough that she won't be racked with guilt if her circumstances or tastes change. This tightly upholstered example boasts a firm seat, on-trend curves and simple powder-coated feet. Puff Puff 87", \$1,699, bludot.com

THE TRADITIONALIST



A Eurocentric connoisseur of quality and classic silhouettes, the Traditionalist wants a handsome piece that plays well with antique furniture and double-breasted vests. This sofa nods to the past with a tufted seat and turned-walnut legs, and its neat back and single-cushion seat remain ever-decorous. Brass casters, a throwback to pre-vacuum housecleaning, allow for easy moves—perhaps as an instant banquet table to a dining table. Gustav Sofa \$4,571, jaysonhome.com

DESIGN & DECORATING



Lucinda Loya allowed this cut-velvet fabric to pool on the parquet.



Copious linen on this sink by Mary Patton looks luxe, not just concealing.



Paloma Contreras added tailored elegance—and hidden storage.

JULIE SOEGER (LOYA); MOLLY CULVER (PATTON); KERRY KIRK (CONTRERAS)

Some Occasions Call for a Skirt

Cloaking a piece in fabric—once a favorite gambit of the cash-strapped—can dress up as well as cover up

BY RACHEL WOLFE

OLD-SCHOOL guides to “frugal” decorating invariably featured a honey tip: Wrap a flaw-concealing “skirt” around rusted sink basins to approximate a bathroom vanity, or cloak troubling table legs to elevate entry-hall furniture. This crafty strategy was typically executed with a sad remnant of cotton and fell short of elegance—more “A Tree Grows in Brooklyn” than “The Crown.”

Recently, however, interior designers have reclaimed the furniture skirt, modernized it and nudged it up the luxury scale by using finer fabrics and introducing tailoring that relies on more than

a stapler and haste.

“Fabric choice changes everything,” said Lucinda Loya, a designer who works out of New York and Houston and favors skirts in modern textiles with geometric patterns or simple textures. For a client’s Houston home, she gave an oval ottoman the treatment, selecting a sumptuous cut-velvet striped in silver and gold. It does not suggest the Depression.

Instead of hemming the ottoman’s upscale upholstery to meet the wooden floor neatly, Ms. Loya let the lustrous material puddle, which looks somehow splendid in a space without area rugs. Another consideration: This room also features a gilded, antique French sofa. It might have looked trapped in time had Ms. Loya gone for a

more rigorously pleated and shortened skirt. The ripples that dance down the ottoman’s sides instead echo the sofa’s curves in an unexpected, modern way.

She gave the sink an extravagantly full skirt of linen, a look that no one would ping for appearing stingy.

“Using a non-dorky fabric is huge,” agreed Houston designer Mary Patton, who tapped her fashion background in skirting a bathroom sink in a gauzy white cotton-linen, adding a gray stripe that

picks up the cool tones of the basket-weave floor tile.

Ms. Patton’s vanity skirt was conceived as a cost-saving measure for clients who didn’t want to replace their existing sink. By using an abundance of linen to create an extravagantly full skirt, however, she achieved a look no one would ping for appearing stingy. Rather, it follows up on the theme of voluptuousness established by the flouncy roman shades on either side of the sink. As for maintenance, the skirt can be removed and cleaned.

Designer Paloma Contreras faced the challenge of establishing some sort of entryway in a 100-year-old bungalow whose front door opened directly into the living room. Her solution: draping a shallow table in peony Schumacher

linen trimmed with two bands of dusty Wedgwood-blue fabric tape from Kravat. This sentry piece’s skirt conceals storage.

Though the bullion fringe that finishes the bottom of the table’s skirt could have dated the piece, adding the tape trim “makes it feel quite graphic,” Ms. Contreras said. The clean box pleats at each corner do their bit to make the table appear lean and tailored, welcoming guests with a degree of formality the classical side chairs that flank it underline.

Fabric doesn’t only hide ungainly legs and ugly pipes, it can bring a discordant piece of furniture in line with the style of the room it occupies. Think of skirts as fashion that can transform motley décor into a more polished outfit.

Scroll Playing

Three Instagram accounts that design and architecture fans will undoubtedly love thumbing through



◀ IF YOU’RE A SHOE/FLOOR FETISHIST

Sebastian Erras launched the pattern-mad account @parisianfloors in 2015 as a shot-from-above homage to the unique flooring of France—and perhaps to his own designer shoes. Based in France and his native Germany, the freelance photographer has since explored more far-flung flooring in places his followers have tipped him off to. His shot of the mint-green-and-cream herringbone tilework at the 19th-century Bahia Palace in Marrakesh includes a peek of his Christian Louboutin loafers. The floor of a vintage market in Antwerp, Belgium (left), gets stylishly impinged upon by his Etro wingtips.

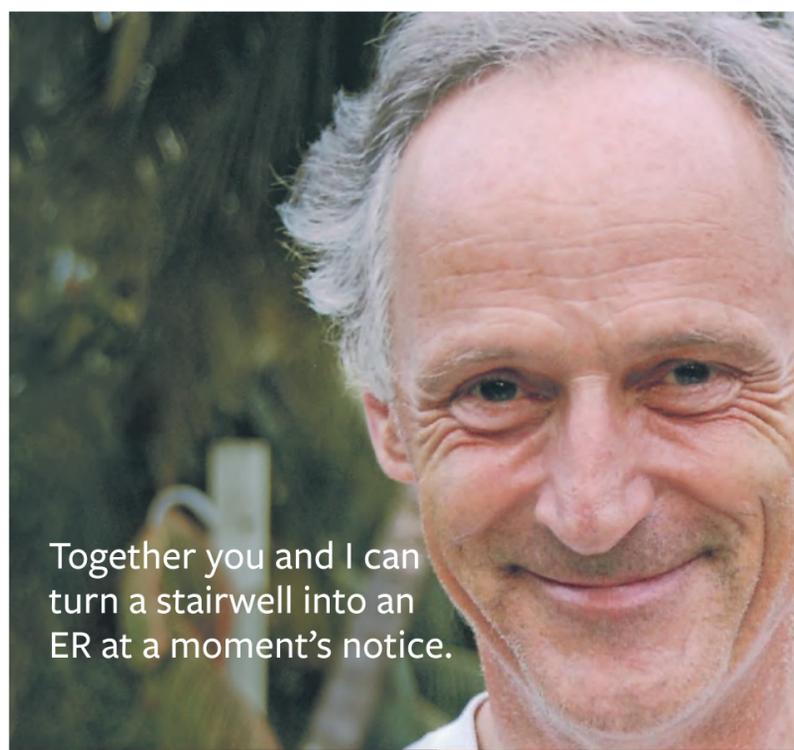


▲ IF YOU THINK SMALL

Mandi Johnson creates dollhouse-size replicas of interior design trends on the compellingly obsessive @mandimakesminis. Begun as a budget-friendly outlet for her home-renovation urges, the feed includes setups—like the one above—to dramatic for her own house. A marketer for crafts retailer Jo-Ann Stores, she hand-makes tiny Venetian-plaster walls, cowhide rugs and floor lamps (half a ping-pong ball serves as a shade). For a partnership with furniture brand Article, Ms. Johnson soldered a steel frame, molded a clay seat and painted it semi-gloss white to mimic the brand’s best-selling dining chair. —Allison Duncan

▼ IF YOU’RE BORED BY YOUR HOUSE

Ksenia Shestakovskaia curates what she calls an “ode to odd beauty” for her @decorhardcore. No fan of the bland, the basic or the soothing, she looks for any building, room or environment that evokes emotion. A whale-shaped building, once part of an Australian marine park, might make you smile. An oppressively red bathroom (below) might repulse you, or a hallway whose walls are covered in pink feathers elicit a pleasant shudder. “What I select must be unapologetic and colorful, and patterns are a plus,” said Ms. Shestakovskaia, a Berlin-based textile designer, who sources images from sites like Airbnb and eBay. “I know something is right when my heart skips a beat.”



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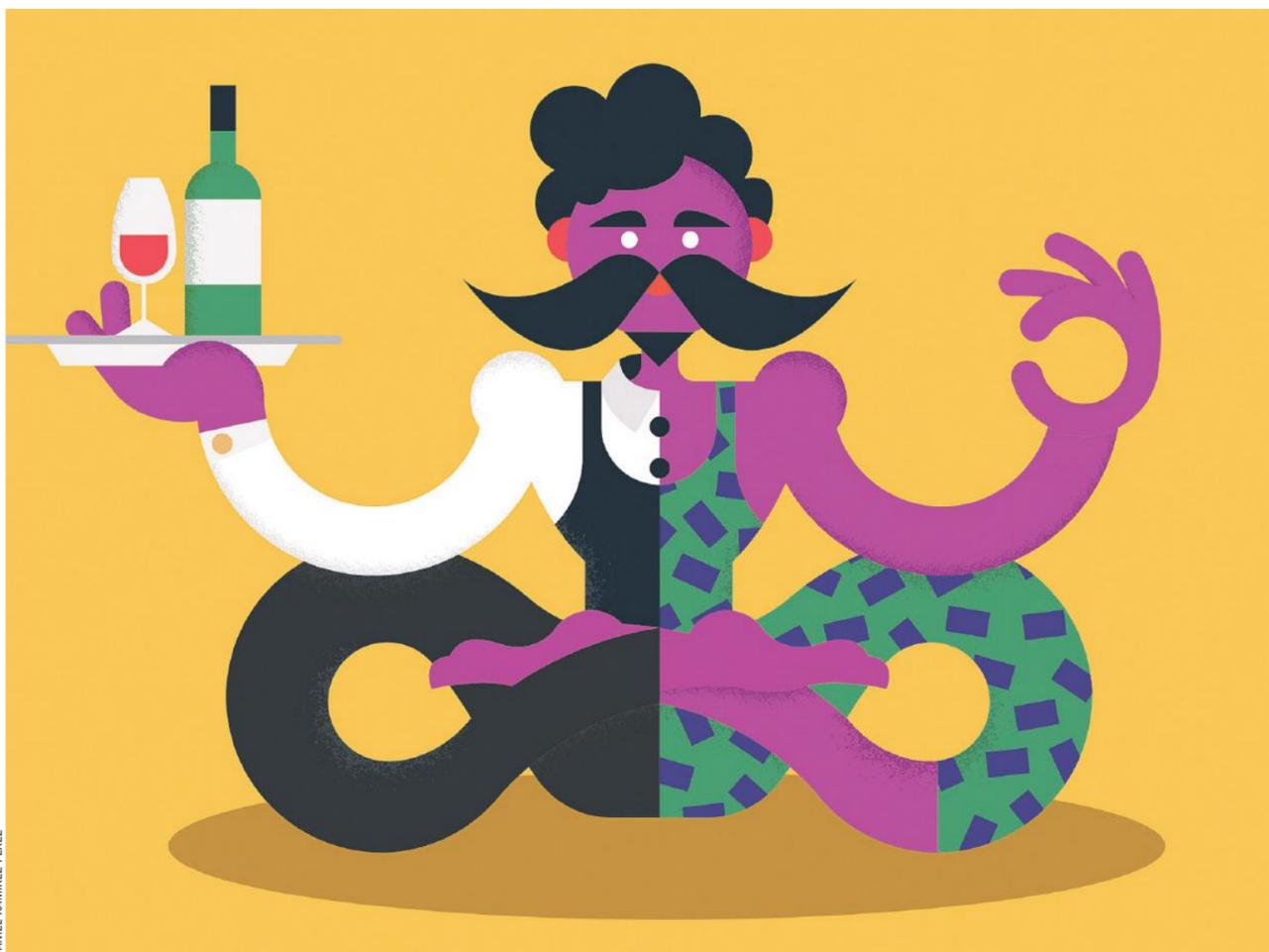
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EATING & DRINKING



DANIEL RAMIREZ PEREZ

ON WINE / LETTIE TEAGUE



Just How Far Can We Stretch The Definition of ‘Sommelier’?

AT A DINNER PARTY a few years ago, the host introduced me as someone who knew about wine. “Are you a sommelier?” a fellow guest eagerly inquired. “Merely a wine writer,” I confessed. The guest looked disappointed—clearly my job didn’t command the same respect. Knowing how hard sommeliers work, I could hardly blame her.

So many people call themselves sommeliers these days, perhaps I should adopt the title, too. Though Merriam-Webster defines a sommelier as “a waiter in a restaurant who has charge of wines and their service; a wine steward,” the title pops up in all sorts of unlikely contexts.

Harry Lalouis, Amsterdam-based Mustard Sommelier of the Maille mustard company, isn’t involved in the service of wine (though some of Maille’s mustards contain it); he develops recipes, promotes the brand’s products and appears on cooking shows. Though one might assume that applying the sommelier title to an expert not in wine but in mustard came straight out of a modern marketing campaign, Maille employed a Mustard Sommelier as far back as

the mid-18th century.

As a self-described Yogi Sommelier—certainly a 21st-century conception—Chiara Shannon deals more directly with wine. Ms. Shannon earned a sommelier certification from the Wine & Spirits Education Trust some 10 years ago, in addition to getting certified as a yoga instructor. Her full-time job is wine buyer and manager at Mission Wines in South Pasadena, Calif.

Ms. Shannon holds her Yogi Sommelier workshops at yoga studios in L.A. and elsewhere. “I don’t teach yoga—I teach mindful wine tasting,” she said. “You learn how to focus, how to tune things out. It’s applying yoga techniques to wine tasting.” She stressed that her sessions are far from the kind she characterized as “yoga instruction coupled to cheap wine consumption.”

Sommeliers are more visible than ever—in the three “Somm” documentaries from director Jason Wise, for instance, as well as the Esquire Network series “Uncorked,” which follows the lives of six people as they prepare for the Master Sommelier exam. As the job has gotten

more attention, the title has become more widely familiar—even marketable. The 67 Wine Somm Series line of wines was founded by Oscar Garcia, a wine buyer for the retail store 67 Wine & Spirits in New York; Carlos Iglesias, general manager of Spain Wine Collection; and Ignacio “Nacho” Monclús of Camperdown Elm in Brooklyn—the partner who is an actual sommelier in a restaurant.

In a word, the sommelier title is hot. But should it be strictly reserved for restaurant professionals?

“Obviously you know it’s a loaded question,” said Alexander LaPratt, founder and wine director of the restaurants Atrium DUMBO and Beasts & Bottles in Brooklyn and a Master Sommelier. “I do think the difference between a sommelier and other wine professionals is [restaurant] service,” he said. Yet he’s not bothered that non-restaurant professionals use the title. “It opens the door to people asking questions, and curiosity is a good thing,” he said.

Increasingly, “sommelier” is understood to denote an expert worth consulting on wine—whatever the setting. But there are those who ad-

here to a more traditional definition. One of the stars of “Uncorked,” Yannick Benjamin, is a sommelier at the University Club of New York and owner of Contento Restaurant, to open later this spring. “Sommelier has become a sexy word,” he acknowledged. Mr. Benjamin refrained from using the title when he worked in a wine shop. “I never felt comfortable calling myself a sommelier,” he said. “I would say I work in retail.”

David Lynch, who has been a sommelier in high-profile restaurants in San Francisco (Quince) and New York (Babbo), and even owned a wine bar (St. Vincent in San Francisco) for a while, agreed that the title should only be used by someone working in a restaurant, past or present. “You can’t call yourself a sommelier if you haven’t amassed significant experience working the floor,” he said. Mr. Lynch, who is now the editorial director of SommSelect, an online wine sales company based in Sonoma, Calif., still considers himself a sommelier, based on his years in restaurants and the expertise he gained there. Dustin Wilson would certainly

qualify in Mr. Lynch’s terms: He’s a certified Master Sommelier and has had a long career at celebrated restaurants, including Frasca Food and Wine in Boulder, Colo., and Eleven Madison Park in New York. And yet Mr. Wilson, now the owner of Verve Wine, a shop in New York, feels he can no longer claim the title because he is not presently on a restaurant floor. “I have a fairly strong opinion on it,” he said. “I no longer call myself a sommelier as that is no longer my job.” Mr. Wilson does call himself a Master Sommelier. The latter is not a job but a credential he earned after passing a series of rigorous exams administered by the Court of Master Sommeliers.

Mr. Garcia of 67 Wine Somm Series said that he and his partners launched their line of wines in 2015 to “demystify” the sommelier’s role. “We used to discuss dealing with sommeliers in restaurants and how highbrow their approach was,” he said. The 67 Wine Somm Series is certainly accessibly priced, at \$14 a

‘I don’t teach yoga—I teach mindful wine tasting.’

bottle; a second line, 67 Wine Petit Somm Series, offers \$7 wines for “the frugal wine consumer,” said Mr. Garcia. I bought the 2018 67 Wine Somm Series Albariño and found it simple and a bit dilute.

Andrew F. Bell, founder of the New York-based American Sommelier, Inc., was specific in his definition: The sommelier puts together the wine list and is responsible for making money for the restaurant; he or she is the salesperson in charge of wine. “I refer to people as sommeliers if they’re solely responsible for a beverage program,” he said.

A former sommelier and wine shop owner, Mr. Bell teaches classes for restaurant and retail professionals as well as people outside the industry. One former student, Cristine Pirro Schwarzman, a partner in the New York law firm Ropes & Gray LLP, has never worked as a sommelier in a restaurant. Yet she calls herself a sommelier when talking wine with friends and colleagues, after taking Mr. Bell’s intensive 24-week Viti Vini course. “The title is important,” she said. “It means I have a knowledge of wine that’s greater than the general population.”

When I told Ms. Schwarzman that many wine professionals believe the title should be reserved for people working in restaurants, she argued that she had earned it. But she welcomed the idea of applying her skills in a restaurant—preferably Le Bernardin in Manhattan. “It’s my dream job,” she said.

I asked Aldo Sohm, wine director at Le Bernardin and wine director/partner at Aldo Sohm Wine Bar, if he’d take her on. Mr. Sohm believes one must work in a restaurant to earn the title sommelier. “She’d have to start at the wine bar,” he said.

► Email Lettie at wine@wsj.com.

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Rigatoni With Cauliflower, Anchovy and Lemon Ragout

ION DAYS OFF, most chefs want to be anywhere but the kitchen. Philip Krajeck is an exception. “I’m a dad and I love to cook,” he said. While you won’t find this warming winter pasta on the menu at either of Mr. Krajeck’s Nashville restaurants, it wins rave reviews from his family. His second Slow Food Fast recipe combines rigatoni with cauliflower, anchovies, chile flakes, garlic and Parmesan. Fresh parsley and crunchy fried

breadcrumbs provide color and contrast.

Even when he cooks at home, Mr. Krajeck clearly thinks like a chef. For instance, he roasts some of the cauliflower to concentrate its flavor. “You get unbelievable umami,” he explained. And he simmers the remaining cauliflower only briefly, to maintain some vibrancy. The combination is sensational—a remarkably toothsome and savory vegetable-based ragout. —*Kitty Greenwald*

Total Time: 35 minutes
Serves: 4

Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper
1 head cauliflower, florets and tender stalks cut into ½-inch pieces
½ cup olive oil
¾ cup bread torn into large (½-inch) crumbs
4 anchovy fillets
3 cloves garlic, thinly sliced
Generous pinch chile flakes, plus more to season
12 ounces rigatoni
2 tablespoons unsalted butter
3 tablespoons coarsely chopped parsley
Grated Parmigiano-Reggiano
Juice and finely grated zest of 1 lemon

1. Preheat oven to 475 de-

grees. Bring a large pot of salted water to a rolling boil. Toss ¾ of the chopped cauliflower with 2 tablespoons olive oil. Season with salt and spread cauliflower across a roasting tray. Roast on lower rack of oven until cauliflower browns, 15-20 minutes.

2. Make the breadcrumbs: Set a small pan over medium heat and pour in ¼ cup olive oil. Once hot, gently fry breadcrumbs until golden brown, about 2 minutes. Transfer fried breadcrumbs to a paper towel lined plate to cool.

3. Pour remaining olive oil into a large pan over medium-low heat. Stir in anchovies, garlic and chile flakes. Once anchovies begin to dissolve and garlic picks up color, after 1-2 minutes, stir in roasted cauliflower. Sauté un-

til seasonings flavor cauliflower, 2-3 minutes.

4. Add pasta to boiling water. Add raw cauliflower to anchovy-cauliflower mixture. Add a ladleful of pasta water to pan with cauliflower. Simmer until raw cauliflower just tenderizes and flavors meld, 5 minutes

5. When pasta is just shy of al dente, strain, reserving 2 cups cooking liquid. Stir pasta and butter into cauliflower mixture and cook, tossing, until pasta is al dente. Add splashes of pasta water as needed to stretch sauce so it thoroughly cloaks pasta.

6. Off heat, season pasta with half the parsley and Parmigiano, salt, pepper, more chile flakes, lemon juice and zest to taste. Top with breadcrumbs and remaining parsley.



THICK OF IT This recipe puts the water the pasta cooks in to smart use. Its starch helps bind the buttery ragout to the noodles.

KATE SEARS FOR THE WALL STREET JOURNAL; FOOD STYLING BY PEARL JONES; PROP STYLING BY SUZIE MYERS; MICHAEL HOEVELER (PORTRAIT)

EATING & DRINKING

Simmer Until Sublime

Oxtail is the stew-season secret weapon. You simply have to give it time to express itself

By KATHLEEN SQUIRES

I'D LIKE TO clear up a few misconceptions about my favorite cold-weather cut of meat. For starters, "oxtail" is a misnomer: The tail does not necessarily come from an ox; it can be obtained from any kind of cattle. Then there's the assumption that because a tail works hard (swatting flies, etc.), its meat will have a tough, chewy texture. Not so, if you prepare it correctly.

"Correctly" might mean simmered in peanut soup in the Philippines, stewed with pumpkin in Yemen, or cooked in a three-legged pot over coals in South Africa. "It was a 'leftover' piece that impacted cultures around the globe because there is poverty everywhere," said Kwame Onwuachi, executive chef of Kith/Kin restaurant in Washington, D.C. "They transformed that pain into something delicious."

An oxtail dish inspired by the cooking of Mr. Onwuachi's Jamaican grandmother has become a staple on the Kith/Kin menu. Marinated overnight with jerk paste, curry powder, brown sugar, ginger and garlic, then roasted and finally simmered low and slow, these braised oxtails carry intense notes of all-spice, Scotch bonnet, cinnamon and tamarind. Mr. Onwuachi serves them with coconut jasmine rice, pigeon peas and glazed carrots.

The one-time "pauper's cut" helped L.A.-based chef Timothy Hollingsworth impress judges at the Bosc d'Or world cooking championship in Lyon, France, in 2009. His savory oxtail tart with endive marmalade and a honey-Banyuls vinegar gastrique placed him 6th out of 24—at the time, the highest placement of any American chef. Each winter, Mr. Hollingsworth marks the triumph at his restaurant Otium by serving oxtail in various European preparations—*crêpinette*, *pot au feu*.

"There is something about it that is just good for the soul," said Angie Mar of Manhattan's Beatrice Inn. "The bones have so much collagen that it produces a deep, rich broth and gives a stickiness to the meat." Her recent cookbook, "Butcher + Beast," features four oxtail recipes, including the restaurant's signature



CHASING OXTAIL

Shopping Tips

Ask your butcher to cut it into rounds of your desired thickness and to trim fat and cartilage.

Look for bright-red, marbled meat and a balanced meat-to-bone ratio.

Braised Oxtail

Total Time (includes chilling) 9 hours **Serves** 4-6

1 teaspoon salt
2 teaspoons freshly ground black pepper
5 pounds oxtail, cut about 3 inches thick, fat trimmed
3 tablespoons olive oil
1 head garlic, halved crosswise
1 yellow onion, roughly chopped

3 celery stalks, roughly chopped
2 carrots, roughly chopped
3 bay leaves
3 thyme sprigs
10 juniper berries
10 whole peppercorns
1 bottle red wine
6 cups beef stock
2 tablespoons cold butter, cut in cubes

1. Season oxtail with salt and pepper. Refrigerate, uncovered, at least 4 hours

and up to overnight.
2. Preheat oven to 275 degrees. On a square of cheesecloth, combine garlic, onions, celery, carrots, bay leaves, thyme, juniper berries and peppercorns, and tie with kitchen twine to form a sachet. Set aside.
3. Heat olive oil in a large skillet over medium-high heat. Brown oxtails on all sides, about 4 minutes per side, then transfer to an 8-quart Dutch oven. Add sa-

chet and wine. Add beef stock. Cover Dutch oven, transfer to oven and cook until tender, 3½-4 hours.
4. Strain oxtail cooking liquid into a pot and set over medium heat. Cook until liquid reduces by two thirds, about 45 minutes. Finish by whisking in cold cubes of butter. Serve oxtail over rice with jus poured over top. —Adapted from Ashleigh Shanti, Benne on Eagle, Asheville, NC

braise with Madeira and prunes.

Ms. Mar hails braising as a fail-safe method for oxtail. "I like to simmer another 30-40 minutes after I think it's done," she said. "A magic alchemy happens within that time that makes it juicy. It's really impossible to screw up."

Cedric Vongerichten always has an oxtail soup on the menu at his Indonesian restaurant, Wayan, in Manhattan. "Hot soup is eaten in Jakarta even when it is steaming hot out," he said. "So why should I take it off the menu in the summer in New York?" His version, inspired by a dish his Indonesian in-laws love,

has a broth spicy with chile, tart with lime leaf, and subtly briny from kombu. His method of blanching, braising and searing the oxtail produces a gorgeous texture—a crisp crust surrounding a silken core.

Ashleigh Shanti's oxtail and cream peas at Benne on Eagle in Asheville, N.C., salutes her Appalachian grandmother, who used tails from cattle farming neighbors. Ms. Shanti's spin includes a rich hit of butter and a hint of sharpness from juniper berries.

At Estes restaurant in Portland, Ore., Patrick McKee's oxtail ragù over potato gnocchi reveals his Ro-

man roots. "My mom and grandmother would make it during Lent on Thursdays, a heavy meat-eating day in preparation for fish Friday," he said. He aggressively spices his oxtail with fennel seed, paprika, piment d'espelette and black pepper. After a long braise, he lets the oxtail sit and "collect its thoughts" for 45 minutes.

If you're seeking a shortcut, a pressure cooker reduces braising time by two-thirds while sealing in meaty flavor and moisture. But even cooked the old-fashioned, time-consuming way, oxtail is easy to get very right indeed.

Oxtail Ragù

Total Time 5 hours **Serves** 4

½ cup fennel seeds
¼ cup black peppercorns
2 tablespoons piment d'espelette or other chile powder
1 tablespoon paprika
½ cup equal parts extra-virgin olive oil and canola oil
5 pounds oxtails, cut about 3 inches thick, trimmed
2 medium yellow onions, diced
2 medium carrots, peeled and sliced lengthwise
2 leeks, sliced lengthwise
2 cups red wine
2 quarts beef stock
8 ounces canned chopped tomatoes
A few sprigs fresh thyme
2 large bay leaves
Salt and black pepper

1. Preheat oven to 325 degrees. In a small pan over high heat, toast peppercorns and fennel until fragrant, 4 minutes. Let cool, then grind with a spice grinder. In a bowl, whisk together pepper-fennel mix, piment d'espelette and paprika.
2. Season oxtails liberally with salt, pepper and spice mix. In a large, heavy pot, heat 4 tablespoons oil over medium-high heat. Sear oxtails until browned all over, 4 minutes per side. Remove and set aside on a plate.
3. In the same pot, heat 4 tablespoons oil. Sauté onions, carrots and leeks until soft, 5 minutes. Deglaze with red wine and return oxtails to pot. Add stock and tomatoes. Bring to a boil. Add thyme and bay leaves and cover. Braise in oven until meat falls from bone, 3½ hours. Let rest in pot 45 minutes.
4. Use a slotted spoon to remove oxtails from braising liquid and place on a baking sheet. Pick meat from bones, discarding fat and cartilage. (Reserve bones for stock). Remove carrots from braising liquid, dice and add to picked oxtail meat.
5. Strain liquid into a saucepan and bring to a simmer. Skim fat and season with salt and pepper. Add meat to liquid and serve over pasta or polenta. —Adapted from Patrick McKee, Estes, Portland, Ore.



ALPHA SHOOT FOR THE WALL STREET JOURNAL, FOOD STYLING BY HEATHER MELDRUM, PROP STYLING BY KATE JORDAN



For frying, butter, duck fat, goose fat and bacon grease all yield tasty results.

Well-seasoned cast-iron imparts flavor, but you can also use a nonstick skillet.

This classic rösti requires no embellishment. But go right ahead, should inspiration strike.

Starch Power

The Swiss know cold-weather cooking. Exhibit A: the world's most comforting potato pancake

RÖSTI RECIPES spark the same fierce debate in Switzerland that chocolate chip cookie recipes do in the U.S. A flattened disc of shredded potatoes cooked in fat until crisp on the outside and tender and creamy within, rösti is served whole or in slices—and few people wish to stop at one. Who could possibly argue with—or about—that?

It comes down to technique, for the most part. Some Swiss cooks insist the potatoes must be boiled a day before cooking and left to dry out a bit in the fridge overnight. I've found this does make the shredding quite easy. One camp insists a rösti must be flipped and cooked on both sides, while another counters that it should be crisped on one side only, leaving the other soft and moist. Wherever you come down on this question, serve the rösti with the more evenly golden and crisp of the two sides faceup.

Other issues can be equally divisive. Some ardently believe the potatoes must be fried in butter, others in duck fat, still others in goose fat; I would add that they are delicious cooked in the rendered fat of bacon or pancetta. (What isn't?) Then there is the question of additions. Served straight, sans dis-

tractions, the pure flavors of the potatoes and fat can shine through. Still, it's tempting to stir in a few ladons of crisped bacon, some grated Gruyère cheese or a sprinkling of chives. On top, a dollop of crème fraîche and a blanket of smoked salmon makes an ideal combination: the heat and crunch of the potatoes against the cool tang of the cream and the silken, salty fish. I've even topped rösti with a poached egg, guacamole, a handful of cilantro leaves and a drizzle of jalapeño hot sauce.

Before considering any of the above, however, one must master the basic recipe. Rösti is not hard to make, but there are a few rules to keep in mind. The goal is a flat cake about ¾ inch thick. Never try to double the recipe; the rösti will not flip intact or cook properly. A well-seasoned 8- or 9-inch cast iron skillet is traditional and makes a flavorful rösti, but a nonstick skillet works too.

Rösti is a winter dish through and through, regardless of whether it's served in view of the snow-capped Matterhorn. It confers warmth and comfort, not to mention ample fuel to take on the slopes or shovel the sidewalk.

—Aleksandra Crapanzano

Rösti

Total Time 35 minutes **Serves** 3

3 medium russet potatoes or 2 large ones
4 tablespoons butter or duck or goose fat
¾ teaspoon salt
2 tablespoons hot water

1. The day before you

plan to cook the rösti, bring a large pot of salted water to a boil. Add potatoes in their skins and boil until just short of tender, about 15 minutes. (Timing will vary according to the size of the potatoes you use.) Drain potatoes and refrigerate overnight.

2. The next day, while potatoes are still cold, peel them, then grate

them using medium holes of a box grater.

3. In an 8- or 9-inch cast-iron or nonstick skillet over low heat, melt butter. Gradually add grated potatoes and salt. Cook over low heat, turning frequently with a spatula, until potatoes are soft and yellow, about 3 minutes.

4. Press potatoes into a flat cake. You don't

need to push hard, but you do want to apply enough pressure to form a cake that will hold its shape. Sprinkle with hot water.

5. Cover and cook, shaking pan frequently to prevent scorching and adding a little butter as necessary to prevent sticking, until potatoes are crusty and golden on bottom, 10-15 minutes.

6. Turn rösti out onto a serving platter, crusty side up, and serve. Alternatively, if you'd like to crisp both sides, flip rösti by inverting onto a plate. Melt another tablespoon of butter in skillet. Slide rösti back into skillet and cook until underside is crusty and golden. Turn out onto a serving platter. Eat while still hot.

GEAR & GADGETS

A QUIET PLACE?

Despite R&D focused on combating cabin noise, the Corsair's interior still can't compete with hushed EVs.



RUMBLE SEAT / DAN NEIL



2020 Lincoln Corsair: It's Time For All SUVs to Go Electric

PITY THE 2020 Lincoln Corsair. It wants so very much to be electric.

New from Ford's premium division, the Corsair is a smartly attired compact crossover based on the company's C-segment front-drive architecture. With strong sales of its refreshed Navigator and new Aviator SUVs, Lincoln is clawing its way back to premium-luxury relevance after decades of being the car you rode home in from the airport. Lincoln brand is targeting younger buyers using leitmotifs of mindfulness and dangled promises of "quiet flight," "serenity" and "sanctuary."

Mm-hmm. It all sounded like the usual Detroit balderdash until I got into an Aviator and discovered that, huh, they really were trying to create a vibe there. Imagine yourself inside Matthew McConaughey's head. It's that quiet.

The Corsair is snipped from the same firmament as the Aviator, conveying much of the larger car's presence—the brightwork grille, the blacked-out roof pillars, the sloping roofline, the stately stance—in a smaller package, little luxe-lite.

The program's engineers want consumers to know it's not just a gussied-up Ford Escape. Among the callouts is the integrated bushing multi-link rear suspension, a road-smoothing upgrade from the

Escape's short-long-arm suspension. Our Reserve AWD edition (\$60,110, as tested) was also fitted with adaptive suspension, much as the top-end Aviators. If Aviator rides like the proverbial flying carpet, the Corsair aspires to be a levitating doormat.

Inside, our tester was upholstered in a lovely, glove-soft leather. But Lincoln's pomp-masters went too far with the boast of "hand-selected" cabin materials. What other appendage would you use?

I was charmed by the push-button selector for the transmission, a row of Wurlitzer-like tabs marked P, R, N, D, in the center stack; less so by the lagging and limited central touch screen. Ahead of the steering wheel, the digital instrument cluster hosts mood-enhancing animation—including images of Mother Earth, which swims into view when drivers select the "Conserve" drive mode. Feel free to reward yourself with a big steak and a blood-trade cigar.

Power comes from either a turbo 2.0-liter four-cylinder gasser (250 hp/280 lb-ft); or, as in our tester, a 2.3-liter turbo four (295 hp/310 lb-ft), the same peppercorn found in the Mustang. An eight-speed automatic transmission directs torque to the front wheels unless the sensors detects a loss of traction or

control, at which point the AWD auto-engages, if so equipped.

Drivers can engage AWD themselves by selecting "Slippery" or "Deep Conditions" drive modes. I'll take rejected Van Halen album titles for \$200.

Under the hood is what Lincoln weirdly calls a "dual-walled dashboard," as if it were model-year 1925. This is actually a baffled engine shroud, creating a sound-proofing air gap between engine and cabin (this part is also shared with the Ford Explorer/Lincoln Aviator). Unpleasant excitations that get through the firewall get throttled by the cabin's sub-aural noise cancellation system.

What's with Ford's sudden crush on hush? The company opened a

new driving dynamics laboratory in Dearborn, Mich., in January 2018, a facility which includes a semi-anechoic test chamber with four-wheel rollers, in a room capable of extreme temperature testing, from -40 to 140 F. While you're thinking how awesome that is, spare a moment to be horrified that Ford didn't have such a facility before, which is vital to tracking down acoustic hot spots like whistling, droning, buffeting, and unexpected resonances.

Ford's investment in NVH (noise, vibration, and harshness) brings it into line with its premium-luxury competitors, some of whom, like Toyota-Lexus, have been selling serenity for decades. But all OEMs are running into the same acoustic

wall: To meet fuel economy and emission standards world-wide, car makers are shrinking internal-combustion (IC) engines and requiring them to work harder. And louder.

Which brings us back to the Corsair. In what qualifies as an engineering irony, because other noises and vibrations are so well attenuated, the engine and drivetrain stand out in curious relief. It sounds a bit like you're being discreetly

Consider the resources, devoted to silencing and taming the engine, when it could be eliminated at a stroke. Make it electric.

tailed by somebody in a Mustang.

The 2.3-liter is not the most melodious of organs, anyway. It sneers grumpily if you drive off before the cold-start cycle is complete, which everyone always does. Faint piping and whisper-whistles (the turbo) carry over the piston-gunning under a hard throttle, before the eight-speed transmission skip-steps to high gear, and the rpm falls. Yes, it's virtually silent at idle; the ticking of the direct-injection jets is inaudible. But when you start pumping a lot of air and gas through it, you can't unhear the quiet riot.

It's not vibration reaching the driver. The Corsair passes the stop/start engine-shake test with flying colors, with a barely discernible tremor. It's the half-heard soundtrack of a distant, disconnected power source that's weird.

So, to recap: Here is a product whose makers heavily invested in cabin quiet as a market differentiator, using latest methods and best practices. These engineers have battled howling winds, whistling side mirrors, roaring roads, and droning tires—all that, only to provide an empty stage for a one-man gasoline band, playing furiously.

Consider the resources, devoted to silencing and taming the engine, when it could be eliminated at a stroke. Make it electric.

As much as there is to like about Lincoln's new direction, it will be hard for any IC-powered vehicle to tout cabin isolation and powertrain refinement in the growing shade of vehicle electrification. Those bars have been reset.



2020 Lincoln Corsair 2.3L Reserve

Base Price \$42,630
Price, as Tested \$60,110

Engine and Drivetrain Turbocharged and intercooled direct-injection 2.3-liter DOHC inline four; eight-speed automatic transmission with manual-shift mode; on-demand AWD

Power/Torque 295 hp at 5,500 rpm/310 lb-ft at 3,000 rpm

Length/Width/Height/Wheelbase 180.6/83.0 (w/mirrors)/64.1/106.7 inches

Curb Weight 3,848 pounds, before options

EPA Fuel Economy 21/28/24 mpg

Cargo Capacity 27.6/57.6 cubic feet (2nd row up/folded)

Easy Listening

How to connect your noise-canceling cans

Often the trickiest part of watching TV with headphones on is the initial set-up. For most devices follow these steps.

1. Turn on your headphones and find the button to set them to pairing mode.
2. From your smart TV or streaming device's home screen, find "Settings," toggle to "Bluetooth" and click on the name or model of your headphones.
3. Once they pair, go back to settings and find your audio menu. Select "audio output" and click on your headphones.
4. Once your headphones make a connection sound, enjoy!

Quiet Riot

Continued from page D1

I'm not sure why I resisted this sonic refuge for so long. With advances in noise-canceling tech and Bluetooth's ease of connectivity with smart TVs, soundbars and streaming devices like Apple TV, headphoned TV fans don't have to worry about intrusive noise. My set always sounds pure and consistent; the audio doesn't dim if I move 4 feet. The dialogue and score coexist evenly so I don't have to constantly fiddle with the volume between scenes. The sound travels with me so I needn't hit pause to go refill my glass or brush my teeth, and I no longer have to rewind if I miss something due to a door slamming.

"In the last 10 years, headphone processors have gotten better, antennas to send and receive signals are better, batteries have gotten stronger. And that all translates to a more consistent and higher quality audio experience," said Matt Engstrom, senior category director, product management at audio brand Shure.

The first feature to look for in a pair of TV-worthy phones, he said, is a wireless range of about 10 meters, which is standard for Bluetooth 5.0 and will let you enjoy watching TV from bed as your partner dozes.



PRIVATE HEARING Four noise-canceling sets that can easily sync to your TV. 1. Nuheara's IQbuds Boost and IQstream TV (\$299 and \$99 respectively, nuheara.com); 2. JBL's Live 650BTNC (\$200, jbl.com); 3. Sennheiser RS 175-U (\$280, sennheiser.com); 4. Apple AirPods Pro (\$249, apple.com)

Does that partner snore? A pair of headphones with noise-canceling "can basically eliminate the sound of a vacuum cleaner and make it a very movie-like experience inside your head," said Mr. Engstrom.

He warned that some people may feel thrown off by the "air-

lock" atmosphere created when all the ambient sound gets sucked out of the air. But if you plan to toggle noise-canceling off, you're just throwing money away on the premium feature.

Recently, differences in audio quality between over-ear and in-ear pairs has "leveled

off," said Mr. Engstrom, allowing you to use whichever style you find most comfortable. But you'll get a longer battery life with over-ear headphones—up to 20 hours of battery life with Shure's Aonic 50 wireless headphones (available this spring, \$399, shure.com) com-

pared to only about 5 hours with Apple AirPods Pro. You'll also pay a premium for earbuds since brands have to pack similar tech in smaller devices.

For film nerds who want a theatrical experience, pairs like Sony's WH-L600 model (\$300, sony.com) can thunderously mimic surround sound. And those with cable boxes or—god forbid—rabbit ears can still tune into any TV's audio with Nuheara's IQstream TV, which sets up a Bluetooth signal you can sync to the IQbuds Boost.

But there are drawbacks: First, headphones are obviously isolating. Most systems won't let you sync multiple pairs of Bluetooth headphones, so good luck convincing a partner to read subtitles. Second, persistent headphone use can damage hearing. OSHA standards suggest that you can safely listen to sounds of about 90 decibels, or equal to the sound of New York's subway, only two hours a day. Meanwhile, some headphones can hit 120 decibels at max volume.

Since noise-canceling blocks out sounds, it lets you listen at a lower register than standard headphones might, said Dr. Joe Shargorodsky, who led a 2010 study of how headphones are accelerating hearing loss in adolescents. He suggested maxing your headphones volume at 50%—about 60 to 70 decibels. You think I'd let Steven Tyler's screech ruin "The Great British Baking Show"? Dream on.