



WII REMOTES



OVEN MITTS



TOY SHOPPING CARTS

Walk a Mile in These Louboutins

An accidental Dadaist dream of footwear.

By Sarah Spellings

Before Iggy Azalea became synonymous with a certain kind of cultural appropriation, her song “Work” was everywhere in 2013. The lyrics “Walk a mile in these Louboutins / But they don’t wear these shits where I’m from” reference her rise from a 16-year-old with “No money, no family” to a person who raps professionally about luxury shoes. Now a younger generation has borrowed the song for its own uses on the social-media platform TikTok.

There you’ll find users making “Louboutins” out of mundane household objects: oven mitts, Legos, watermelons, trash-can lids, entire trash cans, string-cheese sticks stuck on forks taped to feet—the possibilities range from the surreal to the dangerous.



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*Mike Bloomberg
at his campaign
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Photograph by David Williams

1950s Hollywood.

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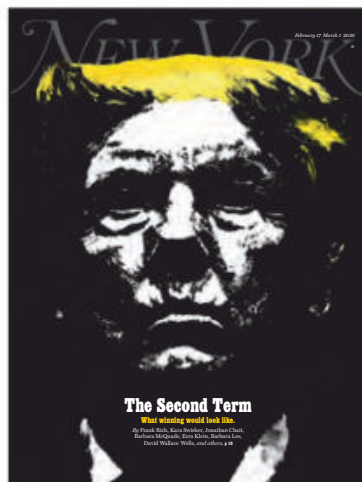
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Comments



1 For *New York*'s latest issue, literary critic Molly Young explored the seemingly unstoppable spread of corporate-speak (“**Garbage Language**,” February 17–March 1). Many people who work in industries inundated with “garbage language” contributed their own experiences. “Recalls to mind Goethe’s quote: *When ideas fail, words come handy*,” commenter LaliZ wrote, explaining that as an editor in the financial industry, “I do battle against garbage language every day. Sometimes I even win.” Kelleyalison wrote, “**I hate how this garbage language has seeped into academia, so that ‘on-boarding,’ ‘think partners,’ etc. are now in fairly common usage even at the Ivy League school where I work.**” Patrick Porter elaborated on that: “For the rest of us, some of whom work in education, garbage business speak is worse than demoralizing. It relentlessly promotes the barbarism that we are all put on earth to make money, that education must be geared to that task, and measured accordingly.” Allison Braley, a communications professional, wrote, “**The bigger issue is the way many companies use jargon to keep minorities, newcomers and people with a different education out of the conversation.**” In praising the essay, Leon Neyfakh, the co-creator of *Slow Burn*, wrote, “Part of what makes this ... essay so good is the visceral contrast between the garbage language she’s describing and the relentless clarity and precision of the language she’s using.” Chef Padma Lakshmi tweeted, “This language is the bane of my existence. Good to know I’m not alone.” Writing for Slate, though, Mark Morgioni challenged Young’s premise and

came to the defense of some corporate language: “My job would be much more complicated—and take far, far longer—without it ... Used correctly and judiciously, those terms serve two invaluable purposes: They save time, and they clearly communicate meaning to peers. **At its core, garbage language is just a shared set of idioms that help people move through meetings and accurately define tasks.**” Commenter AnnabelAndrews concurred with Morgioni, “I really feel seen by Slate right now. Corporate speak is silly but once I stopped being uptight about it, I kind of enjoyed it ... A new one making the rounds at my work is *socialize*, as in ‘let’s finalize this plan and then socialize it.’” Some readers found inspiration in garbage language in praising the story: @twinksy called it, “Such a ‘value-add.’ ‘Key take-away’? Corporate America, ‘regroup’ and ‘evolve’ away from garbage language.” And *The New York Times Book Review*’s Pamela Paul added, “**Molly Young puts into plain but excellent words everything I feel and believe about corporate jargon.** Hope to touch base with you at the next fireside chat, [Molly]. I’ll bring the fireplace. Will circle back soon!”

2 Stephen S. Hall’s investigation into the vaping industry spurred a number of letters from experts in the field (“**Who Thought Sucking on a Battery Was a Good Idea?**,” February 3–16). Thomas Eissenberg, the co-director of the Center for the Study of Tobacco Products at Virginia Commonwealth University, wrote, “**Lungs evolved to deliver oxygen and expel carbon dioxide. Challenging them**

with daily doses of heated chemicals is a bad idea that is potentially lethal.” Sean Callahan, a pulmonary and critical-care physician in Salt Lake City, said, “Vaping in the United States remains the Wild West and our leaders’ feeble attempts have done little to tame it.” Others suggested that vaping is still an important tool for stamping out smoking. David B. Abrams of New York University’s School of Global Public Health wrote that “data conclusively demonstrate that nicotine vaping is substantially safer than smoking deadly cigarettes: Switching saves many smokers’ lives. **Do not let a moral panic trigger hysteria that leads society to treat nicotine vaping as if it is the same as deadly smoking. Doing so will prolong smoking and its horrific damage to health**—based on fear, not facts. 1,300 American smokers prematurely die daily.” Sarah Milov, author of *The Cigarette: A Political History*, disagreed: “Public attention and political resources are now momentarily focused on the spike in vaping-associated lung injuries in otherwise healthy teenagers. But **the history of tobacco should caution us against thinking that even acute and deadly lung illnesses are the biggest problems with e-cigarettes. It took decades for the full consequences of smoking-related diseases to reveal themselves**; it took longer still for the harms of secondhand smoke to become apparent. The history of tobacco suggests our limited capacity to anticipate risk—and, perhaps most tragically, our abundant ability to individualize blame once risks are known.”

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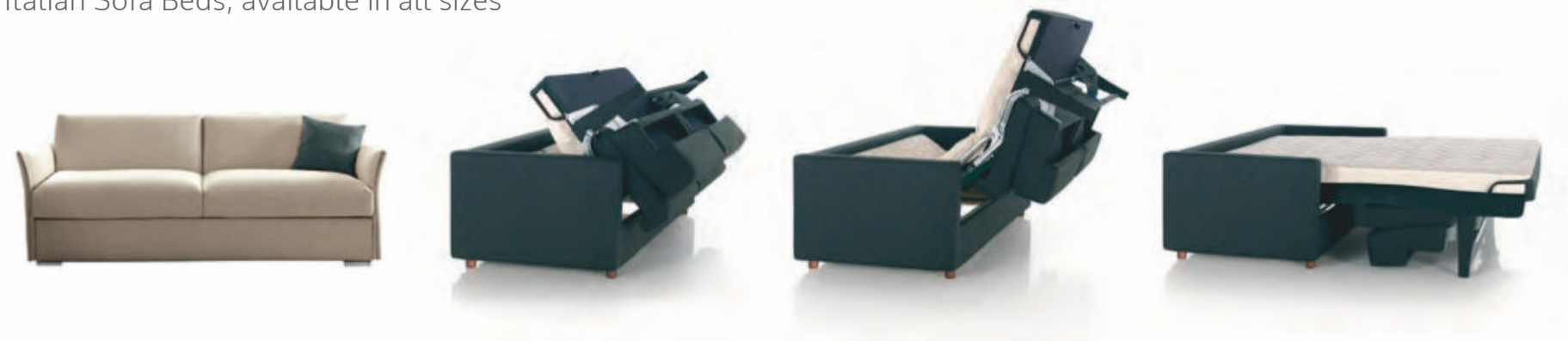
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Intelligencer

INSIDE: *The blockchain's new power twins / Stories from Hollywood's underclass*



At the coronavirus news conference.

The National Interest: Jonathan Chait

This Is Fine
As the world reaches
for face masks,
Trump buries his
head in the sand.

AS A PRIVATE GERMOPHOBIC and very public xenophobe, Donald Trump has the intuitive disposition to grasp the severity of a global epidemic that originated in China. And yet in the early stages of what may explode into a full-blown crisis, Trump is making it clear that he is not the Churchill of the coronavirus. Whatever attributes he possesses that suit him to the task are overwhelmed by negative qualities: profound superficiality, a paranoid fixation on loyalty, and a near-pathological focus on short-term gratification.

Trump inherited from his predecessor a large and capable corps of disease-prevention experts, including ones who guided the country through the 2014 Ebola outbreak and deliberately pared it back. Several officials in charge of pandemic response—Homeland Security adviser Tom Bossert; Dr. Luciana Borio, the National Security Council director for medical and biodefense preparedness; and Tim Ziemer, the NSC senior director for global health

security and biodefense—have left or were fired since 2018. The global health community has been raising alarms for two years about the administration's lack of preparedness. "These moves make us materially less safe. It's inexplicable," complained the Center for Global Development's Jeremy Konyndyk when Ziemer departed and his staff was dissolved. An administration official explained the rationale to the *Washington Post* at the time, "In a world of limited resources, you have to pick and choose." And since there was no terrifying global pandemic at that moment, preparing for one didn't seem like a priority.

Bleeding the department charged with protecting our health seems bafflingly risky. From Trump's perspective, though, it looks like a shrewd streamlining process. Throughout his first term, the president has grown increasingly obsessed with internal subversion. He has reportedly been working through lists of officials his loyalists suspect of harboring impure thoughts about the president. The coronavirus has hit at the moment when Trump is intensifying an ongoing purge of the entire federal bureaucracy of any official suspected of disloyalty. "The federal government is massive, with millions of people—and there are a lot of folks out there taking action against this president, and if we find them, we will take appropriate action," warned White House spokesman Hogan Gidley just last week.

It is fair to assume that the supply of employees possessing both high levels of technical expertise and hearts purely devoted to Donald Trump is finite. Even as the crisis has appeared, though, the president has evinced far deeper concern with his staff's loyalty than its competence.

Rush Limbaugh, the right-wing radio host recently honored by Trump with a Medal of Freedom, has argued the coronavirus is a phantasmal threat being inflated by Democrats in order to spook the markets and thereby hurt Trump. Limbaugh insinuated that Dr. Nancy Messonnier, a top official at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, was directing the plot. "Somebody, quick, find out who she donates to politically," he told listeners. "M-e-s-s-o-n-n-i-e-r, Dr. Nancy, CDC. I want to find out who she donates to." To be clear: Messonnier's offense was disseminating accurate information about the virus's spread. Trump appears to have absorbed this bizarre conspiracy theory. "The president's anger about the CDC briefing yesterday," reported CNBC's Eamon Javers, "is focused on Dr. Nancy Messonnier."

In an attempt to counteract the harmful effect of truthful information from his remaining experts, Trump took control of the message. "Low Ratings Fake News MSDNC (Comcast) & @CNN are doing everything possible to make the Caronavirus look as bad as possible, including panicking markets, if possible," he tweeted, attempting to assure the public of his mastery of the virus, even if he had not yet learned how to spell it correctly. Finding himself in the role of national comforter seemed to discomfit the president. Pandemic response calls for competence and establishing trust, both qualities of which he is bereft. Trump performs best when he can locate a foil to bully, yet the virus—unlike a trade partner or opposing politician—offered no such target. Unless he planned to unveil a mean nickname for COVID-19, none of the tools in his bag seemed to work.

At a news conference attempting to stem the panic,

Don't Expect a Citywide Quarantine

Cordoning off the five boroughs with the NYPD and National Guardsmen is logistically inconceivable and, more importantly, ineffective. Even a voluntary quarantine is unlikely because there is no reason to believe New Yorkers would cooperate. Either people will flee in anticipation or they will "von Trapp it out of the city," says Kelly Hills, a bioethicist who studies quarantines. During the 2003 SARS outbreak, Toronto attempted to quarantine 23,000 people—but only 57 percent complied. More recently, the mayor of Wuhan estimated that almost half of the city's population left before the quarantine was enacted.

—JAMES D. WALSH

Trump announced that Vice-President Mike Pence would lead the response, a claim that was quickly contradicted by Health and Human Services Secretary Alex Azar, who told reporters he still chaired the task force. The president shared with his reporters his shock at his recent discovery that influenza is deadly. "The flu in our country kills from 29,000 people to 69,000 people a year," he said. "That was shocking to me."

When a reporter asked why his proposed 2021 budget would massively cut back medical research and public-health funding, Trump, rather than obfuscate, oddly leaned in to the premise and boasted about his frugality. "Some of the people we cut, they haven't been used for many, many years, and if we ever need them, we can get them very quickly. And rather than spending the money—I'm a businessperson, I don't like having thousands of people around when you don't need 'em, when we need 'em, we can get them back very quickly." Why pay medical experts to conduct research and maintain a public-health infrastructure year after year when you can just hire them up after the epidemic hits? As Homer Simpson once complained, "We're always buying Maggie vaccinations for diseases she doesn't even have."

The most striking thing about Trump's response has been his insistence on viewing the episode through the prism of the stock market. To the extent the stock market matters, it is as an indication of a broader risk to the economy. The market's plunge matters because it suggests the possibility of an economic contraction. If the economy does not suffer from the virus, the market will recover its loss. If the economy goes into recession, the recession, not the advance signal of it sent via the stock market, will be the problem. Yet Trump has acted both publicly and privately as though sustaining the stock market is his ultimate goal. Trump has "become furious about the stock market's slide" and told aides not to say anything that might cause a drop, the *Post* reported. At his news conference, he preposterously insisted the market had dropped in response to the Democratic-primary debate, rather than the global crisis.

Trump has long viewed the stock market as a measure of his success. It matters intensively to his rich friends. Perhaps more importantly, the market's daily performance is often splayed across the television screens he stares at for hours on end, substituting for the numerical affirmation polling has never provided him. Trump does not play the long game or the medium game. He is likely incapable of focusing on any broader goal than making the red downward arrows on his television go away.

"Most people are surprised by the way I work. I play it very loose. I don't carry a briefcase. I try not to schedule too many meetings. I leave my door open. You can't be imaginative or entrepreneurial if you've got too much structure. I prefer to come to work each day and just see what develops," he wrote in his first autobiography. "I plan for the future by focusing exclusively on the present."

Trump has consistently resolved any trade-off between long-term and short-term objectives in favor of the latter. Balloon the deficit to wring a little more juice out of an already healthy economy? Sure. Pump more pollution into the air and water in order to goose the energy sector? Why not? The costs will be borne by somebody else. But it is possible that, for once, the price he has exacted on the country will be due before he has fled the scene. ■



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Duncan and Griffin Cock Foster

Forecasting the future of art collecting with the new blockchain twins in town.

BY BENJAMIN WALLACE

WHEN Duncan and Griffin Cock Foster met Cameron and Tyler Winklevoss last year, it was inevitable that they would have a lot to talk about. Both sets of siblings are twins. Both had been rowers. Both had founded companies to make money in the world of blockchain technology. In other words, both are literal, actual tech bros.

"We were telling them this story about how we realized we could get a lot more out of teaming up as twin brothers working together," Griffin recalled of the Cock Foster-Winklevoss summit. "And they were like, 'Oh yeah, we hear you on that.'"

The Winklevosses—Mark Zuckerberg's Harvard schoolmates, immortalized in *The Social Network*, who famously sued him for stealing Facebook and later became bitcoin billionaires—were then about to buy the 24-year-old Cock Fosters' start-up, Nifty Gateway, through their own cryptocurrency company, Gemini. Part of the acquisition payment was to be, naturally, in bitcoin.

"The funny part," Duncan added, "is [in high school] we went and saw *The Social Network*, and everyone was like, 'Wow, you guys kind of look like those twins from that movie; you guys should row too.' And that's how we started rowing. I mean, we didn't make it to the Olympics."

It was a recent morning, and the brothers, 25, were sitting in the Soho apartment they share. "We were, like, okay at rowing," Griffin added.

"I was pretty good," Duncan said.

We are now at the stage in the internet's evolution when the low-hanging disruption fruit has been plucked. Coding prowess and world-beating ambition may no longer be enough. The remaining opportunities may be lucrative, but they can be dauntingly esoteric. The brothers, who grew up in Seattle with parents who knew lots of people at Microsoft, began coding in sixth grade. "Most of what we do these days is explain 'nifties' to people," Griffin said, as he and Duncan tried to explain nifties to me.

"The elevator pitch I always give," offered Duncan, who wore glasses and had slightly

less buoyant hair than his brother, "is that a nifty is a fundamentally better digital good."

This is helpful if you already understand what a digital good is: a virtual object made of ones and zeros that you can see only when it's rendered onscreen. Based on the same blockchain technology as cryptocurrency, nifties are a departure from that. Short for NFTs (non-fungible tokens), they are unique digital objects you can buy, own, and sell. The brothers' go-to analogy is that nifties are like "digital Air Jordans." "If I own a pair of shoes and Nike shuts down, I don't expect that my shoes would just disappear," Duncan said. "We expect our items to behave a certain way, and past digital items have not."

The Cock Foster twins started Nifty Gateway to mainstream what had been a highly technical subculture by, among other things, allowing civilians to buy nifties (on the Nifty Gateway website) with credit cards. Last summer, when they sold the company to Gemini, the Cock Fosters' lives underwent a dizzying change. Their company was less than a year old, and they were suddenly able to move from a small apartment in San Francisco, in which they shared a bunk bed, to a spacious two-bedroom in Manhattan, which they have nicknamed Cockfosters. "It's a canonical Soho loft," said Duncan, gesturing at the high ceilings, scuffed wide-plank floors, and dangling Edison bulbs in the living room, which overlooks Mercer Street. "I love the word *canonical*," he added.

The Cock Fosters see big things ahead for nifties. The brothers' stated mission is to have 1 billion people collecting them. They talk about how nifties could one day be paired with physical assets, so you could use a digital token to prove your ownership of a piece of, say, real estate. But in these early days, the use cases can seem generationally exclusionary. The first nifty to go viral was *CryptoKitties*, a game featuring a digital feline you can collect and breed. A single CryptoKitty has sold for a record \$170,000, and venture capitalists including Union Square Ventures and Andreessen Horowitz have put money into the company behind the game. "*CryptoKitties* was the thing

that got my attention," Duncan said. "The amount of money people were spending on CryptoKitties was remarkable."

Moving to New York made sense for the Cock Fosters for a couple of reasons. Becoming part of Gemini, which has its headquarters in the Flatiron District, gave them instant access to the heavy-duty technology required to safeguard users' digital assets. Equally appealing was the fact that New York is the center of the art world, because the brothers see nifties' first mainstream application being rare digital artworks and collectibles. MLB has already launched Champions, a line of bobblehead-like crypto-collectibles, and the NBA has a similar collection in the works.

This month, the brothers are launching what they call Nifty Gateway 2.0, which includes a marketplace to buy and sell nifties along with several nifties by noted artists with whom they've partnered. The brothers sketch a vision of a fully niftified world: "We want Supreme making nifties," Duncan said. "We want some Crypto-Punks"—a popular early nifty—"in the permanent collection of MoMA."

It's a world, in their sunny view, where nifties could one day be more valuable than physical art. "If you critically rate what makes art valuable as an asset, which is authenticity, liquidity, and longevity," Duncan said, "then nifties blow traditional art out of the water in all three of those categories." The room we were sitting in was hung with a handful of spatter, Jackson Pollock-esque oils on canvas, and I pointed out that nifties would never be able to offer the physical textures of real-world art. "We're actually working on a 3-D nifty display screen," Duncan said—an app to run on existing hardware, which would enable creators to make holographic art. "I'm a big fan of my friends' art," he said, "but I don't know if I want to display any more physical art from a certain point going forward."

Last June, the brothers toasted the sale to Gemini by throwing a big dinner party at their loft. They gave out party favors to their 34 guests, a QR code leading to a limited-edition nifty they'd commissioned from an artist friend. Starting at 7 p.m., it shows a nighttime version of the apartment, and at 7 a.m., it switches to daytime. (Exactly what they could do with it beyond calling it up online, to gaze at when the mood strikes them, is one of the less developed areas of niftydom so far.) "The only way to get it was to attend that dinner party," Duncan said.

"The dinner party was a proof of concept also," he added. "I like to think that in ten years, everyone will be commissioning artists to create nifties to give away at a dinner party." ■

*Griffin, left, and
Duncan Cock Foster.*

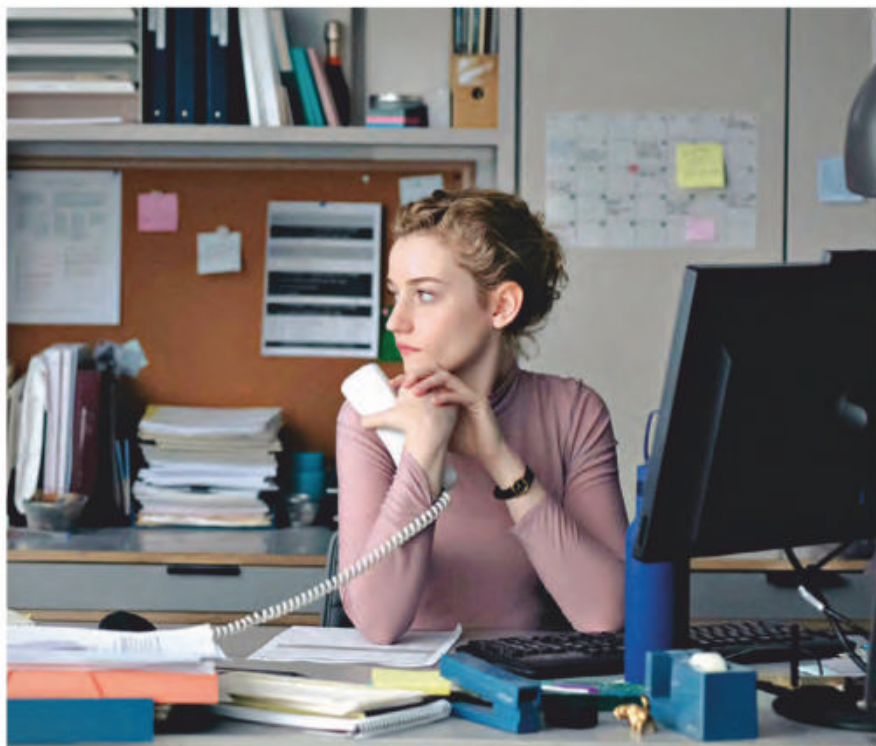


Anonymous in Hollywood

"I Was 25, and Life Was Terrible."

Five stories from entertainment's entry level.

As told to Anne Victoria Clark



Julia Garner in *The Assistant*.

AS HOLLYWOOD REALIGNS itself in the wake of *Me Too*, new questions are being asked about the ethics of power within the entertainment industry. Last year, a survey called #PayUpHollywood, examining the treatment of Hollywood's assistants, revealed that nightmare stories were not exactly rare. In an industry that lacks standards for how assistants' roles are defined, let alone compensated, many entry-level workers reported going without health care and having to file for unemployment-insurance benefits between seasons of shows they'd worked on. As part of a new series, "Anonymous in Hollywood," five former assistants shared their experiences working in the industry.

→ Want to anonymously share a story about working in Hollywood? Email us at anonymousinhollywood@vulture.com.

An assistant to ... a television show writer:

“The executive producer forced me to become her personal assistant (in addition to my other job, and keeping the same title and pay, of course). **I planned one of her kids' birthday parties, bought makeup bags as party favors for the girls, and booked her other kid's travel.** Then the writer's assistant left, and I filled in while still being the assistant and making a writer's PA's negligible salary: \$750 a week with a 50-hour minimum, no benefits. When I went on to become a de facto assistant and writer's assistant, I wasn't allowed to ask for more. It was presented as an expansion of a writer's PA's duties. My boss made me go across town to get her salads for lunch and ice for her cocktails. **One time, she threw out the salad when I handed it to her and sent me out for a second ice trip to find 'actually good ice.'**”

... a TV news anchor:

“My former boss is a garbage human. I once pulled an all-nighter rewriting a speech for him to give at Yale, only for him to inform me the next day that he expected me to drive him from NYC to New Haven. In the car, **he decided to give me an in-depth performance review about all my flaws—including, by the way, how oddly 'robotic' I was, in that I didn't seem to show enough emotions for a woman.** Meanwhile, I was attempting to not drive us both into oncoming traffic. Once we arrived,

he informed me that I would have to find my own way home. (This was a Tuesday, and I was expected at work the next day.) After frantically calling my Yale friends to find a place to sleep for the night, he mentioned that he'd changed his mind. I could ride with him back to NYC that night, but I had to take the subway at 1 a.m. from the Upper West Side to Bushwick. I don't understand how a man can treat a person who has access to all of his bank accounts, emails, and Viagra prescriptions so poorly.”

... a touring agent:

“I did his phone and scheduling, and the ‘work’ of it was dealing with contracts. I was responsible for making sure people got paid at the end of the night—very high stakes and anxiety inducing. A performer is making \$500,000 for an hour of work, and I’m doing all the contract work and making sure all the terms are accounted for while making just above minimum wage. At orientation, they told us we would work one hour of overtime a day and we’re required to take an hour for lunch. Meanwhile, we’re all eating lunch at our desks and staying until the work is done. You’re trying to prove yourself, so you’re going to shows until all hours of the night, scouting, and not getting paid for any of it. One year, we were supposed to be out at 1 p.m. for a holiday, and my boss didn’t know, so I messaged him to say I was leaving. Then I went to the bathroom.

While I was sitting on the toilet, **I heard him shouting, asking everyone where I was. He stormed into the bathroom to yell at me, and I had to explain that I was done for the day and I was going to finish shitting and go home.** He was very unhappy about it. I got yelled at mid-shit. After that, I had to ask to go to the bathroom and was sometimes told no. I was 25, and life was terrible.

It’s funny. All this time later, I still feel guilty telling you this, like I’m betraying my former boss and the company’s trust. I’m years out of it and am doing very well, but that’s what they do to you. They make you feel a debt to them, like they’re doing you a favor. Like you’ll never work in this town again if you say something. I was a terrified, little brown boy making terrible money. If there was going to be mass action, it would have to be fueled by people of color. And I wasn’t brave enough.”

... a top-tier agent:

“Like most, I worked my way up from the mailroom. I started at \$30,000. I worked my ass off to be ‘promoted’ to an agent’s desk. Everything was fine for a while. My boss was the one who helped me find an apartment. She gave me a raise so I could afford rent, showered me with unwarranted gifts, and sent me out to some really great shows, events, and screenings.

And then she snapped. It was like a switch flipped, and to this day, I don’t know what caused it. **She started fabricating things. Once, she called HR to complain that I was making her feel fat. She once berated me for telling her I was unable to DVR shows on Netflix.** I distinctly remember having to put my hands up to protect my face because I had fallen back onto her couch and she was towering over me. Not one person intervened, despite her office having glass walls.

My favorite, though, was when, in an attempt to get me fired, she said I’d cursed out and hung up on the company’s CEO. I relayed all of this to HR, who told me that ‘it’s part of the job.’ I wasn’t fired from the company, but I was sent back to the mailroom. My raise was taken away, and I lost all enthusiasm. HR then called me in to ask why I wasn’t working as hard as the first time I was in the mailroom.”

... a film producer:

“It’s a 14-hour day. You get in at 6 a.m., and you leave at 8 p.m.—there’s no variation on that. There is no overtime. You’re a salaried worker, which is, I guess, how it’s legal. My dad helped me break it down so it’s basically minimum wage. **When I started, everyone was like, ‘I’m so sorry you got this job.’** My boss expects there to be four or five phone calls being made simultaneously, and he will scream and scream if that’s not happening. You can’t really get up; there are no real breaks. Every production job I’ve ever had, there’s not really a break. You are at the beck

and call of everyone else.

No one ever gets trained in that office because he’s constantly firing people or people quit with no notice. You’re supposed to warn him about meetings and phone calls an hour out, half an hour out, 15 minutes out, with emails, texts, or by telling him directly in the office. One day, he had this meeting with two big writers and he was out of the office, so I was sending him emails and texts. He has four numbers on this sheet we have, and I was calling all of them. He just blew it off and then he screamed at me and fired me. He would accuse me of not sending emails or texts, but

I talked to the IT guy, and he told me, ‘No, I can see him opening them.’ **I got physically ill from working there. Every half-hour, I’d get diarrhea and have to run to the bathroom because I was so afraid.** I was there for three whole days before I got fired. The other assistants were really nice to me because we had to be. The assistant with the most ‘authority’ had been there about three months. There were people who got fired in less than a week, less than a day. When I got fired, one of the other assistants texted me, ‘This isn’t you, it’s him.’ But I don’t know if I’m gonna take another film job.”

NEW YORK

Nevertheless

The

The ego
and the
altruism of
Mike
Bloomberg.

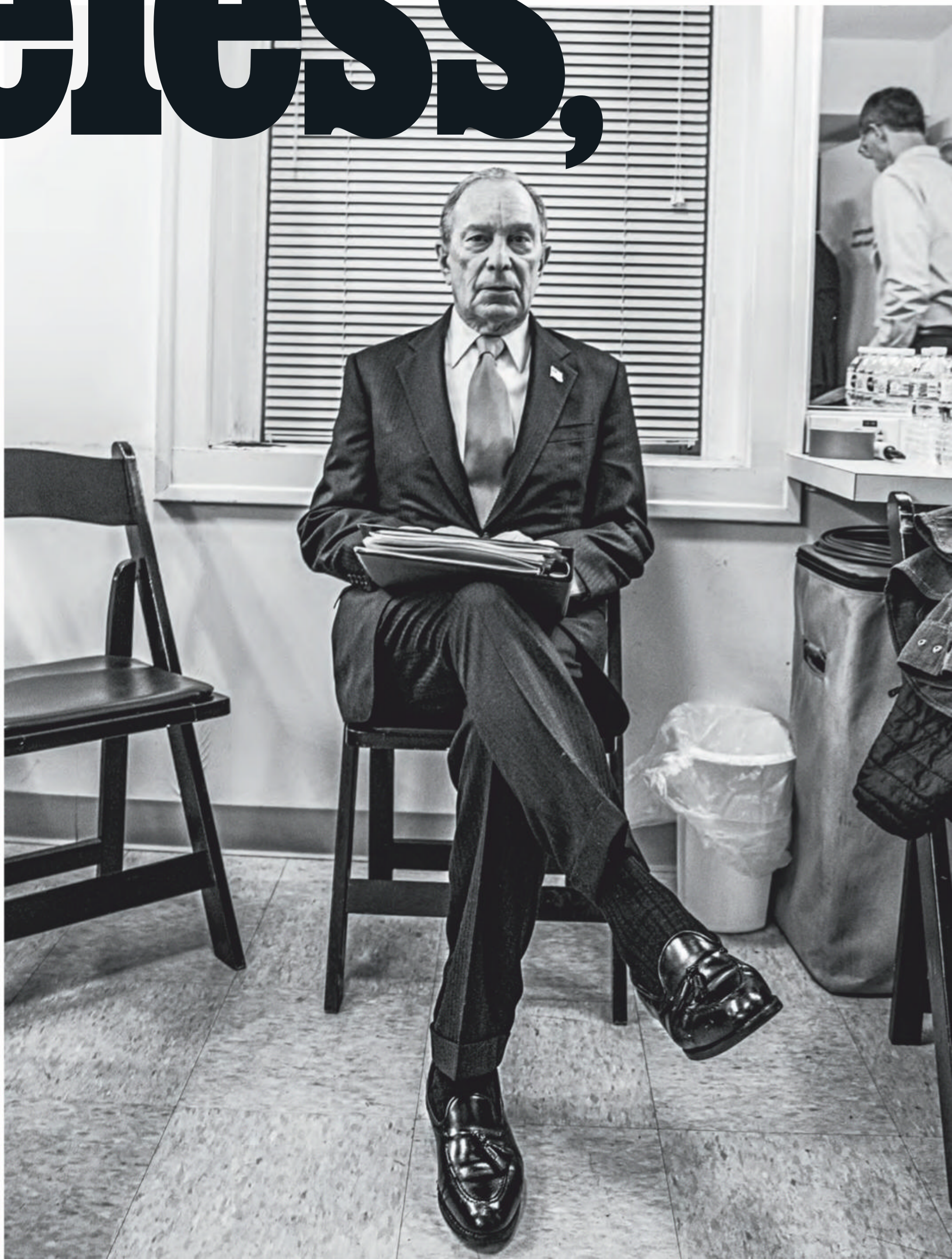
BY VANESSA GRIGORIADIS

PHOTOGRAPHS BY DAVID WILLIAMS

Persists

eless,

Mike Bloomberg
preparing backstage
at the Charleston
town-hall meeting on
February 26.





HE MORNING AFTER PRESIDENT TRUMP

delivered his self-congratulatory State of the Union speech while still in the midst of impeachment, several reporters are waiting in a Providence, Rhode Island, vegan café for Michael Bloomberg. Most of them came from Philadelphia last night, where they covered his nighttime rally that had a laser-light show, buffet, open bar, and rap performance. Like the rest of the media at the time, they have been caught up in a kind of fever dream in which, suddenly, in the brief interval between the Iowa collapse of Joe Biden and the appearance of Bloomberg himself on a Nevada debate stage, it seems possible that a plutocrat could waltz his way to the Democratic nomination as comfortably as he had to the New York City mayoralty, including an extralegal third term. How plausible a fever dream? The reporters are themselves unsure. One of them, picking at a coconut-yogurt-açaí-organic-oat bowl, asks somewhat idly, “Were there real people there last night?”—meaning, was it stocked with paid Bloomberg staffers and spouses and neighbors or were the bodies in the hall actual Bloomberg supporters? “They were real people,” says a tall cameraman, cocking his head. “It was kind of amazing.”

Nearby, the would-be savior of the Democratic Party is resting in a car. Punctual and perfectionistic, the kind of guy who has advised people not to take bathroom breaks and once said “I don’t have anything in common with people who stand on escalators,” Bloomberg had arrived early in his plane and soon strides up to the café alongside Rhode Island governor Gina Raimondo, a former venture capitalist who is about to become the first governor to endorse Bloomberg. The former mayor is a slip of a man in black tasseled leather shoes. One could call his suit navy, but it’s somehow more refined than the color implies and so well cut one imagines a tailor adjusting a small seam when he gains or loses a pound. His face’s central plane—nose, cheeks, brow—is flat, but around his jowls, skin creases like a Chinese paper fan. He smiles only occasionally and not with his mouth. Like many extremely wealthy men born in the mid-20th century, he comes off somewhat effete, his hands making small, gentle gestures even as the tone of his voice veers from low-gear chattiness to swashbuckling machismo.

Raimondo and Bloomberg inch toward a counter to buy coffee as his team scurries into position—an advance man in a spotless suit who mentions John Mellencamp just endorsed Bloomberg; a recent grad in pearl earrings who now isn’t sure she can take a post-Super Tuesday vacation to Tulum. As the cashier shoots Bloomberg a wary look, he picks up a packet of gluten-free energy balls. “Will I feel better afterward?” he asks. He reaches into his pocket for a nondescript black wallet, from which he does not take out \$60 billion, but merely a \$20 bill, and leaves a healthy tip.

“Well,” he says, turning to the restaurant’s owner, “we got back late from Philadelphia, then I unpacked because I was away for four or five days, and by the time you put everything back,” he trails off. “And I read for a few minutes. Which was a mistake. So I could use some more energy.”

The owner begins evangelizing about plant-based nutrition and opening a location in New York City. Then Bloomberg just starts to talk. “I was up in Maine and Vermont recently—look at the foliage and that kind of thing,” he says. “They have a diner we go to. The food was really good. I said, ‘We should have those diners in New York.’ We’ve had a lot of diners close. It’s partially tastes have changed, but we’ve had four restaurants in my neighborhood close in the past six months. Each one was in a townhouse. They’re ripping them down and putting up these thin slivers of buildings. There’s one two doors away from me. I had the developer and his wife over for dinner. He said they’re getting \$3,000 a square foot for 4,000 square feet—one floor, 12 million bucks! He took the top floor for himself, and he thinks he’s going to move in.”

“Nobody could pay that rent,” somebody pipes up.

“Uh,” says Bloomberg, pausing, only a little self-consciously. “Y’know ...” Then he motors on. “And the Upper East Side has become less fashionable, supposedly.”

This kind of monologue—weird, unguarded, almost like it was scripted to illustrate out-of-touchness—is exactly what every political strategist in America pointed to when Bloomberg considered running for president in 2008, and then again in 2012, and then again in 2016. That guy could never win in America, they said—not the pasha of the Upper East Side, as important in his way to the city as the Astors and as foreign to actual voters. But Bloomberg has loomed as a David Koch-like figure in the Democratic Party in recent years, spending \$65 million on the 2016 election and over \$112 million on the midterms two years later—meaning he is now not just one of two or three or four serious Democratic candidates for president (depending on how you count) but also, in recent history, the party’s most important benefactor and donor.

In 2019, he gave \$3.3 billion away, more than Trump’s entire estimated net worth of \$3.1 billion—and the largesse has apparently made everyone very happy to see him at almost all times, which may have given Bloomberg the idea that a presidential campaign could feature more of the same. Yet those who know him best have often thought it wouldn’t be easy. “Mike is not going to arrive as JFK reincarnated,” says Tom Brokaw, an old friend. “That’s not who he is. He’s a different cat altogether.” Joanna Coles, a television producer and the former chief content officer at Hearst, says, “He’s hypercurious, supersmart, and restless. I think the restlessness is key. It’s what makes him such interesting company.” But restlessness isn’t exactly a presidential quality. An ex-employee argues, “The thing about Mike is he actually isn’t that interesting—he’s smart, and you can have a good time talking to him, but it’s like talking to any old Jewish relative of mine. The first time I met him, he started complaining about some soup he got that didn’t taste right. I just met the guy, and he was, like, complaining about his sweet-and-sour soup.”

In Providence, Bloomberg pulls out Raimondo’s chair for her, to sit for coffee, then deadpans that he had to do it or “my mother would shoot me.”

“What should we be talking about that they could overhear by accident?” Bloomberg asks showily, gesturing to the cameras, but doesn’t wait for an answer. “The crowds are getting bigger and the number of reporters,” he muses to Raimondo. “You can tell what editors think when they send them. They think we’re going to win all of a sudden or have a good chance. So they’re all showing up.”

“You have a chance,” Raimondo says. “Better than a chance.”

THE BEGINNING OF FEBRUARY 2020 may be remembered mostly for the global spread of a lethal virus, but close seconds may include the nearly unanimous Republican vote against impeachment in the Senate, followed by Trump’s victory tour of firings and pardons; the possible erasure of Iowa and New Hampshire’s pride of place on the electoral map; and the launch of one of the most quixotic, expensive, and risky presidential

campaigns in our history. Bloomberg's case, beyond climate change, gun control, and urban renewal, rested on an electability argument—that defeating Trump was an absolute necessity and that a technocratic moderate was a safer bet than a democratic socialist. But in the space of two weeks, his campaign had seemed to damage moderate Biden's prospects and dramatically elevate the temperature of conflict between the party's progressive and Wall Street wings, all without managing much headway on his own candidacy. By the end of February, the ride looked to be about over—or at least poised to come to a halt on Super Tuesday, after two weeks of pile-ons from Elizabeth Warren and Bernie Sanders, an increasingly ugly and almost unending archive of oppo research (previous comments about how cops could Xerox pictures of minorities to find criminals or suggesting Mitt Romney would be a better president than Barack Obama) and an absolutely dead-eyed first appearance before a national audience, in which Bloomberg didn't seem to have anticipated needing to answer any of the most obvious criticisms and whiffed his jokes. But in between, for a brief and glorious moment, it had looked like the New York power and media elite, who are Bloomberg's natural base, might actually have their way, taking the most important presidential election of any of our lifetimes into their own hands—and collecting some huge consulting paychecks in the process.

Bloomberg officially announced his candidacy on November 24, signaling immediately that he'd skip the first four states and just focus on the races beginning Super Tuesday. The Iowa-caucus counting app blowing up on February 3 was the stroke of luck Bloomberg needed to move up in the polls, after which he smartly capitalized on the chaos by doubling his ad spending (“Obviously a flex,” as one of his staffers jocularly put it to me). Bloomberg had bet on no clear front-runner coming out of Iowa, then Biden getting soft, then the moderate lane falling apart, then Sanders or Warren arising as the default victor, then a collective buyer's remorse that would allow him to swipe the victory out of his or her hands. But this was better than in his dreams. And it came so cheap! Bloomberg's self-funding was \$5.6 million per day. Given that Bloomberg's fortune earns \$107 million per day, according to the *Washington Post*, he could comfortably go a lot higher still. (Biden, then the putative front-runner, had raised \$8.9 million in all of January.)

Before the Nevada debate, some aides had put out the word that even if Bloomberg performed poorly—which he would, they said, so please lower expectations—the moderate wing of the party should line up behind him, given his money spigot and all. He had publicly floated the idea that he might spend \$1 billion on the November election whether he was the nominee or not. Whispers within the campaign suggested his actual ceiling was \$4 billion. By the end of the month, it seemed he might have to spend that much to save the party from the disarray he had himself helped create, in part by complicating the candidacy of the one moderate who actually had a shot, Biden, while clearing the way for Bernie to march to the nomination with 35 percent support.

Until the debate, the question on everyone's minds had been “Can the presidency be bought by the ninth-richest man in the world?” to which the answer seemed to be “Yes, possibly.” He had even briefly managed to turn the caricature into a sort of strength, at least for niche audiences, churning out a raft of weird social-media memes that it took the internet's cool kids a few days to figure out but that amounted, ultimately, to Mike leaning into a reputation as an out-of-touch moneybags. But that was a kind of managed image, and the debate was disastrously unmanaged—as was the South Carolina reprise, though measurably less embarrassing. Afterward, the question became “Can the presidency be won by someone with negative charisma?” The answer to that was much less certain. After all, Trump performed a similar end run around the Establishment in the last presidential election, but he also knew

how to command the camera, and who could stop rubbernecking whether one regarded him as a demigod or car crash?

So why did Bloomberg run? Love or hate him, he is an exceedingly rational creature, and, over the summer, his team identified a teeny-tiny crack in the door that opens to more power than anywhere in the world—about a 5 percent chance of gaining the presidency, I'd heard—and thought they'd try to wiggle through. Bloomberg had been under the impression that Biden had the moderate lane covered when he declared that he was skipping a run in March 2019. But Bloomberg spent the summer in the dumps (golfing, grandkids, no longer jogging but doing a lot of speed walking), increasingly anxious about another four years under the thumb of a man who had been the laughingstock among his elite friends for decades upon decades. Try to put yourself in the shoes of a \$60 billion ego: If one had Bloomberg's fortune, and Bloomberg's resolve, and did not at least try to destroy the Cheeto with his own bare hands, what would that mean to history? Trump worked against the cause of progress, Trump was bad for the planet, Trump was a threat to rationalism, Trump revealed his indecency in Charlottesville, and who knew what terrifying animal spirits he'd stir up next? “Mike once said to me, ‘The only way the Republicans abandon Donald is if he fucks a child or wakes up in bed next to a dead person,’” says an acquaintance, putting his spin on Louisiana governor Edwin Edwards's famous old line. The campaign responds, “Mike does not remember saying this.”

Throughout 2019, Bloomberg, like many older politicians also feeling their mortality, John Kerry among them, watched as Warren became the presumptive nominee, then faded, and looked again at Biden and thought, *How is this guy this bad, and this broke, and still winning?* For years and years, Bloomberg had an apparatus continually monitoring his chances—maintaining, just as a kind of casual, on-the-side, not-so-serious exploratory team, as big a campaign as most candidates would have as they approached the Iowa caucuses. He also gathered intelligence anecdotally, canvassing his clique. “We had a couple pretty long conversations, with me quizzing him and him trying to get an evaluation for what the odds were,” says Brokaw. “The more he looked at it, the more he thought, *I do have a shot*. And the more he felt a civic obligation.” “My dad often tells me regret is not an emotion that he has,” says Emma, Bloomberg's elder daughter. “I'm not sure how that's possible!” But the interregnum between saying he wouldn't run in March and then declaring he would indeed run in November was “the first time in my life that I would have pushed back,” she adds. “I would've said, ‘I think you regret making the decision not to run.’”

When Bloomberg first announced, facing what seemed like such steep odds Nate Silver was reluctant to even list him among the serious candidates, Democratic insiders suggested that Bloomberg's team may have sold him a little hard on his prospects, making his shot sound more probable than it was. And Bloomberg's campaign manager, Kevin Sheekey, regarded as a master of the dark arts and one of the hardest-charging political operatives in the country, did donate \$2,800 to Biden, the maximum personal contribution, as recently as June. But within months, Sheekey, a baby-faced guy regularly clad in a baby-blue open-collared shirt (“I literally look at people with ties, even in movies or photos, and think, *Who came up with that, and why do you wear it?*”), was back on the Bloomberg train.

“As my uncle says, **‘Rich or poor, it's good to have money.’”**

"We presented Mike with data, which I actually did move up a few days because I did recognize what the calendar was," says Sheekey. If Bloomberg decided to run, even skipping all the primaries before Super Tuesday, his team still needed to file petitions for his candidacy in Alabama right away. "We met with Mike about three days before that deadline, with no real urgency that that was a serious concern—but it was material."

The next morning at seven on the dot, Sheekey's phone went *beep-beep-beep*. "He goes, 'Hey, it's Bloomberg.' I said, 'Yep.' He goes, 'Okay, so I guess we're going to do this thing.' Fortunately I was sitting at the time." Sheekey got on the horn with an advance man in Arkansas, "which struck me as reasonably close to the state of Alabama." Sheekey told him, "I need you to get every single person you know into Birmingham by this afternoon." He said to me, "Does this mean what I think it means?" I said, "It sure does." All I heard was, "Yahoo!"

As a candidate, Bloomberg sells himself as a management savant who can fix the federal government. Maybe there was a constituency for him: Supporter and congressman Ted Deutch of Boca Raton says, "The kind of people I grew up with in Pennsylvania, my neighbors in Ohio, and now in Florida—these folks in swing states who turned up in 2018 to send a message to President Trump—just want a president that lets the country function again." He certainly built an extraordinary election machine almost out of thin air. Within six weeks, Bloomberg had hired nearly a thousand employees and transformed an empty floor of a neo-Gothic building near Times Square that once housed the New York *Times* (and is now partially owned by the Kushner family) into his headquarters.

Up in the waiting room, an ad plays on a flat-screen TV about low-income and minority pregnant women and how they die more than white women (but Mike will fix that). Two countdown clocks hang above the TV, one marking the days until Super Tuesday and the other the days until the national election. The folks here don't seem like run-of-the-mill campaign volunteers; they're middle-aged political mercenaries in fleece with time-tested strategies and robust Rolodexes. A political consultant tells me, "They've hired the whole goddamn world and have a lot of credible people. It's not like Trump's first campaign, with people working for him you'd never heard of before—which, by the way, definitely worked." Bloomberg has recruited from his City Hall and hoovered up people from shuttered presidential campaigns (Kamala Harris, Andrew Yang).

He's always treated employees to salaries, health care, and bonuses beyond industry standards and is now paying many multiples more than other campaigns, plus free furnished apartments in Manhattan. "This is the kind of campaign we'll never be on again in our lives!" exclaims one staffer, incredulous at his new Bloomberg-issued iPhone 11, the free booze, and the three catered meals a day (peeking in the campaign café at dinnertime, I spied pizza *and* tuna steak). Even the lowest-level campaign workers, like a yoga teacher who says they're making \$6,000 a month just to canvass for him—work that almost every other campaign relies on volunteers for—share some of these benefits.

"As my uncle says, 'Rich or poor, it's nice to have money,'" says senior adviser Howard Wolfson, an architect of Hillary '08 and a longtime Bloomberger, usually wearing AirPods in his ears and a Cheshire-cat grin. "Would you pay for people's Ubers" to get them to the polls?, I ask him. "Sounds like a good idea," he says, and it's not entirely clear he's joking. But you can't make people vote for you, he says. "I'll take the Uber and vote for someone else."

To anyone on the outside, it looked like Bloomberg was trying to buy the nomination, and indeed, he was. People at Bloomberg Philanthropies who'd distributed many of his millions to American cities were the same folks facilitating asks to the same mayors and other legislators about endorsing Bloomberg. And even only half-informed voters could see that it was probably impossible for Bloomberg to win the nomination outright and intuited, therefore,

that the mayor's plan was to drive Democrats to generational infighting at a contested convention in Milwaukee in July, which struck fear in their hearts: If they didn't unite behind someone until July, the party stood a good chance of losing again to Trump.

Bloomberg must've known Democrats would figure this out eventually, and when they did, they'd be pissed—so, partially as a defensive maneuver, he made it clear he was only in this game to defeat Trump, and even if he didn't secure the nomination, he'd keep up his payroll and also rain millions upon millions on whoever trounced him, which is a crazy move for one of the world's most competitive people, but he promised.

"You know what's amazing to me?" Sheekey asks, somewhat rhetorically, as we talk in mid-February in a conference room dominated by a TV with CNN on mute. "I was just talking to somebody who worked for Hillary for a really long time. I said, 'Where do you want to start? Joe's campaign's over.' She goes, 'What are you talking about?' I'm like, 'Are you kidding me? What are you drinking? You don't come in fourth in Iowa and fourth or fifth in New Hampshire and go on to win a major party nomination. There's no historical precedent for it. What are you talking about?'"

And then there were the ads—millions of ads. Positioning himself as a friendly new product in the American landscape, like the Geico lizard, Bloomberg carpet-bombed 50 states with television ads and even hired female prisoners in Oklahoma to call to voters via a third-party vendor (the campaign says it was unaware of the arrangement and halted the contract when it was revealed). Gary Briggs, the former CMO at Facebook, is running Hawkfish, Bloomberg's main digital-strategy team, which has put 2 billion ads so far on Facebook and Google. At a scale unprecedented for political campaigns, which are always playing with so much less cash than the corporate world, Bloomberg has drafted an expansive, best-in-class team of Silicon Valley data scientists, social-media managers, and even executives from his own company, "some of whom are true believers in Mike and trying to save the Republic and some of whom were not really given a choice about joining the campaign," says a former colleague. "He's working them like dogs, and they're like, 'When can I go back to my nice corporate job again?'" (A campaign spokesperson says no employees were forced into a job.) Bloomberg, a believer in open-plan offices, sits in a quiet corner. His head pokes up over his desktop computer, partially obscured by a vase with yellow daffodils. One ex-employee describes getting into a fight with Bloomberg and, regardless of whether Bloomberg has an executive suite in his offices, hearing him bark: "Don't forget whose name is on the front door. It's ridiculous," he says. "Mike's name isn't only on the door; it's on the fucking pencils."

BEYOND THE MANAGEMENT SKILLS, those who know Bloomberg call him a sun god—when he's shining on you, all is bright, but wait for the shadow. In Providence, he stands in front of a crowd of a couple hundred in a fancy new civic building dubbed the "Innovation Center" to deliver his usual stump speech to crowd of mostly white professionals (afterward, I talk to a therapist, a retired engineer, a designer of logos at CVS, and several professors). As they hold up their cell phones to capture the historic moment of a presidential candidate in the flesh in their small and not-at-all electorally important state, he drones on and on. He speaks in monotone with such a flat affect that one's brain almost cannot process his words as language, but rather white noise with a soothing background whisper of "We'll do lots of things, it will be great."

Here and there, he usually tells some jokes. "People say, 'Do you really want a general election between two New York billionaires?' To which I say, 'Who's the other one?'"

Directly to Bloomberg's left, a bunch of tattooed guys wearing black leather bomber jackets, looking vaguely like the band Foreigner in Red Sox caps, start hollering. "Can you tell us why



↑
Bloomberg
campaign
headquarters in
New York.

you're in Jeffrey Epstein's little black book?," one yells.

"Time out, time out," exclaims Bloomberg, immediately filling with the pep he thought he'd get from the energy ball. "Folks, No. 1, the answer to your question is I have no idea. And if you stop this, I will talk to you outside."

"You're a sellout!," they scream.

"Thank you for making me feel like I was in New York City," he responds drily.

By ideology and temperament, Bloomberg is a meritocrat with no time for those who might waste his. A libertarian with straight brown hair to his butt and the only-in-Rhode Island name of Elijah Gizzarelli tells me he stayed in the auditorium to meet Bloomberg after his speech. "I said, 'You said you'd talk to us afterward, and we'd like to take you up on that,'" says Gizzarelli. "He said, 'Well, you can't talk to everyone,' and turned away."

Bloomberg has mostly kept his cool during his candidacy—

"I spoke to him" around early February, says Ken Chenault, the former head of American Express, "he is encouraged by the reaction he's getting, though he also knows it's going to be a tough challenge"—but he loves a jaunty comeback. And though his humor at the debates came across less as self-deprecating than deprecating of all humanity, he can be quite funny when he's bitchy. From the beginning, Sheekey and his other top aides advised him to make this an asset, to attack Trump head on, since trading direct insults with the president gives the impression that they are the only two candidates. But it's also because from the beginning of his campaign, he's known if he went after other Democratic contenders hard, they might kill him.

A friend says Bloomberg's deepest self-image, even at 78 years old, is of himself in his mid-20s, in the 1960s, when he was thrust among the blue-collar boors of Wall Street way before the Gordons from Groton showed up. He was the middle-class son of a dairy farm's

bookkeeper from Medford, Massachusetts, with a job as a parking-lot manager to pay tuition at Johns Hopkins who then attended Harvard Business School. Shocked and intimidated by the inherited wealth at HBS, he felt more comfortable on Wall Street. He loved New York, taking an L-shaped studio on the Upper East Side listed for \$150 a month that he bargained down to \$120. He went to Maxwell's Plum, the singles bar where Donald is rumored to have met Ivana, and told this magazine he spent his vacations on his apartment building's roof—"tar beach."

Bloomberg made his billions in an unsexy business: database terminals for the Wall Street bond market. Though his company, of which he owns 88 percent, expanded into many areas, including media, it remains a data-processing and terminal company. "Mike destroyed every competitor in the terminal game to become a monopoly," says a former employee. "The terminal is a status symbol—Bloomberg-terminal fanboys rival Apple fanboys and Tesla fanboys." And while that makes Bloomberg himself a tech mogul, he no longer really plays the part. "If Mike had a problem with his computer or phone, the entire engineering team would run over to his desk," says an ex-employee. "Then they'd be like, 'You need to put your phone on Wi-Fi.'" After expanding into the news business, he worried over the font size on TV chyrons and exhibited only a cursory awareness of the internet. (His campaign counters that Bloomberg is "deeply aware of technology trends.") Long-term employees say he seemed to have lost a step when he returned to the business from the mayoralty in 2014, lobbying the notion he should cease publishing a website and saying he was against advertising. An employee argued for ads, saying, "Well, Mike, what if you were reading, like, a golf magazine and saw some clubs? You might think these are worth getting." He was like, "No, I'd just ask my golf pro what the best club is."

It's incredible that in 2020 anyone still needs a \$24,000 dedicated Bloomberg terminal to gather corporate information and trade stocks, but apparently they do. A friend says Bloomberg mostly socializes with the buyers of big terminal orders at banks and old friends, and he even maintains a relationship with Jeff Bezos, whom he likes quite a bit (Bloomberg was privately appalled that New York

City wouldn't let Amazon into Queens, though he also suggested the deal was too generous to the company). A devout kibitzer, he's a funeralgoer, wedding-speech-maker, and I'm-calling-the-top-oncologist-for-you-er who keeps in touch with many from his past, even those from high school who have fallen on hard times; they hit him up for money, which he finds stressful. But he does dole out. At a New York City fund-raiser, "I was in front of the crowd, waffling on about trees, saying, 'I always had this dream of planting a million trees,'" says

Bette Midler. "Suddenly, Mike leapt to his feet and shouted, 'That's a great idea! We're going to do that!' Everyone stared, aghast. Three beats later, thunderous applause, and a standing ovation, because the whole crowd knew that if he said it, it would get done. And it did."

As mayor, he famously chose not to live in Gracie Mansion, preferring the comforts of his 79th Street compound, though not everyone is impressed by his old-world décor: "The first time I went to Mike's house, I was surprised to find the décor very much like a child's idea of what a rich man's house would look like," says

an acquaintance. "Very *Citizen Kane*." He kept his social life mostly intact, spending weekends golfing at his home in Bermuda. "Mike gets loosey-goosey on wine, visibly shining, but if you really try to get him to open up then, sure enough he gets flustered and retreats into his shell," says a reporter.

Bloomberg's children, Georgina and Emma, are opposites. Georgina, 37, is an equestrian and private-plane-flying Instagram bombshell who, when her dad said he wasn't going to run for president in March, posted a picture of a *faux* campaign sticker, reading BLOOMBERG: BECAUSE FUCK THIS SHIT, with the caption "officially back to being just our family slogan." She has lots of animals: "We have a 300-pound pig," says Mike Bloomberg. "We have a goat who tries to put his horns in your pocket and rip your pants open. We have a pigeon that just moved in, but we also have a rooster who wakes you up early in the morning. We have a mule. We have some horses. Stop me when you get bored."

Emma, 40, is a policy wonk who runs an education nonprofit. When I meet her in a hotel lobby near Bloomberg HQ, she's all Tribeca-mom elegance: her brown hair slightly lightened, arms sculpted, and many tiny diamonds adorning her ears and climbing from wrists to forearms. Donald has famously declared he never changed diapers; Bloomberg, ever the egalitarian, didn't like feeding infants, so took as his solemn duty changing diapers instead. Emma knows Ivanka—they were in an after-school art class in middle school together—but she doesn't remember her dad talking about Donald Trump before he became president. "I cannot remember ever hearing of him," she says. "He's not going to be happy about that. I'm sure he's supposed to be the subject of everyone's dinner-table conversation."

Unlike the Trumps, whose family unit was forged in Donald and Ivana's miserable marriage, Bloomberg and his ex-wife, Susan, had an amicable divorce in the '90s and even lived together at times afterward. "People can love each other, can be dear friends, can be supportive of each other in lots of ways and not be meant for marriage—they were very clearly not," says Emma. "My mother wanted to stay at home, and my father had to be out. As a child, just because you're young doesn't mean you're an idiot, right? You actually do see these things and internalize them." After the divorce, Bloomberg tomcatted around town and made many comments about women's figures not at all under his breath. The campaign has recently been rolling out his longtime partner Diana Taylor, 65, a lifelong Republican from the heartland of Old Greenwich, Connecticut, who became a Democrat in 2018. Taylor attended Milton and Dartmouth, started at Smith Barney in the 1980s, and has been New York's state superintendent for banks. Anna Wintour calls in dresses for her, she loves her Labradors, and she's on the boards of Citigroup and a micro-lending nonprofit.

This genteel lifestyle—Bloomberg's planes aren't very chic, says a friend, "though they have four"—is a direct contrast to the patriarch's salty language. "His humor is dry, almost too dry, and sometimes it's over the line," says Brokaw. "I would say I probably learned every curse word I know from my father," says Emma. "I have vivid memories of the expletive, expletive, slam!" She pantomimes hanging up a corded phone. "But he never used them at me or with me. That was how he got his stuff done." Even at his home, during carefully composed dinner parties, he can get touchy. Long ago, during his quest to build a stadium on the West Side, conversation naturally turned to the viability of the project. "I asked a question, as one does at a cocktail party, revealing my personal concerns, and was startled when he interrupted me with the harsh admonition, 'You have no idea what you're talking about,'" says the head of a nonprofit. "It was a really bizarre moment. I was a guest in his home. Mike was not only not interested in engaging in discussion but devoid of basic manners." (About this episode, the campaign says, "This person probably had no idea what he was talking about.")

**"You're a sellout,"
they scream.**

"Thank you for
making me feel
like I was in
New York City,"
Bloomberg
responds.



↑ Mike 2020 swag.

Bloomberg's not asking for donations for his campaign—though he'd prefer his friends, the donor class, didn't give other candidates money either. This is appealing to some folks, but not all. "How much is Mike worth?" says developer Douglas Durst. "A lot of that's thanks to Trump's tax policies. So he's using the money Donald gave him to run." Durst adds, "He doesn't need my money. I'm going to support whoever the nominee is." Even those who may like Trump regard Bloomberg as a civilized alternative: "Donald has done much that will be perhaps considered positive in the future, but he polarizes people," says Cancer Research Institute trustee Lauren Veronis. "Calling him 'Tiny Mike'—well, the people who like Mike get their shoulders up about it." I ask Emma Bloomberg about the young moneyed class in New York, which, from my casual survey, seemed split on supporting Trump. She mentions being at a couple of dinner parties with friends of hers or her dad's this summer and having "the question [at the table] be, 'If it's Trump or Warren, who do you vote for?'" The number of people who, if you ask them on any individual policy or social policy, are vehemently anti-Trump, who would say, "Well, in that case, I'd have to sit it out," or in that case, "Yes, I'd have to vote for Trump," I found astounding."

THE EARLY STAGES OF THE CAMPAIGN FELT, internally, relatively smooth—the race evolving exactly as Sheekey and Wolfson had hoped, the media desperate to believe in the glow of a Bloomberg candidacy. But the same day as the New Hampshire primary, the first bit of oppo dropped: an audio clip about stop and frisk from a Bloomberg talk at the Aspen Institute several years ago. As the story gained steam the next morning, it just so happened some black faith leaders were at HQ for a meeting when Trump

tweeted out that Bloomberg was a "TOTAL RACIST." "The phones of Mike and the faith leaders in the room kind of lit up," says Sheekey. "Twenty-four to 30 faith leaders around the table's instant reaction was, 'We have to do something. We need to call a press conference. We need to endorse Mike Bloomberg now.'"

To friends, Bloomberg insists he feels bad about stop and frisk, but he still can't understand why he's not gathering applause for gun control. "Mike came into the mayor's office, black people were dying, and he was like, 'God almighty, how do we solve this,'" says a friend. "What he says privately is, 'I was sitting with mothers of boys who were being shot. They said their sons were scared in the projects and had guns to protect them, so I thought you've got to get rid of the guns. The guns are killing people.' But he didn't get the social impact of stopping kids 70 times in high school." They say he understands the humiliation now—mostly. He's also a little "Asperger's-y," friends say, meaning he doesn't quite feel others' pain.

Then the *Washington Post* got its hands on a booklet of "Wit and Wisdom" Bloomberg's employees had put together to celebrate-slash-roast their boss in 1990—a pamphlet actually located by *Fire and Fury* author Michael Wolff for this magazine in 2001. "I wrote about it on Monday, September 10, and the next day, the story was forgotten," says Wolff. "The towers were crumbling and I'm going, 'My scoop, my scoop!'" Bloomberg's grotesque alleged phrases pinged around the world, along with the old news that he'd told an employee newly pregnant to "kill it," which is quite a bit of dry humor indeed.

When I ask Wolfson about Bloomberg and women before the first debate, he waves questions off. "Allegations, news reports," he says. "There's no one who runs for president who doesn't have to deal with some negative information that's disseminated or reported upon—that's table stakes, that's my day at the office." Taylor was reportedly even more unemotional: "It was 30 years ago, get over it." But misogyny is another case where Bloomberg seems to kind of get it and kind of not. He has argued that in the case of Charlie Rose, whose TV show taped in his corporate offices and who, according to two individuals, did not pay rent, courts should decide. He has many capable women around him, yet he's known for making lascivious comments that are totally out of bounds. Ginny Clark, the first woman in Salomon Brothers' training class, sat next to Bloomberg in 1968, and considers him a mentor. "The things that happened to me," she says, trailing off. "Honestly, I've never sued through my whole life, or never wanted to, because I felt I will rise above it, which luckily I always did. You know, today, for a hug they'll sue you." Clark paints a picture of the stockbrokers' lifestyle of yore—an in-office barbershop and waiters in black tie bringing around lunch on china so traders never had to leave, people who would "slam phones, scream, yell, strippers, you name it, it would go on." What did Bloomberg do during all of this? "I won't tell you some of the things they tried on me, but it wasn't Mike—it was some of the others. He was there, kind of like making them back off some," she says.

As the oppo fell from the sky like rain, true believers tried to spread calm. "Mike inspires incredible loyalty," says Dan Doctoroff, one of his lieutenants for years and the founder of Sidewalk Labs. I also talk to Fatima Shama, Bloomberg's commissioner of immigrant affairs. Wearing a lanyard with an I LIKE MIKE button, she describes creating the "culture that is Bloomberg" at HQ, with its grab bag of politicians and social-media managers from all walks of life. "I have said to people here who have had an abrupt tone, 'Try again.' And they're like, 'Excuse me?' And I say, 'We don't speak to people that way here. Try again.'"

On the campaign, Shama leads outreach to minorities and women as the head of constituencies and coalitions. But would Sanders take better care of these folks? "There's no record of Sanders ever doing that," she says. She calls Mayor Pete a "38-year-old who

can't actually lead. He should run Indiana, because we could use that." And when Shama talks about raising three Muslim boys in the Trump era, her eyes become misty—crying from what seems less like sadness than righteous anger. "I know what a Bloomberg administration did in my city and for people—the very people I have worked with my entire life," she says. "Senator Sanders hasn't achieved that, and I don't believe he can for our country. So unless you can prove to me that someone on day one knows how to walk in and knows how to define the challenges in our society that need addressing—for real, not for fake, not for talk, not for like, 'We're going to drain government of money.'" She trails off. "Mike has done that."

LIKE THE PARTY AS A WHOLE, Bloomberg is now trying to move himself to the left, even if at his core, he doesn't really seem to believe in helping people who aren't helping themselves. I once heard him say to a voter asking about Social Security and Medicare, "In this country, we can't have somebody dying in the streets without being able to see a doctor. On the other hand, the taxpayer says, 'Look, there's a limited amount of money that I have. It's balancing that ...'" The voter interrupted, "It's called civilization, though," to which he shot back, "You've got that one right."

And even though he'd said he wouldn't go after other candidates, when Sanders attacked him, he started to, calling Sanders a "communist" and putting out press releases about some people, possibly Sanders supporters, though who knew, defacing Bloomberg-campaign windows around the country with phrases like **CORPORATE PIG** and **EAT THE RICH**. When I talked to Sheekey, in mid-February, he said, "The contest really has turned because we have this existential threat. We have Bernie Sanders, who's now without question the Democratic front-runner, and that's true as you think forward, looking at the delegate count, or politically it's true in any poll you would take nationally. But who ultimately would probably lose in the general election with Donald Trump."

On February 20, the campaign got more aggressive about the field, with Sheekey publicly calling on Klobuchar, Buttigieg, and Biden to all vamoose out of the race. "That's the most galling, hubristic bullshit I've ever seen," says a Democratic strategist. "So you're saying candidates who have spent a year earning support and votes and delegates should get out? Here's another way of looking at it: If you weren't diverting hours and hours of cable-TV coverage and print coverage, everyone in the middle might coalesce around Pete. You don't have one pledged delegate yet, and we should all get out because you have money? That's oligarchy. That's madness."

Plus at the end of February, Biden began climbing in the South Carolina polls. "One of the things even money can't address is the unexpected consequences that happen in a multicandidate field—the physics of it," says strategist Joe Trippi. "If Biden has a big win in South Carolina, it'll be the Comeback Kid thing, and he'll get three days of good TV coverage before Super Tuesday. That lifts him three or four points in some states." Sanders might steamroll the field on Tuesday, or he might have to fight to the convention. At Bloomberg's first debate, only the senator from Vermont said the party should accept the candidate with a plurality as its leader no matter what. If Sanders comes into the convention with 38 percent, Biden with 35, and Bloomberg is still hanging around with something decent, Bloomberg could throw the election to either of these guys. And we know it wouldn't be Sanders.

If he's not the nominee, Bloomberg has promised to keep field operations up in six battleground states, keep his digital operation up and running, and fund paid media with a focus on anti-Trump ads. But those promises might mean spending millions of dollars to elect a socialist whose campaign, when asked about the possibility of Bloomberg support last week, answered, "Hard no." This makes Sanders seem a bit rigid—but Sanders's supporters think Bloomberg himself is an ideologue motivated by his disdain of progres-

sives. "He's on a mission to stop Bernie or Warren," says Waleed Shahid of Justice Democrats. "I would hope he would keep using his wealth to support democratic causes," but "I'm a little concerned that he and Tom Steyer may have hurt feelings."

Trippi feels confident Bloomberg will deliver. "I take his campaign at their word that they're going to keep all these headquarters open and keep fighting," he says. That did seem to be the conventional wisdom, both inside Bloomberg HQ and out; Bloomberg is not known to be petty, but someone who closely guards his legacy. But on February 27, in Houston, he said he'd shutter operations if the nominee rejected his support, as Sanders already had. "What do you mean, I'm going to send a check to somebody and they're not going to cash the check?" said Bloomberg. "I think I wouldn't bother to send the check."

To those close to the campaign, this looked like a temporary squabble of the kind that comes up regularly in primary seasons only to disappear by the fall—not a real obstacle to Bloomberg spending Trump out of office, and maybe just a show for the cameras. But any purse-tightening would represent a colossal walk-back from Bloomberg, given how regularly and steadily he'd been proclaiming he was in this to beat Trump and would do anything it took no matter the nominee—promises that had earned him additional goodwill among the Establishment of the party he'd been funding so lavishly and would now be, hypothetically, disavowing. The campaign says nothing like that is likely to happen: "Mike has said he will happily support another Democrat if he's not the nominee. It's up to them whether they want the support or not." If the candidate refuses, they say, Bloomberg would just spend the money on an anti-Trump super-PAC, as was always the plan (he would never have been able legally to donate more than \$2,800 to the campaign itself). But even if the dustup settles quickly, it's likely the psychodrama between these two egos will be playing out all summer and fall.

AS THE COUNTDOWN CLOCK READ FIVE DAYS and 13 hours and three seconds before Super Tuesday, plus 250 days until the general election, Bloomberg came into the office to meet a smattering of mayors. The event was a curious one but in line with his desire to shake up campaigns: His team had put up a billboard in Times Square and asked people to call in with questions for Mike, then flown in these mayors to take the calls. They huddled with Bloomberg and their cell phones at several white desks (whether those on other line were so random as to be coaxed to call Bloomberg via a billboard I would not venture a guess). The first, Stephanie Rawlings-Blake, formerly of Baltimore, had phone issues, but Bloomberg stood by patiently. "You should go to Silicon Valley. There's no cell service," he said. "Wait until they have a heart attack and nobody can call a doctor. There's actually a couple golf clubs who are changing their rules for just that reason."

When the phone bank is over, a half-dozen top staffers gather near the front door, some off with him to Massachusetts, Tennessee, Alabama, Texas, and elsewhere before Super Tuesday. The group rides an elevator down, but moments later Bloomberg appears with his security guard, who is urgently talking into an earpiece, trying to locate the inner circle that has just disappeared. Bloomberg's sure the crew has gone downstairs and is probably already in a car waiting for him, but the security guard wants him to stay put. Now young staffers notice him and, surprised to find him unsurrounded, stop to shake his hand or ask how long he'll be gone. "I didn't know how much to pack, because I'm leaving for four days," he says—he wasn't sure about how many shirts, how much underwear. The tall mayor of Paterson, New Jersey, from the earlier phone bank, comes by, then asks me to take a picture of them together. Bloomberg's security guy finally waves at him to get in the elevator as the mayor holds up his phone to show me the picture. It's not a good shot. "My head's cut off," he says. ■

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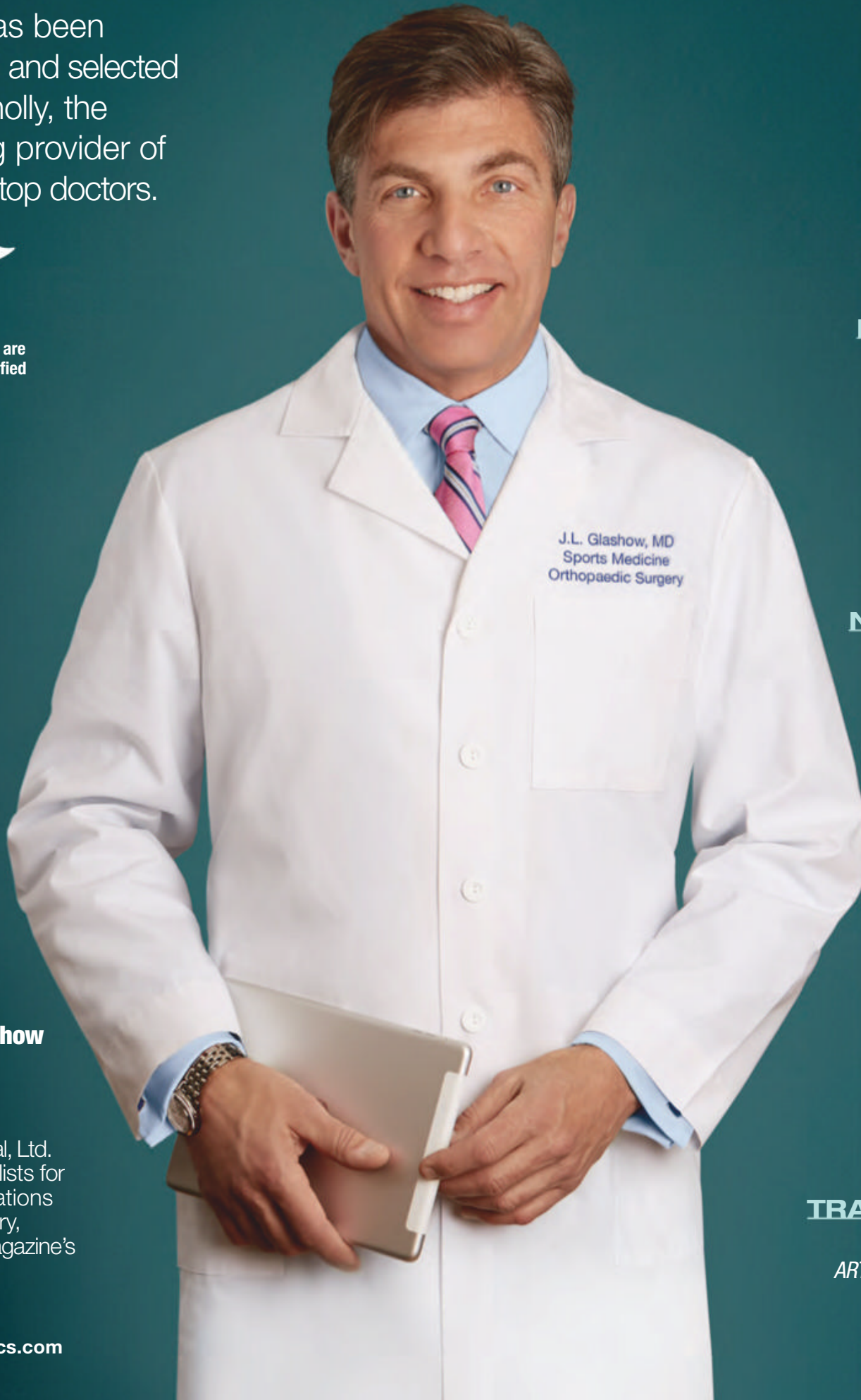
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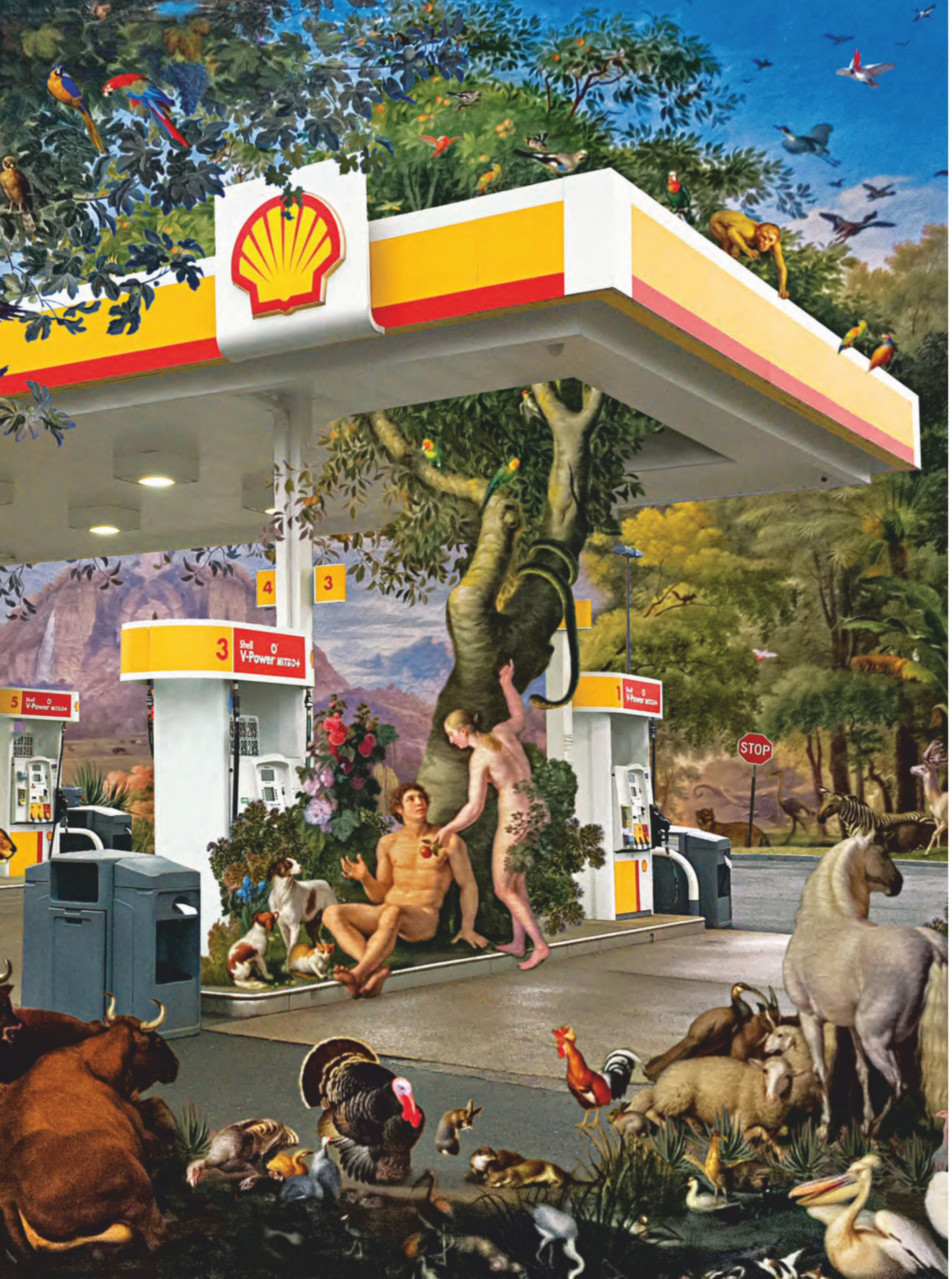
Shell Is Looking Forward

The fossil-fuel companies expect to not just survive climate change but profit from it.

I went to a private planning meeting and took notes.

By **Malcolm Harris**





“We think democracy is better,” said the jet-fuel salesperson. “But is it? In terms of outcomes?”

In a conference room overlooking the gray Thames, a group of young corporate types tried to imagine how the world could save itself, how the international community could balance the need for growth with our precarious ecological situation. For the purposes of our speculative scenarios, everything except for carbon was supposed to be up in the air, and democracy’s track record is mixed.

A graph from Chinese social media showing how many trees the country is planting—a patriotic retort to the Swedish climate activist Greta Thunberg—had a real effect on the room. Combine that with the Chinese state-led investment in clean-energy technology and infrastructure and everyone admired how the world’s largest source of fossil-fuel emissions was going about transition. That’s what the salesperson meant by “outcomes”: decarbonization.

Regional experts from sub-Saharan Africa and the Middle East–North Africa also entertained the democracy question, pointing to Iraqi disillusionment with voting and economic growth in Rwanda under Paul Kagame (“He’s technically a dictator, but it’s working”). The China expert said the average regional Communist Party official is probably more accountable for his or her performance than the average U.K. member of Parliament, a claim no one in the room full of Brits seemed to find objectionable. The moderator didn’t pose the question to me, the American expert, presumably because our national sense of democratic entitlement is inviolable.

Actually, the moderator didn’t ask me any questions during the plenary that followed our regional-perspectives panel, either. That might have had something to do with my talk, which included bullet points like “Green growth is a myth” and “Your corporate existence is incompatible with a livable future for cohorts that are already born.” But I didn’t get that impression, not really. I was repeatedly asked to be honest, and everyone was really nice about it. Everyone was really nice in general.

SINCE 2017, when I published a book about American millennials, I’ve had the occasional cold call from corporations to come talk about my work, all but one of which I’ve turned down. But last fall, the Shell Scenarios team—as in Royal Dutch Shell, one of the biggest oil companies in the world—offered me £2,000 in exchange for a 15-minute talk and my participation in a group exercise. Its internal corporate think tank was holding a daylong conference about how generational change would affect the hopefulness projected in what the company calls the “Sky Scenario,” which it describes as “a technically possible but challenging pathway for society to achieve the goals of the Paris Agreement.” I’m not a climate expert, but apparently I qualify as a generational whisperer, at

least to Shell, and to talk to me about global warming, the giant energy conglomerate wanted to fly me to London from Philadelphia, business class. I warned them that I couldn’t keep their money and asked if I’d need to sign an NDA. When they said no, I saw an opportunity to report on the oil company, undercover while in plain sight, without technically lying to anyone. It was too good to pass up. I said yes, then I emailed my editor.

The October 2019 workshop, it turned out, was timely. Fossil-fuel divestment used to be a fringe, college-campus concern, but over the past year, it has become increasingly in vogue in the world’s financial centers, including Davos, where it recently dominated conversation at the World Economic Forum. In December, a couple of months after the Shell workshop, the Bank of England proposed a new climate stress test to measure the resiliency of its banks in the face of warming—a move echoing that of Christine Lagarde of the European Central Bank and reportedly being considered by the chair of the U.S. Federal Reserve, Jerome Powell. Germany announced major coal phase-outs in January with coal-fired power generation scheduled to halt by 2038 at the latest. In a much-celebrated letter the same month, Larry Fink, the CEO of BlackRock, the world’s largest asset manager, declared an about-face on fossil fuels, saying climate change was now a “defining factor in companies’ long-term prospects.” The entire country of Finland proclaimed it would go carbon neutral by 2035. Even the investor cartoon Jim Cramer, of *Mad Money*, got in on divestment, tweeting, “I am taking a hard pass on anything fossil.” Now ExxonMobil is down \$184 billion-with-a-b since its 2014 peak.

From a certain vantage, the momentum looks almost definitive, as though nothing could stand in the way of a renewable future. But unlike coal, oil and gas companies are still definitely profitable, even investable, and more oil and gas are being produced, and used, every year—which helps explain why carbon emissions keep rising too. There’s little doubt that fossil-fuels are, culturally speaking, on the wrong side of history. But there is still a lot more money to extract from those wells, and the fossil-fuel businesses are intent on extracting as much as they can. It’s not necessarily such a bad time to be an oil and gas company, in other words, but it is a bad time to look like one. These companies aren’t planning for a future without oil and gas, at least not anytime soon, but they want the public to think of them as part of a climate solution. In reality, they’re a problem trying to avoid being solved.

Few organizations have been paying as much attention to global warming for as long as the companies that have helped cause it. Journalists at the Dutch publication *The Correspondent* tracked down an educational video Shell released in 1991 called “Climate of Concern,” which warned, “Global warming is not yet certain, but many think that to wait for final proof would be irresponsible. Action now is seen as the only safe insurance.” There’s good evidence Exxon knew a decade earlier. But not only did these companies continue exploiting their reserves, not only did they explore for new sources and develop new modes of extraction, like fracking, but they funded politicians and groups that claimed not to believe in global warming, agents that have worked to delay the same action they knew was “our only safe insurance.” So far, the oil and gas companies’ calculations—that delay would make them money

and that they could avoid consequences for misleading the public—have been spot on. But denial-backed delay is no longer sufficient, it seems. They're now hoping to leverage their incumbency, and fossil-fuel wealth, to lay claim to the world's clean-energy future as well. To do that, they'll have to persuade young people to forget who caused climate change in the first place, or at least to let bygones be bygones. And if they can transition their corporate profiles from fossil fuel to green energy without missing a profitable quarter, that wouldn't be a repudiation of their delay strategy; it would be a vindication.

Of course, to judge by the advertisements, the transition to renewables has already happened. British Petroleum is now a solar-energy company called BP, ExxonMobil brews giant swimming pools of cool green-algae fuel, and Shell maintains mountain canyons lined with wind turbines floating in fog. All these initiatives actually do exist, though they are a tiny fraction of each company's budget; so far, the main product of Exxon's algae program seems to be propaganda. Right now, these companies have to convince governments and their publics to let them run out the clock with fossil fuels, and they've decided the best way to do that is to appear to be an essential partner for whatever's coming next. I was ostensibly there to help plan the timing.

ORGANIZERS BROKE the conference up into three parts: first, a panel on polling and millennial politics; then the regional-perspectives panel; and finally, a collaborative exercise in which “deductive” and “inductive” groups imagined different paths to 2050. By gathering millennial employees from throughout the company, along with experts on the cohort and senior management, the strategies team surely hoped to infuse the firm's leadership with a drip of youth consciousness, the way some oligarchs are rumored to inject themselves with young people's blood. It's supposed to help them stay agile. Other than the eight outside experts, there were a couple dozen people from Shell, ranging from HR specialists in their 20s to senior global executives (mostly Gen X and boomers). Staffers quoted me the figure “90,000 employees” (roughly the size of the company as a whole) a few times when explaining that virtually

BIG GREEN MOOD

DECEMBER 15

Goldman Sachs ...

promises to **stop financing Arctic oil drilling** and thermal coal operations anywhere.

JANUARY 14

BlackRock ...

the world's largest asset manager, announces the company will **begin to move away from investments that “present a high sustainability-related risk,”** such as coal—while, for the time being, continuing to invest in oil and gas.

JANUARY 16

Microsoft ...

announces that it aims to go **carbon negative by 2030** and to remove as much carbon from the atmosphere by 2050 as it has ever emitted, acknowledging that the climate crisis “will require technology that does not exist today.”

FEBRUARY 12

BP ...

vows to become **carbon neutral by 2050**, though careful analysis suggests it is using that term in a quite misleading way. In February, BP said it planned to withdraw from the American Fuel and Petrochemical Manufacturers, the Western States Petroleum Association, and at least one more trade group—though not the American Petroleum Institute, which has often fought climate-friendly policies.

FEBRUARY 14

Delta ...

pledges to invest **\$1 billion** over the next decade toward projects that aim to **reduce air travel's contribution to climate change.** (So far, the airline has not shared any particulars on where the money will be invested.)

FEBRUARY 17

Amazon ...

founder and CEO Jeff Bezos posted a picture of the Earth on Instagram with a caption announcing his commitment to spend **\$10 billion on “scientists, activists, NGOs—**any effort that offers a real possibility to help preserve and protect the natural world.” Bezos has offered no specifics on how the money will be spent but says he will start issuing grants this summer.

FEBRUARY 24

JPMorgan Chase ...

announces it will **cease financing oil drilling in the Arctic and curb loans for coal mining** following the leak of an internal report suggesting climate change has put the planet on an unsustainable trajectory.

none of them knew one another.

Some of the most revealing insights came the night before the sessions at a group dinner at a minor Gordon Ramsay restaurant. The venue had two party spaces, and it wasn't immediately clear where we were supposed to go, but when someone suggested putting up a sign rather than having wait staff direct the party one by one, the younger Shell employees grimaced. “Extinction Rebellion,” one said, less than half-joking. The climate-protest group has a major presence in the city with flyers and volunteers everywhere. “XR” targeted Shell locally in April 2019, smashing windows at the company's London headquarters. In the U.K., it has succeeded at creating an ambient sense of fear or at least shame. We gathered in the mezzanine dining area and milled around doing introductions, and I asked young workers from the far-flung corners of the Shell empire, “Oh, what's that like?” I tried to remember not to talk like a reporter.

When they called us to the table for dinner, I was lucky enough to be seated next to one of the senior Shell participants, Steven Fries, the firm's chief economist. We met over arancini, the likes of which you might find at an upscale food court in a baseball stadium. Based in Shell's global headquarters in the Hague, Fries pronounces his words with a precision that defies accent; even after speaking with him, his colleagues didn't realize he's an American until he told them. Like many people who studied economics at elite Western institutions between 1975 and 1986 would, he blames the lack of affordable housing in London on too much government regulation, which is why his support for big public investments to transition society away from oil and gas surprised me. That is, until I realized that, in his mind, those big public investments would be going to energy companies. When the proverbial light bulb went on above my head, he gave me a look that seemed to say, “Come on, man. What do you think we're doing here?”

In the corporate sector, there's still faith at the top that economic incentives and profit-seeking behavior can manage the crisis that capitalism has wrought. In such thinking, climate change is like a redux of the hole in the ozone layer: potentially bad but solvable with the tools on hand and without real changes to our lifestyles. Fries estimates that we'll

be able to cost-effectively fill two-thirds of world energy demand with clean sources within 20 years. (That's ten years more optimistic than the optimistic scenario of the International Renewable Energy Agency, an intergovernmental organization mandated to propagate optimistic scenarios about renewable-energy transition.) Even if that kind of turnaround is unrealistic, the Shell plan isn't so different from the mainstream climate left's agenda. A recent paper from Stanford professor and renewable advocate Mark Z. Jacobson calls for \$73 trillion in spending to transition most of the world's power grids no later than 2050, and he and his co-authors figure it'll pay for itself in energy savings alone within a decade. In the analysis of Jacobson and other Green New Deal supporters, how many of those trillions end up going to Shell is largely beside the point. But for Shell, that's the whole ball game.

In the meantime, I asked Fries, if Shell is serious about transition, then couldn't it voluntarily speed it up by leaving some of its wells fallow, constraining oil output and thereby driving the price relative to renewables higher, faster? Sure, it would have to take some losses in the short term, but we're talking about the future of the planet here. He dismissed the idea, telling me it's important not to artificially withhold supply, which would introduce price shocks that could turn public opinion against environmentalist policy. Besides, it would only end up sending money to the Saudis anyway.

"We're going to get as much out of [oil and gas] for as long as we can," he said.

"That's an extremely frightening thing for you to say," I said.

"It doesn't mean every drop," he said, failing to reassure me.

Shell would apparently prefer us not to think about how to reduce carbon emissions by raising the costs of fossil-fuel development. Which makes sense: No matter their green branding, fossil-fuel companies do not want their projects rendered uneconomic. Instead, they want to talk about how their new projects can be rendered economic faster. Even planned production from existing fossil-fuel infrastructure, it's been estimated, will push the planet past the Paris targets, and Shell is still "exploring" for new oil deposits to exploit. "In terms of emissions, it's one of the cleanest ways to go," a Shell employee in deepwater strategy seated across from me explained about deepwater drilling as compared with other kinds of drilling. "Of course, when you put it in your car and burn it, it's oil, but," he said, trailing off.

Although the slice of revenue energy firms derive from fossil fuels is by all accounts scheduled to shrink, Shell foresees a sizable enduring demand. No one has viable plans for a battery-powered container ship, and the world's militaries aren't about to give up jet fighters pending the development of an electric model. Not to mention that all this clean technology requires a lot of energy in advance for manufacturing. Deepwater wells operate on a ten-year schedule, I'm told, so my dinner companion doesn't expect the ones he's looking at now off the coast of Brazil to even yield product until the 2030s, at which point it will take more time just

to earn back the initial investment and even longer to turn a profit.

In February, Shell announced the purchase of a 50 percent operating stake in three deepwater blocks off Colombia's Caribbean coast under an agreement with Colombian state-controlled Ecopetrol. And Shell's not the only one looking in the water off South America: In January, based on exploration in late 2019, Exxon revised its estimate upward for its blocks off Guyana, from 6 billion barrels of recoverable crude to 8 billion. (A week later, the nonprofit watchdog Global Witness released a report estimating that Exxon's 2016 agreement with the country, negotiated with inexperienced government counterparts, had deprived the Guyanese people of \$55 billion compared with international contract norms.) Fossil-fuel companies claim they've got one eye on 2050, but they've clearly got the other on next week. "If these activities are positive, these discoveries could be developed and potentially be a substantial increase in gas supply in the medium term," a Shell spokesperson said of the Colombian offshore blocks, as if that would be a good thing.

But if short- and medium-term profit considerations are still driving plenty of decision-making at Shell and the other energy companies, employees are trying to think ahead when it comes to their careers. During the cocktail hour before dinner, I met a geoscientist who has been attempting his own transition (to the finance side of the business), preparing to move from the declining subsurface field to clean tech. I asked how he got involved in oil exploration in the first place. A little embarrassed, he told me he liked rocks as a kid. When he graduated from college, he saw two career paths: the energy sector or academia, where he would just be training others for the energy sector anyway. He said he was worried about the next generation of Earth-science students, who are graduating into a shrinking industry. Maybe they'll be mining asteroids, suggested the deepwater strategist.

According to the geoscientist, one of the ways Shell incorporates climate change into its calculations is that when it looks to develop a new fuel source, it tries to figure out how much it'll be able to sell it off for when the company transitions out of fossil energy—when the reputational costs start to exceed the returns. Whoever buys it will almost certainly continue extracting but at a lower cost of production, maybe because it has better technology or, more likely, because it cuts corners on labor and safety. What this means: Unregulated fossil-fuel production might

come to look a lot like the narcotics trade, with its brutal criminal organizations that thrive in conjunction with corrupt state elements regardless of international agreements. The problem is that once reserves are discovered, there's no way to undiscover them. "We don't plan to lose money," the geoscientist turned finance analyst said, and he meant it in the most general way.

The whole session was conducted under "Chatham House Rule," which means participants are allowed to repeat what they hear but not who said it. The idea behind the rule is that it creates circumstances under which subordinates can speak freely

"We're going to get as much out of [oil and gas] for as long as we can."

to higher-ups about the company without endangering their career path. (As an American reporter, I am ignoring the rule when I see fit, having technically never agreed to anything.) The deepwater strategist put it to the test, prodding the senior executive Fries about the generational implications of green regulation. Was Fries, he wondered, going to help pay for the new electric car he'll have to buy if the internal-combustion vehicle he just saved up enough to purchase is banned?

At a pub after dinner, away from the executives, the deepwater strategist confessed that he often thinks about what he'll have to tell his child someday about the job he's doing now. "I don't have any kids, but, yeah," the geoscientist agreed. He didn't know how to describe the people to whom he owes an explanation, but he knows they're out there.

THE BIGGEST GAP IN POLITICS right now is generational, the Harvard polling expert told us. "This is a two-thirds generation in a 50-50 country," he said, meaning that millennials are much more reliably progressive than the country as a whole. This makes sense. Young people are fearful, they have little trust in institutions, and they're dealing with high levels of stress and anxiety. This has led to generational tension, especially around the existential challenge of climate change. One of the session's recurring themes was that millennials and Gen-Zers have a stronger moral and ethical drive than their elders, and they expect us to use our values to help force companies to do the right thing. But Shell doesn't seem to fear attacks on its brand from consumers, since most of its business is with other companies, and even when it comes to customers, most people don't make choices about where to buy gas based on the relative climate villainy of the respective oil companies. On top of which, its product is not very recognizably branded. "Jet fuel is jet fuel," I was told. Instead, it's worried about being left behind by the curve of social change, that if it doesn't become more than an oil company, it'll stagnate, wither, and eventually die.

We were tasked with trying to come up with ways Shell could see what's coming, and participants began by imagining various ways Shell would feel this "rise of a new ethics," as one of the experts called it: millennial politicians forcing harsher regulations, millennial investors divesting from fossil fuels, millennial potential recruits who don't want to be embarrassed about their work, and millennial protesters who push everyone else. Shell strategists used the phrase "long march through the institutions"—coined by the German communist Rudi Dutschke for the '60s student movement—to describe the way they expect left-wing climate radicals to become part of the Establishment.

This may seem like a progressive outlook and a surprising one for a fossil-fuel company that has faced the ire of climate protesters so directly. But Shell doesn't seem to see the climate movement as the enemy or even necessarily contrary to the company's interests. If Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez is going to rally millennials around Green New Deal legislation, then it's a good time to become a green-energy company—or at least buy a few of those and rebrand that way. Climate protesters are just another market reality, one that can be profitable when apprehended correctly, even for a big, old oil and gas firm. The question was how to see that generational conflict coming, how to meet it and harness it and ride it into the future.

The youth climate movement is winning plaudits now, but it didn't start with Greta, and the lessons from those previous eras are not especially encouraging. Ten years to the month before the

Shell conference, I was lying down on the concrete walkway in front of the Bank of America in College Park, Maryland, part of a die-in against financing for mountaintop-removal coal extraction. That same year, I attended a Power Shift youth climate conference, which ended one freezing March morning with thousands of us blocking the power plant serving the U.S. Capitol. One of my fellow shivering demonstrators was Shana Rappaport, who recently reflected on how her thinking has changed:

As I stood on the hill in my fuzzy winter hat ... protest sign in hand, trained and prepared for the prospect of getting arrested, I believed wholeheartedly in the message we were chanting: "The enemy is profit. Together, we will stop it! Climate devastation will not be solved by corporations!"

I never would have imagined that, a decade later, my perspective would have shifted so significantly. Specifically, my belief that we have a better chance to build a sustainable future by engaging with as many companies, industries, and individuals as possible. And that includes oil companies.

After all, accelerating the transition to a clean economy requires all hands on deck, including the hands of those that have contributed most significantly to the problems we are working to address.

Rappaport is now the vice-president and executive director of VERGE from GreenBiz, which is, according to her LinkedIn, "the leading global event series focused on accelerating the clean economy and solutions to the climate crisis."

And even the Shell antagonists at XR are friendlier to corporate thinking than their public profile would suggest. In an interview with the *New Left Review*, XR spokesperson Zion Lights explained that, in contrast with the consensus model of decision-making favored during Occupy, the group uses a "self-organizing system based on features of the Holacracy model." Holacracy is a decentralized management program whose most prominent user is the Amazon shoe subsidiary Zappos. In the interview, Lights suggests that "the billions poured into fossil-fuel subsidies could be diverted into cleaner energy and technology." If you're Shell, the ideal compromise would be to simply add the green subsidies on top of the oil and gas subsidies. That's not actually a compromise; it's just an increase in giveaways to energy companies. But Shell's going to make it sound like it's meeting the climate movement halfway by taking billions to trillions of dollars in taxpayer money to jump-start its green divisions.

FOR THE VISIONING EXERCISE, I was put in one of the "deductive" groups; organizers gave us two scenarios for the world in 2050 and told us to work backward to the present to imagine a 2020 approach that would get us to the 2050 target. Both deductive groups did Scenario 1: Concerted global cooperation enables us to meet the Paris-climate accord goals, moving us past the peak of greenhouse-gas emissions and limiting warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius. But personally, I wasn't interested in helping Shell psych itself up for a timeline in which it saves the world and gets paid doing it. Instead, I pressured the members of my group to think about everything else, everything that could go wrong while decarbonization goes right. This seemed, in a way, mutually productive: They know much more about the sector than I do, and I genuinely wanted both their answers and the opportunity to demonstrate that there was more to solving a problem of global political

economy than drawing decarbonization lines up and to the right on a dry-erase board. With one vaguely offended exception—a “strategic-projects manager” called me “cynical”—everyone was happy to give it a try.

I prompted them: If we rapidly expand nuclear-energy production, we’re probably going to see more nuclear accidents, right? I was thinking about the recently deceased French philosopher Paul Virilio, who liked to point out that with every new technology, we also invent new ways for things to go wrong. “Oh, China is due for a big nuclear accident,” said Wim Thomas, Shell’s genial Dutch chief energy adviser. The China expert—also in my group—suggested waste was a huge, unexamined issue. Where are we going to put all the solar panels when they break? Bloomberg has reported on the massive used wind-turbine blades that are so durable they end up in landfills. We talked about corruption, how governments in the global South buy certain pieces of expensive industrial equipment because manufacturers know whom to bribe, a practice that’s bound to increase when there’s all sorts of miracle decarbonization tech floating around. Land use is a big problem, whether it’s for wind or biofuel. We also have to figure that, no matter what metrics we end up using to gauge progress, there’s likely to be some fraud. That’s what ProPublica found when it went looking for the forests that all those “carbon offsets” were supposed to pay for—basically none were working the way they had been sold to guilty Western liberals and greenwashing corporations, as a method of keeping carbon in the ground. By the time we finished with the trade-offs in Scenario 1, we barely had any time for the less rosy Scenario 3: nationalism and corporate geoengineering. Think green border walls and paying Elon Musk to turn down the sun. That’s the alternative to successfully reducing emissions.

Then the groups regathered and presented their work. When members of the other team gave their version of Scenario 1, the first step they imagined was a co-optation of the youth environmental movement by older generations and their institutions. *Co-opt* was the word they used, but they meant it in the positive sense: the end point of being influenced. Liberated from the dour marchers, the Establishment will tweak the messaging from XR-style fear for the immediate future of the species to classic Obama hope and change. There will be “youth innovation hubs” and millennial investors bringing their values to the market, eager to provide capital for clean-energy start-ups. The night before, I had learned Shell was moving into new sectors in part by buying up small firms like Greenlots (electric-vehicle-charging infrastructure) and Sonnen (smart batteries). Some of the younger Shell employees I spoke to had found themselves acquired into jobs they wouldn’t necessarily have applied for. That’s one way around a recruiting problem.

BEFORE I LEFT FOR LONDON, I had reread a piece in the magazine *Commune* about challenges that will be hard to avoid for any growth-based green transition. In “Between the Devil and the Green New Deal,” Jasper Bernes looks at some of the double binds the global profit system puts us in.

**“We don’t
plan to lose
money.”**

If you tax oil, capital will sell it elsewhere. If you increase demand for raw materials, capital will bid up the prices of commodities and rush materials to market in the most wasteful, energy-intensive way. If you require millions of square miles for solar panels, wind farms, and biofuel crops, capital will bid up the price of real estate. If you slap tariffs on necessary imports, capital will leave for better markets. If you try to set a maximum price that doesn’t allow profit, capital will simply stop investing. Lop off one head of the hydra, face another.

At dinner, I tried to get Fries, the economist, to answer some of the article’s questions: How can we move to clean energy without intensifying resource extraction in certain parts of the world? Where are we going to get the lithium for all these new batteries? Won’t Shell’s plans still mean creating ecological dead zones, in effect writing off whole regions of the Earth? And what will happen to the people who live there? I told him that, in June, a couple of miles from where I live in Philadelphia, an oil refinery exploded, releasing 3,271 pounds of toxic hydrofluoric acid into the atmosphere and launching a truck-size piece of shrapnel to the far bank of the Schuylkill River, over 2,000 feet away.

Those are real concerns, he conceded, though clearly not the ones that preoccupy him as the chief economist for Shell.

“There’s a lot of energy in this room,” Fries said, gesturing around our dining area. “We have to find a way to keep supplying it.”

The lights were tastefully dim, but I knew what he meant: There was the mediocre piece of fish perfectly replicated on each of our plates, the exorbitantly expensive airplane ticket that brought me to the table, the oil they sold to pay the participants’ salaries. Shell’s concern, deeper than its fossil-fuel identity and more urgent than the climate crisis, is Shell. I don’t believe it’s going to lead us to the Paris climate goals, and Shell probably doesn’t believe it will either. But in order to survive and keep the bottom line growing, I am convinced the company will do whatever needs to be done, whether that’s networking solar panels, systematic human-rights violations, or both. Maybe it’ll even make some incidental progress along the way, depending on where the subsidies are, but there’s no comprehensive vision for a livable future here, no ethical imagination, no morality to speak of. It is unfit to lead.

To make a point about how the company is prepared to handle resistance from protest groups, I asked Fries (rhetorically) who killed Ken Saro-Wiwa, an environmental activist in the oil-rich Niger Delta who was executed along with eight of his comrades in 1995. In 2009, Shell settled with the victims’ families out of court for \$15.5 million, though to this day the company denies any wrongdoing. Fries deadpanned, “I believe that was the Nigerian government.”

“I just don’t see where the guardrails are,” I said. “We know how companies like yours have handled these problems in the past. What’s to stop you from forcing the poorest people and places in the world to bear the very heavy costs of this transition?” I think I left the “while you keep profiting” implied.

“We have a strong civil society,” he said, off-loading responsibility again. “And freedom of the press.”

I fear that won’t be enough. ■

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The Congresswoman From California Katie Hill's rise heralded the arrival of a new and modern political generation. And then the pictures leaked.

By CAITLIN MOSCATELLO

A

NY CHANCE YOU COULD GRAB US a bottle of wine or something? Lol,” former California congresswoman Katie Hill texted. We settled on rosé. Hill and I had never met, but she was in the midst of a professional and personal crisis. It was 4:30 in the afternoon, and she would be going live on air with MSNBC’s Chris Hayes that night. “ROUGH day,” she wrote. I brought wine as well as a bag of pretzels to Hill’s Manhattan hotel room. Wearing leggings and a hoodie, she took the wine and glanced down at her phone. An editor at the *New York Times* had questions about an op-ed the 32-year-old Hill wrote about contemplating suicide, one that’s set to publish the next day; they’d been going back and forth for hours.

This was in early December as Hill scrambled to form a new life after photos of her—some of which she said were taken without her consent—were published online in mid-October. One shows Hill nude, brushing the hair of a junior female campaign staffer, Morgan (referred to here only by first name), in a hotel room. In others, there is Hill naked, holding a bong, with a tattoo of an iron cross—a Nazi-associated symbol used by white supremacists—near her groin; Hill and Morgan kissing. The articles accompanying them include private text messages among Hill, Morgan, and Hill’s estranged husband, Kenneth Heslep, detailing a three-way romantic relationship, as well as a claim by Heslep from a since-deleted Facebook post that Hill had had an affair with her male legislative director, Graham Kelly.

Hill released a statement denying the relationship with Kelly and accusing Heslep of spreading the rumor. The House Ethics Committee soon announced it would investigate the allegation related to Kelly (who also denied the relationship). If true, a relationship with Kelly would have violated a Me Too-era rule prohibiting members from having sexual relations with congressional staffers. Immediately after, Hill then released another statement admitting to an inappropriate relationship with Morgan. “I had to admit that, yes, I had this relationship with a campaign staffer,” Hill told me. “So, you know, I’ve admitted to that. And once you’ve admitted to that one thing, then it brings everything else into question.”

When Hill decided to run for office in early 2017, she was part of a surge of first-time candidates who felt a new and urgent pull toward politics. Her ascent in particular was a great American story: Daughter of a cop and a nurse wins long-shot congressional race, becoming unlikely star in Washington. But some of the same aspects of Hill’s personality that propelled her as a candidate—the risk-taking, the unfilteredness—were now at the center of a scandal that felt both ultra-modern and like the oldest story ever told.

It was nine days from the publication of the first photos to Hill’s announcement of her resignation—she’d heard there was a Google drive with roughly 700 images being passed around by political operatives. She was afraid that the photos would be released drip by drip. “I knew so much was still coming,” she said. “The ethics thing, it was going to pull our office in, and

*Katie Hill in
her new
apartment in
February.*



specifically my staff in, in a really fucked-up way.” And then there was the political risk to other House Democrats; she was confident that the scandal would be used against vulnerable colleagues running for reelection.

Hill recognized from the beginning that her relationship with Morgan, which spanned the majority of the campaign and her first months in office, could be problematic in her new role. Yet she did little to protect herself, failing to tell her chief of staff about the indiscretion. The photos and what they revealed about her personal life would have been damning for any politician but had the potential to be especially harmful to someone like Hill—young, female, openly bisexual. Having no plan in place put her at an immediate disadvantage. “You know, honestly, it was one of those things where it was like, *Well, I’ll just deny it*,” Hill told me. “Morgan is not accusing me of anything. She doesn’t want it to come out any more than I do.” Plenty of politicians lie, but it’s rare for one to tell a reporter it was her game plan.

THERE IS A STORY Hill’s mother, Rachel Stevenson, likes to tell about her daughter. When Hill was a toddler, “I would ask her if she wanted to do things the hard way or the easy way, and she would look straight at me and say, ‘The hard way,’” Stevenson says. Hill later told me the same story, not knowing I’d already heard it, and it became clear that this anecdote wasn’t simply family lore but a point of pride—a foundation on which she had constructed both her personal sense of self and her public image as an underdog.

Hill spent most of her childhood in Antelope Valley and Santa Clarita, a mostly middle-class enclave just north of Los Angeles. She told me she had a happy childhood, one spent riding bikes with her younger sister and other kids in the neighborhood, who sometimes pushed one another down hills in barrels. Hill credited her parents with allowing her to be independent: “They really did foster in me ... that confidence in knowing I was able to do anything I set my mind to and being willing to take a risk. The risk piece is a big element of this.”

She was seemingly always on the fast track. “As a freshman, I was like, *High school is dumb*, and my closest friends were older than me,” she continued. It pained her to think of being left behind, so she took extra courses in her sophomore and junior years in order to graduate by age 16. “I looked down on people who had to study,” she said.

Looking back, Hill said she was perhaps too eager to rush through childhood. “If I were to say I have regrets, it would be that I was trying to grow up so fast,” she told me. Behind the façade of the brilliant self-starter was a young woman with depression, a fractured family, and the aftermath of what she described as many sexual assaults. (The precise number changes. In two separate interviews in December, Hill recounted to me being sexually assaulted three times. In February, at the Makers Conference in Los Angeles, she told another reporter she’d been sexually assaulted four times “before I even graduated high school.”)

Hill told me the first assault happened when she was 8 years old. “It was child on child,” she explained, adding that she later found out the other girl, slightly older than she, had herself been molested. Hill didn’t tell her parents. “I thought I would be in trouble for having a sexual kind of thing too young,” she said. She can’t remember if that’s

when the depression kicked in or if it was more around the time her parents divorced, a year later. Hill’s mother remarried relatively quickly—which meant moving an hour away and transferring schools. Hill cried at the wedding, sitting with a female friend whom she now thought of as her first love.

At 15, Hill said, she was assaulted during a trip to France, by a man more than ten years her senior, while she was camping in a park with a friend. “[He] started making out with me and stuff like that. I was drunk, I was kind of like, whatever. But then he got much more handsy, and the other girl who was with me pulled me out of that situation,” she said. “Later he came into the tent and got on top of me ... We were able to unzip another zipper [on the tent] while I was fighting him off, and we ran.” A year later, Hill said, she was sexually assaulted at a party she attended with people she knew from an after-school job. At the time, she perceived it as a consensual encounter, even though she was 16 and she said her attacker was in his early 20s. “I was blackout drunk, and he was a lot older, too, and yeah. It’s funny because I say ‘we’ had sex, but I guess it’s not—” Her voice trailed off. Hill told me that the fourth assault also occurred when she was 16, just months before the incident with her co-worker. She was taking an EMT class after school, and, she said, the 20-something-year-old teacher’s assistant touched and kissed her by the lockers. She ran away and said she was so shaken up that she got into a car accident afterward.

Later that same year, she went to Cancún with a friend, and they decided to get tattoos. Hill chose what she thought was a symbol of independence—a thick black cross that looked like the logo for the skater brand Independent Truck Company—and had the tattoo artist drill the symbol into her groin. “I was just stupid, drunk, and traumatized,” she said. “There was a self-harm element to it that was, you know, marking this as my space.”

Shortly after returning from the trip, she took a job at a Barnes & Noble, where she met Heslep, who was then 20. Even though Hill was going off to college soon and Heslep’s future was more of a question mark, they fell in love. His dad was also a cop, and he and Hill bonded over their mutual love of books. (Heslep did not respond to multiple interview requests.)

At the end of the summer, she started college at Mount Saint Mary’s University in Los Angeles, where she had been accepted to study nursing. One night, she was volunteering at a hospital when a teen gunshot victim was rushed in. “I ended up holding his hand while he died and comforting his sister afterward,” said Hill. As she recalled it, the moment shook her into realizing that there were social problems she couldn’t tackle as a nurse; it’s a story she would eventually tell often on the campaign trail. Hill took a semester off to work, enrolled in a commu-

nity college, and later transferred to nearby California State University, Northridge, where she earned a bachelor’s in English and a master’s in public administration.

In 2010, Hill and Heslep married. They’d already been active on websites for people seeking alternative relationships, and Hill said Heslep years before had introduced the idea of engaging in threesomes. “I was like, *Well, if I’m in this committed relationship that I might be in for the rest of my life, like, how else am I going to be able to [be with a woman]?*” It never seemed like an option to me to have a separate relationship with a woman,” said Hill. Not long after exchanging vows, Hill and Heslep entered their first three-person, long-term relationship with a woman they’d met on OkCupid. Hes-



In Santa Clarita in 2013.

lep had also been posting intimate photos of Hill on various websites, which Hill said she knew about at the time. Her face wasn't visible, she said, and she wasn't thinking about any future consequences. "I was a fucking college student, you know? And it was like, *Okay, well, I'm down to try, right?*"

Hill began a career in the nonprofit sector, first working at an organization that helps at-risk youth, then at People Assisting the Homeless (PATH), where she was employed for eight years. Hill worked her way up to executive director, managing a \$50 million budget and earning \$174,000 a year. Heslep briefly held a job as an EMT and also worked at PATH in a role Hill said wasn't under her purview. But from 2014 on, he was unemployed. They bought the small ranch where Heslep grew up, and while Hill worked, Heslep tended to their dogs, goats, and chickens. The couple tried to have children, but Hill said she was diagnosed with endometriosis and had to have an ovary removed.

Hill never thought about a career in politics until President Trump's win. But she did have relevant experience: At PATH, she'd worked on a \$1.2 billion bond measure to provide homelessness relief in the Los Angeles area, which gave her a taste for legislating. She had management chops and genuine roots in the district. At the Women's March, among pink hats and feminist signs, she saw an opportunity. "I knew there was going to be an advantage to being the first one in the race," she said, "and generating excitement as the young woman running."

To kick off her campaign for Congress, Hill, then 29, organized a meeting at a local Chili's with family members and close friends to talk strategy. "I hate to say it, but I don't think anyone thought that it was ever going to happen," says Stevenson. Hill not only made it through the primary but went on to defeat the Republican incumbent, Steve Knight—in a district that had been represented by a Republican for more than two decades—by 9 percentage points.

Even in the earliest weeks of her campaign, Hill proved to be a charismatic natural, able to position herself as both progressive enough for the resistance and palatable enough for moderates and independents. She was openly bisexual but married to a man. She supported gun-safety legislation but owned a gun herself. Hill sold herself as a "pragmatic progressive," the scrappy daughter of a Republican who would cut through the bullshit in Washington and work across the aisle.

To talk about the opioid crisis, she wrote a piece for a local paper about her 17-year-old half-brother's drug use, detailing how she'd helped him recover. To address her views on health care, she wrote a story for BuzzFeed about how Heslep's lung had collapsed on the day of her bridal shower, putting the couple \$200,000 in debt. In reaction to Knight's voting for a 20-week abortion ban, Hill posted a video to Facebook, detailing how she'd had an unplanned pregnancy at 18. In the video, Hill, who is pro-choice, says she contemplated having an abortion—only to suffer a miscarriage while deciding whether to continue the pregnancy. (It's a narrative that also doesn't alienate either side of the abortion debate.) When #WhyIDidntReport began trending on Twitter, Hill shared a video about surviving sexual assault. On World Suicide Prevention Day, she tweeted that it was the second anniversary of a friend's death from suicide by gun.

"I guess it was a conscious decision in the beginning when I decided to run. I wanted to share the stories I felt like people needed," Hill told me. "At some point, people were like, 'She's just got a story for everything,' and it feels a little ridiculous, but this



Top: On Election Night in 2018. Bottom: At her swearing-in with Heslep.

happened to me, and it just keeps adding up."

Hill's team was young and ambitious and had a tendency to run fast and loose, with messy results at times. Before the primary, a senior Hill staffer posted on Facebook that California lieutenant governor Gavin Newsom (later the governor) had endorsed one of Hill's primary opponents over her because "Hill won't sleep with [Newsom]. I know this for a fact." The staffer posted an apology about the false accusation the next day, writing, in part, "I'm an alcoholic and have a long and troubled history with addiction."

But such missteps were overshadowed by the campaign's strong fund-raising and ground game. Hill began building an army of volunteers and came close to matching both her (male) primary opponent and Knight in early fund-raising. From there, excitement around what she called the "most millennial campaign ever" snowballed. She earned endorsements from major groups like Emily's List and Planned Parenthood as well as support from celebrities (Kristen Bell, Alyssa Milano) and politicians (from local lawmakers to President Obama). The Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee, impressed more by the candidate than her team, sent resources and staff. She went on CNN and *The Late Late Show With James Corden*. Vice sent a documentary-film crew to follow her around as part of a series on women running for office. She appeared with other first-time female candidates on the cover of *Time*. Hill's campaign eventually raised an impressive \$8.4 million.

She went all in on women's empowerment; after all, maybe for the first time ever, being a young, female candidate was an asset rather than a detriment. She denounced the appointment of Brett Kavanaugh and stood publicly with local GOP consultant Jennifer Van Laar, retweeting an interview in which Van Laar said she had been sexually harassed by a Republican assembly candidate who'd defeated Van Laar's candidate in a primary. "Believe Women," Hill tweeted. "#TimesUp."

In defeating Knight, Hill became part of the historic group of women who flipped the House from red to blue in 2018, and only the second openly bisexual woman ever to serve in Congress. She seemed like the future, and quickly became a power player in Washington. Hill's freshman House colleagues elected her to represent them at the Democratic-leadership table, a role that would groom her for even more prominent positions. She was also named vice-chair of the prestigious House Oversight Committee and had the ear of Speaker Nancy Pelosi. Former members of Hill's staff tell me they'd eagerly hitched their wagons to her star, figuring their career paths were set for the next ten, 20, maybe even 30 years. Hill might be a senator one day, they thought, or House Speaker.

HILL AND MORGAN first met at a community event early in the fall of 2017. As Hill tells it, they got into a conversation about politics, and she mentioned her campaign was looking to hire someone to manage her schedule and help with fund-raising.

Morgan (who declined to be interviewed) accepted the offer as the campaign's third employee. "She was hired as my body person, my person who was literally with me all the time," said Hill. "Part of it was talking. We both identified as bi, right? That was one of the things that drew her to the campaign. And she was also younger than me and hadn't had as much experience being a bi woman. I ended up revealing that I'd had a [three-person] relationship before."

"I can only account for my feelings, but we fell in love. I don't think there's any way for it not to come off as bad," Hill said. "But whatever. We developed feelings for each other, and even from day one, it was like, 'No, we shouldn't do this; this is a bad idea.' But [we] did anyway, and hoped that it was just not going to come out."

Hill said she'd been unhappy in her marriage for a long time but didn't recognize Heslep's controlling behavior—like listening in on her phone calls—as abusive. Stevenson expressed concern but says Hill would pull away when she did. "It was devastating to watch our daughter fall into this pattern with him," she says. The marriage wasn't open, so a relationship with Morgan required bringing Heslep into the fold. The three of them hung out together rock-climbing, watching *Breaking Bad*, playing video games. They told their families about the relationship. They spent holidays together.

"To me, she was just as responsible for it, you know?"

A tenet of the Me Too movement is that a person can't fully consent, not really, anyway, to someone who wields power over him or her. During her campaign, Hill often tweeted about Me Too issues of harassment and abuse. As the candidate, she was inarguably at the top rung of her campaign team. Yet she said she didn't feel like she was in charge, not when she was barely 30 and most staffers were in their 20s. "We joked about this a lot. Morgan was way more my boss than I was hers," said Hill, "because she got me to places on time. So yes, I recognize that I had power, but also it just wasn't like that at the time ... I was a fucking person that was a few years older than her, and we got wrapped up in this movement of trying to do something, and I happened to be the face of it. But to me, she was just as responsible for it, you know?"

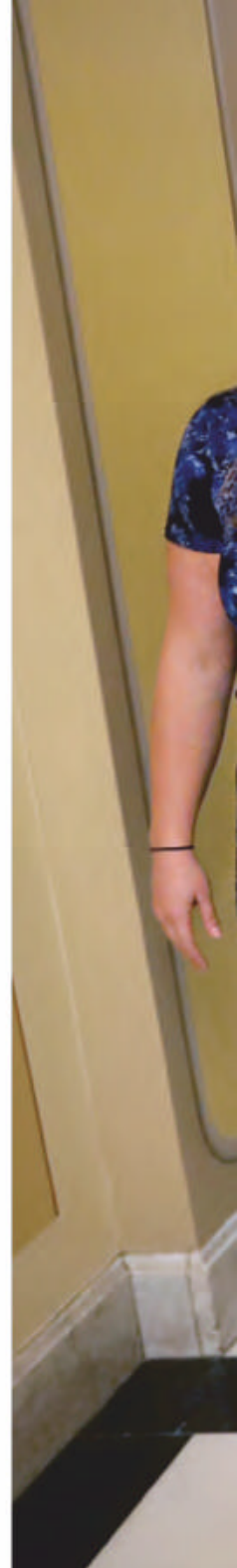
Early in their relationship, Hill, Heslep, and Morgan traveled to Alaska together, where Heslep took the photo of Hill nude, brushing Morgan's hair. In the picture, Hill is staring down and Morgan is looking toward the lens. Hill said she didn't know he was taking the shot, which appears to be candid. There is another photo of Hill and Morgan, also in the hotel, both clothed and smiling at the camera. She said she knew about that one but not another image that appears to have been taken just moments before or after, in which the two women are kissing. "I don't think I would have been okay with that," she said. "Well, I definitely wouldn't have been okay with that."

While only a few senior campaign staffers officially knew about the relationship, "it started to become more and more of an open secret," according to one former team member. "People started to connect two and two together: [Morgan] is not a senior staff member; why is she at Katie's house?"

As Hill became a viable candidate, there was a discussion about whether Morgan should step away. Hill said she doesn't remember who initiated those talks, just that Morgan was invested in the campaign and didn't want to leave. But Hill was also heavily leaning on their relationship, calling Morgan "a vital, vital support ... There's so much about having survived that last year and a half of my marriage and having survived through the campaign that I don't know what I would have done if she weren't in the picture," she said.

During this time, Hill said, Heslep's controlling behaviors escalated, a reaction to her not being around very much. While working at PATH, she'd been home most nights for dinner and rarely traveled. The campaign created a new reality—long hours, often seven days a week. The Vice series depicts a tight-knit group cranking out fund-raising calls, liquor bottles lined up on a shelf in the closet, and Hill joking with staffers. She suddenly had an entire life separate from her husband. "There were fights where Kenny was kind of like, 'Choose me or the campaign,'" she said.

According to Hill, Morgan pointed out Heslep's abusive behaviors. "One of the things I feel guiltiest about was, even then, I was like, 'No, no, no, this is fine, this is normal,'" she said, adding that Heslep eventually began verbally berating Morgan, too. "Sometimes I told him, 'You can't fucking do that to her.'" By October 2018, Hill said, her relationship with Heslep had become unbearable. "For hours and hours and hours, he would just scream at me. He wouldn't let me sleep." The smallest trigger could set off an explosion—if Hill didn't text Heslep enough throughout the day, if she forgot to bring



PHOTOGRAPH: WIN MCNAMEE/GETTY IMAGES



After her resignation speech.

him a fork at dinner. “It would turn into total belittling, like, ‘You are completely selfish, and you’ve got a God complex, and this whole campaign thing has completely gone to your head, and if anyone really knew you like I know you, there’s no way that you would be able to do this,’” she said. (Heslep’s lawyers released the following statement in response to Hill’s public remarks regarding the abuse: “Ms. Hill has made no allegations of abuse in her Petition for Dissolution. Mr. Heslep denies any allegations of abuse or wrongdoing outright.” Heslep, not Hill, filed for the divorce, and California is a no-fault state that does not require either partner to prove wrongdoing.)

The breaking point was a few weeks before the election. Hill was having suicidal thoughts. “I tried to talk to him about that, and he basically turned it around to be my fault and said to me, ‘Well, if you really feel that way about us and about everything, then you should go do it,’” she said. “He kept trying to hand me a gun and told me, ‘Well, if you go up in that corner, then no one will hear you.’”

The suggestion was even crueler because of a past incident: The friend whose suicide Hill talked about on the campaign trail had shot herself on Hill and Heslep’s property, where she’d been living in a yurt with her husband. Los Angeles County detective Marcelo Quintero says the 25-year-old woman was found near a car, next to a .22 rifle, with bullets in her pocket and a gunshot wound to her

head, after she and her husband had gotten into a fight and she made an ominous phone call to her parents. County records show her body was not found for several hours after her death. “Sometimes in these areas, it’s feasible that you’re not going to hear a shot,” Quintero says.

The night of Hill’s confrontation with Heslep, she called a campaign staffer and asked him to pick her up at 6 a.m., before Heslep was awake. She loaded her belongings into his car, and Hill later drove to her mother’s house. Stevenson says Heslep called her that night. As she recalls, “He said, ‘I don’t give a fuck about her political career, I will destroy her. She needs help.’” (Hill’s stepdad overheard the threat, and a campaign staffer who was present also confirms it.)

Heslep sent flowers and cards, and a couple of weeks before the election, Hill went back to him. It was easier to pretend things were okay. “I knew at that point I was going to leave. It was just a matter of time,” she said.

Winning the election provided Hill with a clear exit: She moved to D.C. without Heslep or Morgan and got an apartment with fellow House freshman Lauren Underwood of Illinois. For the most part, she returned to California only on weekends for short trips packed with work events. By May, she had decided to end the relationship with both Heslep and Morgan. Now that she’d been elected, “I knew I can’t be in this relationship with Morgan,” she said. “And I also

knew I needed to get out with Kenny. I think one of the things that Morgan is probably—in fact, I know one of the things she’s most upset by—is that by the end, Kenny was also taking out a lot on her, right? I left her in a really bad situation.”

By mid-2019, Hill was thriving in her new role in Congress. She’d begun a romantic relationship with Alex Thomas, a political writer she met in D.C. In August, they went on a beach vacation together. “There was this overwhelming sense then that, like, this is perfect,” she said. “I feel so happy and I feel like I’ve accomplished so much and I’m doing this important work. And, like, it can’t really get better than this, and maybe this is the point that I should just check out, right?” She said she stared at the ocean and thought of *The Awakening*, by Kate Chopin, a feminist novel from the turn of the 20th century in which a dissatisfied wife and mother commits suicide by drowning.

Hill said Morgan eventually broke up with Heslep but remained on the campaign team in California. “It’s not like I could fire Morgan,” Hill said. “That’s part of why it’s problematic, right? You can’t promote somebody without it being a problem. You can’t give them a raise. You can’t fire them.”

Heslep had filed for divorce in July, and tensions were heightening around the issue of alimony. “I knew he had everything he needed to ruin me,” said Hill. “The relationship with Morgan alone was enough.”

According to screen grabs of private Facebook messages sent to Santa Clarita news podcaster Stephen Daniels, Heslep had been shopping around what he called “the whole story” about Hill very early in the morning on September 27. Daniels, who had hosted Hill on his show, declined it. “I assumed he just wanted to air dirty laundry about the divorce,” he says.

Heslep sent Daniels a long response that ping-ponged between smiley-face and sobbing emoji, in which he accused Hill of “fighting even basic spousal support” and of draining their accounts. Next, Heslep posted on Facebook an accusation about Hill having a sexual relationship with her legislative director, Kelly. On October 10, a writer for the conservative political blog RedState, published a story based on Heslep’s claim. Local political operatives soon had their hands on information about Hill that they were sharing internally.

Seven days later, conservative radio host Joe Mesina—a self-described “Right-wing, Bible-thumping, White guy” and former campaign adviser for Steve Knight—wrote on his blog that he’d received “over 700 images, pictures, texts, and notes on the escapades of one Katie Hill” and that he’d seen photos of her “in sexual situations” with a female campaign staffer. The next day, Van Laar—the GOP consultant Hill had supported in her Me Too accusations, now a writer for Red State—published the first article to include intimate photos of Hill as well as her private texts.

Hill and her staff used feminist messaging. “The fact is I am going through a divorce from an abusive husband who seems determined to try to humiliate me,” she said in a statement. “I am disgusted that my opponents would seek to exploit such a private matter for political gain.” While Heslep has not talked to the press about the photos, his father, Fred, told BuzzFeed that his son says he was hacked and that he denies playing a role in disseminating the photos. Hill said Heslep also issued her a warning: “He was like, ‘You’re going to want to stop with this abusive-husband stuff, because that’s not going to age well.’”

Initially, Hill said she would cooperate with the Ethics Committee and forge ahead with her work in Congress. RedState was a right-wing blog with a relatively small readership. But on the morning of October 24, she woke up to news that the British tabloid the *Daily*

Mail, one of the most-read news outlets in the world, had published a story featuring additional explicit photographs. Hill turned to Thomas and said, “It’s over.”

HILL WENT INTO crisis mode, calling her chief of staff, lawyers from the high-powered firm Perkins Coie, and consultants who’d worked on her campaign—including Lindsay Bubar, who’d been a senior adviser, and Bill Burton, a former deputy press secretary for President Obama.

Alone in her D.C. apartment, Hill opened a bottle of wine. She started reading articles about herself and “just got more and more depressed,” she told me. She ran a bath and lit candles. As she soaked in the water, she said, “I had this wave of *I just want this to be done*.” She got out of the tub to find a box cutter, then settled for a knife. Back in the tub, she held the knife up to her wrist but then thought about what it would mean for her family. “And then I thought about, well, what if I try and somebody stops it—[if Thomas] comes in and he’s worried and he has the super open [the apartment] for a wellness check, and then I get



At the 2020 State of the Union address.

5150-ed [involuntarily committed to a psychiatric facility] and go to the fucking hospital and my family has to fly across the country?,” she said. “So I was just like, *I can’t do it. I can’t do it. And I stopped and put the knife away.*”

As Hill told it, shortly after, Thomas pounded on her apartment door. (He says the door was open and he walked in to find her in the bathtub. There are multiple inconsistencies in their details of the night.) He’d been out with friends, watching the Nationals play in the World Series. “I guess I’d been texting in a way that had him worried,” Hill told me. Thomas says he grabbed the knife from the edge of the tub; she’d scraped her wrists with it. After hiding the knife in a closet and putting on “some inane TV show,” he says he went out to get junk food. “I thought, *What do you get someone to eat after they just tried to kill themselves?*,” he says.

Thomas called a member of Hill’s staff, relayed the situation and said that Hill needed to step down. “My emotional bandwidth was fried,” he says. (Thomas later published information about the dissemination of the photos on his personal newsletter, unaffiliated with any of the outlets he writes for, and tweeted about his investigation on the matter. He didn’t reveal his relationship with Hill.) Hill soon started writing her resignation speech. She sent her finished draft to Bubar, who Hill said edited out the long list of apologies she planned to issue. Hill put them back in.

"I am leaving," she said on the House floor, "but we have men who have been credibly accused of intentional acts of sexual violence and remain in boardrooms, on the Supreme Court, in this very body, and, worst of all, in the Oval Office."

Afterward, Massachusetts Democratic congresswoman Ayanna Pressley handed Hill a T-shirt that read, IF YOU'RE NOT OUTRAGED, YOU'RE NOT PAYING ATTENTION. Pressley and Hill had become friends early on, when Hill—having learned that her office had once belonged to Shirley Chisholm and that Pressley wanted it—insisted they switch.

Many of Hill's Democratic colleagues remained silent. But plenty of those who didn't publicly stand by Hill did so privately, attending a farewell party Underwood threw on the roof of their apartment building. Until then, the silence on social media had been excruciating. "As a fellow politician, I understand why this is messy, and you can't explain it in 280 characters, and everyone from your comms team is telling you, 'Don't touch this.' But I'm here, and I feel so alone," Hill said, tearing up. "When they showed up, I was like, *Thank God.*"

In a video posted online a few days before Hill left Congress, she vowed to "take up a new fight" against what's commonly called revenge porn. She began talking with lawyers and came across an article about her case by Carrie Goldberg, a lawyer in Brooklyn who specializes in victims'-rights law and cyberexploitation and is often featured in the media. Hill called Goldberg, who came to D.C. the next day. The legal battle will likely be long and messy, and so far, the GoFundMe to help cover Hill's fees has raised more than \$29,000. In the meantime, the photos remain online.

Hill was the first member of Congress to be investigated under the House rule against relationships with staffers, approved in February 2018. She is also the first female member to resign amid allegations of her own misconduct. But since the dawn of the Me Too movement in October 2017, four men in Congress—including representatives John Conyers, Trent Franks, and Pat Meehan as well as Senator Al Franken—resigned after admitting to or being accused of various transgressions. In November, the Ethics Committee announced a second probe under its new rule, this time into an alleged longtime romantic relationship between Florida congressman Alcee Hastings and a congressional aide whom he'd reportedly paid more than his chief of staff for a decade.

Hill said there were rumors swirling around the halls of Congress about plenty of lawmakers that nobody was acting on. "You know that so-and-so is banging their staff ... You know, it's very common," she said. "Look, it's not confirmed, so I can't say. Whatever."

When I ask Pressley if she agrees with Hill that a double standard was at play, she emphatically says yes. There's a long pause before she speaks again. "Are you kidding me?"

THE APARTMENT THAT Hill and Underwood shared until late January had the feel of a modern corporate rental or an Airbnb that nobody actually lives in—a place to sleep and shower on your way somewhere else. Hill's congressional wardrobe still hung in her closet like a museum exhibit, reds and blues and tweeds from some other period. There was no rug, no photos on the wall. The closest thing to décor was Underwood's framed poster of Chisholm leaning against the wall and a stack of books sent by Hill's agent: *And Then We Grew Up*, *So You've Been Publicly Shamed*, *Rage Becomes Her*, *Unscrewed*, and *Why Does He Do That?*

Hill said she was tens of thousands of dollars in debt from her divorce's legal fees, and her last congressional paycheck was deposited on December 1. So she was wasting no time in launching her comeback. Hill is simultaneously writing a book, appearing regularly on TV, taking paid speaking gigs about women's empower-

ment, and starting a political PAC with money from her war chest.

Some of her former staffers have distanced themselves, at least publicly—scrubbing Hill's name from their social-media bios and, in the case of at least one senior staffer, removing their time with her from their LinkedIn page. In the immediate aftermath of the photos' release, someone in Hill's hometown put up posters of her in a Nazi uniform with the hashtag #WifeSwap-penSS. Her mother received texts with those same images. A man with a camera began parking his car outside Stevenson's house and trailing her and her husband when they walked out their door. A suspicious, but ultimately innocuous, white powder was sent to her district office.

Hill said she feared that what happened to her will deter other young women from running for office, and her experience has shaken some of her former colleagues. Underwood, at 33 the youngest black woman ever to serve in Congress, tells me, "There is extreme risk in me doing this interview with you right now." (Multiple Democrats contacted for this article, either directly or through their press offices, declined or never responded to repeated requests to be interviewed.) "There is an entire political party armed with millions of dollars willing and ready to spend to clip these quotes that I'm giving you right now to be used for my political peril. And I didn't even *do* anything."

IN DECEMBER, HILL went home for the holidays. "There's a lot I have to heal from," she told me before leaving. "There's also three years of lost time—like even phone calls I didn't have time for, to talk to my friends." But the trip wasn't a respite. Her mother underwent surgery to relieve a buildup of fluid around her brain. Then, on the morning of January 18, Hill found her 20-year-old brother dead on her mother's couch from what Hill describes as an apparent overdose (the toxicology report has not yet been completed). They were both at home because Stevenson was still in the hospital recovering. "I was with him the night before," said Hill. "I saw him in the morning, like two hours, probably, before it happened." She said she did CPR but to no avail. "The night before, we hung out. We talked about our plans for the future ... I was recording our conversation, because I was, like, I just thought it was an interesting conversation. I was like, 'Do you mind if I record this? I feel like I might use this for something someday.' And it was from the fucking night before."

Hill crowdfunded the funeral and shared a link to donate on Twitter, raising more than \$15,000. (She deleted the tweet weeks later.) After her brother's death, she couldn't bear to be at her mother's house and instead went to Malibu to stay at a home owned by one of her former donors.

"I hate pity more than anything else, and the last several months have led to a lot of pity," said Hill. People ask if she's okay, and her family worries about her mental health. "After my brother died, my mom and sister made me make a pact that I would never actually do something like that, and I was like, 'Of course not,'" she said. "It was starkly clear to me once my brother died that that was totally off the table."

Hill flew out to D.C. for the State of the Union address, just over two weeks after her brother's death (members have lifetime invitations to attend). Wearing suffragette white, as she had the year before, as well as her congressional pin, she walked down the halls of the Capitol with her former colleagues, passing reporters on the way. This seemed to have been the point. Hill was highly aware that her new path hinged on remaining relevant. "The easier thing is definitely not showing up, right?," she told me the next day. "For me, personally, it feels really fucking shitty. Going there and being the person where it's like, you're not a member anymore, what are you doing here?"

Hill's book advance allowed her to move into a one-bedroom

apartment in D.C.—for the first time in her life, she had a place of her own. She pointed out the balcony and the washer-dryer. She couldn't wait to pick out a rug. Red is her favorite color, but she was thinking gray and white—a Scandinavian vibe, something calming. It had the feel of a fresh start. "Being out of office is so much easier than being in office," she said. "This year, I'm going to make a lot more money. I'm going to have a bunch of vacations. I'm going to have a lot of downtime."

There's suddenly a lot of freedom in her life. She has a new girlfriend. "Let's put it this way: I'm new at being single, and I'm seeing a few people," she said. It mattered less what people say or who they see her with. And while she hadn't ruled out a future run for office, "I'm not going to live my life planning to run." In a year when she thought she'd be campaigning for her reelection, she has thrown her weight behind California assemblywoman Christy Smith. It's shaping up to be a political circus, with 13 candidates seeking her seat, including Knight and former Trump campaign adviser and convicted felon George Papadopoulos.

SOMETIMES, AS WE WERE talking, I could see Hill calculating what she thought I'd respond to and how. She texted me a link to Joan Didion's essay "On Self-Respect" and said there's a line that stood out to her now: "People with self-respect have the courage of their mistakes. They know the price of things." But when the narrative shifted from the story she wanted to tell, so did her tone. After letting her know in person that a detail she'd omitted came up in my reporting, she sent me a series of increasingly agitated texts. On the phone, she choked up and yelled, saying that unless I promise her it won't be included, anxiety would hang over her. "So you should know that," she said. A week later, even though I told her I couldn't promise not to include it, she texted to apologize for getting so emotional. She had a couple more TV spots lined up, she said. She was going to be on *Good Morning America* and *The View*.

Only hours after Hill appeared on *The View* on February 21, happily tweeting a photo of herself in a pink blazer outside the green room, news broke that the FBI had arrested a hacker connected to her campaign: Arthur Dam, who is married to Hill's campaign fund-raiser and later district director, Kelsey O'Hara, was tied to a series of cyberattacks that had temporarily shut down the website of one of Hill's Democratic opponents in the lead-up to the 2018 primary, just before the start of an important debate. The target was Bryan Caforio, a lawyer who had once been considered the Democratic favorite. He lost to Hill in the primary by a little under 2,700 votes. (A senior staffer for another primary opponent, Jess Phoenix, says hacking attempts were made on the campaign's computer systems and staffers' social-media accounts, but nothing was breached.)

Caforio tells me he'd had his suspicions when Hill's website was never targeted. "Of course, after the 2016 election, everybody in the world is worried about Russia and interference. But I'm sitting there thinking, *Would Russia really care about little old me in a primary against a congressional candidate?*," he says.

Daniels, the local-politics podcaster, who'd also moderated a 2018 primary debate, says many Democrats in her district had been forgiving about the relationship with Morgan and shown sympathy for the circumstances under which Hill resigned. Her continued popularity was so strong that Smith's campaign had gladly and publicly accepted her endorsement and fund-raising help. But now, Daniels says, the tone among people he knows—many of whom knocked on doors for and donated to Hill's campaign—has changed. "Honestly, it's 'Fuck her. Go away, Katie. You've disappointed us all,'" he says. "There are people who are just like, 'I can't believe we worked so hard to get her elected and

all this crap is coming out about her.'" As one Democratic strategist said, "At the end of the day, the buck stops with the candidate," he says. "If she didn't know, she should have."

There are rumblings that there's more to come, and just over a week before the primary, Smith's campaign appeared to be distancing itself from Hill in light of the FBI complaint. "Hacking, phishing, cyber-attacks, or any other illegal interference—foreign or domestic, from either side of the aisle—cannot be tolerated. I've read the latest reports, and they are deeply troubling," Smith said in a written statement. Smith has, however, publicly been endorsed by Hill's PAC. Endorsements come with a \$2,000 donation and an email list, which Smith didn't return.

Hill's reinvention as full-time feminist champion has relied almost entirely on people both liking and trusting her. Her forthcoming book, *She Will Rise*, will be both a memoir and "about how women ultimately shift power," Hill said. (It will be released on August 18, the 100th anniversary of women's suffrage.) And on the purple-and-pink website for Hill's new PAC, HER Time, she pledged to help women running for office, making amends for what she called "this unreconciled dynamic around what happened with Morgan." The possibility that Hill's campaign had cheated does not fit well with the image she'd assembled, especially not when some voters are frustrated that Hill didn't funnel her war chest back into the district. Bubar, the senior adviser who also handles Hill's personal publicity and is helping with her book, was paid \$10,000 in December from PAC funds. That same month, Morgan and at least two other campaign staffers were paid for "administrative services" related to the campaign closure, according to a Federal Election Commission report—and Morgan declined to comment for this article through Bubar.

Hill denied being involved in the hacking and said that the news of the FBI complaint came "as a total surprise to me." While O'Hara was part of Hill's tight-knit senior campaign team, Hill said she only met her husband a couple of times at events. "It wouldn't have even occurred to me to ask someone to do this—even if I were nefarious—because it would have such a low impact," she said of the hackings. Hill said her lawyers had advised her not to have contact with O'Hara. "I really feel like this is not something, like, in any way that would have been worth the risk," she said. Hill paused. "Kelsey, I don't even think she would have known ... I think she would be the same way, like, 'How would shutting down the website for any period of time help us when you are seen as interfering in an election?'" Hill issued a formal statement, but "the side reaction I had to it was like, *Fuck,*" she told me. "This is a scandal I had nothing to do with ... you're like, *What the hell, does it ever stop?*"

As news of the hacking arrest spread on Twitter, Hill posted, "Sometimes you think you've hit your lowest low & are on the upswing, starting to feel ok, then something else happens & you slide right back into the mud. You just want to sink all the way in instead of trying to fight your way back up. But you will rise again. #depression."

Late that night, she shared a photo of herself and a friend out dancing, and soon she was back to tweeting about politics and wanting a pet squirrel. The next week, there were plugs for HER Time in national media outlets, with headlines such as "Katie Hill's Next Chapter Starts Now" and "Katie Hill Is on a Mission to Get Young Women Elected to Office," and a New York Times piece about her book that didn't mention the hacking. Hill seemed to know the news cycle moves fast and that the interest in her, no matter what prompts it, is valuable. "She is an unbelievable political talent," says the strategist, who watched her campaign closely. "Katie has that quality that people don't believe negative things about her." ■

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These creams, sprays, and powders tend to cost about as much as any of their CVS counterparts—with exceptions, like the \$23 Yves Klein-blue eyedrops that turn the reddest eyes a pleasing white.



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Never-
fall-off
French
bandages

\$10

Powerful
(Yves
Klein-blue)
eyedrops

\$23

Measurable
melatonin for
non-stuporific
sleep

\$13

Aubrey Plaza's
favorite
natural deodorant
(by way of
Judy Greer)

\$18

Coconut-
oil-infused
floss

\$9

Dentist-
recommended
canker-sore
treatment (that's
actually milk of
magnesia)

\$8

Gold
standard of
diaper-rash
creams

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“DAVID MAMET
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OF GREAT
DRAMATISTS.

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BUFFALO IS HIS
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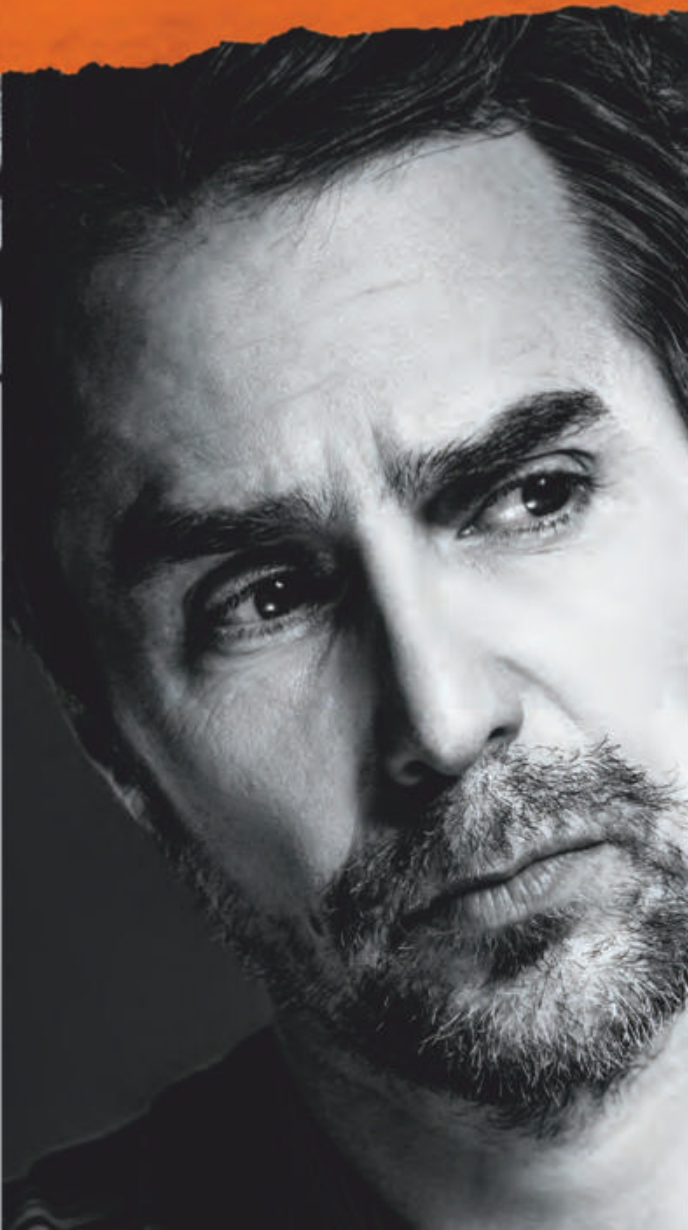
**AMERICAN
BUFFALO**

WRITTEN BY

DAVID MAMET

DIRECTED BY

NEIL PEPE



THE LOOK BOOK GOES TO

Movement Class

We spoke to sweaty dancers in Soho after two hours of what instructor Julia Crockett describes as “creative movement, play, music, contact exercises, and human-to-human connection” (*movementforeverybody.com.wordpress.com*).

INTERVIEWS BY KATY SCHNEIDER
AND JANE DRINKARD

ZOË OLIVER

22, Student,
Crown Heights

You're so flexible.

I'm double-jointed in my shoulders and can put both my legs behind my head. That's why I love coming to Movement class—because

I can do things with my body that are almost grotesque, but it's good.

How'd you find the class?

Julia was my teacher at NYU. It can be really emotional. Once, I came in and I was in a horrible mood. I'd just had this missed connection on the subway—this handsome guy tried to start a flirty conversation with me, and I panicked and ran away, totally sabotaging myself.

We were stretching, and Julia mouthed to me, “Are you okay?” I started crying and cried for two hours while I moved. Everyone was kind of emotional that day, laughing and weepy.

I've been in art school since

I was 7, so I can't really imagine a world where I'm not able to cry in class.



THE LOOK BOOK: MOVEMENT CLASS



ALEX MAHGOUB
35, Real-Estate Broker, Boerum Hill



SOFÍA FIGUEROA
23, Actor, Park Slope

→ **Have you been to other dance classes?**
Yes, and this is not like them. Sometimes it goes toward improv. There will be random call-and-repeats, like “The dog is over here!,” and everyone will be like, “The *dog* is over here!,” and then start barking.



NORA DELIGTER
27, Writer, Clinton Hill



CANDACE MAXWELL
29, Actor and Dancer, Upper West Side



MARTINIQUE WATSON
28, Actor, Ridgewood



DANA ZOE DRORI
31, Actor and Model, Carroll Gardens



GABRIELLA MARRARO
24, Software Engineer, Park Slope

➤ **Nice ribbon.**
I own three ribbons. Pink is for when I’m feeling more playful and girly, blue is for a happy mood, and green means serene. Today is a serene day.



HEATHER CRAIG
32, Actor, Prospect Heights



WILLIAM PAUBNIS
44, Social Worker, Sunset Park



ABI LIEFF
26, *Producer, Williamsburg*



JULIA CROCKETT
33, *Movement Co-Founder, Ridgewood*



PHILIPPE GARCESTO
34, *Actor and Bartender, Jersey City Heights*

➤ **What was your last acting job?**
I was a soldier recently in a World War II period-piece situation. I manifested that character here in Movement—put my energy in my chest, imagined myself as someone who is a bit naïve but ready to go. It's funny, though; generally I'm typecast as a techie nerd.



BRIANA PACKEN O'MELVENY
35, *Movement Co-Founder, Inwood*



CYNTHIA NAVARRO
38, *Actor and Dancer, Upper West Side*



LOGAN RICKET
31, *Actor and Server, Bushwick*



SHANI BEKE
27, *Actor and Dancer, Prospect Lefferts Gardens*

← **How often do you audition?**
A few times a week. This is the exact opposite of what an audition room is like. In class today, there was so much babbling, screaming, noises you never hear adults make. The last time I'd heard those noises was when I used to babysit.



KALIE NATTINGER
28, *Bartender and Student, Bed-Stuy*



JESSIE MCLAUGHLIN
21, *Student, Bed-Stuy*

MIRRORS

Twenty-four arched mirrors framed by cherry molding run the length of the dining room. Why so many?

Because partner Eugene Tollner, a student of human psychology, believed customers would grow weary of paintings but never tire of looking at themselves.

LINCRUSTA

The original hand-etched wall-covering style was invented in 1877 by the guy who also came up with linoleum. Six staterooms on the *Titanic* were fairly swathed in the stuff.

Gage & Tollner's new owners, from left: Ben Schneider, Sohui Kim, and St. John Frizell.

A man with grey hair and a beard, wearing a grey suit jacket over a blue shirt and a colorful patterned tie, sits at a round wooden table in a restaurant. The table is set with a glass of white wine, a plate of oysters, a plate of breaded shrimp, and a small bowl of butter. In the background, several waiters in white aprons are visible, along with ornate chandeliers and arched doorways. The lighting is warm and ambient.

CHANDELIERS

The original light fixtures have long been wired for electricity as well as gas, but dining by the glow of gaslight is no longer an option.

CEILING

The material was “a source of great anxiety,” says partner Ben Schneider. Having deemed gold leaf shiny enough to upstage the lights, the team opted instead for Venetian plaster coated with silver wax in the center section and bronze paint in the coves.

HAT HOOKS

They were sized to accommodate top hats, stovepipes, homburgs, and assorted other sky-scraping headgear of the day.

OPENINGS

Can New Brooklyn Save Old Brooklyn?

The long life, ignominious death, and crowdfunded rebirth of Gage & Tollner.

BY ROBIN RAISFELD
AND ROB PATRONITE

Photograph by Jonas Fredwall Karlsson

BY THE TIME the oyster- and chophouse Gage & Tollner closed in 2004 after a 125-year run, it had had eight different owners. When it reopens on March 15 at the same Downtown Brooklyn address, it will have 378. Well, actually, it will have three owners and 375 investors, the majority of whom were enticed to kick in as much by the ease and accessibility of modern internet crowdfunding as by the antiquated, nostalgic charm of the gone but not forgotten restaurant.

In its day, Gage & Tollner was a place of power lunches and celebratory dinners; of beefsteaks and mutton chops and countless crustaceans creamed, steamed, and fricasseed; of seasoned staff whose jackets bore service insignia marking their typically lengthy tenure. Today, it's remembered chiefly for its anachronistic gaslights, which were ritually lit even into the current century, and for the author and cook Edna Lewis's stint as head chef in the late '80s and early '90s. At that point, it looked much as it did 100 years prior, on account of meticulous stewardship and its 1975 landmark designation: symmetrical rows of mahogany tables running the length of the Gilded Age dining room, its walls embellished with ornate Lincrusta coverings, cut velvet, and cherry-trimmed arched mirrors that reflected the cut-glass chandeliers' glow. Or as the late *New York* contributing editor Seymour Britchky summed it up, "turn-of-the-century splendor, dark and handsome and a little bit grand."

When it closed for good, a victim of changing tastes as well as the traffic-restricting construction of the pedestrian Fulton Mall, this grandeur quickly faded. The space was leased to TGI Fridays, Arby's, and cut-rate jewelry and clothing shops until the landlord decided in 2016 that booming Downtown Brooklyn was ready for fine dining again. It was right around that time that St. John Frizell, owner of Red Hook's Fort Defiance, was leaving Kings County Supreme Court during divorce proceedings and in need of a drink. Noticing the lack of a decent cocktail bar in the vicinity, he decided it would be a good idea to open one himself, and he enlisted his friend and fellow restaurateur Ben Schneider—co-owner with his chef wife, Sohui Kim, of Insa and the Good Fork—to help him fill the void.

They began scouting locations, but it wasn't going well. One stormy day, after

seeing a space that on an earlier visit had shown promise but revealed itself to be a leaky-roofed disaster zone, fate intervened. Almost on a lark, or just to get out of the rain, their real-estate broker led them to the revolving door of 372-374 Fulton Street. Just like that, any notions of a modest little cocktail lounge vanished as they stepped inside the hallowed space and saw its unvarnished potential. Although they both represented the bearded, bootstrapping new breed of Brooklyn restaurateur, it became their mission to resuscitate the borough's most venerable eating-and-drinking establishment. Schneider, a former cabinet-maker who had built his own restaurants, would orchestrate the renovations; cocktail maestro Frizell would handle the front of the house and open a second bar, the Sunken Harbor Club, upstairs; and Kim (with chef de cuisine Adam Shepard and pastry chef Caroline Schiff) would create a menu that paid homage to Gage & Tollner relics like clam-belly broil and she-crab soup, and build a larder of housemade condiments, pickles, and ferments. It was New Brooklyn Cuisine meets Ye Olde Brooklyn Cuisine, with the type of pre-Prohibition cocktails associated with both.

There was only one hitch: They needed a lot more cash. "We were looking for one or two big investors who could foot the whole bill," says Frizell. It didn't work out that way. Brooklyn's old-money Establishment wasn't interested in investing, and younger venture capitalists weren't willing to invest enough (plus they wanted special perks). So the partners decided to try Wefunder, a newish crowdfunding platform that allows start-ups to solicit online investments as small as \$100. (The Gage & Tollner team set its minimum at \$1,000; early-round lenders of that amount will get back \$1,500, with returns coming from a 4 percent share of revenues.) "We determined

that we didn't know ten people who could give us \$100,000 each, but we might know 1,000 people who could give us \$1,000 each," says Frizell. Plus, "They'd be advocating on our behalf to everybody they know and probably coming here a lot."

The partners advertised the project on Facebook and Instagram and at a series of Saturday-morning open houses on location, fomenting excitement among old customers and history buffs and turning the money-raising mechanism into its own form of marketing campaign. And the \$477,000 they raised through Wefunder helped attract 40 equity investors who paid \$32,500 per share. While they were scrambling to raise money, though, the landlord was aggressively marketing the space to other prospective tenants, Brooklyn restaurateurs Andrew Tarlow and Noah Bernamoff among them. The biggest scare for Frizell and Schneider came when they bumped into someone surveying the space one day with actual blueprints for a medical-marijuana dispensary in hand. "We were like, *Oh God, the clock is ticking here*," says Frizell. "*We have to put this together*."

Finally, funding target met and lease signed, the partners got to work on restoration (new, Landmarks Preservation Commission-sanctioned additions: marble high-tops at the bar, Venetian-plaster ceiling, William Morris wallcoverings). And they continued the historical research, compiling oral histories of descendants of past owners, former employees, and new investors. Frizell describes the restaurant's backers as "a real mixed bag, and it's great." They include Elizabeth Warren's digital-media director, Joe Rospars, and his wife, Georgia, who live in Fort Greene. "They were the first to contact us," says Frizell. Then came a painter friend of his named Beau Stanton, whose work will hang in the Sunken Harbor Club; children's-book author Tad Hills, whose series *Duck & Goose* is all the rage among the preschool set; cocktail-world royalty like writer David Wondrich and entrepreneur Greg Boehm; and, of course, assorted relatives, high-school classmates, and regulars from the trio's others spots, including actor Michael Shannon, who thought it would be cool to keep the 21-foot Arby's sign hanging outside as a memento (request denied). Young and old, famous and not, family and stranger, they all share the dream of helping launch Brooklyn's oldest new restaurant—and thanks to the phenomenon of crowdfunding, the feeling that it belongs to all of them.

372 Fulton St., Downtown Brooklyn.

A Timeline of Matchbook Covers



1950s-1960s



1970s



Today

ments as small as \$100. (The Gage & Tollner team set its minimum at \$1,000; early-round lenders of that amount will get back \$1,500, with returns coming from a 4 percent share of revenues.) "We determined

*The dining room
in the 1960s.*



Eating History

The new Gage & Tollner menu is full of old classics (and a touch of uni).



DEVILS & ANGELS ON HORSEBACK

Not one but two delicious things (almond-stuffed dates and sea scallops) get wrapped in house-smoked, molasses-glazed bacon.



CREAMED SPINACH

The Ur-steakhouse side, larded with soubise and béchamel and seasoned with nutmeg and preserved lemon.



CHEESECAKE

With Junior's practically around the corner, pastry chef Caroline Schiff distinguishes her version with chèvre in place of cream cheese, a streusel crust, and a seasonal garnish (candied Meyer lemon for now).



SHE-CRAB SOUP

Edna Lewis made it famous; Kim and Shepard's version also incorporates crab roe and sherry.



BONE-IN RIB EYE

The steak is dry-aged, butchered in house, and priced per ounce; you can get it with salsa verde or garlic confit and a side of scalloped potatoes.



BAKED ALASKA

The whimsical shape of Schiff's baked Alaska was inspired by her own impressively gravity-defying hair; inside the meringue lie layers of housemade vanilla, chocolate, and fresh-mint ice cream.



SHRIMP SCAMPI

Kim's nod to the restaurant's last owner, Joe Chirico, who added an Italian-American flair to the menu. The butter-broiled shrimp come with ricotta gnudi, not linguine.



SEA SCALLOPS

These sea scallops may not be wrapped in bacon, but they're bathed in butter, plopped on sunchoke purée, and surrounded by a small army of uni.



BLOOD-ORANGE TART

Seasonal-fruit desserts like this will come and go. Winter means citrus, layered with frangipane and garnished with vanilla ice cream for a Creamsicle effect.

PORK POTPIE

Never mind turkey. Forget about chicken. This potpie is filled with pork—shoulder and belly—and crowned with a laminated pâte brisée crust.



PARKER HOUSE ROLLS

"We felt strongly about putting Parker House rolls on the menu," says Kim. "Edna Lewis was big on dinner rolls."



**OYSTERS
ROCKEFELLER**

The trick to this herby, buttery classic is not to overcook the oysters, says Kim. "We want the dish to be light with an element of freshness."

WEDGE SALAD

The molasses-glazed bacon is housemade, and so is the clabbered cream in the blue-cheese dressing.

MONTAUK CLAMS KIMSINO

Kim adds a little kimchee to her take on a G&T menu mainstay, clams casino. (Her husband coined the name in her honor.)

**No Bar Chefs
Allowed**

The downstairs bar serves classic cocktails only, most of them from vintage G&T menus. "I don't want the brainchilds of bartenders to get in the way of the beautiful dining room," says partner St. John Frizell.



TURF MARTINI

This old riff on the martini gets a dash of maraschino and absinthe, and it comes in a V-shaped glass—albeit one that's smaller and shorter than those you may remember from the Appletini era. "It's time to revisit that shape," says Frizell.



WHISKEY SMASH

It's in the first cocktail manual by Jerry Thomas, it's on the original G&T cocktail menu, and it's one of the first drinks Frizell learned to make during his time at Pegu Club.



PINK LADY

No Cosmo joke, the original Pink Lady (gin, applejack, lemon juice, egg, and a dash of grenadine) was much drier and more delicious than what the drink became in later years.

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FORCE OF NATURE"**

—THE ARTS DESK

**"MIGHTY &
MAGICAL"**

—MAIL ON SUNDAY

**"GLORIOUSLY
TRANSFORMATIVE"**

—THE NEW YORK TIMES

**"SHARON D CLARKE
ASTONISHES"**

—EVENING STANDARD

**"THE MUST-SEE PERFORMANCE
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“Inside, I’m Still So Blue”

Sophie Allison, a.k.a.
Soccer Mommy,
is a little bit country
and a little bit goth.
By Lindsay Zoladz



UTFITTED IN GRUNGY FISHNETS, an array of glittery hair clips, and a black satin slipdress layered atop a long-sleeved T-shirt, Sophie Allison keeps the dream of the '90s alive—never mind that the 22-year-old musician, who records as Soccer Mommy, was alive for only about two and a half years of that decade. Actually, maybe that's the point.

"I love '90s stuff, I love early 2000s stuff," she tells me one drizzly Thursday in mid-February before we head out to go antiquing at Furnish Green, this shop that's hidden away on the third floor of an old building near Herald Square. "I feel like that's because that was the culture when I was, like, a 5-year-old," she adds. "I was imagining being a teen and being a young adult and how cool it was going to be. So I feel like that's why I, and a lot of people my age, have this attachment and nostalgia for that kind of stuff. It's what we looked up to when we were kids."

It's also a time in her life that Allison found herself reflecting upon when writing the songs on her new album, *Color Theory* (which, like her look, harks back to the days of dreamy, female-driven alternative rock à la the Breeders and Liz Phair). "I was thinking about being younger and how I've changed, how I might have thought I'd be and how I didn't turn out that way," she says. The ten songs that compose the record are even more ambitious and panoramic than those on her 2018 breakthrough, *Clean*, toggling from her childhood to her current reality and plumbing the depths of her family history to better understand her own mental health. "It's a half-hearted calm, the way I've felt since I was 13," she sings on the opener, "Bloodstream," a tuneful and raw reflection on depression and self-doubt.

Over the years, though, Allison has come to embrace—or at least aestheticize—her dark side. She giddily describes her bedroom in the house she shares with her boyfriend in Nashville as a "gothic haven": an ornate black canopy bed, purple velvet drapes, a vintage *Dracula: Prince of Darkness* poster (1966), and "this really cool candelabra that's all black." She scored most of these finds at antiques stores, which is why she's eager to check out the one we're going to. Although anything she buys has to fit in her luggage, Allison is undeterred. "Hope-

fully, I can find something tiny and goth I can grab for the room," she says.

Allison grew up in Nashville, and the first song she ever wrote—on a plastic toy guitar, when she was 5—had a title worthy of that town: "What the Heck Is a Cowgirl?" She graduated to a proper six-string not long after but didn't start sharing her music until she was in her teens. "Releasing to a wide audience feels so much less like you're naked than tweeting out a song to all your high-school friends when you're 15," she says. "When I started putting stuff on my Tumblr, I was definitely more worried about people seeing it and thinking it was stupid."

They didn't, nor did the indie label Orchid Tapes, which released her jangly, lo-fi collection *For Young Hearts* the summer after her first year in college. Allison had come to New York and was enrolled for a time in NYU's music-business program, but she quickly found her own career was outpacing what she was learning in school. "We'd be learning how to book a show [in class] and I'd be like, 'I already have an agent,'" she says, laughing. She never bothered graduating.

When writing a song, Allison sometimes associates it with a particular color. It's not quite full-blown synesthesia, she explains, but "I'll kind of imagine in my head a music video or album cover or something that's very mood and color based." *Color Theory* takes this one step further. The record moves through three distinct sections, each organized around a hue and what it signifies: blue for melancholy and depression, yellow for physical and emotional illness, and, finally, gray for darkness, emptiness, and loss. Heavy stuff, sure, but Allison's lilting voice and buoyant melodies give *Color Theory* an inviting atmosphere.

The gray and yellow sections in particular find Allison grappling with her mother's chronic illness. Ten years ago, when Allison was 12, her mother was

diagnosed with cancer. "It was a hard surgery and a long recovery, and that was the hardest part to watch," she tells me. "But when I was really young, I was very emotionally stunted, and I was just like, *I'm not going to deal with this*. So I just kind of stuffed it down and ignored it."

Her mother has been reacting well to medication lately, but her condition is still on Allison's mind—especially when she's on the road. "There's still this constant threat that it could change at any time because it's never going to go away. So when I started touring, it would pop up in my head more often because I was gone all the time and I wasn't seeing her."

She wrote her way through it. The centerpiece of *Color Theory*, a seven-minute slow burner called "Yellow Is the Color of Her Eyes," digs up all that buried emotion. (*Her Smell* filmmaker Alex Ross Perry directed the gold-saturated video.) "And I could lie / But it's never made me feel good inside," Allison sings. "I'm still so blue." By the final verse, Allison describes the inevitability of her mother's death in language that's both poetic ("I'm thinking of her from over the ocean / See her face in the waves, her body is floating") and straightforward ("Loving you isn't enough / You'll still be deep in the ground when it's done"). All the while, guitar chords swell with the calming ebb and flow of the tide. The effect is cathartic.

As we end our slow loop around the antiques store, Allison has admired quite a few oddities she'll never be able to take with her: a groovy 1970s TV, an entire library-card-catalogue cabinet, and even (with a combination of fear and interest) a taxidermy tarantula. She settles on an "amber"-scented candle. On our way out, she eyes some kitschy 1950s-housewife books that remind her of her mom's ironic sense of humor; she loves to collect all sorts of outdated tomes "about how women are crazy and stuff like that," Allison says. I ask if she has played the album for her yet, and she indicates that she's not quite ready for that. "I gave her the album and was like, 'Have fun, uhhhh ... Don't talk to me about it!' I just don't like getting sappy, especially with my family."

In the multihued music she has come to make as Soccer Mommy, though, Allison has found a way to articulate and expunge emotions that are more complex than just "sappiness." Perhaps a song for her mother was easier—or maybe just more expressive—than having a conversation with her. As this realization suddenly seems to wash over Allison, she pauses before adding, "I was like, 'You can have the album, and that's all I need to say.'" ■

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What Comes After TV?

Snapchat is making hypercondensed shows specifically to watch on a smartphone. It's harder than you'd think.

By Kathryn VanArendonk

➔ AT SNAPCHAT'S New York offices this winter, members of the creative team behind the popular reality series *Endless* were feeling the limitations of mobile storytelling. The episode they had gathered to edit included a big set piece: Star Summer McKeen and her friend Jessica Matis walk through Times Square without realizing that McKeen's ex-boyfriend, Dylan Jordan, is there at the same time. As McKeen disappears into the crowd, there is a *Sliding Doors* moment; behind her, Jordan appears on a billboard-size screen, filmed by a camera that captures footage of tourists. On a reality show made for TV, this is where you would cut to a wide shot, measuring the distance between the two exes. But on one made for a phone-size screen, it didn't quite ... fit.

The team knew this posed narrative problems. How close were McKeen and Jordan supposed to be? Had she seen him, or hadn't she? "There's no time for slow builds on mobile," Snapchat head of content Sean Mills, explained later. He mimicked panning a camera around the room. "You'll lose people right *here*." His hands stopped long before the camera would have come to focus on our conversation.

For months now, a mobile-storytelling platform called Quibi has loomed on the content horizon, promising that, when its app launches this spring, it will be a home to a huge library of short-form shows made specifically for your phone. But Snapchat has been operating in that space for years. According to its numbers, 218 million people use the app daily. With over 38 million viewers, *Endless* (previously called *Endless Summer*), created by Michelle Peerali and Andrea Metz, is the most watched of the 95 original shows that have appeared on the platform in the past few years. It's now in its

third season, and most of its audience is between 13 and 24 years old (by Snapchat's statistics, 90 percent of people in the U.S. in that age range have the app on their phones). The company has studied what works on a phone and what does not, and from those lessons, it has invented mobile storytelling as a new art form.

It's tempting to define Snap Originals by comparing them with more familiar formats, but they're not TV and they're not movies chopped up into little pieces. They're not YouTube videos, either, or half-baked snippets of other content spliced for Facebook. None of those mediums or platforms have radically rethought how mobile stories could work in the way Snapchat has. YouTube videos, for instance, can be of any length, and they're made for a standard horizontal frame; Snap shows are designed for a vertical one, and they play without asking viewers to flip their phones sideways. This may seem minor, but in practice it has been an enormous shift, requiring the company to completely reconsider the directing and editing process. Since film was invented, vertical framing has been seen as incongruous with cinematic storytelling. For Snapchat, it means new camera rigs, scene transitions, carefully calibrated blocking, and a visual aesthetic designed expressly to fit its digital platform. It's a level of challenge that could make the platform's creative partners throw up their hands in frustration. But it's also exactly the type of constraint that can lead to remarkable innovation.

It isn't the only major obstacle, either. Snap Originals must be hypercondensed, each episode edited down to a few minutes of ultralean narrative machinery. If a movie is a mansion, a Snap Original is a Pinterest-worthy tiny house. If TV is a semi-truck, capacious and capable of traveling long dis-

tances, a Snap Original is a moped, fun and fast, carrying little but zipping through traffic. Mills spoke about his mission as if it's both world changing and painfully obvious. Of course, mobile content deserves to be considered with care and attention. Of course, something made for a phone should be designed to play on a phone. "This opportunity doesn't come around often for a medium to tell stories in a new way," Mills said. "As much as that stuff can be a convenient talking point, for us, it's religion."

THERE ARE HALLMARKS to a Snapchat show. Episodes run five minutes on average and ideally no longer than eight. While your typical half-hour sitcom needs to grab a viewer's attention in the first three minutes, on Snapchat, the goal is closer to three seconds. A show might tell a story with several characters—in the case of *Endless*, McKeen and Jordan are joined by a small constellation of friends and love interests—but a single scene rarely shows more than two or three. Vertical frames don't have room for two faces unless the subjects are sitting unnaturally close to each other. To get around this, they rely heavily on split screens.

Shows are structured so that one scene tumbles into the next without a break, but they are not defined by speed. Characters don't speak unusually fast, and plots don't move at a breakneck pace. They are distinguished by a feeling of density that has more to do with what's missing: Every bit of stillness has been excised to optimize how much gets packed into each episode. In some ways, this is the same as any TV series or movie—all storytelling involves cutting out parts that don't pull their weight. But in a three-hour extravaganza of *The Bachelor*, or the C-plot of any sitcom, there's space for filler *Endless* could never afford. Silly faces, talking-head-style interviews in which the subject trails off in the middle of an idea—you don't realize how fundamental that stuff is to the experience of watching TV until it's suddenly gone.

These features are in every Snap Original across genres. There's the zombie drama *Dead of Night* and *CoEd*, a show about high-school friends going to different colleges. *Dead Girls Detective Agency* is a YA adaptation about, yes, four dead girls who team up to solve a murder. All these shows move with the same heightened efficiency.

Operating creatively from a place of scarcity also demands a particular aesthetic. The "Snap product is a lot about stimulating the visual," said Julie Pizzi, the president of entertainment and development for Bunim/Murray Productions, the company behind *Endless* and other genre-defining reality shows like *Keeping Up With the Kardashians* and *The Real World*. She compared it to

a video of many colors of paint swirling together or a body leaping into a pool full of foam. *Endless* is a moving mosaic of the most appealing images of McKeen and Jordan's lives. In a worrisome scene in which Jordan starts drinking at a party, the build-up is a run of beautiful establishing shots: a stunning California day, Jordan pulling a bottle of vodka from a cooler, hot dogs being thrown on a grill. The effect is hypnotic.

Nowhere is it more so than in a visual technique Snapchat calls "screen reality"—essentially a phone's-eye view that tells a story through text messages and apps. It sounds gimmicky, but it's curiously effective when you experience it. The best example is *Dead of Night*, an unlikely show for the platform. Snap Originals are terribly built for the horror genre's most familiar tropes. Wide shots of the series' zombie army don't read well. There's no time for the slow-building dread of a shot that pans around a room. Vertical frames are not ideal for showing a person fleeing from something. The only place to run is toward or away

if you got a video call. You become her.

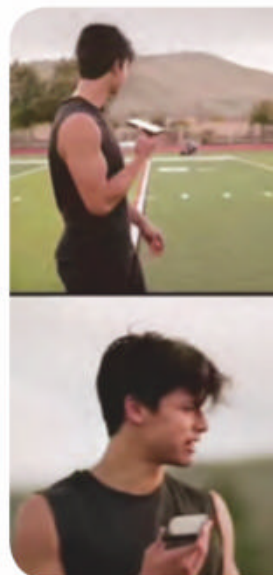
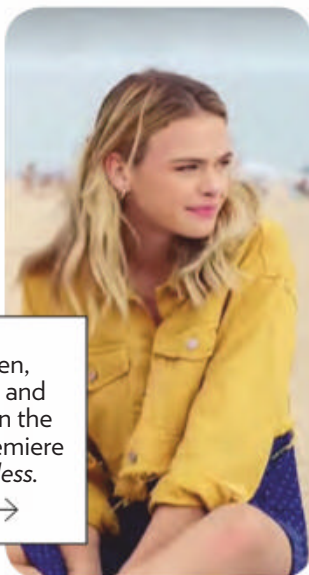
Snap Originals ask to be watched in a way that reminds me most of spending time on social-media apps: endlessly refreshing, moving rapidly from one platform to the next. "A scene isn't necessarily moving fast," *Endless* producer Dave Henry explained, "but for you to be able to do some active work with your eyes, it gives the perception that things are moving a little quicker."

There's a reason for that. Radios, theaters, movies, TV screens—in each case, the starting presumption was that audiences would pay attention to the thing playing on them. Even now, distractions come from the addition of a viewer's second or third screen. On Snapchat, the pull away from an original series and toward something else comes from inside the house: Audiences are barraged with messages, notifications, calls, emails, all on the same screen and likely from within the same application. Snapchat users open the app 20 or 30 times a day, and it's not because they're returning to watch original programming every time. It is first

how poorly their platform supports them. When you open Snapchat, the entry point is a forward-facing camera, an invitation to join its messaging ecosystem. Hitting the Discover button shuttles you out of the world of content creation and into content consumption. But the Discover page is an impossible morass, an unending wash of forms mixed together. There are original series, stories from Snap's publishing partners, videos by popular users, all in one stream. If you're looking for a Snap Original, there are two options: stumble upon it by chance, or already know it exists so you can type its title into the search bar.

Then there are the ads. A five-minute episode can't support lengthy interstitials, so Snapchat supplies brief, unskippable commercials. They arrive abruptly in the middle of a story, last for five to ten seconds, and disappear. Take the docuseries *While Black*, with MK Asante, which examines the experience of blackness in America. The first episode is a conversation with a man whose family was racially profiled by a store man-

McKeen, Jordan, and friends in the series premiere of *Endless*.



from the camera.

So *Dead of Night* leans into its limitations. The viewer's phone becomes the protagonist's phone, displaying exactly what she sees in the early moments of the zombie outbreak. The pilot episode starts with the main character receiving a link from a friend in the iMessage app. She opens it to see a grainy phone video of a zombie pounding on the glass door of a restaurant. "WTF was that?" she types. "Something scary is going on," her friend responds. But as the viewer, you can't see the main character. You don't see her hands or the room she's sitting in. All you see is a perfect replica of her phone screen, which is playing on the phone you hold in your hand. The only time you see her face is a brief moment when she gets a FaceTime call, which she quickly dismisses so she can answer a text message instead. You see her face the same way you'd see your own

and foremost a messaging platform. Any brief gap when nothing happens on a Snap Original is an invitation to stop viewing, so the creators must aim to make you stay (or at least come back when you inevitably leave to answer a message).

It's an aesthetic that suits the medium. When you get notifications from outside the show, they don't feel like intrusions. The rest of the phone is another layer of rapid-fire information arriving constantly and simultaneously along with everything else. The experience of the phone and the experience of the video playing on the phone bleed into each other. They make sense together. More than anything I've seen, Snap Originals are a form of storytelling that replicates the rhythms of digital life.

SNAP ORIGINALS ARE SO well suited to the app they exist in it's almost astonishing

ager and police. "These are not isolated incidents," Asante explains. "We are racially profiled all the time. They're happening even when you don't see the footage, even when there's no video ..."—a pink, sparkling ad for OkCupid cuts him off for five seconds—"and even when there's no body camera," he continues. How much can careful editing matter when an advertisement can shout about dating apps in the middle of a sentence about police discrimination?

The company knows some of these things are problems. Last year, CEO Evan Spiegel compared the current state of the Discover page to wandering through a grocery store "without the aisles labeled." Snapchat is testing ways to rearrange the page. And Mills insists Snapchat cares most about "engagement." He touts the stats for *Two Sides*, a series about a breakup. (Of the viewers who watched the first episode, about 20 percent

went on to watch the season in one day.) But users come to the app mostly for its social-media functions. Ultimately, Snapchat is relying on its audience's desire to share stories to overcome the platform's deficits.

THERE ARE NO GREAT Snap Original shows—not yet. The form is full of promise, but watching it can feel like observing the construction of a beautiful, trendy box. The walls are there, and it's a distinctive shape; you can see why lots of people would like this box. But nothing inside it feels indispensable.

It's still early. When televisions were popularized, it took time before the storytelling solidified into what we now recognize as a "TV show." Those first days were rocky. Plot timing, what visually worked onscreen, how many cameras to use, how to incorporate sponsorships, what genres worked best—all of it took years of development. *I Love Lucy* is widely credited with inventing the three-camera setup, but that didn't happen until

laser focused on its primary under-34 audience, especially teenagers. Quibi's shows will be viewable horizontally and clock in at seven to ten minutes—practically longform for mobile. It calls some of its titles, like the thriller *The Stranger*, "Movies in Chapters" and sound closer to what's already out there than Snap's reimagining of the form.

But both are interested in bringing auteurs to their platforms. Quibi has a head start; it will offer programming from Steven Spielberg, Steven Soderbergh, and Ridley Scott, while Mills cited Donald Glover as a creator Snapchat would like to partner with. What could someone like Glover, whose work exploits the boundaries of TV, do with *this* form? The metacommentary that has defined his work on *Atlanta* could work here, too—a Snap show about race in online communities, maybe, or a series that turns a piratical eye back onto the privileged white digital voices that so often co-opt the language, style, and creativity of young black talent online. What might it look like when the rules for mobile storytelling are familiar

the aesthetic design of the work. People in novels had boring conversations; they went on errands and did chores. This helped make the novel remarkable. More than other literary forms, it could be a closer reflection of lives as they were lived.

TV and film have whittled away at the role of filler or have found more efficient ways to represent it than the pages-long descriptions of making a canoe in *Robinson Crusoe*, for example. A minute-long montage may get the same idea across, but the experience of watching it feels quite different from battling through the many paragraphs of *Crusoe's* trials. For a TV showrunner or film director who wants to, though, there's nothing in the form of a movie or TV series that prevents him or her from dedicating many minutes to purposelessness. David Simon's TV work is full of plotless snippets that slowly build into something bigger. There's an entire genre of hangout comedy, from *Cheers* onward, predicated entirely on the resistance to narrative momentum.

Snapchat doesn't have that luxury. Back



1951, four years after sitcoms like *Mary Kay and Johnny* blazed a trail. It takes time for a form to become itself.

Snapchat is hoping that, as its profile grows, more storytellers will be curious to play in the box the company has created. Their curiosity may be sparked by other platforms, however. Even before its release, Quibi has used an immense marketing budget and high-profile names to produce the kind of buzz Snap Originals has never had. Mills hopes that, rather than being a zero-sum game, Quibi will make all mobile shows more visible, Snapchat's included. "We've been a pioneer in mobile-only storytelling, and to the degree that they're doing that, it's going to be to our benefit," he said.

There are crucial differences between the ways Snap and Quibi approach storytelling. Whereas Quibi is aimed at traditional TV viewers, who tend to skew older, Snapchat is

enough that artists can begin to mess with them? The claustrophobic space of a phone screen could be an inspiring box for a Jordan Peele-style horror series. But it could also be a window of freedom in a Ramy Youssef show about Muslim teens using their phones to find one another. What stories about life online can you tell when you're working with a form designed to reflect it?

Any new medium is a system of gains and losses, and while the potential gains of Snap Originals are huge (truly harnessing phones as a storytelling platform would be a massive industrial sea change), there are also losses. Critical theorist Franco Moretti wrote that when the novel coalesced into its own form, sometime during the 18th century, "filler" was one of its defining features. Unlike theater or poetry, novels made space for scenes that didn't directly move the plot forward, make moral arguments, or advance

at the office, showrunner Andrea Metz and the rest of the creative team knew they'd need a few more seconds to let *Endless's* Times Square scene play out. To get that space, they would probably cut a sweet, ultimately unnecessary scene in which McKeen and Matis place orders at a Wafels & Dinges stand. Matis asks for whipped cream on her almond-milk latte until McKeen reminds her she's supposed to be "dairy free, beetch!" How much could be lost without sacrificing something essential, they wondered? It's easy to cut a story down to a skeletal frame for the sake of peak mobile performance. But like so much of life in the digital age, it's hard to find a balance between ruthless optimization and messy humanity. This is the most crucial task for this new art form. "The dance" of editing a Snap show, Metz said, is about "not cutting too much where you're not feeling any emotion." ■



WHAT IF, AFTER ALL THE DIVORCES (OR, TECHNICALLY, ANNULMENTS), beheadings, and deaths, Henry VIII's six wives got together in a kind of 16th-century version of VH1's *Divas Afterlife*? That's the concept behind *Six*, a musical that imagines all the wives in a singing competition—with six solos, three group numbers, and, of course, one megamix—about who had the worst go of it. *Six* was created in 2017 by Toby Marlow and Lucy Moss when they were Cambridge undergrads. They were always worried about the possibility that *Six* could be “terrible” given its audacious concept. But, says Marlow, “Lucy was like, ‘Maybe a way of not making it terrible is to give the show a sense of humor.’” And it's definitely not terrible: It has already traveled to London's West End, Chicago, Boston, Edmonton, Sydney, and several cruise ships. Now, it's finally on Broadway. How exactly did history and diva worship coalesce into one remarkable show? Marlow, Moss, and the American cast walked us through the creation of the six queens of *Six*.

Wife

4



Anne of Cleves

married 1540

Played by Brittney Mack

IRL: Next up: a strategic political marriage to one of the sisters of Germany's Duke of Cleves. Most famous for being rejected by Henry for not looking as good as her portrait (or so he claimed). Six months in, she accepted an annulment and a generous settlement. The show calls her Anna of Cleves.

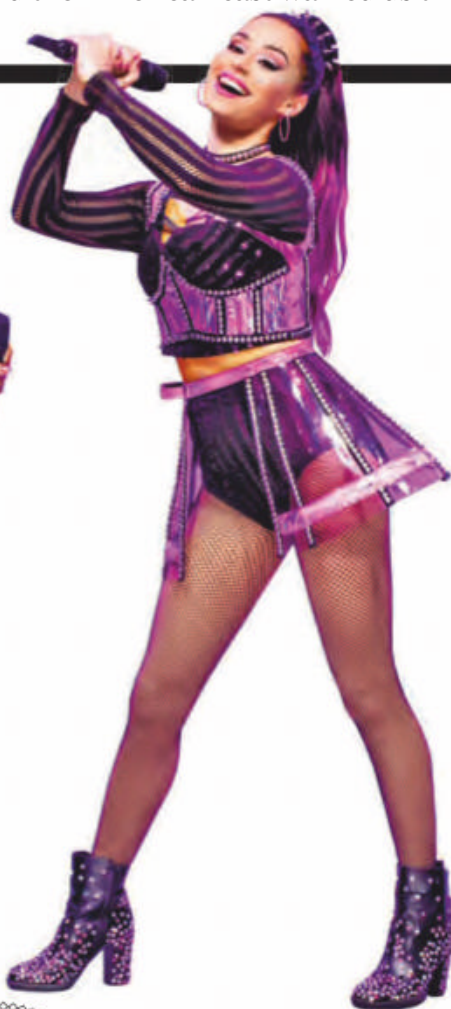
AS A DIVA: The “Feeling Myself” vibe of Nicki Minaj and Beyoncé, plus the wealth parody of Iggy Azalea and Charli XCX's “Fancy” and Lorde's “Royals.”

HER SONG: “Get Down,” in which Marlow and Moss reframe contemporary odes to opulence with brags about “pheasant instead of Grey Goose,” as Moss says. “When you hear ‘Get Down,’ immediately you want to get into this ‘urban’ approach to her,” Mack says. “But as a black woman portraying this role, I don't want to do that.” Mack cites the poise of Janet Jackson and Tina Turner as inspiration for her performance but notes that “it's so wonderful that” in every production of *Six*, the character is not always played by a black actor.

STANDOUT LYRIC: “Okay, ladies, let's get in Reformation.”

Wife

5



Catherine Howard

married 1540–42

Played by Samantha Pauly

IRL: Henry became smitten by another of the queen's ladies-in-waiting. They lasted a year or so, but then he had her beheaded for treason on the basis of adultery. Moss and Marlow conceived of her as the survivor of sexual abuse. The show spells her first name with a K.

AS A DIVA: An amalgam of “young pop stars sexualized early on in their careers,” as Marlow puts it, like Miley Cyrus, Britney Spears, and Ariana Grande (the inspiration for the queen's ponytail).

HER SONG: “All You Wanna Do,” in which Moss and Marlow use the earwormy hooks of a repeated chorus to emphasize the repetitive nature of the abuse she experienced.

THE TONE: The dark core of the bubblegum-packaged song isn't necessarily apparent out of context. So the actress playing her has to bring out both sides of the music and lyrics. “I have to stay in this pop-show mode,” Pauly says. “But I also have to make it clear things aren't what they seem. It isn't until the end of the song that people are like, ‘I've been laughing the whole time; maybe I shouldn't.’”

Wife

6



Catherine Parr

married 1543–47

Played by Anna Uzele

IRL: The one who outlived him, marrying Henry after having several relationships of her own (she was a widow). Catherine pushed for women to be able to study the Bible unsupervised by men (a big step for the time). She got his daughters Mary and Elizabeth restored to the order of succession and acted as regent when Henry went to war with France. She survived him by a year and a half.

AS A DIVA: Emeli Sandé, Alicia Keys, and “the side of Beyoncé when she's talking to the audience as if she's their best friend,” according to Moss.

HER SONG: “I Don't Need Your Love,” a jazzy solo that starts as a letter to the man Catherine had to abandon for Henry and morphs into a group number directed at the king.

THE TONE: In a show of tricky tonal shifts, *Six*'s transition from the devastation at the end of “All You Wanna Do” to the rousing, girl-power spirit of “I Don't Need Your Love” might be the hardest to pull off without seeming glib.

ies to include bandeaux, sequined dance slacks, and temporary face tattoos. (Call it elevated gang-leisure.) Soon, the enormous back wall fills with their images. A camera mounted on the balcony rail zooms in to show us 20-foot-high close-ups of the company sneering and posing hard. Seen from the audience, they look so grim! But onscreen, they look... so pretty. The choreography of the long camera pan along their line turns the Jets and Sharks from toughs giving us a hard stare into models serving runway-ready stink eye. That's the first gesture the video undermines; it won't be the last.

Van Hove's interpretation is Hobbesian: brutal and short. The lush 1957 Romeo-and-Juliet story has been tightened to an intermissionless hour and 45 minutes, and one of Sondheim's least-favorite songs, "I Feel Pretty," has been chopped entirely. Robbins's choreography is gone, replaced by the Belgian postmodernist Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker's work, though her contribution is a surprisingly conventional mélange of styles. The musical itself forces her hand: If people sing about mamboing, then they're gonna have to mambo.

Even though this show has been freaking out critics since its beginnings, the new team has decided to (further?) emphasize its savagery. The already vile "taunting" of Maria's friend Anita (Yesenia Ayala, a profoundly effective actor and astounding dancer) has been translated into an unambiguous rape scene caught in a corner of the set by a voyeuristic camera. The racial makeup has changed; the Jets, written as a white gang, are now a diverse group led by a black Riff (Dharon E. Jones), sometimes deliberately making it difficult to tell the Jets and Sharks apart. The authority figures remain all white, though: Doc (Daniel Oreskes, affecting in tiny moments) is still the well-meaning Jewish pharmacist; Lieutenant Schrank (Thomas Jay Ryan) and Officer Krupke (Danny Wolohan) are still terrifying, unsympathetic portraits of white legal coercion. These attempts at political commentary rebound unflatteringly, since the show seems unsure of how to handle explicit violence when the fights are so dancy. The sly, vaudevillian "Gee, Officer Krupke" is already about police malfeasance, so putting a montage behind it of black people in handcuffs and a shrine to those cut down by cops' bullets is somehow both embarrassingly on the nose and a grave tonal misfire.

And real-world trouble has already touched this production. Protests continue over Amar Ramasar's casting as Bernardo. Last year, Ramasar was one of the New York City Ballet dancers suspended and expelled for exchanging nude photographs of women in the company. After arbitration, he was reinstated. Van Hove and producer Scott

Rudin have both been asked about the choice to cast him; both have expressed full support. The director has described the dancer as "acquitted," which may mean he hasn't understood the NYCB's disciplinary actions.

But Ramasar, once cast, actually needed a very different form of directorial support. *West Side Story* requires enormous things of its performers, and Ramasar's singing voice is unsteady; his acting, rendered ludicrous by his stage-Puerto Rican accent, hammy. Among so many triple and double threats, even his balletic elegance—when he jumps, it's like a dolphin spinning—seems like a small offering. In Ramasar's Broadway debut, *Carousel*, Jack O'Brien's production heavily weighted the dancer's time onstage toward movement, bending to his strengths. Here, he is one of many in the "America" ensemble and is lost in the scrum of the fight scenes. De Keersmaeker never offers him a bravura sequence. In the plot, though, he's the equivalent of Shakespeare's Tybalt, the Prince of Sharks who needs to keep an entire Puerto Rican community together. Bernardo sets the tone: It's a tough acting challenge. Van Hove leaves Ramasar exposed.

Which brings us back to that strange divided quality, that sense of a production fighting internally and leaving the actors to fend for themselves.

Van Hove's austere aesthetic, devised by his brilliant longtime designer, Jan Versweyveld, is leaner and more abstract than the typical Broadway look; he automatically modernizes everything he touches, from Shakespeare to O'Neill. But when van Hove introduces those video components, his control wavers and crashes. The filmscapes in his shows are too frequently sloppy and unattractive, and here they're at their worst. They're aesthetically inchoate (as if made by a half-dozen different hands), and the entire stage composition has almost never been taken into account.

And what good do they do? We watch a 25-foot Tony walk moodily down a street in slow motion, or the Jets bro-ishly pummel one other in slow motion, or Bernardo put on a shirt... in slow motion. We don't tend to see much of the women in these sequences, so they steer directly into a boy-band-music-video vibe. (Man, One Direction got *serious*.) For the live images, actors sometimes shoot one another from unsteady iPhones, which makes a dizzying, distracting backdrop. And some interior scenes, like Doc's pharmacy, are shot in sets that are either partly or completely obscured from the audience. The camera transmissions have the flat look of soap operas, and they do no favors to the actors.

So is it all trash? No. It's self-defeating for long sections, but there's enough promising material to wish that everyone could have just taken a year off and tried again. Sure, the screen utterly overpowers the stage while also feeling like an afterthought, but that makes the first decision easy: Switch off the projectors. The good moments are already the ones that don't rely on video; the rumble in the rain is thrilling, and De Keersmaeker echoes other *Romeo and Juliet* ballets to stage an effective non-balcony Balcony Scene, with Maria and Tony leaning together like ships' figureheads as their communities pull them apart. And instead of the traditional "Somewhere" ballet, van Hove has the ensemble sing the song under deep-orange sodium light, lovers everywhere dreaming of walking two by two. He generalizes the central pair's plight out to the entire company. In this simple "Somewhere," van Hove touches the live wire of his own show. He escapes the claustrophobic literalism of the video and says something new and valuable and beautiful about *West Side Story*. "Somewhere" turns out to be just a stage with bodies on it. Start from there. ■

TV / MATT ZOLLER SEITZ

Sisterhood

Believe it or not, season four of *Better Things* is better than ever.



SEASON FOUR OF Pamela Adlon's FX series *Better Things*, created, directed by, and starring Adlon as an actress and a single mom raising three eccentric, steel-willed girls, boasts four episodes that are stone-cold classics, endlessly rewatchable and rewarding. The rest of the season is pretty good too—so nervy yet exact that it makes almost every other American TV show, even excellent ones, seem formulaic and timid in comparison. The series is filled with believably awkward, occasionally volatile, but always humane moments among Adlon's Sam Fox and her daughters (Mikey Madison,



MOVIES / DAVID EDELSTEIN

Peter Ponderous

Wendy takes a children's classic into art-house Neverland.

 SOME FAIRY TALES are treasure troves for folklorists, who plumb their depths for themes and archetypes often shared by disparate cultures. Other fairy tales are best left unplumbed. Take J.M. Barrie's play *Peter Pan*, which the writer-director Benh Zeitlin has reimagined and retitled *Wendy*. As in Zeitlin's attention-grabbing debut, *Beasts of the Southern Wild*, the story is told in a free-wheeling, imagistic style plainly influenced by Terrence Malick and similarly steeped in anxiety over civilization's threat to the environment. Zeitlin—who was raised by folklore scholars and has more or less remained in the family business—depicts the boy who refuses to grow up as a dreadlocked imp who is intimately connected to an undersea creature called Mother, who looks like a giant, shimmering catfish. Mother appears to represent Nature (and youth, and life, and hope, etc.) and communicates with her Lost Boys and Girls through geysers and volcanic eruptions on a remote island. Her aura is reminiscent of Barrie's Tinker Bell, but the consequences of not believing in Mother's mystical beneficence are far more dire: You promptly get old, are exiled from paradise, and develop piratical impulses. On paper, Zeitlin's story ties together better than *Peter Pan*'s, in which the characters seem random—dogs who serve as nannies, Native American princesses, fair-

ies who are applauded back to life, clock-swallowing crocodiles. But random turns out to be a hell of a lot more fun.

The movie's prologue is the only thrilling part. Zeitlin's titular heroine and narrator first appears as a toddler in her mother's diner; it's adjacent to a train station, and she watches a little boy celebrating his birthday throw a fit, wander out onto the tracks, climb a ladder to the top of a car, and go chugging off to who knows where. Years later, Wendy (Devin France) still lives upstairs from that diner and has identical twin brothers named Douglas and James (Gage and Gavin Naquin). Unlike

WENDY
DIRECTED BY
BENH ZEITLIN.
SEARCHLIGHT
PICTURES. PG-13.

the adults, she doesn't just mourn the disappearance of that boy; she seems to envy him for having escaped. She wants adventure before she turns out like her mom, once a badass but now sagging under the weight of grown-up responsibilities. When Peter Pan (Yashua Mack) and his wayward shadow show up, the three children scamper after him onto a passing train and leave the swamps and the factories behind.

It's an exhilarating trip until that island looms, whereupon Peter greets its belching volcano with "Hey, Mother! Happy to see you too!" That's when I started to get confused. In the original *Peter Pan*, Wendy was whisked away to serve as a mother to the Lost Boys, who revel in their eternal youth but still—here's the dramatic tension—

crave maternal affection and guidance. Except there's a mother here already: a mother of a mother, Mother Nature. There seems little for Wendy to do but watch the kids frolic with Sturla Brandth Grøvlen's camera chasing after them (he looks to be getting in on the fun) and Dan Romer and Zeitlin's score surging and swooping from crescendo to crescendo to manufacture and sustain momentum. The style is immersive, meant to envelop us and bring us into the story, but it ends up making the movie feel abstract and distant. And there's a void at the center. Mack's Peter is either talking to Mother or on his own rascally wavelength. He seems much younger than Wendy, who doesn't have much of a relationship with him. (When Barrie rewrote his play as a novel, he called it *Peter and Wendy*. Their bond is what holds the ramshackle fairy tale together.)

The pirate equivalents are a loose tribe of old men and women who loll around the arid part of the island lamenting the youth that was taken from them because they had sad thoughts and doubted themselves. They hate on Mother something fierce. One of them (whose identity is a surprise) loses a hand, acquires a hook, and hatches a plan to murder Mother, an act he is convinced will turn him back into a child—a baffling notion we have to accept or risk losing interest in the film altogether. By the time of the climactic duel, Zeitlin has managed to wind his way back to the specifics of Barrie's *Peter Pan* but in a way that feels grimly intellectualized. Look, it's Captain Hook—only without the *arrrrs* and the cool pirate costume and the paranoid fixation on a croc. Anything a kid (or the kid in us) would get excited about has been purged.

Beasts of the Southern Wild also unfolded on a semi-abstract plane, but it was grounded in a vivid, specific sense of place (the Louisiana bayou) and in the clear, watchful face of Quvenzhané Wallis as a moppet who scans the water and air for signals from her absent mother. Expressive as France's Wendy is, we don't feel the same sort of connection. Barrie's heroine is wilting under a rigid, unfeeling mother in an England laboring to keep up appearances in the wake of Queen Victoria's death, and for a limited time, she finds Peter's refusal to grow up—his unyielding allegiance to anarchism—enchanting. The randomness of Barrie's ingredients suggests a child asserting his freedom: *I can too bring together pirates and Indians and crocodiles that go ticktock!* He can and does, and the world is more magical for it, while Zeitlin's island of abrasive kids, depressive senior citizens, a laser-beam-shooting catfish, and a hyperactive cinematographer feels more like art-house purgatory. ■

TV

7. Watch Amazing Stories

The late Robert Forster is (basically) a superhero.

Apple TV+, March 6.

Steven Spielberg's 1985 anthology series gets a reboot, with Spielberg as one of the executive producers and a vibe that, based on the trailer for the series, is indeed Spielbergian. J.C.

POP MUSIC

8. Listen to Ceremony

Ft. alt-rock ballads.

Republic Records, March 6.

Following singles like "Into Happiness," "Mister Impossible," and "Pedestal," the electropop duo Phantogram return with their fourth album. *Ceremony* muses on the loss of singer and multi-instrumentalist Sarah Barthel's sister Becky in 2016 as it blends trip-hop and rock vibes with poignant lyrics and sharp hooks. C.J.

MOVIES

9. See Epicentro

A Sundance winner.

Museum of the Moving Image, March 11.

Opening the Museum of the Moving Image's First Look festival, Austrian director Hubert Sauper's portrait of modern-day Cuba unfolds as a mixture of historical-poetic analysis and a ground-level journey among the denizens of Havana—schoolkids, teachers, parents, artists, sex workers, tourists, and others. The director's remarkable eye for lived-in detail and spectacular imagery will mesmerize you even if you don't agree with his theories about the state of the world and where Cuba fits within it. BILGE EBIRI

CLASSICAL MUSIC

10. Hear David Briggs

The Great Organ.

Cathedral Church of Saint John the Divine, March 10.

Until the development of the symphony orchestra, no musical machine or ensemble could match the church organ's all-enveloping sound, kaleidoscopic colors, thundering drama, and contrapuntal

BEYOND THE ARMORY SHOW

Don't miss it, but there are other must-see exhibitions in the art world right now.

IF YOU'RE GOING TO ... YOU MIGHT LIKE

The Armory Show,
March 5 to 8,
Piers 90 and 94

Judd at the Museum
of Modern Art, through
July 11

**Independent Art
Fair,** March 6 to 8,
50 Varick Street

Jordan Casteel at the
New Museum, through
May 24

**Spring/Break Art
Show,** March 3 to 9,
625 Madison Avenue

Curtis Talwst Santiago
at the Drawing Center,
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VOLTA,
March 4 to 8,
639 West 46th Street

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ART

15. **See** Gladys Nilsson

A museum survey is way overdue.

Matthew Marks Gallery, 523 West 24th Street, through April 18.

Here, 50 years of work by Gladys Nilsson, the great Chicago-based artist. Her wild imaginings—arrays of crazy, partially clad, cartoonish figures and narratives of sex and violence and making art and getting by—create teeming compositional blankets that bathe the eye in detail, wit, feminism, bad behavior, and laughter.

J.S.

DANCE

16. **See** Proceso Eterno

The body is a drum.

Baryshnikov Arts Center, March 13 and 14.

Great flamenco has all the cathartic power of a Greek tragedy and the sympathetic endorphin production of watching Olympic diving—the rhythm, speed, sound, intensity, and ecstasy communicate themselves directly to your root brain. Patricia Guerrero, one of Spain's young innovators in the field, presents her solo piece with guitarist-composer Dani de Morón, singer Sergio Gómez "El Colorao," and percussionist Agustín Diassera.

H.S.

BOOKS

17. **Read**

The Lantern Man

An assemblage of fears.

Down & Out Books, March 9.

This weird novel by Jon Bassoff starts with a "news clip" about a teen's suicide, then reveals an apocryphal killer's tale under cover of multiple framing devices—journals salvaged from a fire, pages of footnotes, collagelike photos, stultifying police reports—to keep the horror disarmingly off center.

POP MUSIC

18. **Listen to**

Heartbreak Weather

A story of a relationship.

Capitol Records, March 13.

Irish singer-songwriter and former One Direction member Niall Horan follows up his 2017 solo debut, *Flicker*, with *Heartbreak Weather*, which seems informed by his 2018 split with Hailee Steinfeld. The singles "No Judgment" and "Nice to Meet Ya" trade *Flicker*'s acoustic folk for a more wide-ranging, pop-oriented vibe.

C.J.

TV

19. & 20. **Preview and Watch** The Plot Against America

If you're missing The Man in the High Castle.

92nd Street Y, March 6; HBO, March 16.

Philip Roth's alternate-history novel, about the rise of fascism in America as Charles Lindbergh becomes president, is given the HBO limited-series treatment, with David Simon and Ed Burns writing and Winona Ryder and John Turturro among its stars. Catch the first hour of the six-part show at a 92nd Street Y screening and conversation before its release.

J.C.

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JESSE GREEN, *THE NEW YORK TIMES*

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RAVEN SNOOK, *TIME OUT*

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DONNA HERMAN, *NEW YORK THEATRE GUIDE*

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THE APPROVAL MATRIX

Our deliberately oversimplified guide to who falls where on our taste hierarchies.

HIGHBROW



Trump thinks we're too worried about coronavirus (why do the CDC and the NIH need so much **money**?) ...



... And about sea-level rise: "Get your **mops** & buckets ready!" ...

... Also he proposes cutting funds for the city's public-housing residents and **section-8** voucher users.



Why couldn't the Guggenheim force a little more **intellectual rigor** on Rem Koolhaas's "Countryside, the Future" exhibition?



The Ahmanson Foundation will stop giving to LACMA over plans to put some of its gifts of European old-master paintings and sculptures **in storage**.



The landlord of 666 Fifth Avenue wants to remove Isamu Noguchi's "**landscape of clouds**" from the skyscraper's twin lobbies.



Project Veritas gets ABC News reporter David Wright suspended over **mundane** comments about liking national health insurance and disliking news-division plugs of Marvel films.



Months after Scorsese accuses Disney of making movies that are basically theme-park rides, the **theme-park guy** gets promoted to run Disney.



The renovation of the Frick Collection would destroy the music room, stirring discord among the **robber baron's** descendants.

Philip Kennicott's seriously touching **Counterpoint: A Memoir of Bach and Mourning**.



Jordan Casteel at the New Museum.



The pope asks us to **stop trolling** for Lent.



The adamantly political, still relevant art of Rivera, Kahlo, Siqueiros, and Orozco of the Whitney's "**Vida Americana**" show.

Fin de siècle **manic-pixie-dream-boy** novelist and playwright Alfred Jarry at the Morgan Library.



Hilary Mantel's *The Mirror and the Light* concludes her "Wolf Hall" trilogy. Now go see the musical **Six**.



The **also adamantly political** *The Unsinkable Molly Brown* at the Abrons Arts Center.



Kate Hamill's *Dracula* goes full **Buffy** at Classic Stage Company.

Deirdre O'Connell's **searing**, lip-synched performance in *Dana H.*



But for actual horror, see Alice Birch's **bleak** *Anatomy of a Suicide* at the Atlantic Theater Company.

DESPICABLE



Disney+ **shunts** its *Love, Simon* series to Hulu, reportedly for not being "family friendly."



Are these \$1,655 Maison Margiela sneakers supposed to look like they're **drizzled** in ... semen?

Blue Apron was supposed to revolutionize **dinnertime**. Now it's on the brink of collapse.



Courteney Cox admits the titular *Friends* have hung out only "like twice" since the show ended in 2004. Were they ever **really** friends?

Johnny Depp's alleged 2013 texts to Paul Bettany are revealed in court: He would "burn" and "drown" ex-wife Amber Heard, then **"f--k her burnt corpse."**



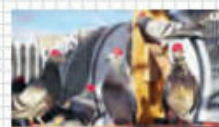
Las Vegas pigeons (last seen in tiny cowboy hats) have tiny **MAGA hats** affixed to their heads.



Because of high rents, RV living is up 45 percent in San Francisco. That's some **disruption!**



The last location of Burger Heaven **gets sent to hell**.



Of course a **Hot Pockets** heiress was involved in the college-cheating scandal.

The cops are cracking down on bike riders without **bells**.



And soon the F-train tunnel **hell begins**.



BRILLIANT

Andrew Yang says if he were mayor, he'd try to get James Dolan to **sell** the Knicks.



Barbuto is **back!**

Justice comes for Harvey Weinstein.



Emma assembles a **supergroup** of pale, haughtily cheekboned up-and-coming actors.

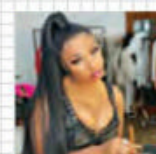


Tim Tebow's surprisingly **good** exhibition games for the Mets.

Shameless's **newlyweds**, Ian and Mickey.



Jimmy Fallon has **BTS** play Grand Central Terminal. Hope you didn't miss your train because of it.



Finally something to look forward to: Megan Thee Stallion says her new album, *Suga*, should be out in time for **Hot Girl Summer 2020!**

The internet discovers John C. Reilly's **hot son** Leo.



Gigi Hadid shuts down Jake Paul's **"irrelevant"** ugly ass.



You kinda can't **not dance** to SZA and Justin Timberlake's "The Other Side."

LOWBROW

PHOTOGRAPHS: CNN (TRUMP); DAVID HEALD (SCORSSE); GUGGENHEIM FOUNDATION (COUNTRYSIDE); THE FUTURE; PAUL KOLNIK (SWAN LAKE); EPICGENIUS/WIKIMEDIA (SEA-LEVEL RISE); COURTESY THE ARTIST AND CASEY KAPLAN, NEW YORK (CASTLE); CASA ROSADA/WIKIMEDIA (POPE); NOGUCHIMUSEUM/INSTAGRAM (666 FIFTH AVE.); CAROL M. HIGGINS/WIKIMEDIA (LACMA); THE ROBERT J. AND LINDA KLEGER STILLMAN PATRAPHYSICS COLLECTION, MORGAN LIBRARY AND MUSEUM (JARRY); © THE ALFREDO RAMOS MARTINEZ RESEARCH PROJECT (VIDA AMERICANA); MICHAEL BODYCONIB (PRICK); JOAN MARCUS (THE UNSINKABLE MOLLY BROWN, DRACULA); ABC (WRIGHT); PIGEONS; CAROL ROSEGG (DANA H.); AHRON R. FOSTER (ANATOMY OF A SUICIDE); DISNEY+ (LOVE, SIMON); GAGE SKIDMORE/WIKIMEDIA (YANG); MELISSA HOM (BARBUTO); COURTESY OF BLUE APRON; (EMMA); BYE LOVE/INSTAGRAM (REILLY); PATRICK MCMILLAN (WEINSTEIN, DEPP); SHINYA SUZUKI/FILICKR (BURGER HEAVEN); THE TONIGHT SHOW STARRING JIMMY FALLON/YOUTUBE (BTS); TONY RIVETTI JR./SHOWTIME (SHAMELESS); THESTALLION/INSTAGRAM (MEGAN THEE STALLION); JUSTIN TIMBERLAKE/YOUTUBE (SZA AND TIMBERLAKE)

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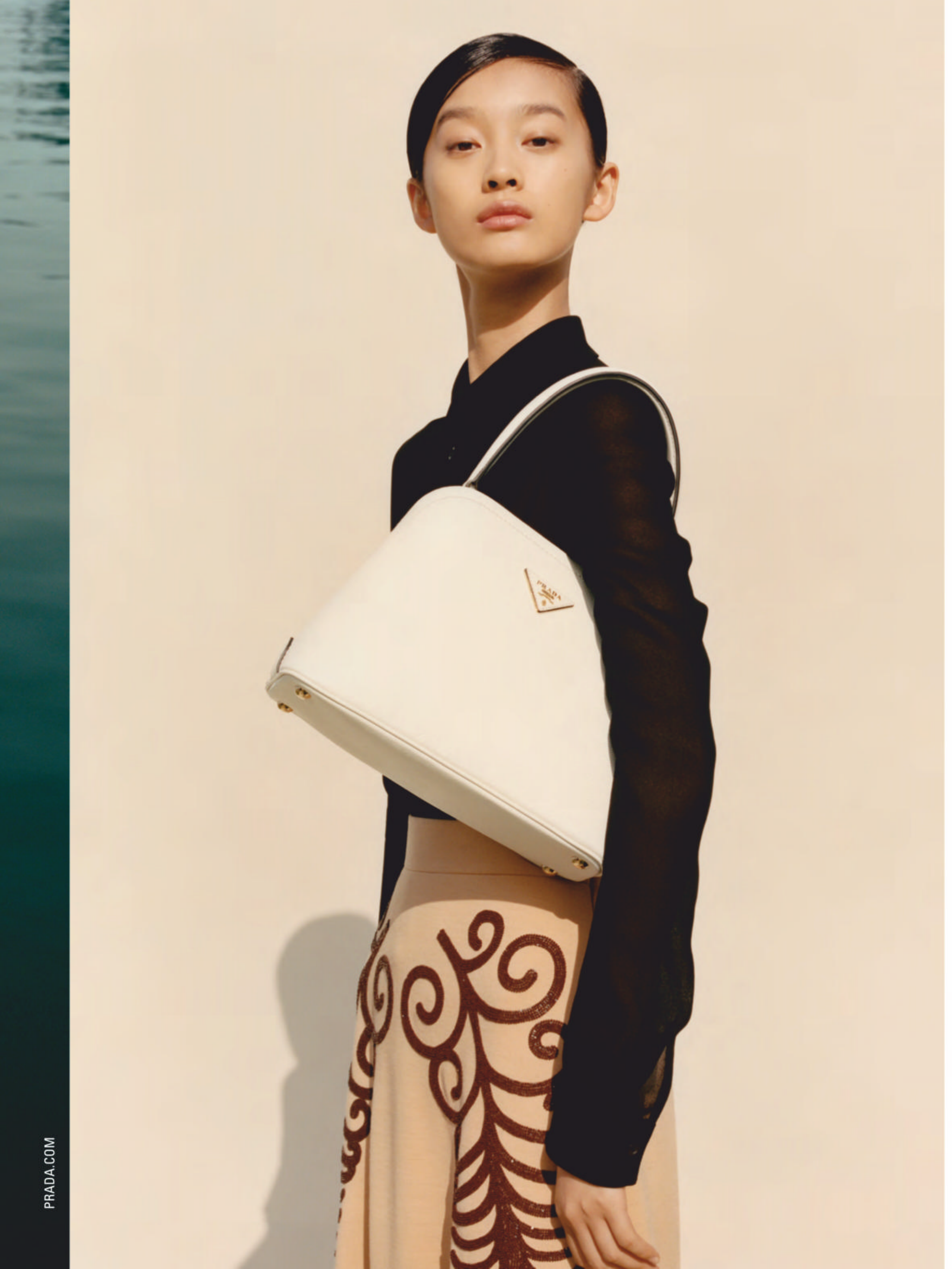
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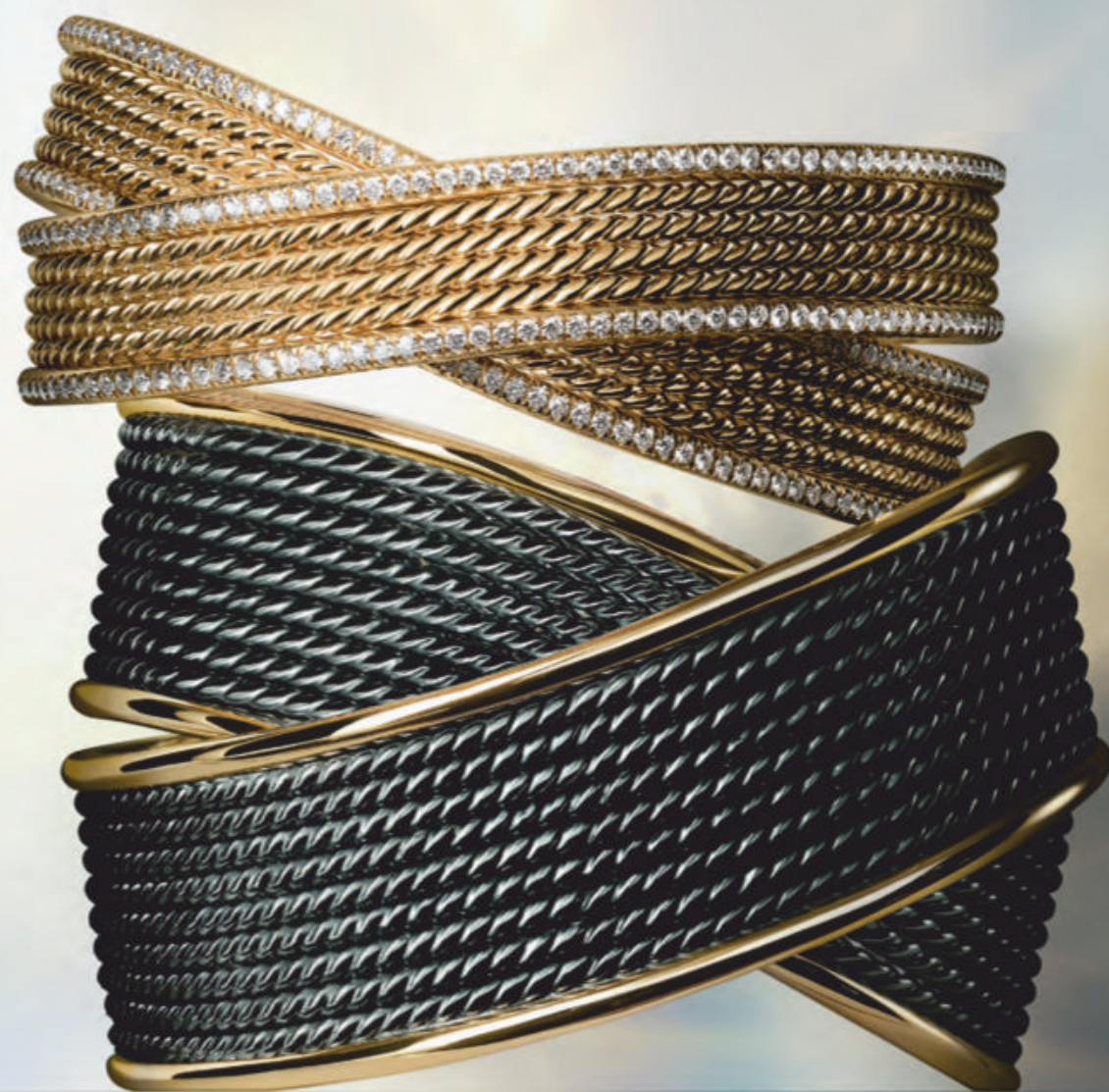
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ON THE COVER: STYLING BY REBECCA RAMSEY; STYLING ASSISTANCE BY DEVINE BLACKSHER; SET DESIGN BY ANDREW ONDREJCAK AT LALALAND ARTISTS; HAIR BY ITALO GREGORIO AT BRYAN BANTRY; MAKEUP BY FULVIA FAROLFI FOR CHANEL AT BRYAN BANTRY; PARTS MODEL ELISAVETA AT PARTS MODELS; MANICURE BY HONEY AT EXPOSURE NY; TAILORING BY LUCY PAYNE. THIS PAGE: ACUPUNCTURE BY NOHA GHALY, D.A.O.M. MODEL: ROBYN WILLIAMSON FOR PARTS MODELS. MAKEUP BY MARYGENE USING CHANEL FOR SEE MANAGEMENT.



▶ **LAURA LOMBARDI** earrings, at lauralombardi.com. (See p.26.)

▶ ON THE COVER: Fran Drescher. Photograph by Maurizio Cattelan and Pierpaolo Ferrari for New York Magazine/the Cut. ON FRAN: **MANOLO BLAHNIK** pumps, at manoloblahnik.com. **WOLFORD** stockings, at saks.com. **CHOPARD** earrings, at 709 Madison Ave. Arm, at left: **DAVID YURMAN** ring, at 5 E. 57th St. **DE BEERS** bracelet, at 716 Madison Ave. Arm, at right: **CARTIER** ring, available by appointment at 653 Fifth Ave. **CHOPARD** bracelet. Foot, at right: **JIMMY CHOO** shoe, at jimmychoo.com.

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82 #Lastpage

LEON IS IN OPENING CEREMONY SS2020 AND LIM IS IN OPENING CEREMONY SS2018. MAKEUP BY DANIEL MARTIN; HAIR BY TETSUYA YAMAKATA.

ISABEL MARANT

REBECCA LEIGH
PHOTOGRAPHED BY JUERGEN TELLER



Follow the Party

Simone Bodmer-Turner (right)
and Gia Kuan (below)
at La Grenouille.



On Kuan: MIU MIU vest and shirt, at 11 E. 57th St.; MAX MARA polka-dot vest, at 813 Madison Ave.; OMEGA watch, at omegawatches.com; FERNANDO JORGE earrings, at Bergdorf Goodman, 754 Fifth Ave.

On Bodmer-Turner: CHANEL jacket, at 15 E. 57th St.; EILEEN FISHER shirt, at eileenfisher.com; GABRIELA HEARST skirt, at neimanmarcus.com; STUART WEITZMAN shoes, at saks.com.

» A FEW YEARS AGO, before Matthew Schneier worked at the Cut, we were colleagues on the fashion circuit. One bleak February afternoon, we were walking along 52nd Street between shows and found ourselves in front of one of mid-century New York's dining temples, La Grenouille. "Let's have a power lunch!" I suggested—half-joke, half-dare—knowing it was a bit reckless to enter the golden, floral glow of the bar area, where for more than five decades the rich and influential (not to mention the rich and idle) have closed deals over pike quenelles and white Burgundy. Luckily for our credit cards and our deadlines, the restaurant was closed for a private event that day. But I always wanted to go back, and when Matthew suggested it as the place to shoot New York's rising power players for our fashion portfolio, I was happy we'd invented an excuse. At the Cut, we try to show off seasonal fashion in unexpected ways. "Let's just take the money and throw a party and photograph that" has been my perennial suggestion for every "Fashion

Issue" we've ever made. I'm happy to say we finally achieved it, over lunch, in midtown.

The power lunch these days is more often than not a to-go salad from Pret or Juice Press hoovered at your desk. But even if power—and the people who earn and wield it—looks different in 2020, what would a mix of the Establishment and the rookies look like? We brought in the new and kept the regulars, and suddenly Jeremy O. Harris was swapping *faux* fur and war stories with the horse breeder and pizza doyenne Joan Sbarro as Ralph Rucci and Alison Roman looked on. Set the stage, and a place at the table, and connections get made in every direction.

Whenever young people ask me what they can do to get ahead in fashion, I give them the same advice: Follow the party. Find the people you like to have a good time with, because eventually those will be your comrades and collaborators, and the best scenes always start there. This issue is full of New York institutions that perpetually seem up for a good time. The crew of Opening Ceremony gives a look back at the store on the brink of its closing—a space they christened with a blowout so big it became a demolition. Our fair cover lady, Fran Drescher, is a one-woman

Fellini movie. Molly Fischer lays into the bright orgy of pink and brass that defines "millennial aesthetics," only to discover an insidious commercialism under all the cheerful neon mantras that took over the world. And if mantras aren't your thing, there's always the option of bathing naked in infrared light, which, as Melissa Dahl explains, might cure ... almost everything?

If that's too advanced woo-woo wellness for you, try one of the candles we commissioned from artist Janie Korn, based on fashion director Rebecca Ramsey's favorite picks from some of spring's best collections. Somehow, the wax figures, in their lumpy finery, capture that feeling of being face-meltingly drunk on fashion. And if you can't be at the big party, you can always make your own by slipping into a place you don't quite belong with someone equally mischievous. A scene is born.

—Stella Bugbee

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PHOTOGRAPHED BY ELLEN VON UNWERTH

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OUR INFATUATIONS
FOR SPRING 2020



A candle made
by artist
Janie Korn
representing
a runway look from
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VACCARELLO
spring 2020 show.

INSIDE Alternative medicine meets alternative lifestyles,
the snap cardigan's ascent to status symbol, a history of Opening Ceremony,
runway looks set aflame, bra hoarding, graphic heels, *and more.*



Charlotte Gainsbourg wearing a snap cardigan with her mother, Jane Birkin, in the 1988 film *Kung-Fu Master*.

IT'S VINTAGE

The Legacy Piece

How the snap cardigan became the Chanel tweed jacket of New York.

By Emilia Petrarca

» AT SOME POINT IN A WOMAN'S JOURNEY to either become, or avoid becoming, her own mother, she realizes that the person who raised her might have actually had good taste. For myself and a contingent of women I know whose mothers lived in New York in the 1980s and '90s, this happened the moment we first tried on, and later stole for ourselves, our mothers' agnès b. snap cardigans.

Created by the French fashion designer Agnès Troublé in 1979 (the "b." was for Bourgois, her first husband), the snap cardigan is a uniquely French combination of bohemian ease and bourgeois austerity, a Chanel jacket meets a Champion hoodie meets a baby onesie. Agnès, who is now 78 and one of the richest self-made women in France, calls it "a child's garment for grown-ups." Its origins were pragmatic. At the time, "I had long, curly hair, so I thought it would be nice to not take [my sweatshirt] off over my head," Agnès (pronounced *an-yes*) tells me. So she got out a pair of scissors, cut it up the front, and voilà: her own update on the '50s twinsets her mother and aunts used to wear. "Right away, I sketched this very simple, square shape," she says. She then added roomy sleeves "to be able to raise your arms and kiss someone." The 13 pearlescent snaps were inspired by 18th-century jackets on statues around her hometown of Versailles.

Decades on, the snap cardigan, an ageless, timeless wardrobe staple from New York to Tokyo to Paris, is having a comeback. The style, called "Le Classique," is still sold in a variety of colors and priced at \$185, though it costs more in cashmere or leather. Sales for "Le Classique" grew by 253 percent in 2019. "In the past year, we've started to have a different type of clientele," says the Soho store's manager, Maggie Nathan. Young people who "don't know who agnès b. is" have found the brand.

Agnès has never advertised, but she understood influencers before anybody hashtagged, rolling with everyone from Jean-Michel Basquiat to Harmony Korine. In January, Chloë Sevigny announced her pregnancy on Instagram with a photo of her stomach bulging out from a snap cardigan. (The photo was taken by director Jim

Jarmusch for a 40th-anniversary exhibition on the sweater.)

Made of a sturdy cotton fleece from Troyes, France, these snap cardigans tend to get better with age like a fine, machine-washable wine. So you really want a vintage one. It has become a pretentiously unpretentious micro status symbol passed down from mothers and cool aunts—either willingly or through a case of permanent "borrowing." It's neither trendy nor particularly flattering, but it signals something about you. "I can't explain why, but I tend to get along with everyone who wears this cardigan," says Audrey Gelman, founder of The Wing.

You don't need cool parents to be part of the club. You can find vintage ones on eBay, Etsy, and Poshmark; many come from Japan, with 40 agnès b. retail sites in Tokyo. Fashion designer Mike Eckhaus found his first snap cardigan at a thrift store in Hudson a few years ago. He liked it so much that he designed his own iterations for Eckhaus Latta, calling one with a curved row of snaps "agnès b. on acid."

"Now, I see people wearing it everywhere," says illustrator Joana Avillez, who inherited one from her grandmother and owns about a dozen.

My own mother—who, not to brag, moved to Soho in the early '80s—bought her first black snap cardigan at the Prince Street store simply because it looked comfortable. Coincidentally, her best friend also bought one. "Do they still sell it?" Mom asks when I tell her about this article. After 25 years, she lost hers to a spill, so I had to buy my own.

For my generation, the snap cardigan is an anchor to an idea of the past, specifically a time in New York when ordinary people, places, and things were free from overwrought mythologies. Most important, it's not fashion. It's genuine. As a friend of a snap-cardigan-wearing friend, Elena Tarchi, age 28, tells me, "I get fed Instagram ads for every new brand on the planet, but all I want is another snap cardigan." ■



TURTLENECKS

Styling Tips I Borrowed From the Rock

By Sarah Spellings

IF YOU'RE READING this in the Northern Hemisphere, there's a decent chance you're wearing a turtleneck right now. And you may be getting tired of it. You can do only so much *Love Actually* cosplay before you're itching for something new. Why not decorate your turtleneck? The obvious way is with a necklace, a trick that has been used by everyone from Gucci Mane to Joyce Carol Oates to the Rock. But there's another level: Take a cue from the Schiaparelli 2020 haute couture show, where the jewelry wasn't an afterthought but the main event. Even if you don't have access to couture jewelry, you can still adorn your neck like a Christmas tree.



The Tony Soprano

Wearing a black turtleneck with a leather jacket and a gold chain is very Cosa Nostra.

The Ladies Who Lunch
A camel turtleneck plus a single string of pearls will make you look like a chic granny. To make even more of an impact, layer multiple pearl necklaces on top of one another.



The Belt

If a choker-length chain isn't enough, try a belt. You can use anything that has hardware—all you have to do is believe.

How I Get It Done: Parul Sehgal, Book Critic

By Bridget Read



» Parul Sehgal is a book critic at the New York Times. She's known for her clear-eyed, razor-sharp reviews, such as her recent dissection of the controversial novel *American Dirt*. Before joining the Times in 2012, she was books editor for NPR. Sehgal has lived in India, Hungary, the Philippines, and Canada and now resides in Fort Greene with her daughter and husband. Here's how she gets it done.

On a typical morning:

I usually go to bed around 3 or 4 a.m. I have a 3-year-old daughter, so I need those unbroken hours to trick myself into thinking and reading. My husband handles the morning with my daughter. I emerge after about five hours of sleep, like a character stumbling onstage in a Eugene O'Neill play. There are simmering resentments and tantrums and dance parties. I don't really eat breakfast; I nibble. I get people out the door, walk the dog, and then, on my best days, I'm able to plunge back into whatever I was reading or writing the night before. A few days a week, I take a two-hour walk to work at the Times Building from Brooklyn. I love looking at people, looking at what they're wearing.

On her reviewing process:

Every week, I have a different book to review, and I typically read books I'm reviewing in one sitting, hence my mad midnight schedule. I also want to be able to reread the book and to dip into the author's other work, which means I'm probably reading a book a day or every two days. Some weeks, it's an author I've read, but there are a lot of times where I'm coming fresh to a writer or an entire discipline. I try to research for as long as I can, because then I don't have to write. I don't bail on books very often—there might have been one or two in the last few years. But I'll frequently have to review something that turns out to be a drag. What do I do? Whinge and moan. Snack. Give myself small bribes.

On organized chaos:

I'm always amazed that people have strong feelings about things like pens or the right notebook. I'll happily write a first draft in crayon. I've written drafts of reviews on receipts. Just however it gets done. These are the circumstances of life raising a child without a ton of child care.

I have my bookshelves organized in a very draconian system, alphabetically and by genre. But I write in books. I dog-ear them. I drop them in the bath. I like the way that certain really loved books show the life creeping in—like when there are little coffee rings.

On the work of a critic:

I don't think about criticism in terms of authority. I think about it in terms of charm and persuasion, which anybody can possess. Your authority is in your sentences, in your lede, in how attractive your own prose is. To be a critic is to say, "Try sitting next to me." That's the conspiratorial nature of criticism. If you love particular critics, it always feels like they're talking to you.

On staying out of literary drama:

To do this work, you have to be kind of monkish. Book reviewing involves a time commitment that reviewing film and music just doesn't impose on a critic. I love gossip, but even if the backstory is fantastic, or there's some very juicy impolitic statements that the writer has uttered, the work is always so much richer. It helps that most of my friends aren't writers. If someone is glaring at me at a party, it's not usually because of a review.

On motherhood:

I don't know what I thought motherhood would be like. I thought it would feel honorable to do it, but I didn't think it would be interesting. I was very serious before my daughter showed up. And now I play a lot. I do dress-up and a shocking amount of tea parties. My daughter is this absolutely anarchic person; she's interesting and strange and very rude and great fun to chat with. I think we could all benefit from painting and dancing and singing. Which I do now, with her, although subject to her withering reviews.

UGLY TRUTHS

Throw Out Your Bra, Already

An intimate look at our worst intimates.

By Madeleine Aggeler

» SOMETIMES WHEN I'M WEARING a low-cut top, I'll glance down at my own cleavage. *What's going on down there?* Does the inside of my blouse look like the balloon-filled ceiling of a political convention before the big drop? Like two hearty scoops of flan wobbling serenely in their fabric bowls?

On a recent inspection, I was dismayed. There, at the bottom of a once-lavender-colored bra I had lived in for the better part of two years, my breasts pooled limply in its tired, gaping cups. From its murky depths, the tops of my areolae gazed up at me sadly.

Despite the titillating promises made by lingerie ads, most bras aren't so much seductive accessories as basic utilities, a containment device you need to be able to move through the world without getting knocked out by a tit when you run to the 4 train. Once you find ones that work for you, you hold on to them. Sometimes it's for emotional reasons. More often it's because, now that their chest is relatively secure, bra wearers have other things they want to think about and spend their money on.

That was my attitude, at least. So when a friend recently asked me how long people are supposed to keep their bras, my response was, "Until they dissolve into dust on your body."

As soon as I said it out loud, I realized that maybe I was wrong. Maybe—possibly—people shouldn't wear a bra until it swings loosely around their chest like tattered college honor cords.

If I was wrong, however, I certainly wasn't alone. "Too long," most of the people answered when I asked how long they kept their bras. How long is too long, though? In a poll I sent out on Twitter, 28 percent of the more than 200 respondents said they had owned most of their bras for between two and three years; 33 percent said they had owned them for less than two years; and 15 percent said they had owned them for over five years. As for the state of

Jenny, 57,
36B

**PURCHASED
ROUGHLY 2010**

"I ain't exactly the Fleur du Mal or Agent Provocateur type. I like a friendly bra, not one that intimidates."

Liz, 39
34C

**PURCHASED
2004**

"I met my husband at a bar on the Lower East Side while wearing the bra. We went home together, and the rest is history. Over the years, I've gotten rid of the asymmetrical black top (!) and brown skinny jeans (!) and ... red rubber rain boots (???) ... I was wearing that night, but I've never been able to bring myself to throw out the bra."

Lily, 29
34D

**PURCHASED
2013**

"The bra is a workhorse. She shows a lot of wear, but she also was supremely hardy to begin with, like an old truck."





Madeleine, 28

36B

**PURCHASED
2018**

"When I first got this bra, she was vibrant and full of life. Now, after over a year of heavy wear, she has the general complexion and energy of an old pack-a-day smoker."

Sophie, 23

32FF

**PURCHASED
2018**

"I don't hate the way this bra looks, but it is a little sexless. I refuse to wear any other bra on most occasions, though, so I've had my fair share of times when I'm unexpectedly hooking up with someone and realize, *Oh God, they're gonna see my beige minimizing mom bra.* I'm not too bothered by it at this point, though."

Emily, 25

32A

**PURCHASED
2017**

"I bought this when I was seriously dating a woman for the first time, and I remember it helping me feel more confident and sexy during the nerve-racking early stages with her."

Madison, 27

36DDDD

**PURCHASED
2018**

"This is my favorite everyday bra. I've bought it easily a half-dozen times in various sizes and colors over the years. This particular one I wore essentially anytime I wore something black (read: every day) for the entire eight months I had it in my rotation."

these undergarments, most agreed they had seen better days.

"Most of them are in really sad condition," one woman wrote. "Old outlines from sweat, under-boob galore, and even some stretched-out bands."

"Too long" was also how long bra sellers said people keep their bras. "I've had a girl come in, she was in her 50s, and she said she'd been wearing her bra since she was 16. The same bra," said Rebecca Apsan, the owner of Greenwich Village's famed lingerie boutique La Petite Coquette. When I visited her and her sister at the store one afternoon in January, they showed me the trash can where they sometimes instruct customers to deposit the loose old bras they come into the store wearing.

How long you should keep your bra depends in part on how you care for it, Apsan says. Ideally, one should own six to eight bras and rotate them every single day. "I never wear the same bra two days in a row," she said. "And I have my bras for a decent amount of time. I have them for years."

Lori Kaplan of BraTenders in midtown said the reason many people keep their bras well past their prime is that they form an emotional attachment to them—"like a teddy bear." For some, this attachment comes from the fact that it's difficult to find a bra in their size, so they cling to the ones that fit them. For others, it's that the style they like has been discontinued or that their bodies have changed and their breasts aren't the same size they used to be. And there's the financial challenge as well.

As one respondent explained, she needs to go to specialty stores to get the G-cup bras she wears. And while she knows her current bras need replacing, "to drop \$400 to \$500 on new bras is not a luxury I can afford right now."

Regardless of the reason, Kaplan and Apsan agree that having a well-fitting bra is key to any outfit. "You can buy a \$2 T-shirt and you'll look like a million bucks if you've got the right undergarments, and you can buy a \$30,000 dress that will look like a rag if you've got the wrong undergarments," Kaplan said.

A few days after I spoke to Apsan and Kaplan, I decided to add two new bras to my limp collection. When they arrived, their bands and straps were taut, their cups sturdy. They didn't gape or droop. They held my breasts firmly aloft. I didn't think I looked that different in my clothes, but I liked the idea that maybe this was the person

I might be from now on—someone whose bras look fresh and not like something that was pulled off a disinterred corpse. This person, I imagined, always has a fresh manicure instead of chipped nail polish. She gets all her clothes tailored and grows fresh herbs on her kitchen windowsill. She is someone I aspired to be but whom I knew, at the bottom of my newly contained heart, I didn't really care enough to make the effort to become. Still, I was happy to playact as her for a while, until these bras, like my others, eventually dissolve, 15 years from now. ■



ACUPUNCTURE

TIFFANY & CO. rings, *at tiffany.com*; CHRISTIAN LOUBOUTIN heels, *at saks.com*.



ACCESSORIES

Needles, Diamonds, Smoke, and Bruising

Whatever it takes
to clear your chakras.

Photographs by RALPH GIBSON

Styling by Devine Blacksher

MOXIBUSTION

VAN CLEEF & ARPELS ring and bracelet, *at 744 Fifth Ave.*



CUPPING THERAPY

CARTIER bracelet and Clash de Cartier ring, *at cartier.com*; AGENT PROVOCATEUR bikini bottoms, *at agentprovocateur.com*.



“You Had to Be There”

An oral history of Opening Ceremony, New York’s most downtown-y retail store, on the eve of its closing.

By Emilia Petrarca

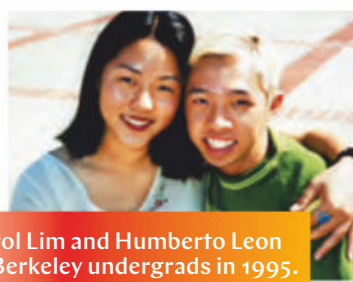


35 Howard Street, where it all began.

» AT THE START of this year, Opening Ceremony announced it had been bought by the New Guards Group and would be closing its four retail locations: the flagship on Howard Street, where it all started; the shop in the Ace Hotel near Madison Square; and the stores in Los Angeles and Tokyo (which was the first to shut). OC was founded in 2002 by best friends Carol Lim and Humberto Leon, who met as sophomores at UC Berkeley (“We bonded over her

studying, me going out, me forcing her to go out, and me not studying,” Humberto once said). In everything they did, they operated on instinct and enthusiasm. It paid off. OC quickly became the defining store of its era—a hub for the fashion-curious seeking new brands from both around the globe and emerging local talent. Many New Yorkers first met Acne, Alexander Wang, and even Havaianas there. The Soho location was a clubhouse for the world famous and downtown famous, who all considered themselves “family.” But it also strove to be a place where anyone could hang

out. “It’s like your favorite record store, but a clothing store,” Chloë Sevigny told this magazine in 2010, shortly after the company expanded to Japan. But, as with record stores before it, the music moved elsewhere. “You had to be there,” says Humberto.



Carol Lim and Humberto Leon as Berkeley undergrads in 1995.

2000 An Idea Is Born

The two friends move to New York and begin working in fashion, Carol at Bally (after a stint as an investment banker) and Humberto at Burberry. In April, they visit Hong Kong: They shop, meet designers, eat, and get massages. They also get an idea: Each year, they’ll travel to a different country and bring back what they find.

Carol: On the plane, we were like, “Everyone would love all this stuff!”

2001 ‘Let’s Do This’

Carol and Humberto meet every Sunday to hash out a business plan over dim sum—cheung fun (shrimp rice rolls), turnip cakes, chive dumplings, and pork buns—at Jing Fong on Elizabeth Street. The hard part is coming up with a name.

Humberto: It had to be rooted in the idea of travel. We kept throwing out names like “Terminal” and then we would be like, “Oh

my God, no. That sounds like ‘terminally ill.’”

C: They all seemed so pretentious.

H: Our friend Shannon Han was like, “What about ‘Opening Ceremony?’” And we were like, “You can’t really make fun of that.” *Ceremony* is a hard word to be bitchy about.



2013
The tote.

Riffing on the idea of the Olympics, they decide that each year will be dedicated to a different country, with designers from around the world “competing” with local ones.

August They each have \$10,000 saved up and give notice at work.

H: We thought we were loaded.

September After 9/11, they take their bosses’ advice to not leave their jobs after all. But a couple of months later, they decide they can’t undream their dream. They find their way to a pro bono business adviser at Pace University, where they get help drafting a real business plan.

H: The original was like, “Our store is going to be open from 9 a.m. to midnight, maybe 2 a.m. We’re going to have a register that sits on this big lazy Susan, and then at 8 p.m., the lazy Susan turns from a register to a DJ booth. Basically, we think all our friends are going to want to hang out and shop until two.” But they were like, “Guys, banks don’t want to see anything about a lazy Susan.” **C:** We still have the version with the lazy Susan. In the next iteration, it’ll come back.

2002 Howard Street Is Home

A bank loans them \$20,000, and they rent a former fabric store with a “massage parlor” in the basement on an out-of-the-way stretch at the southern terminus of



Visiting Hong Kong in 2002.

Crosby Street in Soho. Periodically, men would come into the store confused and ask Carol for a massage. She would refuse.

Claire Danes: I grew up on Crosby ... [The flagship] was a special little spot. By the time you finally got there, your mind was happily blown.

June Humberto throws himself a raucous 27th-birthday celebration in the empty space. It turns into a demolition party when guests tag the walls with graffiti and jump from the balcony, breaking through to the bathroom.

September The store opens its doors. Michael Stipe is one of the first customers. Carol and Humberto work the floor, ring up sales, take out the trash, and even chase after shoplifters.

C: For a long time, even if we were both there, we would greet the customer and then we would go to our office in the back. We wanted to let people look. We thought it was totally normal until one day someone stole five leather pieces from the mezzanine. I started crying.

The Diamond hoodie, which they sell for \$60, is their first hit.

H: Carol and I are from Southern California, and having a sweatshirt in your car is absolutely essential. My mom is an amazing

seamstress—she worked in garment factories—so we enlisted her to help us. We wanted something really graphic that could stand out without actually having to print anything, which would require extra money. We started with a run of 50; they



2002 Diamond hoodie.



With Claire Danes at a 2010 dinner in L.A. for Alexander Wang.

were there with us on the first day the store opened, and they sold out within the first week.

Patrik Ervell, designer and friend: When the store first opened, it was also a place to hang out. People would come by and play music. There were always people working in the back. It was almost a weird precursor to WeWork in a strange way.

Kids star *Leo Fitzpatrick* would use their fax machine and have scripts sent to the store. Designer Benjamin Cho would come in to sketch, while his sister, Cathy, studied for her medical exams. Shu Hung (who would go on to work at Nike and then Uniqlo as global creative director) starts a magazine called *In* with Ken Miller, which is based in the back of the store. Brian Phillips, who would go on to found Black Frame, the fashion PR firm that also represented the brand, starts an art-consulting company there.

Brian Phillips: You'd come to figure out what was happening that night. Pre-social media, if you wanted to know what the cool kids were doing, you'd go and chat with the sales associates.

2003 Year of Brazil

January They travel to Brazil on a buying trip, find plastic flip-flops called Havaianas in a grocery store, and fill their suitcases with them.

May Olivia Kim is hired as the first employee. (In 2013, she would join Nordstrom and is now VP of creative projects.)

Olivia Kim: The first day they left me alone in the store, I was by myself and like a thousand people came in, so I locked the door. I was like, *What if all these people just grab clothes and run out of here!*

2004 Year of Germany

March The store makes its first \$1 million in total sales.

H: Carol and I had a really crazy idea that the minute we ran up that millionth-dollar transaction, we were going to throw confetti at this person. We had also been collecting this goody bag of everything we loved that we were



The OC office in 2010.

going to hand them. It happened to be someone we knew. She bought a pair of sneakers for her boyfriend and was like, "Hey, I'm in a rush." When we went to ring her up, we were like, "Oh my gosh... she's the one." And so Carol and I, of course, acted insane. As soon as she paid and we rang up her credit card, we threw all this confetti over her head. She was just like, "What is going on, guys?" And we were like, "Congratulations!"



2004 Nike collab.

She was all dressed up for dinner for her boyfriend's birthday. It was kind of a hilarious mess.

August After working with only their friends, Carol and Humberto do their first brand collaboration, with Nike, for the 2004 Olympics. They invite each designer and artist they carry to create a unique item, turning the entire store into a Nike shop called Souvenir.

2005 Year of the U.K.

They bring Topshop to the U.S.

C: When we approached [Topshop], the idea was completely foreign to them because they had never wholesaled their clothing before. They were confused why we wanted them next to emerging brands like Gareth Pugh, Peter Pilotto, and Peter Jensen. But to us and our friends, Topshop was a crucial part of the London fashion experience.

2006 Year of Sweden

They bring Acne and Cheap Monday to the U.S.

C: I first noticed Acne when we were in Berlin in 2004. We started selling the whole collection at the store, along with other Swedish brands like Cheap Monday. We actually became for a while Acne's retail partner in the U.S., helping them open a Soho store.

2007 Year of the USA

February They are one of the first to sell Alexander Wang, who shopped at the store while a student at Parsons.

April OC opens its first branch in L.A. in Charlie Chaplin's former dance studio on La Cienega Boulevard.

C: We didn't believe in making it a store with only textbook L.A. summery jersey products all year round.

About this time, back in New York, they realize the staff seems to be letting OC's status as the "It" store go to their heads.

H: We had to have a lot of talks with the staff. We would go in and have to tell them, like, "Don't think you're cool. What's cool is how not cool you guys are."

C: We had to have a big staff meeting in New York. We'd gotten maybe four or five texts in a row from friends saying, "Your staff is horrendous," and we'd seen it too. We had a major conversation. We said, "You have the choice today: You can either walk out, or you can change your attitude." It was intense. It was the first time I'd

seen Humberto cry in all the years I'd known him. We were so pissed! We took it so personally.

May Jacky Tang is hired as manager.

Jacky Tang: It was an intimidating store



2003 Introducing Havaianas.

The Tokyo store's new location opened in 2013.



With Ashley, left, and Mary-Kate Olsen at the Tokyo store opening in 2009.



Chloë Sevigny wearing Chloë Sevigny for OC in 2010.



to walk into, so I made sure that, if it was going to be a clubhouse, we welcomed everyone into the club. If you are a retail associate, you are a customer's friend. You are also a stylist; you're not just selling clothes. Some of those looks are really difficult to put together.

That said, it increasingly becomes a place for celebrities to shop.

Jacky: One time, Lindsay Lohan, Kim Kardashian, and Chloë Sevigny all came into the store at once. It had never really occurred to me that there could be more than one VIP at a time. Lindsay came in first. She lived down the street, so she came in often. So we blocked out a fitting room for her, then Kim came in with Kris Jenner and we were like, "Uh ... we don't have a fitting room for Kim." I had to ask Kim if she would share a fitting room with Lindsay. Luckily, Chloë just came in to pick something up. I'm not even sure she was aware that was all going on.

2008 Year of Japan

March In an interview, Chloë Sevigny is asked whom she would ever want to collaborate with on a fashion line, and she says, "Opening Ceremony." Humberto asks her to lunch to see if she's serious. She is: The collection is a huge hit, and they collaborate many more times.

Chloë Sevigny: I started seeing those Diamond sweatshirts around town, and I was like, *Who makes those?* So that was the introduction. And then I guess I saw Humberto out at clubs [like Sway]. They were my peers. So much of fashion and streetwear tries to be so cool, but they were more about family.

Carol and Humberto have this can-do attitude, and there's no cynicism. None. No "Ughs!" or eye-roll-y fashion stuff, ever.

August They keep the store open for 72 hours straight to celebrate the Olympics.

Jacky: We did an in-store dance party with Hercules and Love Affair. We did astrology readings with Susan Miller. We did a double-Dutch contest and Ping-Pong tournament. It was a feat to convince staff members to start their shifts at 5 a.m.

By now, OC has its own blog, with food maps for every city and new music.

C: One of our most popular columns was called "Wish You Were Here," and we would take pictures of wherever we went on our trips. One time, our friend visited a really small village in Ireland, and he was wearing the Diamond sweatshirt. A girl who worked at the pub knew what it was because she read the blog. He said she talked about the store and us as if she knew us.



2009 'Where the Wild Things Are' collection.

2009 The Scale-Up

Which means e-commerce, more collaborations, a bigger wholesale operation, and a store in Japan.

Olivia: I really do believe Opening Ceremony put the concept of collaborations on the

map for retail stores.

C: Most of the time, [brands] had no idea who we were or what we were about, so we were always up to the challenge of showing them and proving a collaboration through our lens could open up their brands to a new audience.

In their e-commerce, store employees and onetime interns, like Anna Gray, are cast as models.

Anna Gray: Everyone that worked in the store could, in a pinch, be an e-comm model. There were always people running up and down the stairs shouting, "We need another man!" The shoots were a shitshow, but in a fun way. I also doubled as an intern, and I would just go there

for so many hours all the time and I was paid in trade. They did feed me lunch, though.

August OC partners with the Japanese holding company Onward to open its first store in Tokyo after a buying trip leaves them disappointed. Kirsten Dunst, Jason Schwartzman, Andy Samberg, and the Olsen twins all attend the opening.

September OC collaborates with Spike Jonze on a *Where the Wild Things Are* collection. They sell out of the \$610 furry adult onesie with ears and a tail in one hour.

H: I was introduced to Spike through Jason Schwartzman at Jason's mom's Christmas party. We became best friends overnight. When *Where the Wild Things Are* came out, we decided to do an entire faux-fur collection based on each Wild Thing. He was like, "Who's going to want that?" And we were like, "Trust us." The day that it launched, the first person that came through the door was Jake Gyllenhaal to buy that Max outfit. He needed it.

2010 Year of France

Carol Song, former buying director: When we first started with smaller countries, it was hard to get more established designers to understand what we were doing. When we did France, we were able to get a lot of cool young French designers and then someone as established as Jean Paul Gaultier.

February They open an outpost inside the Ace Hotel near Madison Square, which sells souvenirs like Alexander Wang tote bags. Solange and the Dirty Projectors play at the opening party.

June They expand next door in Soho to 33 Howard, previously home to a "hair salon" that was,

curiously, not open during the day. Of course, they throw another pre-renovation party. This time, Beyoncé comes.

Jesse Hudnutt, former sales associate who became men's buying director: It was 90 percent shop kids, but Humberto is good friends with Solange, and Beyoncé came, and it was kind of just ... chill? We were all dancing together in this little space.

2011 Year of Argentina

February OC collaborates with Rodarte on a ready-to-wear collection.

July Carol and Humberto are appointed creative directors at Kenzo.

C: We had been approached to work on other brands and other lines, but we thought about brands that we'd be excited about and Kenzo was on that list.

The first big hit, of course, is a sweatshirt (with a tiger on it).

November Rihanna's *Talk That Talk* album comes out with her wearing an OC sale-rack dress on the cover.



2011 Rihanna wears OC on her album cover.

Mel Offenberg, stylist: The night before the cover shoot, I wanted to change her look for a new era.

I ran over to OC, which is a block from my studio,

and found an Opening Ceremony camo minidress on a sale rack in the basement.

2012 Year of Korea

September OC celebrates its tenth anniversary with a Rizzoli book and a party at Webster Hall.

Phillips: The idea was that every room would be a different legendary New York party. We had every amazing DJ, every promoter, every crew of kids from

Spike Jonze and Jonah Hill at the 2014 Met Opera show.



The 2014 chocolate-wall runway show.



conclusion that the only way we could try to make it work is if someone plugged in the generator, which could electrocute them.

Our incredible lighting designer rose to the challenge, despite everyone begging him not to. He had his assistant stand behind him with a wood plank to hit him with in case he started getting electrocuted. We were dead silent when he plugged it in... Thankfully, he was okay, but



2015 Varsity Beyoncé.

nothing happened. At this point, the crowd had been waiting almost an hour and was getting antsy. Of course, right when our PR team started to let people in, the lights came on, and the entire set started inflating.

September OC puts on a "Pageant of the People" at the Jacob Javits Convention Center. Fred Armisen and Carrie Brownstein host a cast of women, including Aidy Bryant, Ali Wong, Whoopi Goldberg, Rosario Dawson, and Jessica Williams, each of whom takes the mic to talk about a different political issue. In the Olympics-style ceremony, 47 countries are represented with a flag and a custom varsity jacket.

H: We took the idea of Trump's beauty pageants and twisted it to make it a pageant of the people. The ceremony part was really important. Every single person carrying the flags was of the origin of where that flag came from. We scouted people from all over New York, so the Polish flag was held by a kid we found in a grocery store. We cried at the end, and I think a lot of people cried. We needed that.

Fred Armisen: I honestly have never had an experience like that, before or after.

2017 OC's 15th Anniversary

January OC collaborates with choreographer Justin Peck on *The Times Are Racing*, a ballet in which the dancers all wear sneakers.

The 2016 show inspired by 'Blade Runner.'



Justin Peck: I had always been obsessed with their stores. I ended up meeting Humberto through artist Marcel Dzama, one of my visual collaborators. I asked if he'd be up for working on a ballet, and that led to [the dances] *New Blood* and *The Times Are Racing*.



2017 Vans that sparkle!

March OC drops glitter Vans.

2018

March OC brings its show to Disneyland to celebrate the 90th anniversary of Mickey Mouse. **September** "The Gift of Showz," a 100 percent LGBTQA+ show, is held at the club Le Poisson Rouge and hosted by Sasha Velour, featuring a surprise appearance from Christina Aguilera.

2020 Year of Mexico

January OC sells its intellectual property and trademark to New Guards Group, which owns Off-White and Heron Preston. The retail stores will close, but Carol and Humberto will remain co-creative directors of the house line.

C: We always say that the physical will change, but that emotional connection is forever. When I hear people say, "Oh, that's so OC," I think that's a major accomplishment. We've created a feeling.

H: The store was a meeting point for people. With whatever we create, we always keep that in mind. What's come out of this is an amazing community. That's not going to change. And if you think about it that way, you feel less sad about it.

New York City, like the Sway kids, the goth kids, the Misshapes, the hip-hop kids—every single different constituency was brought together under one roof that night. People were freaking out. I've never seen a door like that.

November OC collaborates with longtime shopper Yoko Ono on a collection inspired by John Lennon's "very sexy bod." Whenever she would come into the store, they'd pull a special rack for her of black and white items.



2012 Yoko Ono—designed sweats.

2013 Year of Belgium

September OC hosts its first runway show, with models coming out of a fleet of cars. Justin Bieber is in the front row.

H: The collection was all about this street-racing culture that Carol and I grew up with in high school with our Asian friends. No one in the audience knew, and when the headlights of the cars came on, I remember Rihanna screaming and clapping.

C: Everyone in the front row also got a Cronut.

Jonze write a 30-minute play titled 100% Lost Cotton for OC's show at the Metropolitan Opera House. John Cameron Mitchell plays Humberto, and Catherine Keener plays Carol.

Jonah Hill: That was my first time working in fashion at all. I was always scared of fashion because I thought it was intimidating. It was also my first time working with Spike Jonze. If I didn't have the experience of working with Carol and Humberto, I don't think I would have explored it the way I am now. They made me realize that fashion could be fun and not to be taken too seriously.

November Humberto designs Solange's wedding dress under the Kenzo label.

2015

September OC is early on the vape craze; PAX sponsors its spring 2016 show, and the stores start selling vape pens.



2013 Front-row Cronut.

2016 Year of China

February OC collaborates with Syd Mead, the concept artist responsible for the look of *Blade Runner*, on a futuristic collection.

H: Our entire set was comprised of around 20 of the futuristic vehicles [Mead] had drawn, blown up into massive inflatables. About five minutes before the show, the lights went out and all of the inflatables completely deflated. About 700 people were outside waiting to be let in. Our producer came to the

2014 Year of Russia

February OC hosts a show with 2,000 pounds of chocolate melting down a wall next to the runway.

April OC collaborates with Teva. That same month, Berkshire Partners LLC takes a minority stake in the company—OC's first outside investment since opening.



2014 Update on Teva.

September Jonah Hill and Spike

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MOTIVATE ME

I Want This Cheer Coach to Run My Life

By Anna Silman

▶ LIKE MANY PEOPLE, I have become engrossed in *Cheer*, Netflix's new docuseries about the superstar squad at Navarro College. But mostly I have become enthralled by one character, a real-life legend who makes *Friday Night Lights*' Coach Taylor look like a rec-league zhlub: Coach Monica Aldama, the Bill Belichick of cheerleading with perfect square French tips. "If you're not giving your best, you're going to have a problem with Monica," her husband says with a haunted look in his eyes. "She doesn't put up with weakness." Clearly, her tactics work, because Monica's kids would do anything for her. As one of her cheerleaders says when Monica asks her to try an incredibly dangerous toss for the first time, "People have broken their necks doing this, but Monica needs me to do it, so I'll just do it ... I would take a bullet for her." Frankly, same. If only I had a Monica to run my life. I can imagine how much better I would be at pretty much everything. Maybe I wouldn't have given up piano after four lessons. Maybe I would be able to run more than half a mile without my internal organs breaking down. I would certainly work out and floss and remember to make my bed every morning, because, as Monica says, "How can you expect to be successful if you don't organize your life?" Some days, I wish Monica could stand next to me while I write, looking disapprovingly down at her bejeweled Apple Watch as I struggle to craft a paragraph that will earn her respect. Do you think she'd care that I was out drinking last night and have a hangover and am struggling to put together a strong closing sentence? No, she would not. I may not know much about cheerleading, but I know Monica would scream at me to be the best version of myself, and personally, that's all I want. If I have to tumble out of my desk chair and break my neck to achieve greatness, so be it.

PHOTOGRAPH: COURTESY OF NETFLIX (CHEER)

Photographs by HANNAH WHITAKER

An aerial photograph of New York City at sunset. The sky is a mix of purple, pink, and blue. In the foreground on the right, a modern skyscraper with a glass facade and a unique triangular top is visible. A sky deck extends from the building, with several people standing on it. The rest of the city, including the Hudson River and the Manhattan skyline with various skyscrapers, is visible in the background.

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MIU MIU

GUCCI

SAINT LAURENT BY
ANTHONY
VACCARELLO

DRIES VAN NOTEN

Artist Janie Korn cast our favorite runway looks of the season as candles.



PRADA

BALENCIAGA

PYER MOSS

DIOR

MARC JACOBS

LOUIS VUITTON



LOUIS VUITTON
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 and shoes, at
 louisvuitton.com.



MARC JACOBS
 dress and Stephen
 Jones for Marc
 Jacobs headpiece,
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DIOR dress,
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BALENCIAGA
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 and skirt,
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 at nordstrom.com.



SAINT LAURENT
 BY ANTHONY
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GUCCI dress,
 hat, and boots,
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MIU MIU dress,
 boots, and bag,
 at 11 E. 57th St.



RICK OWENS
 bodysuit, dress,
 bag, and boots,
 at 30 Howard St.



MARNI
 dress, at 822
 Madison Ave.

CH-CH-CHANGES

Raf Simons Will Join Miuccia Prada

Inside a fashion partnership for the ages.

By Cathy Horyn

➤ AS THE MILAN FALL SHOWS were ending—amid the dreadful news of a surge in the number of coronavirus cases in Italy—a select number of journalists were summoned to a secretive press conference at Prada. Most could have guessed the purpose: Raf Simons, the influential menswear designer who'd recently tried to overhaul Calvin Klein, was joining Prada. The move had been rumored for months.

Still, the news came with an unexpected jolt: Simons would be co-designing the brand with Miuccia Prada, beginning April 2, with their first collection to be shown in Milan in September. This isn't a one-off collaboration. As Prada said, "In theory, it's forever."

So one of the best-known luxury brands in the world will now draw on the imaginations of two of the industry's most creative minds. "We think it's probably the first time that two designers, two mature designers, decided to work together," said Prada, who was wearing a navy sweater and pants with an antique diamond necklace.

Does Prada—or any major luxury brand—really need two huge talents to design some interesting new clothes? And at a time when a lot of consumers are more attuned to a celebrity label (think of the Rihanna-induced madness at Bergdorf's during New York Fashion Week) or maybe limiting their designer purchases to shoes or a bag?

Well, yes. The message behind the Prada-Simons partnership is that creativity matters. It should be the motor of the luxury industry, and its products (I mean clothes as well as accessories) should be bold and risky. That's the definition of fashion. And for decades, that was the assumption—that designers, whether a Lagerfeld or a Gaultier or a McQueen, had complete license to disturb the peace.

But in the past few years, as Prada and Simons themselves have acknowledged in interviews, there is less and less time to actually create. When Simons was creative director at Dior (from 2012 to 2015, before Calvin Klein), he and his team typically had about a month to conceive and execute a runway collection. That was partly

because they were producing so many shows a year and with theatrical staging. In 2004, Prada, in an interview with Michael Specter of *The New Yorker*, talked about the push-pull between her own independent ideas and an immensely successful brand. She said, "I want the name Prada to be huge. But also I want to make what I want to make and what I want to wear." It's safe to say that has become harder.

Certainly, Prada, 70, and Simons, 52, have a long, intertwined history. Both have a wide visual vocabulary, ranging from nostalgia to futurism to youth culture. They also connect in their passion for contemporary art. And Simons once worked for Prada's husband and business partner, Patrizio Bertelli, when he chose Simons in 2005 to be creative director of Jil Sander. At the time, Simons was doing his alternative men's label out of Antwerp with a relatively small but discerning fan base compared with Jil Sander's. It was Simons's first job in the competitive arena of women's fashion, and it changed the course of his career. He went on to Dior and then, in 2016, to Calvin Klein; he left there in December 2018. Despite strong sales and mostly glowing reviews in the first few seasons, a weak quarter and perhaps other factors led to a breakup. The company has not replaced Simons, nor has it staged shows since.

Simons says Bertelli contacted him right after the Calvin Klein exit. "Mr. Bertelli emailed me, then he called and he asked me to come to Milan. It was a



very open dialogue about Prada's future in general." Later, there were similar discussions with both Bertelli and Prada. As Simons said, "Then, out of that, came this thinking: *Why not do it together?*"

Prada insisted that the appointment of Simons is not a prelude to her retirement. "Oh, no," she said. "To me, to do better, to work harder, I'm very interested in this."

Be that as it may, Prada and Bertelli are at least entertaining the idea of succession. And if everything comes up weird and wonderful on the Prada runway this fall, they will be really ahead. That's another message to the industry, where great founders tend to think they're immortal. Giorgio Armani and Ralph Lauren, are you listening?

PHOTOGRAPHS: COURTESY OF LOUIS VUITTON; COURTESY OF MARC JACOBS; COURTESY OF DIOR; COURTESY OF PIERRE CARDIN; COURTESY OF MIU MIU; COURTESY OF GUCCI; COURTESY OF SAINT LAURENT; COURTESY OF RICK OWENS; COURTESY OF DRIES VAN NOTEN; COURTESY OF MARNI; SEAN ZANNI/GETTY (SIMONS)



MIND-SETS

Big Feels

I have begun to see people who obsess about their weight as part of their lifestyle as a class of their own.

By Marisa Meltzer



I LIVE IN A WORLD OF THIN PEOPLE. I interview the famously thin—actors, models, musicians, influencers—but mostly I observe them. I know their habits, but I’m also aware that I am not one of them.

Once, I went to a photo shoot to meet the actress Emily Blunt for a magazine profile I was writing. She was getting her hair and makeup done, so I was killing time before we were introduced. I set my bag on a green velvet sofa and eventually made my way to a table strewn with the remnants of a catered lunch: quinoa salad, grilled chicken, iced tea, and a plate of dairy-free, flourless brownies. I sat down and ate one brownie after another, the way I always eat things, without savoring them, as if the act of eating needed to be gotten over with as quickly as possible. With no dairy or flour, the brownies were almost healthy, I figured. A bearded photography assistant wandered inside to get a cable while I was stuffing my face. I turned my back to him, as if that would hide my crime of appetite.

The shoot was just a few weeks after Blunt had given birth to her second daughter—“My Bean,” she called her in her lilting accent—and I’m so nosy that I’d snuck first thing into the wardrobe area of the shoot to see what size jeans she currently wore: 26. Which is about a size 2. I realize that is a little bit compulsive. I could try to say I was checking to be a good journalist, but really I was doing what all women learn to do: indulge in a morbid kind of curiosity about each other through our bodies and how we each measure up.

When I heard Blunt coming down the stairs, there was just enough time to rearrange the remaining brownies so it didn’t look like a troop of ravenous Girl Scouts had been at them. Blunt smiled graciously and gestured toward the brownies. “You really must try one,” she said to me, adding that the brownies were just so good, so rich, that she was satisfied with just one small bite.

Was this how normal people’s brains reacted to food—one nibble and you were satisfied? I had eaten perhaps four brownies in less than five minutes and stuffed another half a dozen in my bag to devour at home, alone.

I am nearly constantly aware of the feeling of my stomach hanging down toward my pelvis, of my thighs rubbing together, of the fat under my chin touching my neck when I look down. And I have tried my best to change my body—dieting, working out, spas, personal trainers, radical body acceptance, Botox, fillers, fat-melting shots of Kybella in an attempt to get rid of a double

chin. I'd even gone under general anesthesia for liposuction. And that list is not complete.

I am fat, at least by the standards of coastal America, where I have spent my whole life. At my heaviest of the 50 or so pounds that I yo-yo diet on and off, I wear a size 16. My body feels tragic to me, but by the standards of non-SoulCycle America, it is in fact quite ordinary: For women over the age of 20, a size 16 is dead average.

THE ROLE I TAKE ON AS A WRITER IS THAT of an Everywoman. I can ask famous women how much they currently weigh, or if they have been mistaken for being pregnant, because that has happened to me. It would be much harder for a thin woman to ask those kinds of questions. I know that I am so far from competing with them on a beauty scale that insecurity doesn't even factor into these environments. Instead, I find talking to beautiful women sort of soothing. It's time away from my normal feelings of not measuring up, but I'm also in control, being the one there to ask questions, to be smart. Knowing I am not one of them and not trying to compete is its own kind of power trip.

I have sat for meals with the numerous models I have profiled—Karlie Kloss, Helena Christensen, Joan Smalls, Stella Maxwell, Imaan Hammam—and they almost always explain to me that they are keto, or paleo, or gluten free, or quit sugar for their health. (I don't believe most models when they tell me it's all about balance, with the exception of Christie Brinkley, whom I interviewed while she ate an entire pizza. It was a personal size, but I was still impressed.) I'm always wondering what these women think of my body—if they are jealous because they think I've given myself license to eat with abandon, or if they'd rather be dead than be my size. Sometimes I think that it's easier for the most beautiful and famous women to relax and open up to someone they don't perceive as a threat. Instead, they pick at their quinoa salads as they bare their insecurities to me. This is probably my competitive advantage as a journalist, that the very presence of my large body can be comforting to them. As someone who is bigger and softer and sometimes a few years older than they are, I can be their mom or favorite teacher or sidekick. That has turned me into a kind of anthropologist of ectomorphs. I know firsthand that food and weight are things that take over a significant portion of their lives, too. The actress Zosia Mamet once told me over a breakfast interview (I had a bagel and lox; she had a soy cappuccino), "It's an endless roller coaster of that tiny voice, and it's always present."

The beautiful people I so often encounter in my job go to extreme lengths to maintain their bodies. But I do, too. I have begun to see people who obsess about their weight as part of their lifestyle as a class of their own. There's the class we are born

into and the class we strive to belong to. To what lengths will we go to earn our position? How much do we fear falling from it?

But the problem with this professional advantage—the best friend in movies is often not as cute as the star, so it's a trope I know I'm filling—is that you can't turn it off. Every time I turn over my phone, it's there. Instagram allows me to follow attractive women who are larger than me in some token effort to reset my eye to a different standard of beauty. But this doesn't shield me from the rest of the app. In unflattering photos of myself I'm tagged in, instead of seeing how much I was enjoying a party, I see jowls and a short neck. Or the beautiful girls (who knew there were so many beautiful girls?) posing in bikinis or high-waisted denim jeans with no stretch encouraging all of us, no matter our weight, to embrace our curves, to shun diets, to just love our bodies—and, by extension, ourselves—already.

Even the fat women have enviable bone structure and proportionate bodies and boy-friends with cute haircuts who worship them. And everywhere, women are talking about how important it is to love yourself and the body you're in. There is a well-known plus-size body activist I follow on social media. She'd lost a lot of weight in recent months but hadn't commented on it publicly. In an interview, she told me she was doing boot-camp classes twice daily because she just loved it so much. It's possible that was the truth, but it's also highly unlikely. I wonder what it would look like if she could be totally honest with her hundreds of thousands of boosters about whether she

wanted to lose 20 pounds and what her real struggles were.

How do you live online as a person unhappy with your weight? In our cultural moment, fatness can be a surface that denies interiority, and fat acceptance a further denial of this interiority—a way of brushing off the painful truth of living in a bigger body, and also a way of compelling a happy performance of virtuousness. You've seen her: a woman who wears a size 14 with an Instagram grid full of photos showing off her small waist and vaguely artistic, silver-fox husband. Instead of making me feel seen, she sends me—with my apple-shaped body and poor romantic history—into fits of rage and sorrow about not quite measuring up. I can't stop comparing myself to these kinds of polished yet attainable women who are so similar to me that they're supposed to inspire, even influence me. Instead, they manage to bring out my insecurities more than any model or actor ever has in real life.

Or maybe it's a warped kind of narcissism. I can resent my body all I want, but I still want to be the only Everywoman in the room.

Adapted from This Is Big: How the Founder of Weight Watchers Changed the World and Me, by Marisa Meltzer. Copyright

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How do you live online as a person unhappy with your weight?

TINY HOT TAKE

Look at This Incredibly Sexy Bird

By Amanda Arnold



HOW FORTUNATE WE ARE TO COEXIST with so many remarkable life-forms: cave salamanders that refuse to move for years. Marsupials that die after marathon mating sessions. And a bird so alluring I will spend the rest of my life in awe of her beauty. Writer Jordan Blok blessed my Twitter timeline with three images of the sexiest bird I've ever seen. "Thinking about ~her~," they tweeted. I can't stress this enough: Everything about this bird is sensual as hell. Her name: secretary bird (hot). Her scientific name: *Sagittarius serpentarius* (incredibly voluptuous). Her lashes are long. Her legs go on for miles. And she has this look on her face that says, *I'm going to peck your eyes out*. Render me blind, you stunning queen. If you're the last thing I see, I would count myself lucky.

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The
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Fran

Twenty-one years
after the end of
'The Nanny,' we're
still in her thrall.

By Matthew Schneider

PHOTOGRAPHS BY
Maurizio Cattelan and
Pierpaolo Ferrari

STYLING BY
Rebecca Ramsey

What you first need to understand is that I learned joie de vivre from *The Nanny*. Literally, as in the phrase: It sneaked into the theme song to describe the stock-in-trade of the flashy girl from Flushing, as the Nanny was, and as Fran Drescher, its star and creator, was. Ann Hampton Callaway wrote that song for her and did its jazzy performance, a stepping-stone on the way to writing hits for Barbra Streisand, which, if you're a Jewish girl from the boroughs, as Drescher is, is a little like saying Callaway wrote for some little yeshiva Yentl before ascending, pen in hand, to work for G-d Herself.

The joy of Fran! The Jewish girl onscreen who wasn't a *meeskite* but a bombshell, who turned what could have been a career-killer—a face that could launch a thousand ships paired with a voice that could sink them—and made it, through gale-force charm, a selling point, a calling card. Thirty years' worth of journalists have struggled to describe her nasal whinny. I like *Los Angeles* magazine's version: the voice of “a Bloomies perfume spritzer in heat.” Teachers told her to lose it, and she tried. But when she trained it out of herself, she lost her whole personality and spoke at a snail's pace. She remembers drawling her way through an audition for a part in an epic television drama and losing out to Jane Seymour. “They said to my manager, ‘You know, she did fine, but she talked too slow, and it's only an 18-hour miniseries,’” Drescher says. “So that was kind of the end of that.”

If you are of the generation that grew up on Drescher—those of us who were impressionable, and often latchkey, kids during her nannying days, from 1993 to 1999—it is more than a little surreal to find yourself suddenly in communication with her, like meeting a former babysitter years later, each of you older, wiser, and a little wider, the dynamics of your relationship subtly changed. At 62, Drescher is both a whole new woman—a cancer survivor with a foundation to advocate for early detection, prevention, and policy; a marijuana evangelist; and a fiery political opinionator with a snappy anti-capitalist bent—and exactly the one you feel you know. Her text messages are spangled with kiss-print emoji. She loves an espresso martini, the height of '90s elegance.

Back home on the Upper West Side after a stop at a Columbus Avenue bodega for \$186 worth of fresh flowers, which she arranges and distributes across a number of vases, Drescher has quick-changed into a terrycloth robe and UGGs, a diamond tennis bracelet on her wrist, while her ever-present assistant, Jordan, lights a fire in the living-room hearth. Drescher's company is called Uh-Oh Productions, and emails from Jordan, dispatches from and about Fran, have been popping up on my phone for days as simply “Uh-Oh.”

Drescher spends most of her time in Malibu, where she has a house on the ocean and a regular table at Nobu. But she keeps an apartment in New York in an Arts and Crafts-style building just off the park, where she once shared a wall with Madonna. Here, among rattan chairs and Asian antiques, most of which predate her in the apartment—she bought it furnished from a decorator—Drescher lives softly, a star in temporary residence. Framed photos of her with potentates—Barack Obama, Hillary Clinton, Joe Biden—grace a side table. (She hasn't yet chosen a 2020 candidate, though fans who have been stoked by her anti-capitalist sallies may be surprised to hear that, while she's Bernie-curious, “I do like Amy,

and I do think that Joe has a lot of experience.”) In the kitchen is a framed cover of *New York Dog* magazine featuring Drescher with Esther, one of her late, beloved Pomeranians. Esther's predecessor Chester was a guest star on *The Nanny*.

The line between her lives onscreen and off can feel blurry. When a phone call from her mother interrupts for a few minutes—a periodontal appointment is discussed—I have to remind myself that the person on the other end is Sylvia Drescher, whom I have never seen, not Sylvia Fine, her *Nanny* equivalent on the plastic-covered couch. Fran isn't Fran Fine, the door-to-door makeup saleswoman turned nanny to three sad, spoiled, Anglo-American scamps and their blustery British father (“Mistuhhh Sheffield!”), but her characters tend to be avatars of their creator. Most of them, she points out, are called Fran. “I have the good fortune of being recognizable,” she says. “For people to roll out the red carpet for me wherever I go in the world, it's such heaven. Sometimes people say, ‘I don't like Paris. They're not nice to me.’ And it's like, ‘Really? I'm like Jerry Lewis there.’” She is *Une Nounou d'Enfer*—“A Nanny From Hell,” as the show was titled in France—and *La Tata*, as it was called in Italy. *The Nanny* has been syndicated and adapted around the world, both dubbed in its original version and recast in remakes. In more than 25 years, it has never not been showing somewhere.

The Fran Generation is now grown up, and its members have carried Drescher with them. “I watched a lot of TV as a kid, at night when my parents were working,” says *Broad City*'s Ilana Glazer, one of Drescher's spiritual descendants. “Fran as the nanny was like *my* nanny.” Glazer cast and directed her on an episode of *Broad City* as her character's aunt. “I have watched so many hours, every episode of the show,” says Glazer. “She makes up part of the structure of my brain.”

“*The Nanny* was very formative,” says Rachel Bloom, the Emmy-winning composer, lyricist, and star of *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend*, who is working with Drescher on a *Nanny* musical headed to Broadway. Dan Levy, a producer and writer for the ABC show *The Goldbergs*, created a “Fran Drescher type” mother figure in his new NBC sitcom, *Indebted*, which premiered last month; he told every development executive that he'd pictured Fran Drescher in the part and then, bowing to Occam's razor, cast Fran Drescher. *Indebted* gives Drescher her first starring network role in years, and one, she says with relief, that her elderly parents in Florida and their friends can find in the newspaper TV listings. She is even working on a cabaret act that will take her to Café Carlyle in New York, the first in its history, said Carlyle's Jennifer Cooke, that will not include singing.

It's worth asking why, 21 years after the end of *The Nanny*, we're still in her thrall. It's not just that those who are overwhelmed by the chaos of the internet—which is to say, all of us—see the feel-good sitcoms of the '90s as sort of a cultural balm, much of it accessible now, ironically enough, on the internet. (*The Nanny* remains confoundingly hard to stream, though it is a mark of digital glut that I discovered the first two seasons are available on something called the Roku Channel, which it turns out I have.) It's also Drescher herself. *The Nanny*'s rags-to-riches story—which is also her rags-to-riches story—gave us a Borscht Belt Maria von Trapp with an exuberance, even a vulgarity, that wasn't an obstacle to overcome.

MICHAEL KORS COLLECTION dress, at michaelkors.com; **BALENCIAGA** shoes, at 620 Madison Ave.; **CARTIER** ring, at cartier.com; **DAVID WEBB** ring, at 942 Madison Ave.



“I was never going to have Meryl Streep’s
“I was going to have Fran Drescher’s



MARC JACOBS
dress, at
marcjacobs.com;
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career,” she says.
career, and that’s what I did.”



It was the whole point. She was gorgeous, she was clever, she was outer-borough middle class—she fairly honked. Drescher is not unapprised of the singularity of Fran. “I was never going to have Meryl Streep’s career,” she says. “I was going to have Fran Drescher’s career, and that’s what I did.”

She couldn’t have had anyone else’s. She made her film debut coming on to John Travolta in *Saturday Night Fever*. “Hey, are you as good in bed as you are on that dance floor?” is her adenoïdal purr, and he leads her there, her proprietary hand on his polyester ass. She kicked around in some other movies; she did pilots for TV. But she realized early on that she’d have to make her own opportunities. You can still see a few episodes of the last sitcom she did before breaking out, the now-forgotten *Princesses*, on YouTube: She and Julie Hagerty and the ’60s model Twiggy shack up together as wacky roommates with wildly divergent styles. But the show failed to catch on. “On TV, a New York Flavor May Be Poison,” ran the headline in the *New York Times*.

After its cancellation, Drescher wound up on an international flight with Jeff Sagansky, then-president of entertainment at CBS. Seizing her chance, she buttonholed him. “I thought, *Thank you, Lord*, and I ran into the bathroom to put some makeup on,” she says. “I remember the movie was starting—back then, everybody watched the same movie—and it was *The Prince of Tides* with Barbra Streisand. And he said, ‘Oh, I want to watch this. It’s my favorite.’ And I thought to myself, *Oh, this guy is so ripe for me*.” She told him that, because of her voice, networks had always gotten her wrong. She wasn’t sitcom seasoning. She was the main course.

Sagansky agreed to a meeting and eventually to what would become *The Nanny*, the idea Drescher and her then-husband, now-out gay ex-husband, and now-and-forever writing partner, Peter Marc Jacobson, came up with for her. It was sparked by her experience schlepping Twiggy’s daughter, Carly, around London. They’d spent years working as frustrated actors in L.A. and suddenly had the chance to write their own ticket. The studio brought in Prudence Fraser and Robert Sternin to help guide the writing process, but Drescher “was doing stories every single day,” Jacobson says. “We were so young, I think we did things that if I was getting into it now I’d be afraid to do. Who brings Yiddish into a CBS eight-o’clock show in 1993?”

But the gamble worked. *The Nanny* was a major hit and, with it, Drescher, who had been a bit player for Miloš Forman and a standout as a brassy publicist in *Spinal Tap*, became not only a star but a durable icon. A New York flavor, no longer poison, was now a bragging right. The *New York Times*: “For Queens, a Place in the Sun; Hollywood Is Suddenly Zooming In, With a Vengeance.” Queens’s other most famous modern export, Donald J. Trump, was a frequent punch line and onetime guest star. They were once two comic actors, one playing a souped-up fantasy version of her younger self, the other playing a souped-up, fantasy version of his father. Now they are president and guru, sitting on the opposite ends of the emotional spectrum. He bellows with inchoate rage. Drescher remains a foghorn of joy.

DRESCHER LIKES TO point out that, until the show aired, there hadn’t been a Jewish actress playing a Jewish main character on an American comedy for decades—not since Molly Gold-

berg, the echt Jewish mama of early broadcasting, appeared on CBS in the late 1940s. (Rhoda, the canonical sassy Jewish gal of ’70s TV, was played by Valerie Harper, who wasn’t.) *The Nanny* was “the only show where someone being Jewish was a major part of the show,” Bloom says. “You’d think there’d be a lot more shows where people were overtly Jewish, considering the disproportionate amount of Jewish people writing and creating shows. But there’s this idea of ‘We don’t want to alienate Middle America.’”

Drescher and Jacobson based Fran Fine on the young Fran and insisted on her being Jewish even when a major conglomerate offered to sponsor the show provided Fran be rewritten as Italian. “We thought about it because we knew it was our big break,” Drescher says, “and we didn’t want to be difficult. But I thought of Neil Simon because he said, ‘Write what you know.’ I didn’t know Italian like I know Jewish. So I mustered up my chutzpah and told them Fran Fine must be Jewish. And they said, ‘Okay.’”

There were occasional complaints that Nanny Fine and her Queens clan—a domineering, guilt-tripping Jewish mother and a yenta grandmother, Yetta, named after Drescher’s grandmother—didn’t represent the best of Jewish womanhood. The

L.A. Times published an opinion piece to this effect, then Drescher’s rebuttal. But the archetype she incarnated was both hyperspecific and hyper-relatable—if not in its details, then in its values—to women, and non-women, used to being told to turn it down. The shock of *The Nanny* was “not only the Judaism,” Bloom says. “It was being too much, being loud, being different. It was a lot of things that I hadn’t seen before.”

Since *The Nanny*, Drescher has never fallen out of the cultural mainstream, though she has, project by project, drifted toward the outer boroughs of the television landscape. There was *Living With Fran*, on the now-defunct WB, about a Fran who juggles family and a younger boyfriend (2005–6). Then *Happily Divorced*, on TV Land, about a Fran still living with her newly out, newly gay ex-husband (2011–13), another show she created with Jacobson. After their divorce, they didn’t speak for a year—he hadn’t wanted to get divorced and was angry. They’ve since come back together professionally and personally, and they’re both single again now. “I always used to joke and say if I do have a relationship, they’re going to have to be happy sitting, when we’re 70 watching *The Nanny* on television, between me and Fran,” he says.

Her life hasn’t all been sitcom rosy. “I’ve been very candid about my personal life,” she says. She has written two memoirs (fun fact: Fran loves Phish). The second, *Cancer Schmancer*, details her fight to correctly diagnose and ultimately beat uterine cancer. Drescher’s relationship after Jacobson, with a producer on *The Nanny*, ended following her cancer treatment, and a second marriage, to the tech entrepreneur Shiva Ayyadurai, ended in divorce. Ayyadurai is internet infamous for his claim that he invented email, though he sued Gawker for its posts debunking the claim, a suit the company settled for \$750,000; he also ran unsuccessfully against Elizabeth Warren for a Massachusetts Senate seat. “In my second marriage, we were together for three years. The first year was bliss, the second year was agony and ecstasy, and the third year was just agony, and I said, ‘Enough,’” Drescher has said. Some of her

GIORGIO ARMANI
gown and wrap, *similar*
styles at armani.com;
LISA SHAUB FINE
MILLINERY hat, *similar*
styles at 134 Orchard St.;
CHOPARD earring,
at 709 Madison Ave.



flowers go into vases they received as wedding gifts. She underwent a hysterectomy as part of her cancer treatment and never had kids. “I think I would have been a good mom,” she says, “and sometimes I think I kind of missed out on that.”

That makes *Indebted*’s Debbie, a doting grandmother and a frisky mate to a graying husband (Steven Weber), a different type of Drescher character and a slightly bittersweet one as well. On the show, Debbie hovers over Adam Pally and Abby Elliott, who play its central characters, a youngish married couple who are tending to both their own kids and their regressing, neo-adolescent parents. Drescher took care to insert enough Fran into the character to make it her own; early scripts, she said, made Debbie more of a traditional, hectoring mother-in-law type. “I’m not that actress. I cannot get away with that,” she says. “I’m a star. People are tuning in to see who they’re used to seeing. You want to get some heavy character actress, older woman, to be this pain in the ass in the house and have this, you know, antagonistic relationship with the daughter-in-law like they did in *Everybody Loves Raymond*, be my guest. But that’s not me.” Drescher turned out to be a bright spot in *Indebted*’s otherwise rough rollout. Reviews so far have been grim. The exception is Drescher, whom *Variety* singled out as “the only person who seems to be trying,” in a performance that is “a reminder of an old-fashioned sitcom sparkle.”

“Old-fashioned” may be a tell. The show is a sitcom in the kid-friendly, yuks-and-shticks mold (multi-camera, guffawing studio audience), which has not fared well critically in the age of single-cam auteurs and HBO gore. It is the safest of network TV. “I think we’re going to see them coming back,” Drescher says. Her characters are lovable and stylish; unlike most Emmy bait, she is proudly, unapologetically uncontroversial. (“You can’t sit down with your family and watch *Game of Thrones*,” Bloom says. “I mean, I’m sure some people do. I wouldn’t recommend it.”) Family-friendly fare syndicates, and it performs worldwide. Drescher is living proof. “From the studio standpoint, that’s where the money is,” she says. “Sony has done very well by *The Nanny*. I mean, something that is this popular a quarter of a century later, that’s pretty decent.”

Pretty decent has made Drescher a wealthy woman. She loves to work, she says, but she doesn’t have to. “I don’t need the money,” she says. “And if you don’t need the money, that takes a little bit of fire out of your belly.” But stardom agrees with her, and shows like *Indebted* offer, if they catch on, a pathway back to the televised mainstream. Drescher has already made her peace with whatever the show’s fate may be. “As a Buddhist—or a Bu-Jew, which is more to the point of what I am, really—balance is a big part of your daily practice,” she says. “And I try and find balance in everything. I never forget where I come from. And inside, I’m still a chubby girl from Queens, anyway.”

THE COMMISSARY at The Wing does not offer espresso martinis, but for Drescher, they are inclined to make an exception. So it was that on a recent Tuesday night, a few empty glasses were on a side table, drained but for the telltale damp coffee beans. Drescher was on hand to screen the pilot episode of

Indebted for a crowd of 200 and hold a Q&A after. She is one of The Wing’s presiding spirits; Fran Fine has a phone booth named in her honor there. (Fellow honorees include Ramona Quimby and Lisa Simpson.) Audrey Gelman, The Wing’s co-founder (smart, ambitious, Jewish) loves Fran Drescher (smart, ambitious, Jewish). “Im crying ok,” she wrote on Instagram when they met.

But the crowd at The Wing testified that Fran’s appeal is not limited to those most categorically similar to her. The too-muchness of *The Nanny*, from Fran’s wardrobe of leopard, sequins, and skintight to her clarion call, didn’t alienate Middle America: America, and the world, ate it up. Her appeal cut across age, race, and creed. Shanae Brown, who runs the Instagram account @WhatFranWore, which is dedicated to tracking down and identifying Fran Fine’s outfits for an audience of almost 300,000, isn’t a young, Jewish striver from the city. She’s a 30-year-old Jamaican patient-care technician living in Atlanta.

Brown doesn’t wear the sequined vests, the hourglass cocktail dresses, the Todd Oldham and Moschino and Ferré and, Lord have mercy, Allen Schwartz that Fran Fine did. But then neither does Fran Drescher. The show’s costumes were a fantasy creation, a TV-land exaggeration, by the costume designer Brenda Cooper, who won an Emmy for her efforts. The studio, Jacobson recalled, originally pushed for Fran to wear T-shirts and jeans in an effort to be relatable; he and Drescher doubled down on the brights, even making the sets a polite, neutral cream to make the costumes pop. What they telegraphed was an irrepressible presence. “She was such a strong person,” Brown said in an interview. “She was kind of this irreverent woman who didn’t care what people thought about her. I feel like that’s the energy we have now.” Brown has occasionally tried posting the outfits of another 1990s TV heroine, Sabrina the Teenage Witch, but she didn’t get the response Fran has.

At The Wing, the crowd laughed politely through *Indebted*, then roared for Drescher’s onstage Q&A. Afterward, she took questions from the audience.

“I’m not going to stand, because I think if I stand, I’m going to pass out,” said a young woman up front when handed the microphone. “You’re such a hero of mine. I grew up watching you; I’ve seen every episode a million times. I can’t believe I’m in the same room as you. Thank you so much for all the work you’ve put out into the world.” She went on, “While I’m not Jewish, I’m Latina, to see a woman really use her ethnicity, especially in the ’90s, meant so much, and I really resonated with it so much.”

After her, a young man—rare for The Wing but never for Fran—with sunglasses perched on his close-cropped skull, was briefer. “I went through a lot of trauma in high school,” he said, quavering. “And watching you really got me through a lot.”

Before the event ended, Drescher led the room in a recitation of the mantra a spiritual adviser once taught her: “I love you, Fran,” she was to repeat to herself. “I know how wonderful you are. It’s Fran and Fran till the end of time.” She encouraged everyone to insert their own name to self-love their way to spiritual enlightenment, but the response that came back still echoed with Frans. ■

DOLCE & GABBANA jacket, vest, and pants, at dolcegabbana.it; **SHANNON PHILLIPS** hat, at nethats.com; **RENÉ CAOVILLA** shoes, at renecaovilla.com; bow tie, made by **LUCY PAYNE**.

PHOTOGRAPHS: STYLING ASSISTANT: DEVINE BLACKSHER; SET DESIGN: ANDREW ONDREJCÁK AT LALALAND ARTISTS; MAKEUP BY FULVIA FAROLFI FOR CHANEL AT BRYAN BANTRY; HAIR: ITALO GREGORIO AT BRYAN BANTRY; PARTS MODEL: ELISAVETA AT PARTS MODELS; MANICURIST: HONEY AT EXPOSURE NY; TAILOR: LUCY PAYNE



The TYRANNY of TERRAZZO

BY Molly Fischer

Will the MILLENNIAL AESTHETIC EVER END?

YOU WALK BENEATH a white molded archway. You've entered a white room.

A basketlike lamp hangs overhead; other lamps, globes of brass and glass, glow nearby. Before you is a couch, neatly tufted and boxy, padded with an assortment of pillows in muted geometric designs. Circles of faded terra-cotta and pale yellow; mint-green and mustard confetti; white, with black half-circles and two little dots—aha. Those are boobs. You look down. Upon the terrazzo nougat of the coffee table, a glass tray trimmed in brass. It holds a succulent in a lumpy ceramic pot, a scented candle with a matte-pink label. A fiddle-leaf fig somewhere looms. Above a bookshelf (spines organized by color), a poster advises you to **WORK HARD & BE NICE TO PEOPLE**. In the far corner, within the shrine of an arched alcove, atop a marble plinth: one lonely, giant cartoon jungle leaf, tilting from a pink ceramic tube. You sense—in a way you could neither articulate nor explain—the presence of a mail-order foam mattress somewhere close at hand.

ILLUSTRATION BY Fala Atelier





All that pink. All those plants. All that white. It's so clean! Everything's fun, but not too much fun. And there, in the round mirror above the couch: It's you. You know where you are. Or do you?

Search your brain. Swap out the monstera leaf for waxy red anthurium, WORK HARD & BE NICE TO PEOPLE FOR GOOD VIBES ONLY. Maybe the pillows were succulent-print; maybe the ceramics had boobs. IT WAS ALL A DREAM, says a neon sign in schoolgirl cursive. You hadn't noticed that before.

Maybe it is a dream, this room you do and don't know, assembled from cliché and half-recollected spare parts; a fever dream—or, no, that's too much. This room functions more like a CBD seltzer, something you might buy in a salmon-pink can. There's not a lot of distinctive taste, but still, it's hard to resist when you're on a permanent search for ways to feel better. The ambience is palliative—simple but not severe. Even the palette faintly suggests a medicine cabinet: powdery pharmaceutical pastels, orange pill bottles, Band-Aid pink.

Now imagine that the white room isn't a dream; it's behind a velvet rope in the American Wing at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Perhaps it's a home, or a store, or maybe the two cases blur—a store designed to look like a home, a home in which one might shop. An interior filled with recognizable products.

"Peggy" sofa (ca. 2015): A mid-price offering from the chain retailer West Elm, the model's name evoked the heroine of popular television drama Mad Men, widely admired for its recreation of the previous century's design. (Discontinued 2017, following a viral essay titled "Why Does This One Couch From West Elm Suck So Much?")

The future museumgoer would naturally require some sort of digital experience—some screen—to fill in the view from that couch. So in lieu of an audio tour, mounted nearby there's a replica rose-gold iPhone 7. Swipe for a selection of other clean, white, curvilinear interiors. There's a place to do laundry that looks like a spa, a place to get therapy that looks like The Wing, a boutique newsstand that sells scented candles and has an app. A dental clinic called Tend provides "curated, seasonal toothpaste" in what's billed as "The Brushery": a "swishy, swirly room just for freshening up" (it has marbleized turquoise concrete sinks). And then there are advertisements, making up a visual world of their own. The products on view—cookware, supplements, stretchy clothes—occupy blank pastel landscapes manipulated by a diversity of hands. These aren't ads that belittle or hector; they whisper, in restrained sans-serif fonts, or chastely flirt, in letters with curves and bounce. They're ads, sure, but they're so well designed.

In this era, you come to understand, design was the product. Whatever else you might be buying, you were buying design, and all the design looked the same.

EVER SINCE MODERNISM brought industry into design, tastes have cycled between embracing and rejecting what it wrought. A forward-looking, high-tech style obsessed with mass commercial appeal will give way to one that's backward-looking, handmade, authenticity-obsessed—which will then give way to some new variation on tech-forward mass style. (Furniture dealers joke that "brown" goes in and out with every generation.) It's a logic that gets filtered through the reliable desire for the world the way it looked when we were young, and lately this has meant looking back 30 or so years to the Memphis-inflected pastel pop of the '80s and '90s. We might call the latest iteration of the cycle the "millennial aesthetic"—not to say that it was embraced by all mil-

↓ Soft Colors

Motivational
↓ Ad Copy



Casper

THE PERFECT MATTRESS
FOR NEW PARENTS

↓ Photogenic
Domesticity



lennials, just that it came to prominence alongside them and will one day be a recognizable artifact of their era.

Consider a previous youth-style shorthand: the hipster, pre-eminent cultural punch line of the aughts. Both *hipster* and *millennial* were terms that drifted away from strict definitions (hipsters being subcultural, millennials being generational) to become placeholders for "whatever fussy young people seem to like." It is strange, now, to remember a time when chunky-framed glasses were understood as a hipster affectation; today they just look like Warby Parker. The hipster aesthetic harked back to a grimy past: Its spaces were wood-paneled, nostalgic; perhaps they contained taxidermy. Behind lumberjack beards and '70s rec-room mustaches, there was a desire for something preindustrial or at least pre-internet.

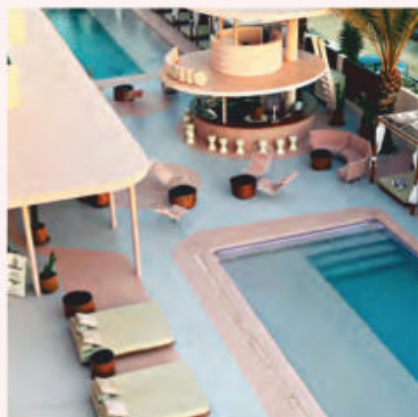
The hipster was *Vice*; the millennial is virtue, or at least virtuous consumption. The hipster aesthetic was capable of rendering even plain cotton T-shirts a little gross under the gaze of Dov Charney—the grossness was, indeed, part of the appeal. The millennial aesthetic, meanwhile, could take something disgusting and attempt—through sheer force of branding—to make it cute and fun. One such product, called "Come&Gone" (sans-serif logo, pastel website, friendly GIFs), attracted notice on Twitter last year. Essentially a sponge on a stick, it was marketed as an "after-sex cleanup" device by a start-up "on a mission to ban the dripping, forever."

Sometimes the hipster flirted with racism and misogyny, couched as irony or provocation—a certain performance of exclusivity (even just daring your audience not to get the joke or know the band) was central to the hipster aesthetic's appeal. But the millennial aesthetic aims its appeal at everyone. Propagated by brands and advertisements, it is a fundamentally commercial aesthetic—and why alienate any potential customer? Millennial marketing showcases models of many races and body types, and the products on offer are obvious in their charms. Every sofa and soft-cup bra presents itself not as evidence of distinctive taste but

PHOTOGRAPHS: COURTESY OF EQUAL PARTS (COOKWARE); COURTESY OF EAT CANDID (FOOD); COURTESY OF SUPER RURAL (POSTER); COURTESY OF MARTA MORZY (PARADISO IBIZA HOTEL); COURTESY OF BLOOMSCAPE (PLANTS)



↑ Curated Messes



↓ Beveled Edges

FOR
LIKE
EVER

↑ Text Everywhere

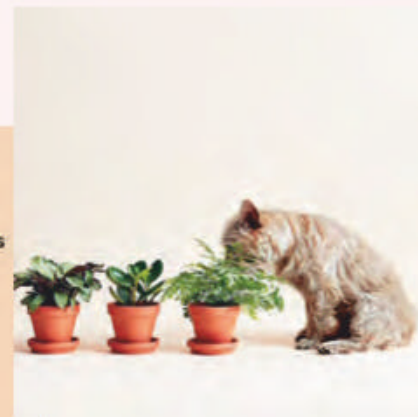


Gratuitous Fruits ↑



↑ Sans Serif

↓ Generic Houseplants



as the most elegant, economical, and ethical solution to the problem of sofas or soft-cup bras. Simplicity of design encourages an impression that all errors and artifice have fallen away. The millennial aesthetic promises a kind of teleology of taste: as if we have only now, finally, thanks to innovation and refinement, arrived at the objectively correct way for things to look.

If you simultaneously can't afford any frills and can't afford any failure, you end up with millennial design: crowd-pleasing, risk-averse, calling just enough attention to itself to make it clear that you tried. For a cohort reared to achieve and then released into an economy where achievement held no guarantees, the millennial aesthetic provides something that looks a little like bourgeois stability, at least. This is a style that makes basic success cheap and easy; it requires little in the way of special access, skills, or goods. It is style that can be borrowed, inhabited temporarily or virtually. At the very least, you can stay a few hours in a photogenic co-working venue. At the very least, Squarespace gives you the tools you need to build your own presentable online home.

WHEN SARAH SHERMAN SAMUEL DECORATED her first pink room, she assumed she was doing something sort of daring. But no: Pink was a crowd-pleaser, Samuel soon learned. Or, it was crowd-pleasing when she tempered it with the warmth of wood, something to cut the sugar high. Samuel is an interior designer employed by clients like Mandy Moore, born 1984. (Moore's house, with its pale terrazzo floors and upholstery in pink and ocher, was on the cover of *Architectural Digest* in 2018.) Pink became a crucial ingredient in the serene millennial dreamscapes with which Samuel has made her name.

No account of the millennial aesthetic could fail to address pink: For the better part of a decade, millennial pink bedeviled anyone a color could bedevil. When Facebook rolled out a corporate rebrand last fall, the lead image in the press release showed

the new logo—breezily spaced sans serif—in a muted shade somewhere on the ham-to-salmon spectrum. Samuel keeps wondering when people will get sick of the color, but they don't; almost every client asks for pink. She thinks this is because it's soothing. They want houses that remind them of vacations, suggest Mediterranean idylls.

"It kind of feels like a binky," Deborah Needleman, the former editor of *T*, *WSJ*, and *Domino*, says of millennial interiors. (Boob-print pillows and bath mats are perhaps the most literal expression of a general tendency toward the comforts of babyhood.) Needleman sees not a trip to Greece but something more like childproofing. "It's like it has no edge or sense of humor or sense of mystery," she says. "There's no weirdness. There's nothing that clashes. It is very controlled."

Pink is not the only soft color in the millennial palette. There's green, often in the form of plant life—it has a wholesome appeal next to the pink—and then an expanding array of colors simultaneously saturated and chalky, muted even when not actually pastel: seafoam, terra-cotta, lavender, and (especially) ocher. In explaining the appetite for colors that soothe, we might gesture vaguely in the direction of Now More Than Ever, anxiety, the news. A more direct explanation would probably be that other stalwart of millennial pop sociology: the phone, now the basic tool with which we view, record, and disseminate images of the world. All that time spent staring into a glowing screen makes the prospect of something gentle—something literally easier on the eye—enticing. The millennial palette is the opposite of glare; onscreen or off, it's color softly veiled.

Pink is a color with baggage, of course. It arrives trailing associations of repressive femininity from previous eras of pastels: the 1950s, most pointedly, but also a childhood of 1980s and '90s Barbie plastic. Millennial pink mutes those bright bubblegum colors, chews them up a little, leaves them faded. In doing so, it suggests a slight, winking self-awareness, albeit one that stops short

of irony or critique. It's pink that's sweet even though it knows better. And something of the tension captured in that color—a placid surface and a knowing attitude—seems to mark the millennial aesthetic at large. It is a constantly self-conscious sensibility, that of someone who is always performing, always watching themselves be watched: Maybe that was once primarily the condition of women, but it seems increasingly to apply to us all.

If the millennial aesthetic crystallizes most clearly in realms associated with femininity (style, beauty, wellness, domesticity), it has diffused outward to goods and businesses of all sorts. The design is soft in its colors and in its lines, curved and unthreatening—not unlike the iPhone, as Jessica Helfand, the co-founder and creative director of Design Observer, points out. It is beveled, as are all the little logos for apps that inhabit it, framed by smoothly rounded edges. “The bevel by its very nature suggests ‘friendlier’—like, easier, softer,” Helfand says. “True modernism, true minimalism, would be the square.” Minimalism, however, demands severity, and the millennial aesthetic has none.

To Needleman's eye, the effect is anomalous, ahistorical. “It feels like its own little bubble,” she says. It's possible to pick out vague references here and there—the cleanness of mid-century modern, the selfie-optimized pink glow of an Ultrafragola mirror. Needleman points to the curvy furniture of designers like Vladimir Kagan or Pierre Paulin as precursors. “But none of this has the design rigor that those things had,” she says. “Everything now just seems saccharine.” Styles that might once have been provocative or challenging become palatable and easily understood. They conjure, if anything, some bygone idea of the future—somehow looking neither forward nor back.

ONE OF THE FIRST SOFT, PINK HARBINGERS of the millennial aesthetic appeared in 2004, created by Tracy Jenkins, then a graphic-design M.F.A. student at Yale. It was a poster printed in red ink on cheap, pale-pink paper: ice-cream-scoop clouds and above them, in fat block letters, the words (overheard from a student) **FOR LIKE EVER**.

Jenkins's professor—steeped in the elaborately designed post-modernism of the '80s and '90s—hated it. But for Jenkins, pop simplicity was the point. “I think big and dumb is valid,” she says now. After graduation, a classmate encouraged her to print up more copies. Jenkins and her husband gave them away to clients at their type foundry; sometimes they'd sell one on its own for \$10. Then one of those posters wound up framed in a home on the cover of *Domino*. This was 2006, and **FOR LIKE EVER** went viral, insofar as going viral was possible at the time. By 2018, Apartment Therapy included the poster alongside succulents and sheepskin as a square in “Millennial Apartment Bingo.”

Today, Urban Outfitters sells a pink-and-red poster that says **COOL TO BE KIND** and another that says **BAE BAE BAE**. A voice of chatty positivity, conveyed via fun typography, pervades walls, ads, and social media. The text is casual, friendly, and impersonal—the verbal equivalent of a beveled edge. And perhaps all those words are just the logical end point of a broader tendency to prize legibility. *Instagrammable* is a term that does not mean “beautiful” or even quite “photogenic”; it means something more like “readable.” The viewer could scroll past an image and still grasp its meaning, e.g., “I saw fireworks,” “I am on vacation,” or “I have friends.” On a basic level, the visual experience of a phone favors images and objects that are as legible as possible as quickly as possible: The widely acknowledged clichés of millennial branding—clean typefaces, white space—are less a matter of taste than a concession to this fact.

Before Samuel began working on interiors, her training was in graphic design, which has proved to be an advantage: “I think about it in all the different points of view—how it will look flat in a photo as well as how it moves as a space.” The summary of services she provides clients in her contract promises “Instagram-ready interiors.” The millennial aesthetic flows freely between physical space and flat image, between brands and the people who buy.

EMILY HEYWARD REMEMBERS when she sensed that everyone was becoming more aware of design. Heyward is the co-founder and chief brand officer at Red Antler, the Brooklyn-based branding firm behind companies like Allbirds, Burrow, and Prose. A couple of years ago, friends started asking her: *Why do so many brands use sans serif?* Heyward thought about fonts all the time, but she was unaccustomed to interest from nonwork friends, let alone familiarity with the jargon.

Heyward and her company often take on clients that are still embryonic; they started working with the mattress company Casper when Casper didn't have its mattress yet. The approach is deliberate; it means design and branding become a part of the company early on, so Red Antler helps shape the way a company does business, not just its logo and name. Red Antler's clients sell steak, scented candles, antacid, premium bus travel, engagement rings, and insurance, among many, many other things. Visiting recently, passing through the industrial-design team's area, I saw a stack of orange bins. These were for the disaster-preparedness start-up Judy, my guide explained. Once stocked, the bins will retail for \$250 and contain 72 hours' worth of survival supplies—including a first-aid kit, meal bars, and water—to sustain a family of four. It had not previously occurred to me that the millennial aesthetic might come for the apocalypse, but I was not entirely surprised.

It was roughly 20 years ago that companies like Target and JetBlue found success with a new kind of marketing strategy. They weren't selling luxury, but they weren't hawking bargains either; instead, they were using design as a way to address potential customers as discerning and savvy. The new crop of direct-to-consumer brands (among them Red Antler's clients) pick up where companies like these left off, while relying on design in a more essential way. For an unknown start-up cutting out the middleman on sneakers or shampoo, design performs the work of salespeople and stores: It's the hook, but also the promise of legitimacy. And as companies devise offerings that are less about innovation than about making familiar experiences more pleasant, design looms ever larger.

Heyward is emphatic that no business can succeed on the strength of good design alone. Not long ago, for example, her wife bought a nightgown from a brand on Instagram that “looked really cool.” But the shipping was slow, the customer service unresponsive, the packaging (when the nightgown finally arrived) poor. So: “She's not going to buy another thing from them ever again.” The Red Antler philosophy is that real success requires that a brand offer the customer something “magic.” Without that, Heyward says, “someone else is gonna pick a similar font, and there's going to be no way to tell the two apart.”

As the millennial aesthetic grows omnipresent, as its consumers grow more design-fluent, our response grows more complex. We resent its absence (*Why is this restaurant website so crappy?*) but also resent its allure; we resent that knowing the term *sans serif* does not make you immune to sans serif's appeal. The desire for individuality rebels against its sameness, even as the

sameness feels reassuring, feels good. In the 2019 book *How to Start a Revolution*, Lauren Duca complains on behalf of a millennial cohort about politicians’ “refusing to cater to us as political customers.” *Market to me better*, she demands: “Assembling the stock crap that my generation is drawn to doesn’t require a marketing genius. You get a potted plant, a neon sign, and a nice bold sans-serif font, and boom, you’ve got a subway ad for the latest disruptive millennial brand.” She seems to be saying that she does indeed want politicians to assemble that stock crap, but still, it’s hard to miss the note of contempt.

Today, the Elizabeth Warren campaign sells pastel sans-serif posters, displayed in its online store alongside a fiddle-leaf fig. The Pete Buttigieg campaign provides supporters an extensive online branding-and-design tool kit: Its “brand story” calls him a millennial twice in three sentences, and its color palette (“deeply rooted in Pete’s hometown”) includes mustard, muted orange, and rosy beige. If anything, the Buttigieg campaign’s strenuously millennial design efforts seem to have primarily inspired millennial disdain.

The millennial aesthetic can be enlisted to try to sell anything, as has quickly become apparent. In the midst of an organizing drive at NBC last year, an anti-union Instagram account briefly appeared. The account shared slogans like DUES ARE FOR THE GYM on pastel backgrounds; women’s health care would be “subject to negotiation,” warned one post, with cartoon hands in a range of skin tones and nail-polish shades making peace signs along the border. “Millennial Pinkerton,” commented artist and writer Molly Crabapple.

The legitimating power of clean lines is one thing when applied to meal kits and face wash, another applied to politics and people. “This is a thing keeping me up at night, actually,” says Helfand. “To what degree does design confer false authority on anything it touches?”

IT IS HARD TO IMAGINE ourselves growing old—to imagine the time, nearly upon us already, when “millennial” no longer means “young.” Likewise, it is hard to imagine how the millennial aesthetic will age. Its blank, clean surfaces aspire to a world without clutter or scuffs, unmarked by the passage of time. In this aspiration, the millennial aesthetic is somewhat democratic—anything can be new, for a while. It is a style that looks, in its ideal state, like a purchase.

When I try to imagine the millennial aesthetic someday becoming the past, I think of the work of artist Sara Cwynar. Trained as a graphic designer, now working in still photography and film, Cwynar (a millennial) is interested in the way advertising and advertised objects decay. Her 2017 film *Rose Gold* places the rose-gold iPhone, produced between 2015 and 2017, alongside older artifacts of taste.

“I keep buying these plastics called melamine,” says the voice-over, panning over a row of pastel cups. Melamine is another past that once looked like the future; Russel Wright, the industrial designer whose ceramic dinnerware brought modernism to millions of postwar homes, sold melamine dishes, too. Their

ovoid plastic forms, in colors like salmon and pale blue, today look both dated and contemporary.

In *Rose Gold*, Cwynar piles her melamine in yard-sale heaps alongside millennial-pink Acne shopping bags. “This product was marketed as indestructible,” the voice-over says, as pink cups crash to the ground and shatter. Her mid-century plastic and its faded guarantees are evidence of an era like ours, when bright surfaces and new conveniences presented an appealing alternative to existential dread. Looking back, their inadequacy is obvious. But pink hits a pleasure center, a promise sounds good, and in the moment perhaps you don’t resist. “I love the rose-gold iPhone,” Cwynar admits. *Rose Gold* ends, and the film reverses; shattered pink melamine cups reassemble themselves and float.

What the millennial aesthetic sells, it sells through the promise of novelty. This is true even when the product on offer is not appreciably novel: cat food, Dutch ovens, and generic drugs are repackaged, redesigned, as if millennial buyers required a version all their own. Jessica Walsh, a graphic designer and founder of the creative agency &Walsh, dates the style to the last five years and sees its expiration date approaching already. “Everyone wants to look like the Casper, Warby Parker, or Aways of the world,” she explains, which has made branding increasingly interchangeable. “People are tired of the sameness and already craving something new.”

When the time comes—when smooth pastels start to feel a little tacky, when brown starts looking good again—what will be saved? As in any era, most of our belongings will be lost, but fewer than ever seem worth trying to preserve. In her article “Why Does This One Couch From West Elm Suck So Much?,” author Anna Hezel asks employees in a West Elm store how long that “Peggy” couch was, ideally, supposed to last. One to three years, they inform her.

Last year, the interior-design start-up Homepolish collapsed; last month, Casper made its disappointing IPO; last week, Outdoor Voices CEO Tyler Haney stepped down amid reports that her company, based on tastefully colored leggings, was losing cash. Design created an astonishing amount of value in the last ten years, and increasingly that value looks ephemeral. I remember

“There’s NO WEIRDNESS.
There’s NOTHING that CLASHES.
It’s very CONTROLLED.”

visiting WeWork corporate offices in early 2016 and telling a friend that the space already felt period—larded and spackled with efforts to look designed ca. 2016, which now sounds like a very long time ago. Of course, I can also look around my apartment and see what threatens to wilt: boob poster, pink blanket, plants. We have lived through a moment in which design came to seem like something besides what it was, like a business model or a virtue or a consolation prize. The sense of safety promised in its soft, clean forms begins to look less optimistic than naïve. ■

BLCG

THINK BIG

BALENCIAGA

BLCG

POWER OF DREAMS

BALENCIAGA



Prosper, Alex,
and Martine
Assouline in
their New York
apartment.

A man in a dark pinstripe suit stands with his arms crossed on the left. A woman in a white ruffled blouse and dark trousers sits in a leopard-print armchair on the right. The background features a gallery with various artworks, including a large abstract painting of a face, a portrait of a woman with a crown, and a wooden mask hanging on the wall.

How the
Assoulines
made their
name on
books to be
seen (and
occasionally
read).

By MATTHEW
SCHNEIER

Photograph by
JASON SCHMIDT

JUDGED *By* THEIR COVERS

Up the stairs, behind the balustrade, a modern *cabinet de curiosités* hangs above Fifth Avenue. It is a library guarded by a pair of statuary sheep and scattered here and there with fair-trade woven masks from Africa and vintage Louis Vuitton trunks. On its rich shelves are books bound in leather or linen or boxed in wood that attest to the great glories of world culture: the art of Picasso, the furniture of Chandigarh, the design of Coco Chanel, the cola of Coca-Cola.

Here, on the mezzanine of the Plaza Hotel (though you would find similar outposts in the Four Seasons, the Mark, the D&D Building for the architecture-and-interiors trade, or the Pacific Design Center in Los Angeles), is the world according to Assouline, where everything is beautiful, expensive, and chic. The Assoulines—Prosper and Martine, the married founders, and Alexandre and Sébastien, their sons—are librarians of luxury, and their publishing house, which turned 25 last year, is both a rhapsodist of, and a mouthpiece for, the international fashion industry. Assouline's books, more than 1,700 of them, published at a rate of 60 to 70 per year, are on subjects as various as cocktail-party chatter. Decorators and real-estate developers, two of the company's most important and quickly growing client bases, now order full rooms' worth more or less by the pound. "The content is super-important," says Prosper, sitting in his wife's office at the company headquarters on lower Park Avenue, where shelves groaning with books line the walls. "But 99 percent of the time, a book is closed in your apartment. So if it's ugly, it's a problem. It has to be beautiful."

Since arriving in the U.S. in 1999 and settling permanently a few years after, the Assoulines have often been tagged as a publisher for socialites, which is true—Kelly Killoren Bensimon was an Assouline author before she was a *Real Housewife* of New York—but that description falls short. Assouline strives to produce books by, for, or about any of the megacorporations that peddle luxury (Chanel, Dior, Cartier) or that don't but aspire to (Coke, Mattel). And its founders look the part: Prosper, expensively tailored, his thinned-out hair slicked suavely back; Martine, lithe and lavishly accessorized, expensive with just a hint of French excess in her Louis Vuitton leopard-print sweater. Alex, the younger son at 27, in a young-fogey suit and suspenders, manages the business of the business (sales and marketing), while his parents handle the more creative aspects (acquiring, commissioning, and editing); 44-year-old Sébastien, in Paris, focuses on designing their new experiments in home décor. In conversation, Alex defers largely to his parents, whose social fluency in contiguous, interspersed French and English—Martine's raspy, Prosper's creamy—has been honed by long years on the party circuits of the world. "They're very social, very networked," says Ron Frasc, a retail-industry consultant who has been friends with the family for years. "They work very hard at it."

Assouline isn't the only publisher to work this territory. Plenty of rival houses specialize in lavish photography and illustrated books and compete with Assouline for clients and their reliable orders—august Rizzoli, intellectual Taschen, tony Phaidon—all of which are involved in one way or another with brand-fluffing publishing. But Assouline, more than any other, fashions itself as a peer of the brands it services, so much so that Prosper scoffs at comparisons to other presses. "I always say our competitor is more Ladurée," he says, referring to the purveyor

of high-end macarons. "It's beautiful packaging. It's good taste. You want to go back every day. And it's a beautiful gift."

The family is not a "hawker" of catalogues, he says, though the distinction can feel a bit squishy. A little more than a third of Assouline's sales come from its Ultimate line, a series of masterpiece anthologies that includes *The Impossible Collection of Art* and *The Impossible Collection of Design* but also *Louis Vuitton Windows* and *The Impossible Collection of Bentley*. One built-in benefit of doing admiring books on or with companies is that those companies agree, officially or implicitly, to buy a portion of the print run to keep for themselves or to gift to shareholders, clients, and journalists. Others are sold in stores. "Sometimes our clients don't have the budget to buy a Trinity ring or a \$2 million Cartier diamond," says Michel Aliaga, Cartier's associate director of heritage information. "But they have the taste to buy a book."

The family looked to fashion and luxury for inspiration early on. Martine was the director of communications for the French fashion label Rochas; Prosper was running a creative agency specializing in advertising for luxury brands. "At the time, shoes were very important, and it was the beginning of Louboutin, et cetera," Prosper says. "Everybody was crazy about it. And the price of the shoes was \$600; it was huge." Assouline saw that a book, properly made and marketed, could be sold the same way, in the same places, to the same clients. "*C'est bizarre*, but it is exactly this," Prosper says. Although early hits for Assouline were the palm-size, 99 franc—about \$15—editions from its *Memoire* series on major designers and houses of fashion and jewelry, Assouline's books these days are generally more like objets d'art, and limited editions may run into the five-figure range. The company recently launched an XXL Collection of oversize books that cost \$12,000. After a few years, the Assoulines shut down the creative agency and turned their attention to book publishing full time.

Their first retail space, opened in 2003, was housed on the seventh floor of Bergdorf Goodman. The family hatched the idea over dinner with Frasc, the department store's CEO in the early aughts, when Assouline was working on the design of the Bergdorf catalogue mailer. "There's other presses that do interesting books," says Frasc. "But they've really found the niche in the marketplace." Their customer was not a books customer; Prosper and Martine had turned up their noses at Borders and Barnes & Noble. "I told him our business is not in the bookstores," Prosper says. "We found our public at Bergdorf Goodman."

The Assoulines do not carry themselves like inky publishers. They are charming, courtly, *Fronch*, living and working surrounded by art, fine cigars, and bourgeois-bohemian eclectic. Their office conference room is an homage to Seville, their favorite vacation destination, and is decorated with art and antiques from their pilgrimages there. Their stores once sold a scented candle meant to smell like cocaine. "I learned a lot about the theater of doing business" from them, says Richard Christiansen, who previously worked for Prosper as a creative director. "The importance of walking into an office, opening the door, and gasping because it's so beautiful." (He once learned the hard way not to sneak wine out of the boss's office while burning the midnight oil; it cost a small fortune to replace the bottle.)

Prosper and Martine draw a line between what they call "editorial" books and "partner" books—those titles commissioned by brands for occasions, a particular item or collection, or simply the

brand itself in honor of its eminence, such as a book on Rimowa, the German company whose grooved aluminum suitcases are the kings of the baggage carousel. Many partners become repeat customers. “We’ve done five books with Coca-Cola,” Alex Assouline says. “Dior, 13.” Richard Dickson, now the president of Mattel, approached the Assoulines in 2008, “trying to convince them,” he said, “what they could do with me if we created this amazing celebration of Barbie.” The Barbie book became a collector’s item, not least because Mattel stood ready to snap up copies to proudly display in its offices worldwide. “We talk about what is the vision for what story we’re trying to tell, whether that’s a Barbie story, a Hot Wheels story, or a Mattel story,” Dickson said in an interview. Another book, for Mattel’s 75th anniversary, is being discussed.

And yet partner and editorial books sit spine by spine in Assouline’s stores and their clients’ libraries. “It’s interesting to see the interest in the library,” Martine says. “It was not the case ten years ago. The library was something boring. ‘You want a *bibliothèque* at home? Oh my God.’” Now the company offers curation services to interior designers.

The Assoulines insist on editorial independence, but they acknowledge that exposés are not the point and their gentility is, in part, expressed in gentleness. “I think they give the subjects a lot of freedom in terms of how to position the books,” Frasci says. One of their best sellers, and a key get, is Lee Radziwill’s memoir, *Happy Times*, which Assouline published in 2001. In her long, exciting lifetime, Radziwill was commissioned to write a memoir in the ’70s and again in the ’90s, but neither came to fruition. It’s hard to imagine a traditional publisher accepting the agreeable trifle Radziwill produced, “a slim picture book with reminiscences on the Bouvier sisters’ carefree early years,” in the words of the *New York Times*. “Most memories are happy, right?” Larry King asked Radziwill when she appeared on his show in 2001. “Oh yes, I think so,” she replied. “You can sort of block the ones that aren’t, to a certain extent.” The book has sold 50,000 copies to date.

The guiding principle seems to be “If you don’t have anything nice to say, don’t say anything at all.” For a fee, Assouline will happily produce books not meant for the public marketplace at all. Prosper compares his team to a restaurant kitchen: “We have all of our three-star kitchen doing a bar mitzvah for somebody you do not know,” he crows with a merry laugh. Assouline has published titles on private collections, private homes (“We just finished a book on one of the most expensive houses in the world,” a 17th-century behemoth in Paris, Prosper says), private travel diaries (“like *Noa Noa*,” Gauguin’s Tahitian memoir), even entire countries, commissioned by their governments. “They can do it anywhere else,” he says, “but they want to have an Assouline.” I wondered aloud if all of these governments were democratically elected ones, which got a laugh, but in his office Prosper proudly displays a forthcoming title, as tall as his waist, on Al Ula, the soon-to-open “living museum” of archaeological and historical sites in Saudi Arabia, photographed by Robert Polidori and commissioned by the Saudis.



Unlike a seasonal campaign or a throwaway bit of marketing, books last. “They are all going to the garbage,” Prosper says, “and the book is going to stay at home.”

Book publishing is a difficult business, especially for more expensive, illustrated books, whose costs can be driven sky high by photo rights and permissions, and some of Assouline’s rival companies have sought refuge in larger companies or patrons. (The private-equity billionaire and avid rare-book collector Leon Black owns Phaidon.) Assouline has maintained its independence, but the conglomerate LVMH—which owns Dior, Fendi, Givenchy, and Marc Jacobs—acquired a minority stake in the business in 2013. The company is profitable, though the family declined to share specifics of their revenue or volume.

The Assouline sensibility—not surprising for a company that publishes *In the Spirit of Miami Beach*, *In the Spirit of Palm Beach*, and *In the Spirit of Gstaad*—can travel. And in recent years, its scope has expanded from books into the world around them. Prosper sees the next generation of the business, now vested in Alex’s care, as being in partnerships that bring a touch of Assouline to worthy projects, for a price. The company now keeps 13 shops and 20 “branded corners” in high-end department stores around the world as well as the flagship Maison Assouline in London and a franchise Maison in Dubai. (Gucci, which has published with Assouline, named the London Maison, in a former bank building dating to the early 1920s, one of its “Gucci Places,” which “reflect the taste and values of the House.”) “This is one of the most important departments,” Prosper says.

The Related Companies, the real-estate developer that is among the most landowning in Manhattan, contracted with the Assoulines to put a library lounge in the Caledonia (a hybrid rental-condo building in Chelsea, which opened in 2008), as one of several on-site amenities that include an Equinox gym and high-end dog care. The Assoulines designed the space and picked the books. “All of the advertising was ‘Equinox for your body, Assouline for your mind,’” Prosper says. Two years ago, they came back to “refresh” the lounge; another refresh is planned, and Related has brought them into more buildings, including 15 Hudson Yards and the forthcoming Lantern House near the High Line.

The Caledonia refresh was one of Alex’s first major projects for Assouline, after he returned to the family business following a short career in consulting. “There’s a lot in every industry we can venture into, because we really create luxury *lifestyle*,” he says. The biggest opportunity is not to blanket the world with books: Luxury and availability are natural enemies, and the print runs for high-end illustrated books like Assouline’s generally don’t exceed 5,000, anyway. Assouline is a “niche, still a niche,” Martine says. “We like that.” ■

WHAT I Learned ABOUT BEING A Plant

*The actually convincing
science of light therapy.*

Here is a partial list of what one company promises sitting under a small panel of red lights will improve: athletic performance and recovery (owing to faster muscle recovery and joint repair), sleep (thanks to increased melatonin production and a “healthy circadian rhythm”), and skin quality (because of reduced inflammation and increased collagen production).

These red lights, in this case made by Joovv, are one of dozens of at-home versions of what’s known as light therapy, or photomedicine, or photobiomodulation, a technology based on the idea that light can change us on a cellular level. This past summer, the journal *Frontiers in Medicine* published an issue dedicated to

BY
Melissa
Dahl

PHOTOGRAPH
BY
Elizaveta
Porodina

photomedicine, and its 12 articles have an overwhelming effect similar to Joovv’s marketing copy, covering dermatological concerns like aging, skin cancer, and psoriasis as well as autoimmune diseases like type 1 diabetes. I like the way a 2016 journal article phrases it with a bad joke that gives away the researcher’s quiet exuberance: After a brief overview of peer-reviewed light-therapy treatments (for arthritis, hearing loss, and chemotherapy side effects), the conclusion states that “after decades confined to the ‘scientific wasteland,’ [photobiomodulation] may be finally emerging into the light of day (pun intended).”



In recent years, research on light therapy has moved from the fringes of scientific discovery to something closer to the mainstream; its commercial uses are now following the same path, as these devices, once available only in spas, gyms, or dermatologists' offices, become increasingly affordable for consumers. Meanwhile, the research is only getting more ecstatic. New studies are showing how light can heal the brain and body of ... anything? Everything? That's an exaggeration, obviously, but just barely, or so I'm beginning to believe.

Something about the sheer breadth of maladies that light therapy can supposedly treat has the effect of making the whole thing seem too good to be true; it starts to sound like an infomercial or maybe something advertised on Joe Rogan's podcast. It does make intuitive sense that light could change the skin—I know (vaguely) that a baby born with jaundice will often be treated with light. I know (personally, irresponsibly) that if you lie in the sun, your skin will tan or burn. And I know people who've seen their seasonal depression lift after using a SAD lamp. But what does something like diabetes have to do with light? There's even some evidence that neurological problems, including Alzheimer's and traumatic brain injuries, can be improved with light therapy. What does neurology have to do with light? And even if I understand that light can and does alter the skin, why (how?) would it reduce wrinkles or acne?

I remember from my brief, failed attempt at becoming a millennial plant parent that houseplants respond to sunlight more dramatically than I might've guessed; the cheery, perky pothos I bought for my desk drooped within two days because I'd placed it too far from a window. But that's a plant. I am not a plant.

(Am I a plant?)

LIGHT-THERAPY DEVICES use different kinds of light, from invisible, near-infrared light through the visible-light spectrum (red, orange, yellow, green, and blue), stopping before the harmful ultraviolet rays. So far, the effects of red and near-infrared light are the most studied; red light is often used to treat skin conditions, whereas near infrared can penetrate much deeper, working its way through skin and bone and even into the brain. Blue light is thought to be especially good at treating infections and is often used for acne. The effects of green and yellow light are less understood, but green might improve hyperpigmentation, and yellow might reduce photoaging.

The concept of using sunlight or visible light (in other words, colors) to cure diseases is an old one, something humans have intuited again and again across the centuries. In the late 1800s, European doctors began recommending heliotherapy for various illnesses, including tuberculosis; it was thought that sunlight could destroy the disease-causing bacteria. Avicenna, a Persian physician who practiced ca. A.D. 1025, thought color itself could treat various ailments—red was for stimulating blood flow, blue was for cooling the body, yellow was for easing muscle pain. He also believed a person with a nosebleed should not so much as look at the color red, as it would make the bleeding worse.

The modern study of light therapy arguably began in the 1960s, but it got a significant boost in the late 1980s, when NASA scientists started experimenting with light-emitting diodes, or LEDs, to stimulate plant growth in the hope that, one day, astronauts would be able to grow their own food while in deep space. It's now almost taken for granted that they can—

and they do—grow produce like lettuce, kale, and cabbage in 40ish-pound rectangular boxes that emit a purple-pink glow. (Plants absorb red and blue light and reflect green light, which creates the magenta effect.) On Valentine's Day 2016, the astronaut Scott Kelly posted a photo from the International Space Station: The background is Earth, and the foreground is a bouquet of space flowers—zinnias grown onboard.

Kelly had revived the zinnias after a bout of mold; space travel does weird things to flowers. It does weird things to the human body, too. In space, even the smallest scratches don't heal properly on their own. It's not fully understood why, but, as the theory goes, the zero-gravity environment disrupts the cellular and molecular processes involved in tissue repair. But something funny happened to the scientists who were growing the plants under the LEDs: The cuts on their hands healed, almost as they would on Earth. This accidental discovery helped drive interest in the search for a medical application of light, says Janis Eells, who studies light therapy at the University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee. (Eells began her career in pharmacology but switched to studying photomedicine after being amazed by its healing potential. “Light is my new drug,” she told me.) Some scientists who study photomedicine believe the NASA origin story is overblown, that it's only one of the factors that led to the development of the field. “People sure do like to talk about it,” said Michael Hamblin, a former principal investigator at the Wellman Center for Photomedicine at Massachusetts General Hospital.

Well, of course we like to talk about it! I like to talk about it now, ever since I started using these devices. They are futuristic, otherworldly; it makes perfect sense to think this technology might've come from outer space. My Joovv Mini is an 8¾-by-15-inch flat panel of red and near-infrared lights, and it costs \$695. I tend to turn it on after dark, when the lights cast an eerie red glow in my living room that makes me think of the *Stranger Things* logo. Mine is small enough to keep on a side table, and it's meant for “targeted treatments”: face, joints, or muscles, one at a time. But there are bigger versions, too, intended to be used on your whole body at once—the biggest Joovv device is the Elite, which is 26¼ by 72 inches and costs \$5,995. You're supposed to stand in front of the larger ones, but some other at-home products can be configured in dome shapes, like the Celluma Pro (an LED device on loan to me from aesthetician Joanna Czech), so you can lie underneath, maybe take a nap. I also tried the Déesse Pro LED Mask (lent to me by aesthetician Shani Darden), the same type of device Chrissy Teigen and Jessica Alba have shared photos of themselves wearing. With the mask, you can, in theory, multitask, which is maybe why I liked it the least.

I expected these things to be hot to the touch, but they're not; they're room temperature, maybe even a little cool. Yet after a few minutes of sitting in front of them, I feel warm: It's my cells, apparently, heating me from the inside out. I'm growing attached to the blissed-out sensation I get from the red glow. It's similar to the sun-drunk feeling I remember as a California teenager, minus the guilt I now associate with damaging my skin. I'm not sure if it's “working,” but I'm also not sure that it isn't. Since the summer, I've had two small scars just above my right wrist, accidental tattoos from making dinner. It might be my imagination, but once a day for a week now, I've been putting my hand under the Celluma Pro panel, and I think the scars are fading finally.

AT-HOME LED DEVICES



CELLUMA PRO
\$1,795, celluma.com



JOOVV MINI
\$695, joovv.com



DÉESSE PRO LED MASK
\$2,168, shop.deessepro.com

But how? Why? Sometimes, trying to understand photobiomodulation is so circular it makes me think of an exasperated Luke Wilson in *Idiocracy* trying to understand the energy drink Brawndo. (What are electrolytes? It's what they use to make Brawndo. But why do they use it to make Brawndo? 'Cause Brawndo's got electrolytes.) Researchers who study light therapy say the mechanism at work here isn't 100 percent clear, but basically, light sparks a cellular response because ... our cells respond to light.

For red and near-infrared light, scientists speculate that the light interacts with something called cytochrome c oxidase, or CCO, a photosensitive enzyme found within the mitochondria. Eells thinks of it as light giving the mitochondria a little kick in the pants. "I'm not sure the mitochondria are real happy to get that zap of red light," she said. "But what it does is it tells the cell to start making the proteins that will protect it or that will make it healthier." When CCO finds light, it converts it to energy and uses that energy to do whatever that cell is sup-

posed to do, only more efficiently. "We have all these damn creams we try to rub on our face, and this lets your cells do it naturally," she said.

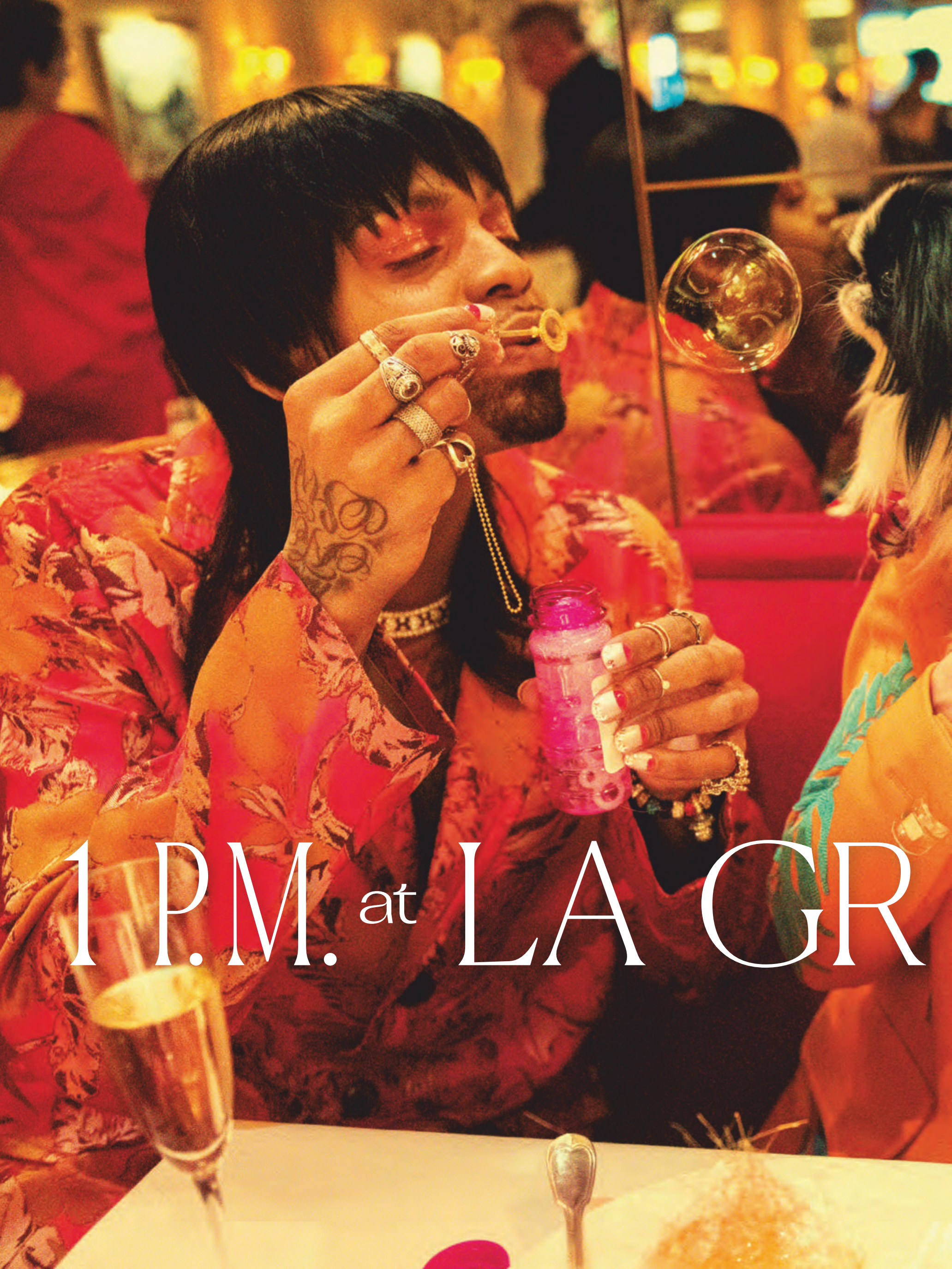
It turns out mitochondria and chloroplasts in plants are "basically evolutionary kissing cousins," as Eells phrases it. Chloroplasts absorb light and make energy for plants during photosynthesis; our mitochondria convert light to energy in a similar way. I *am* a plant, sort of, or at least my cells behave more like plants than I would ever have imagined.

CLOSE UP, LIGHT THERAPY is complicated, baffling, impenetrable. Take a few steps back, though, and it's about the most obvious idea on earth. In a way, light therapy has been a reminder of how often I overlook the basics, how every few days I need to force-feed myself similar reminders about how to be a human: Water is good, sleep is good, socializing with friends is good, alcohol is not always so good. Light is good.

Still, there are a few claims about light therapy I know not to fall for. Any at-home device that makes confident promises about green or yellow light is to be met with skepticism; the evidence just isn't there yet. Pulsing red light, a hypnotizing effect some devices offer, should be regarded with interest mixed with some suspicion. (Dr. Jared Jagdeo, director of the Center for Photomedicine at SUNY Downstate Medical Center, told me firmly of pulsing red light, "Nobody knows the function of that. Anyone who claims to know the function of it, they're just hypothesizing.") Anything cheaper than a few hundred dollars is probably ineffective, and prescribing yourself light therapy for some ailment instead of visiting a doctor is inadvisable. The scientists who've studied photomedicine for decades met my questions with excitement and trepidation; many of them fear the consumer appetite will outpace the science, as tends to happen with wellness fads.

It does make sense that light therapy is gaining traction as a wellness practice. It fits right in with the paleo diet, biphasic sleep, and other theories that assume what is modern is bad and what is ancient (and therefore natural) is best. Not that these theories are necessarily wrong. In a viral 2014 interview with the website *Into the Gloss*, the actress Shailene Woodley shared her beliefs about the link between vaginal health and the natural light of the sun. "If you live in a place that has heavy winters," she said, "when the sun finally comes out, spread your legs and get some sunshine." Yeast infections in particular, she explained, are no match for sunlight. She was wrong about the way it works (she assumed it involved vitamin D), but she was right that it does work, or at least that it can: There is some evidence that blue light can destroy fungi like *Candida albicans*, which can cause yeast infections.

The rise of light therapy also happens to coincide with increasing paranoia around climate change and real anxieties over whether we'll eventually live in a world where it isn't safe to be outside for very long. In California this past fall, smoke and dust storms from the relentless wildfires caused "fine particulate matter," which has been linked to heart disease, lung disease, and premature death, to settle in the air. People living in the North and East Bay were advised to stay inside; my parents had just moved to Napa Valley, and they sent me photos of the neighborhood haze. I think about this now and a vague image comes to mind of a future set even more indoors, me curling up around my Joovv Mini, soaking up artificial light like a space-station zinnia. ■



1 P.M. at LA GR



Ian Isiah

WITH Laura Lobdell,
Jewelry designer and La Grenouille
regular (holding her dog, Foo)

On Lobdell:
PRADA coat, shirt, and skirt,
at prada.com; LAURA
LOBDELL jewelry and bubble
wand, at 183½ W. 10th St.

On Foo: HERMÈS scarf and
leash, at 691 Madison Ave.

“Foo really loves
La Grenouille. His
only disappointment
today was that
he didn’t have his own
cheese soufflé.”

—Laura Lobdell

ENOUILLE

The New York Establishment has
lunched here since 1962. On a recent afternoon,
we invited a New Guard to join them.

Portfolio by PARI DUKOVIC

Styling by DORA FUNG

"I had like five glasses of Champagne. Me and Jackie were saying, 'Oh, is this what power players in New York do?'"

—Jeremy O. Harris

Jeremy O. Harris

30, playwright (*Slave Play*, *Daddy*), performer, screenwriter

Harris's next project, *Zola*, a film adaptation of the viral stripper tweetstorm, which he wrote with director Janicza Bravo, premiered this year at Sundance.

🕒 On Harris: MAISON MARGIELA jacket, at maisonmargiela.com; COLLINA STRADA bodysuit, at collinastrada.com; ROLEX watch, at rolex.com.



Jacqueline Novak

37, comedian, playwright

Novak's one-woman show about the metaphysics and mechanics of oral sex, *Get on Your Knees*, played for seven months in New York through mid-February and travels next to Boston.

"La Grenouille is from a different time. The lamps on the table were said to have been brought over from France by the original restaurant owners. Actually, I read that on my phone during the meal."

—Jacqueline Novak



On Novak:
DRIES VAN NOTEN top,
at neimanmarcus.com;
CARTIER earrings,
at 653 Fifth Ave.

Naomi Fry

43, writer, Bed-Stuy saloniste

As a culture critic, reporter, and humor writer at *The New Yorker*, Fry has covered everything from Harvey Weinstein's trial to Ben Affleck's back tattoo. John Mayer is a regular in her DMs.

MARNI dress, at
822 Madison Ave.; CHOPARD
earrings, at chopard.com.





Chloé Véro

23, model

Véro has appeared in campaigns for Everlane, Neiman Marcus, and H&M; she has also been featured in the Tommy X Zendaya runway show and Barbie Ferreira's video series for the plus-size retailer Torrid.

🔗 DOLCE & GABBANA coat, [at dolcegabbana.it](https://www.dolcegabbana.it); ISABEL MARANT jumpsuit, [at isabelmarant.com](https://www.isabelmarant.com); JOANNA LAURA CONSTANTINE earrings, [at joannalauraconstantine.com](https://www.joannalauraconstantine.com); LAGOS bracelet, [at bloomingdales.com](https://www.bloomingdales.com); QUEENIE CAO ring, [at queeniecaojewelry.com](https://www.queeniecaojewelry.com).

FASHION ASSISTANCE BY BECKY AKINYODE, JOEL PARADA, AND NATALIE MATSUDA; HAIR BY NEAL PITTMAN USING ORIBE, LISA RAQUEL USING RENÉ FURTERER AT SEE MANAGEMENT, AND TOM MANTEL FOR LAURA LOBDELL; MAKEUP BY MARYGENE WALKER USING CHANEL AND ASHLEIGH CIUCCI USING MAC COSMETICS AT SEE MANAGEMENT; TAILORING BY LUCY PAYNE



FROM LEFT

Maximilian Sinstedden
Interior designer
and La Grenouille regular

On Sinstedden: HERNO coat, at 95 Greene St.

Peter Martino
Private jeweler and 40-year
La Grenouille regular

Marilyn Kirschner
Fashion editor and La Grenouille regular

On Kirschner: COACH trench coat, at coach.com;
SCHIAPARELLI jacket and bodysuit, at schiaparelli.com.

Joan Sbarro

Retired, but “available for all my friends who need help” (the Sbarro family sold its pizza business in 2007), and La Grenouille regular

“I’ve been coming here since I was in my 30s, two to three times a month, always with friends. There used to be a woman who was 93 years old, and she would sit in the same seat that I love to sit in and have two martinis for lunch. I like to say we’ve earned those lunches, as women.”

—Joan Sbarro

BALENCIAGA coat,
at 620 Madison Ave.





☑ On Bodmer-Turner: **GIVENCHY** dress, at 747 Madison Ave.; **SIES MARJAN** shoes, at matchesfashion.com.



☑ On Donahue: **JW ANDERSON** jacket, at bergdorfgoodman.com; **LAGOS** ring, at lagos.com.

☑ **LOUIS VUITTON** shoes, at louisvuitton.com.

☑ On Russell: **LOUIS VUITTON** dress, earrings, bracelet, gold ring, and bag, at louisvuitton.com; **CARTIER** ring, at 653 Fifth Ave.



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT

Simone Bodmer-Turner

30, ceramic designer and sculptor

Bodmer-Turner's sculptures have been exhibited around the world; her "Permanent" collection, ceramic vessels in organic, aortic shapes, is available in New York boutiques like Totokaelo, the Primary Essentials, and Mociun.

Bridget Donahue

39, gallerist

WITH **Heidi Roberts**

La Grenouille regular

Donahue launched her namesake gallery in 2015, after several years with Gavin Brown; she now represents a slate of artists that is three-quarters female—three of them were included in the most recent Whitney Biennial.

Ajani Russell

21, actor, skateboarder

In 2018, Russell appeared in director Crystal Moselle's skater-girl drama *Skate Kitchen*; this spring, the two will reunite for the HBO series *Betty*, inspired by the film.



On Fratino: DIOR MEN suit and shirt, [at dior.com](http://at.dior.com). 

CLOCKWISE FROM BOTTOM LEFT

Jeremy O. Harris WITH
Simone Bodmer-Turner, LEFT,
AND **Alison Roman**

FROM LEFT, *La Grenouille* regulars
Peter Martino, **Gigi Fisdell**,
Pamela Fiori,
former editor of *Town & Country*,
AND **Ralph Rucci**,
American couturier

Gia Kuan WITH
Louis Fratino,
26, artist

Fratino's sensual paintings and drawings of men in various states of undress drew crowds to his debut solo show at Sikkema Jenkins & Co. last year; he is currently at work on his next show, to open at Sikkema Jenkins in October.



“I’ve been here a few times to power-lunch.
Generally, someone else is paying.”

—Alison Roman

Alison Roman

34, cookbook author, Instagram lifestyle guru

Roman is the queen of the viral recipe (the shortbread cookie of 2018, the stew of 2019), and her *Dining In* and *New York Times* videos have made her a Brooklynite Nigella Lawson; her latest cookbook, *Nothing Fancy*, came out in October.

● GUCCI dress, [at gucci.com](https://www.gucci.com);
ANA KHOURI earrings,
[at anakhouri.com](https://www.anakhouri.com); TIFFANY & CO.
bracelet and ring, [at tiffany.com](https://www.tiffany.com).



Gia Kuan

33, downtown press maven

After years at Comme des Garçons and Nadine Johnson, Kuan founded her own publicity-and-consulting firm in April 2019, connecting rising labels (often those without the resources to hire her larger competitors) with their public; Telfar, Susan Alexandra, and Puppets & Puppets are all on her roster.

MIU MIU vest and shirt, at 11 E. 57th St.;
MAX MARA polka-dot vest, at 813 Madison Ave.;
FERNANDO JORGE earrings, at Bergdorf Goodman,
754 Fifth Ave.; ALEXANDER MCQUEEN clutch,
at alexandermcqueen.com.

Ian Isiah

a.k.a. Big Shugga, 31,
neo-funk musician

A collaborator of the New York fashion collective Hood by Air, Isiah also focuses on music. His EPs include *The Love Champion* and *Shugga Sextape (Vol. 1)*; he performs with Blood Orange and has played the Pornhub Awards.

“I’m not from this New York;
I’m from downtown. I’m going
to go back and link up
with the lady who sat next to me.
She’s a legend. Fucking genius.”

—Ian Isiah

DRIES VAN NOTEN coat,
at Bergdorf Goodman, 745 Fifth Ave.;
VAN CLEEF & ARPELS choker, at
744 Fifth Ave.; **DIOR** ring, at 21 E. 57th St.;
CHRISTIAN LOUBOUTIN clutch,
at bergdorfgoodman.com.

